Abstract
While the roles of elites and mass mobilization have received growing attention in the democratization literature, comparative theories on Asia remain largely informed by the “Asian values” thesis that has subsumed wide regional variations. Against the tendency to generalize Asia’s democracy deficit, this paper argues that midrange theorizing is critical to understanding the region’s historical commonalities as well as diverse trajectories. Through a paired comparison strategy, this study examines Taiwan and the Philippines as similar systems that have taken divergent routes to democracy during the third wave: Taipei’s gradual elite settlement versus Manila’s rupture by mass mobilization. The study probes the interplay of authoritarian institutions, cultural hegemony, mass mobilization, and international factors to explain the nationally distinctive patterns of political change in two of Asia’s leading democracies.

Key words: democratization, authoritarian regimes, elite settlement, ruptura, Taiwan, Philippines

* I am grateful for research funding provided by the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation and Green Taiwan Foundation to enable data collection in the Philippines.
Introduction

The People Power Revolution of February 1986 that toppled Ferdinand Marcos’s dictatorship and swept the Philippine opposition to power has been a major impetus for political transition in East Asia. That year, a nonviolent Manila uprising that galvanized a million unarmed civilians against loyalist troops sparked Asia’s first episode of “third wave” democratization, inspiring activists worldwide to intensify movements of contention. The *Laban* sign flashed by Corazon Aquino to symbolize the Filipino democracy movement became a popular emblem in Taiwanese opposition rallies, which culminated in the Democratic Progressive Party’s formation in September. The end of the world’s longest martial law period ensued shortly when the erstwhile party-state could no longer contain a floodgate of societal demands for genuine political change. Meanwhile, nationwide demonstrations invoking “people’s power” rocked South Korea throughout 1986 and shook the foundations of Chun Doo-hwan’s rule, paving the road for the country’s founding elections the following year. Indeed, many analysts have associated the simultaneous and unprecedented agitation across East Asia with the international demonstration effect of the Filipino revolution. Yet, how these mechanisms of mutual influence have operated in practice has been less explored. Worse still, current analyses of Asian comparative democratization appear undertheorized in contrast the voluminous literature on Latin America’s military-controlled transitions and Eastern Europe’s velvet revolutions.

To date, insufficient attention has been paid to the commonalities as well as differences in the timing, scope, and outcomes of democratic transitions across the recently pluralized societies of East Asia. On a conceptual level, the lack of such a comparative emphasis has rendered it difficult to investigate issues such as prior regime types (Linz and Stepan 1996), modes of transition, the impact of regional snowballing on domestic politics (Huntington 1991), and the overall progress toward democratic consolidation in Asia. Theoretically, too, the relative dearth of systematic cross-national studies on East Asia has made explanations either highly general or particularistic, with little intermediate theory-building in between. The literature on
democratization in Asia, for instance, has tended to employ the controversial notion of “Asian values” to explain the region’s overall preoccupation with economic performance and political authoritarianism. These universal accounts, however, do little to elucidate the nearly coterminous regime transitions underway in the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, and Mongolia in the late 1980s to the early 1990s—countries that presumably share the same cultural norms purported to be inimical to liberal democracy.

If these general conclusions about Asia’s political cultures seem premature, so too do those of case studies that treat political developments in one country as if they were entirely unique and isolated, unrelated to the broader momentum that was sweeping the region. In fact, however, the acknowledged role of international factors of regime change in Latin America, Eastern Europe and Africa suggests that they deserve closer scrutiny than allowed for by some case studies on East Asia. In light of these major conceptual and theoretical lacunae, a comparative perspective appears all the more pressing for fostering a better understanding of Asia’s diverse pathways to democracy and their common challenges and prospects.

The purpose of this article is to engage in a comparative, albeit still preliminary, inquiry of the prior authoritarian regimes and transition paths of two of Asia’s newly democratized polities, using Taiwan and the Philippines as contrasting cases. Although the Taiwanese opposition in 1986 had been influenced by the People Power Revolution, its political impact on the authoritarian regime was less pronounced. Despite coalescing into the Democratic Progressive Party in preparation for the 1986 parliamentary elections, far from ending one of the world’s longest reigning party-states, the island’s first opposition party scored limited electoral gains with the authoritarian state structures left essentially unscathed. In contrast to its southern neighbor’s *ruptura*, Taiwan witnessed a prolonged process of political transition that began in 1987 but was not completed until 1996—the opposition excluded from state power until 2000, fourteen years after Aquino’s election as Philippine president. Though sharing similar colonial and postwar socioeconomic and political legacies and a history of mutual interaction, the two countries
traversed divergent routes to democracy as the 1980s drew to a close: the Philippines by popular revolution; Taiwan by belated and uncertain reform.

While scholars have stressed the importance of socioeconomic requisites and elite compromises in promoting political transitions across the third wave, the contemporaneous but contrasting democratic trajectories taken by Taiwan and the Philippines are less understood. Analysts working in the macrostructural tradition such as Przeworski and Limongi (1991) have highlighted Taiwan as a major outlier of the established association between income levels and democratic regime change. Albeit a country specialist, Winckler (2001) likewise agrees that the Taiwanese pattern of protracted and piecemeal reform is exceptional in light of its economic achievements. The Philippines appears as another deviant case, for its successful transition occurred without the kind of elite pacting or settlement argued to be crucial in the agency-centered paradigm (O’Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead 1986; Higley and Gunther 1992).

Although much of the transitions literature focuses on Southern Europe, Latin America and Eastern Europe, surprisingly less comparative-historical analysis has been carried out for East Asia, a site of massive sociopolitical transformations. Because there are very few studies that incorporate Taiwan and the Philippines in a comparative framework, I first examine their similarities as a means to establish a basis for comparability. Accordingly, the article begins by highlighting the political and socioeconomic conditions of Taiwan and the Philippines, focusing on their shared legacies of colonial and postwar development. Then I briefly review the transitions literature to underscore its limitations when considering the anomalous patterns of democratization in Taiwan and the Philippines. Methodologically, I adopt the Most Similar

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2 A notable exception is Diamond and Plattner’s (1998) volume, which surveys recent political developments across Northeast and Southeast Asia. Many of its articles, however, are of a normative nature and are confined to case studies. The few attempts at regional analyses generally center on the debate over the role of Asian values in explaining the inadequacies of the liberal democratic model in certain parts of East Asia. While Pei (1998) does seek to adopt a regional perspective, he acknowledges that his work is a survey rather than a systematic comparative study of East Asian regime changes. More problematic, Pei maintains that the Filipino transition is exceptional in that many of the postulates on political change in East Asia are not applicable to the Philippines, suggesting that a major lacuna exists in this literature. The recurring theme of “Philippine exceptionalism” also appears in Shin’s (2008) otherwise impressive comparative work.
Systems Design and the paired comparison strategy in order to juxtapose the experiences of the two countries with sufficient historical detail. I then offer a tentative alternative framework which integrates the voluntarist and macrostructural traditions of democratization theory to account for institutional stasis and change in the two countries. This article concludes by suggesting further avenues of research and by drawing out tentative implications for theories of comparative democratization.

**Similar Origins but Divergent Trajectories**

Although taking divergent paths to democracy in the 1980s, the Philippines and Taiwan have shared strikingly analogous histories of socioeconomic development since the early 20th century and during a significant portion of the postwar decades. The two neighboring societies experienced half a century of colonial rule under expansionist imperial powers, during which both islands witnessed social modernization on an unprecedented scale. While there were notable differences in economic management under the Japanese and American administrations, the dramatic expansion of commercial agriculture and manufacture of light industrial goods like cement and textiles, along with lucrative cash crops such as rice, sugar, and coconut to the mother country, greatly enriched the colonial economies (Power and Sicat 1971). By the end of the Japanese occupation and the Second World War, the two societies enjoyed among the highest standards of living in Asia (Gold 1986; Wurfel 1988). The Philippines, in particular, boasted the strongest human capital development in East Asia from the 1950s and at least until the late 1960s. The levels of commercial activity, literacy rates, educational attainment, public infrastructure, and real per capita incomes in the Philippines were arguably higher than its contemporaries like South Korea and Taiwan.

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3 For example, one major difference between colonial development in Taiwan and the Philippines relates to the commercialization of agriculture. In the former, sugar production was achieved through the state monopoly's forced compliance of Taiwanese smallholders to sell their cane at controlled prices. In the Philippines, however, sugar production saw relatively minimal state interference and expanded concomitant with land accumulation by Chinese-Filipino estate owners. This class of oligarchs came to wrest much political and socioeconomic clout under the colonial state's auspices, and has continued to rule Filipino politics to this day (Tu 1992; Wurfel 1988).
Beginning in 1949, moreover, the Taiwanese and the Filipino states undertook parallel policies in import, foreign exchange, and price controls as the Chiang Kai-shek and Elpidio Quirino administrations sought to inaugurate import-substitution industrialization in order to resolve mounting balance-of-payment issues. With substantial American military and financial aid, an economic boom that saw impressive annual growth rates of 6% in the Philippines and Taiwan, at times exceeding 10%, was sustained from 1948 to at least 1968 (see Table 1). Though its growth patterns did diverge from Taiwan in the mid-1960s, the Philippines under authoritarian rule experienced internationally respectable growth rates that bolstered Marcos’s legitimacy among international creditors, foreign investors, and the domestic capitalists for much of the martial law years. Like Taiwan, the Philippines under Marcos underwent a change from import-replacement to export-oriented industrialization in the early 1970s. In fact, even scholars who question Marcos’s industrialization policies concede that the period of 1973-79 was an era of historically unparalleled growth for the Philippine economy, ranging from 6 to 7%, rates that compared favorably with the performance of middle-income countries (Oshima 1983; Hill and Jayasuriya 1985: 130-131).

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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In addition to their comparable socioeconomic trajectories, Taiwan and the Philippines
display crucial similarities in their postwar political legacies. Both countries became full-blown authoritarian regimes following serious crises in authority amid social protests, economic stagnation, and indiscriminate state violence. The patrimonial dictatorships established by Ferdinand Marcos and Chiang Kai-shek initiated and oversaw long periods of martial rule, during which opposition parties and autonomous civic associations were banned; leading dissidents imprisoned or coopted en masse; communist insurgencies and civil liberties systematically suppressed; and rampant human rights violations were committed by the ever-expanding military apparatus and the internal security agencies. When overt repression succeeded in eliminating manifest expressions of dissent, the Kuomintang under the two Chiangs and the Kilusan Bagong Lipunan (New Society Movement; KBL) under Marcos ensured their dominance through extensive clientalism and military surveillance that coopted oligarchs and opposition elites, and through severely restrictive elections that excluded participation by alternative parties. At the same time, both autocracies acquired unwavering international support from Western countries for their leading positions in the global anti-communist front.

Following the imposition of martial law in 1949, Taiwan Provincial Governor Ch’en Ch’eng and Chiang Kai-shek’s Soviet-trained son Chiang Ching-kuo greatly expanded the scope of powers of the Taiwan Garrison Command, suspended constitutionally guaranteed civil liberties, and streamlined the complex internal security apparatus that oversaw the arrests and murders of thousands of Taiwanese and mainland refugees in the 1950s (Gold 1986: 54, 63)—an era widely known as White Terror. In the words of Gold, “the reconquered Taiwanese again became leaderless, atomized, quiescent, and apolitical” (p.52). This ruthless internal pacification saw the simultaneous institution of local elections that on the one hand divided indigenous elites into competing factions that crosscut administrative divisions below the provincial level, and on the other hand earned the loyalty of local factions to the Supreme Leader through the reallocation of financial rewards (Wu 1987; Ch’en 1995). With successful purges of rival mainlander factions at the national level, the mainlander oligarchy came to hold a strong stake in the authoritarian
order with their domination of the unelected state institutions—the parliament, military, bureaucracy, and the security apparatus. Faced with minimal organized opposition, the Kuomintang easily won local, provincial as well as supplementary legislative elections from 1950 to 1977 (Chu 1992).

The Philippines under Marcos exhibited a pattern of “constitutional authoritarianism” similar to Taiwan. Despite its long tradition of competitive elections harking back to American rule, the Philippines experienced a severe breakdown of democracy and militarization during Marcos’s presidency. The country saw “massive disappearances at the hands of military units, paramilitary forces, covert intelligence operatives,” along with the suppression of civil liberties, suspension of the Constitution, Congress and political parties, and the systematic detention, torture, and murder of regime opponents (Hedman 2006: 88; Wurfel 1988: 124-126). In fact, human rights violations were so pervasive that the dramatically expanded Armed Forces of the Philippines, the Philippine Constabulary, and its various security surrogates had engaged in nearly 50,000 arrests of politicians, businesspeople, landowners, church activists in the first three years of martial law, and killed at least 2,250 between 1977 and 1986 (Rho 1992: 196). So effective was Marcos’s repression that the traditional opposition had been thrown into disarray, either being coopted by the regime, fled to the United States, or rendered powerless amid the KBL’s growing political clout (Thompson 1991). The landed oligarchs, military, technocrats, and crony capitalists—clients who arose under Marcos’s auspices—also displayed strong allegiance to an authoritarian regime that had received phenomenal injections of U.S. military and economic aid (Bello and Rivera 1977; Nemenzo 1985: 47-50).

Geopolitical factors have partly influenced cross-national similarities in authoritarian institutions and practices, as well as in the general patterns of economic development. In an insightful journalistic account, Sterling Seagrave (1988) delineates the mechanisms of Kuomintang influence on the Marcos dictatorship and the interdependence of the two Chiangs and Marcos in the wider context of the Cold War. Through military exchanges,
financial contributions to Marcos by the pro-ROC Chinese-Filipino lobby, and the training of Philippine covert operatives at Taipei’s Political Warfare Cadre Academy, the Kuomintang came to exercise significant influence on the Philippines. Similarly, successive postwar Filipino administrations had long marshaled ideological support to Chiang Kai-shek, believing that doing so would not only contain the external threat posed by Communist China, but would also prevent the Philippine left from obtaining assistance from the foreign foe\(^4\). The U.S. government, the Washington-dominated international lending agencies, and the Chinese diaspora had likewise played an indispensable part in advancing the interests of Chiang and Marcos through organizations such as the World Anticommunist League and the Asian Peoples’ Anticommunist League, of which Taiwan and the Philippines were founding members. Because of Taiwan’s geographic proximity to the Philippines, its successful economic model helped to shape one of Marcos’s pillars of “New Society”: statist development through technocratic management, labor repression and recruitment of foreign capital. Though the symbiotic relationship between Taipei and Manila changed in response to the ROC’s waning influence and its eventual derecognition in the late 1970s, the economic and political contacts established by the postwar state elites of both countries remained important through the 1980s.

In summary, despite their similar political and socioeconomic processes and shared historical experiences, Taiwan and the Philippines underwent contrasting trajectories of democratic regime change in the late 1980s. While the Philippine opposition in conjunction with civil society forces and ordinary people spawned a nonviolent popular movement that dislodged Marcos from power and reinstated democracy, Taiwan saw a protracted transition whereby authoritarian vestiges remained in place long after the liberalization of the 1980s. And while popular mobilization, launched by an array of civil society sectors such as church, labor, human

\(^4\) The unusually strong relations between Taiwan and the Philippines as anticommunist allies date back to the pre-Marcos years. During the Taiwan Strait crisis of 1955, for instance, the Philippines was the first Asian country to authorize the use of its military force against the PRC for the defense of the Chiang regime. Other cornerstones of mutual cooperation include the Sino-Philippine Friendship Treaty of 1947 and the Philippines’ Anti-Subversive Act of 1957 (Haberer 2009: 62).
rights, farmer and student movements, had been vital to both the Taiwanese and Filipino cases of transition, the former did not lead to the breakdown of the authoritarian state but to a very gradual reform of the existing nondemocratic institutions.

Although I have demonstrated numerous similarities between Taiwan and the Philippines, comparative studies on the two countries’ political development are still rare, though a few recent volumes examine their post-transition challenges (Hsiao 2006; Ku 2008). Nevertheless, some of these analyses take for granted the presumed political and economic differences between Taiwan and the Philippines rather than subject them to systematic analysis, and present the countries’ differential transition experiences as starting points rather than as objects to be explained. As a result, crucial commonalities are often underplayed while variations between the two countries are often emphasized and offered as reasons for their divergent patterns of democratic consolidation. Because a comparative literature on Taiwan and the Philippines is as yet lacking, I anchor my theoretical discussion by briefly reviewing the general transitions literature.

Competing Theories of Democratization

Taiwan and the Philippines appear to fit well the modernization thesis put forward by Lipset (1959). Both countries have experienced a dramatic improvement after 1945 in the various socioeconomic indicators cited by scholars to be important for democracy. Yet, these structural changes hardly demonstrate a clear linkage with the two countries’ actual political experiences.

In fact, the Philippines degenerated from an electoral democracy to a hard authoritarian regime after two decades of relatively strong economic growth; the decay of Marcos’s

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5 Ku’s study, for instance, takes as his point of departure the difference between the Philippines’ “bottom-up” transition and Taiwan’s “top-down” process, and contends that both countries have experienced different forms of political crisis despite similar progress toward amending the constitution, enhancing political participation, restructuring the political system, and improving civil liberties in the post-Marcos and post-Chiang eras. His conclusion is that Taiwan has done better in consolidating democracy than the Philippines due to the absence of rebel groups, military coups, and mass distrust of the electoral process in Taiwan during the 1990s. Nevertheless, the author makes no attempt to analyze the pre-transition commonalities and variations between Taiwan and the Philippines that might have been critical for their varying paths to consolidation.
dictatorship in the 1980s, moreover, occurred in a context of an acute economic crisis where real per capita incomes had fallen by more than 10% according to some conservative estimates. In the case of Taiwan, the longevity of the KMT well past the income threshold predicted to conduce to a breakdown of dictatorship also challenges the conventional wisdom of modernization theory. More problematic for present purposes, modernization theory is used to explain whether countries have a high probability for transiting to democracy; it does not provide an explanation as to how countries may undertake varying patterns of regime change. An account that looks into political agency and strategic interactions among social forces appears to be more helpful in understanding the distinctive course of a country’s path to democracy.

The transitologist perspective offers a promising corrective to the relatively static understanding of democratization prevalent in the macrostructural approach. O’Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead (1986) contend that the strategic interactions between authoritarian regimes and opposition elites are vital for improving the prospects for a successful transition. Elite negotiations between regime softliners and opposition moderates in which the interests of hardliners are safeguarded and the “radicals” are marginalized are claimed to be conducive to a smooth transition process. Though focusing on the post-transition aspects of democracy, Higley and Gunther (1992) also stress the centrality of consensual unity and settlement among elites as a necessary condition for democratic consolidation.

While the elite-centered theory meshes fairly well with the Taiwanese case, where some form of elite settlement was noticeably present, it does not provide a convincing explanation for the Filipino situation. As argued earlier, in the Philippines the widespread societal mobilization not only forced Marcos out of power; it also precluded a negotiated transition between outgoing and incoming political elites (Thompson 1991). A major shortcoming of the elite-centered approach is that it underplays the roles of mass mobilization and civil society groups in the

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6 I adopt Cohen and Arato’s (1992) definition of civil society as “a sphere of social interaction between economy and state, composed above all of the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of associations (especially voluntary associations), social movements, and forms of public communication” (ix).
transformation of a polity. The Filipino case shows that theories of pacted transitions are insufficient to understand its revolutionary mode of transition. Rather than focusing exclusively on the rulers’ self-interested behavior, more attention also needs to be paid to the mobilization of nonelite actors in uncovering the dynamics of political change. This article seeks to fill this gap by proposing an alternative framework that examines structural factors that constrain or encourage mass mobilization and political change, as well as the strategies taken by diverse social forces, including the political opposition and organized sectors within civil society, that limit or facilitate the attainment of their goals. Before proceeding to my theoretical framework, it is useful at this point to elaborate how I conceptualize transition paths.

Although prevailing theories may classify the Philippine mode of democratization in 1986 as ruptura, wherein authoritarian elites are immediately replaced by members of the opposition marking the beginning of transition, I argue that the People Power Revolution was far-reaching in intensity and scope compared to the vast majority of third wave transitions. The popular movement for democracy had not only foreclosed elite settlement altogether, preventing the kind of elite replacement in East Central Europe; it had also overthrown the ancien régime by nonviolent protest, leading to the disposition of Marcos and the opposition’s rise to the presidency. The transition to democracy, solidified by ratification in a national plebiscite of the 1987 Constitution, had completed by the end of Corazon Aquino’s term in 1992. Following Thompson (2004), I define the Filipino transition as a revolutionary pattern of democratization, brought about through sustained and widespread mobilization by opposition and civil society sectors.

Taiwan, by contrast, underwent a protracted electoral transition in spite of Chiang Ching-kuo’s lifting of martial law in 1987. General elections were held for the first time in 1992, followed by municipal and gubernatorial elections in 1994. Despite a decade of public demand for direct election of the presidency, it did not materialize until 1996 and only with a resounding victory for the KMT—one of the world’s longest reigning party dynasties. While many political
scientists characterize the Taiwanese transition as one of regime-led transformation, I would contend that it is a negotiated transition whereby both regime and opposition elites had played prominent roles in the process. Thus, the case of Taiwan would seem to fit with Higley, Huang, and Lin’s (1998) definition of elite settlement between Kuomintang reformers and moderate members of the DPP. Still, the persistence of the one-party regime and the piecemeal, “delayed”, and highly reformist nature of Taiwan’s transition (Shatz 2000; Winckler 2001), presents a particularly difficult puzzle for students of democratization. As two of Asia’s few countries that have undergone dual transitions to capitalism and democracy in the contemporary age, the Filipino and Taiwanese trajectories of political change appear as polar opposites and crucial deviant cases.

**Methodology**

The comparative features of this study are reflected on two fronts. First, this article employs the Most Similar Systems Design, attributing divergence in outcomes not to very similar factors but to crucial differences in starting conditions. Methodologically, I utilize the paired comparison strategy and comparative historical methods, in order to deepen understanding of the two unique country processes, to improve the precision of single case studies and broader comparative analyses, and to formulate middle-range generalizations (Whitehead 2002: 202-211).

I argue that comparative-historical methods are particularly useful for illuminating the general causes of the Taiwanese and the Filipino political developments because of the numerous cross-national interactions that I have illustrated. Marc Bloch’s (1969) description below aptly captures the utility of comparative history as a method of inquiry:

> [The method permits] a parallel study of societies that are at once neighbouring and

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7 In her study on Mexico, Shatz argues that the country’s process of democratization is delayed in relation to its socioeconomic development and organizational theories of political control, rendering Mexico a crucial deviant case for Latin America in particular, and for the third wave in general. She further maintains that Taiwan under the Kuomintang and Mexico under Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) resemble each other and constitute what she terms an ideal type of belated democratization in non-Leninist single-party systems.

8 For an overview of the comparative historical tradition in the social sciences, see Mahoney and Rueschemeyer (2003).
contemporary, exercising a constant mutual influence, exposed throughout their
development to the action of the same broad causes just because they are close and
contemporaneous, and owing their existence in part at least to a common origin (p.47).

Another rationale for employing cross-national comparisons in my study is because of their
sensitivity to institutional variations and commonalities across different societies. By developing
expertise in more than one case, comparativists have moved away from the “grand theories” of
canonical social science of the 1950s to a more contextualized body of scientific knowledge
covering diverse fields of inquiry and nearly all regions of the world. Far from ignoring
contextual differences, a major appeal of comparative-historical inquiry is its attention to
common historical experiences with a view to identifying theoretically relevant crucial differences
on independent variables that affect variations in outcomes. Such an intellectual exercise
contributes to more empirically grounded and historically accurate generalizations that are
immensely valuable for theory-building.

An Integrative Approach to Democratization

Theoretically, my research adopts an integrative-institutionalist approach. The integrative
approach incorporates micro and macro levels of analysis, subjective states of actors and
objective conditions as explanatory variables, and idiographic and nomothetic methods of
comparison, all of which serve to synthesize the agential and structural theories of
democratization (Mahoney and Snyder 1999). The conceptual foundation of my approach leans
toward the voluntarist tradition because structural constraints, I submit, are insufficient to
account for the frequently volatile compromises and struggles that characterize interactions
between social actors preceding, during, and after a transition. A comparative investigation,
nevertheless, suggests that political and social structures matter greatly, as institutional variations
significantly affect the differential success of actors in promoting or hindering change. Hence in
the next phase of my research, my integrative framework will probe the role of founding
Andy Scott Chang

institutions in shaping political behavior across varying historical periods, as well as examine how the choices of domestic and international forces at distinct conjunctures influence subsequent trajectories. For now, my causal explanation consists of four variables that incorporate structural and agentic dimensions to account for institutional stasis and change in postwar Taiwan and the Philippines.

First, the timing and extent of state formation is crucial to understanding differences in transition paths between Taiwan and the Philippines. This structural variable is related to the degree of state capacity in implementing its goals vis-à-vis competing forces in society (Skocpol 1985), and the distribution and organization of state power. In line with this conception of state power, one may characterize the Taiwanese authoritarian regime as highly consolidated but with a centralized bureaucratic structure whose powers are allocated across various levels of state and party organizations. A more diffused distribution of resources, as opposed to concentration in a narrow circle of personalities and groups, makes it possible to speak of the Taiwanese state as displaying greater insulation from provincial interests, which facilitates the implementation of state goals. In contrast, while the Philippine state was also centralized under Ferdinand Marcos, control of the state apparatus was vested in the hands of a few cronies closely allied with the dictator and the bureaucracy remained largely in the shadow with real decision-making reserved to Marcos and his associates. This scenario created difficulties for the Marcos dictatorship’s sustainability by depriving the regime of a much-needed popular base and by hampering the professional management of its bureaucratic state.

To be more specific, I would contend that the authoritarian regime crafted by the Kuomintang was a product of institutionalized state-building that emerged out of a systematic repression of indigenous intelligentsia and the creation of parallel structures of central and provincial authority on the basis of a colonial state that was already highly centralized and effective. In March 1947 following island-wide uprisings and riots against Chen Yi, reinforcements of 50,000 troops from the Chinese mainland executed 10,000 to 20,000 of the
Settlement Committee’s supporters (McCoy 1971: 25). With successful suppression of regime critics, the massive party, military, and internal security organs that the KMT streamlined in the 1950s and the centralized bureaucratic administration and state monopolies inherited from the Japanese, strengthened the repressive capacity and politico-economic foundations of the transplanted regime. Indeed, the growth of the Taiwan Garrison Command’s internal surveillance networks and the infiltration of Leninist party organizations into many spheres of social life—state enterprises, schools, farmer, worker and professional associations—enabled the Kuomintang state to impose tight control over an initially antagonistic population. Meanwhile, incorporation of a broad spectrum of indigenous elites through restricted elections and crosscutting local factions further set limits to the growth of the opposition and facilitated the consolidation of the martial law regime in its early years. The sustained, relatively equitable and rapid development during the industrial expansion of the 1960s also prolonged authoritarian rule by increasing the party-state’s financial resources, securing mainlander and Taiwanese factional allegiance to the regime, and diverting popular demands for political reform. In short, one may describe the Taiwanese political scene during martial law as dominated by a sophisticated and insulated state machinery noted for its capacity to control and demobilize a “weak society,” and its ability to maintain the acquiescence of mainland and native elites under the aegis of a hegemonic, catch-all party.

By contrast, Marcos’s regime was little institutionalized and in large measure conditioned by the elite patronage connections that had persisted from the colonial times and well into the 1960s. While Marcos did succeed in concentrating executive power and enhancing the capacity of the state with his appointment of U.S.-trained technocrats and expansion of the military and bureaucracy, Marcos had been unable or unwilling to forge institutions that could elicit popular support beyond narrow factions of the pro-Marcos oligarchy. Though he did dispossess the lands and businesses owned by oppositional oligarchs, Marcos did so to enrich his family and friends rather than to transfer resources to the peasantry or to enhance state coffers. And while
the Philippine Armed Forces under Marcos saw aggrandizement unmatched anywhere in Southeast Asia, the levels of military organization and spending in this once-democratic country had been lower to begin with, making the Philippine Republic arguably less militarized than the ROC.

That the Marcos regime was vulnerable to challenge was in no insignificant part due to the highly “sultanistic” nature of Philippine political institutions. The point is not that the Marcos regime was less repressive than Chiang, but that it lacked the will to forge a rational, broadly based state apparatus that could expand the polity's mass base while coopting broad segments of the political elite. Instead, Marcos’s governing coalition became increasingly monopolized by an exclusive, personal circle of cronies who seemed more interested in self-enrichment than in incorporating other political elites into the system. In lieu of routinizing a hegemonic party system as the Chiings did on Taiwan, Marcos sought loyalty to his one-man rule by siphoning off state resources and privileging his political allies, friends and relatives in all matters dealing with the Philippine state—from lucrative business deals to government posts and pork politics. This style of “patrimonial plunder,” in the words of Hutchcroft (1991), was especially pronounced in Marcos’s developmental policy. Not willing to delegate powers to professional technocrats for economic management, Marcos embarked on debt-financed development centering on wasteful infrastructural projects and export of crony-operated primary production that was captive to the fluctuations of the world commodity market (Abinales and Amoroso 2005). The administration also exacted bribes from businesses and channeled foreign loans and state income to crony enterprises and the Marcos family. It is no wonder that the predatory state was ultimately unable to tackle the chronic problems of mass unemployment and severe income inequality—problems that would continue to exacerbate during the debt crisis of the 1980s and turn the population further against Marcos. In short, the Philippines’ style of extremely personalistic governance proved detrimental for the institutionalization of a broadly based polity that could manufacture and sustain societal consent over time. Such a system also makes the
Philippine state’s autonomy from particularistic interests considerably weaker compared to Taiwan.

The second factor to explain nationally different modes of transition paths is related to the ideological foundations of the authoritarian regime, specifically its ability to impose cultural hegemony over rival power holders. Through a political socialization process, societal forces may internalize a collectivist, authoritarian political culture inculcated by the state in a way that condition their possibilities for resisting authority. My argument is that the Kuomintang had been more successful than Marcos in transforming the moral and ideological fabric of society in a way that ensured the political conservatism of the masses. The suppression of leftist clandestine networks, communism, the Taiwanese national liberation movement, and other alternative ideologies and cultural identities, had been arguably more extensive in Taiwan than in the Philippines. The hugely successful social reengineering as encapsulated in the land reform also served as a counterrevolutionary device that forestalled peasant stirrings and communist recruitment, and “eliminated the entrenched power of the hostile landowning families and won the allegiance of the peasants” (McCoy 1971: 25). Any semblance of competing ideologies were quickly suppressed, evidenced in the mass arrests of mainland liberal intellectuals who attempted to form a political party with the Taiwanese gentry in 1960 behind the platform of the Free China journal. The KMT’s monopoly on political socialization, backed up by the coercive arms of the state, in effect prevented the rise of an ideologically grounded anti-government alliance, let alone a leftist armed struggle.

Marcos, on the other hand, has been said to show relatively little interest in promoting and institutionalizing a dominant ideology (Thompson 1996). Amid the weaknesses of Marcos’s ideological commitment to his professed desire for a “new society,” the people’s army of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) exploited the situations of peasant poverty and landlord oppression and made major inroads into rural areas, so much so that the revolutionary movement had spread exponentially under Marcos. In the 1970s and 1980s, members of the
traditional opposition and the Church came to forge alliances with the CPP for mobilization against martial law. Beliefs in procedural democracy and human rights, especially in the wake of “Ninoy” Aquino’s assassination, also became significant ideological currents that united various civil society organizations under the umbrella of the National Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL). The continuing viability of alternative political ideologies, and the KBL’s relative incapacity of political indoctrination in a society that had once been the most democratic in Southeast Asia, made it difficult for Marcos to consolidate his authoritarian rule.

The third component, derived in part from social movement and transition theories, concerns the more contingent strategic choices made by the regime and opposition forces and the masses antecedent to a transition. Contingent factors are important because, while the processes of regime transition are conditioned by the structural constraints put in place by authoritarian rulers, the outcomes of these political struggles are by no means preordained. Moreover, state structures do create unintended consequences that may offer opportunities for actors to promote their goals. Nemenzo (1985), for example, argues that many alternatives existed in the event Marcos’s health problems incapacitated him, depending on the strength of particular political forces: the regime could experience a communist revolution, a more bureaucratic form of authoritarian rule, or a genuine transition to democracy. This is so because large-scale political change does not flow automatically from the structural conditions of a regime; they are at the very least mediated through actors’ cognitive processes and through the actions taken by political agents.

In the Philippines after Benigno Aquino’s assassination, the opposition and various civil society groups, notably the Catholic Church led by Cardinal Sin and pro-Aquino business associations, united behind a common anti-Marcos platform, facilitating the impressive popular movement for democracy that has inspired activists across Asia and beyond. At the same time, however, the full potential of these civil society groups and ordinary individuals could not have been realized without the occurrence of the unexpected 1986 snap elections and the emergent
rifts within the military as exemplified by the Reform the Armed Forces Movement (RAM). The failed coup attempt by Juan Ponce Enrile, Fidel Ramos, Gregorio Honasan and others, and Cardinal Sin’s timely calls for mass support behind the mutineers also created a window of opportunity for a mass rebellion. A combination of tactical errors made by Marcos and his cronies, and the decisive choices made by the Church and millions of unarmed people to come to the aid of the RAM, fostered a situation in which the structural weaknesses of the Marcos regime were fully exploited. But perhaps most critical to the success of the Philippine revolution was the unity between opposition elites and civil society sectors in their resistance against the Marcos dictatorship and their desire to restore democracy.

Such a concerted movement for democracy was late in coming in the case of Taiwan, where power struggles and cleavages between and among opposition and erstwhile authoritarian elites took shape both before and in response to the proliferation of social movements and popular protests in the late 1980s. Divisions among opposition elites, notably between the Formosa and New Tide factions, over whether to partake in street protests or to form interorganizational alliances with social movements had probably limited the potential for multi-class mass demonstrations against authoritarian rule. At the same time, the weakness of a consensus among civil society groups on the need for political change and the fragmented nature of Taiwanese collective protests prevented the forging of a popular democratic movement. The lack of a concerted opposition to authoritarian rule created little incentives for the KMT to inaugurate wide-ranging political reforms that might threaten its survival.

The final issue to consider is the international environment that influenced events in Taiwan and the Philippines. International distrust towards the soundness of Marcos’s economic management and dissatisfaction with the dictator’s human rights record appeared to have been significant factors in aggravating Marcos’s floundering legitimacy at home and abroad, especially after the Aquino assassination. Taiwan, meanwhile, had continued to enjoy steady levels of economic growth and healthy trade relations with foreign nations through successful
export-oriented industrialization, which probably had helped to engender international praise for Taiwan’s efficient if dictatorial developmental state. The regime’s successful economic performance, coupled with the international community’s abstention of criticism against the KMT’s martial law regime, seemed to have been a factor enabling the KMT to delay political liberalization until the late 1980s.

To sum up, the confluence of a weakly institutionalized dictatorship, limited cultural hegemony, a united opposition and civil society, and a critical international environment provided opportunities for a political revolution in the Philippines. By the same token, the combination of a strongly consolidated party-state, an authoritarian political culture, disunited pro-democracy forces, and a less critical international environment, facilitated political change in a more reformist direction.

**Conclusion**

This article has examined the Taiwanese and Filipino democratic transitions in a comparative perspective. It has argued that the Philippine mode of transition by mass mobilization has served as an influential model for the Taiwanese opposition. As subsequent events have demonstrated, however, Taiwan and the Philippines underwent very different trajectories of democratic regime change. Whereas Taiwan embarked on a remarkably prolonged and controlled process of liberalization with the Kuomintang maintaining its firm hold over the polity, the Philippines witnessed a dramatic transformation of state-society relations whereby the opposition swiftly took power and restored democratic institutions in the immediate years under Mrs. Aquino.9

In order to show that Taiwan and the Philippines are comparable in many vital respects, I have adopted the Most Similar Systems Design to highlight their analogous processes of socioeconomic and political development from the colonial to the postwar decades. I have

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9 These changes include the ratification of a democratic Philippine Constitution in 1987; the release of all political prisoners; the restoration of civil liberties and democratic elections; and a greater role for civil society groups in government policymaking.
shown that both countries had experienced long periods of socioeconomic modernization and broadly similar courses of industrial development in response to both external and internal challenges. Politically, in Taiwan and the Philippines authoritarian state-building came into full swing following a succession of crises brought by economic malaise, communist revolt, popular protests, and state violence. Where Chiang Kai-shek persecuted tens of thousands of suspected communist sympathizers and Taiwanese dissenters, Ferdinand Marcos engaged in startling acts of human rights violations, torture and summary executions of leftists, vocal members of the traditional opposition, student activists, journalists, and civic group leaders. Both regimes also consolidated power through extensive patronage and electoral manipulation on the domestic front, and through American military and economic aid during the Cold War. These cross-national similarities became all the more clear when viewed in the context of mutual influence between the Taiwanese and Filipino martial regimes on the frontline of anticommunism.

Having established their comparability, I proceeded to conceptualize the transition pathways taken by Taiwan and the Philippines as reformist and revolutionary. The article then advanced an alternative framework that postulated four explanatory variables—state institutions, cultural hegemony, oppositional mobilization, and international factors—to account for the variations in transition modes.

Though this preliminary investigation has focused on two of Asia’s new democracies, it bears relevance for theory construction in general. On a theoretical level, it is critical to transcend the current methodical divide between overly abstract grand theories and highly particular case studies that seem less open to comparative theorizing. While there is a certain appeal with universal generalizations and detailed historical narrations, it appears that a contextualized body of knowledge that can adequately account for both cross-national similarities and differences provides a better balance between theory building and empirical explanation. In relation to the literature on Asian democratization, to avoid overgeneralizing
“Asian values” or modernization as root causes of regime transitions, successful middle-range theorizing would benefit from greater scholarly engagement in systematic, cross-country comparative inquiry across Asia’s new democracies. By analyzing each country’s historical evolution in greater depth, it would also facilitate researchers’ identification of causal mechanisms behind nationally distinctive transition pathways.
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