Southeast Asia political Systems Development: Democracy or Democratization Politics

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ABSTRACT

The concept of democracy and the process of democratization are always difficult to define and operationalize. One way to deal with this challenge is to define democracy in liberal terms and assess democratization as a liberal process. This study argue that there is a difference between democracy and democratization in terms and processing. In addition, I argue that Southeast Asia is a region where uneven political development presents a theoretical challenge to the study of regime change and continuity in the academic field of comparative politics. Only Timor-Leste, the Philippines, and Indonesia can now considered liberally democratic. However, these democracies far from merged. The other eight regimes range from soft dictatorships to electoral authoritarian regimes and illiberal democracies. This study seeks to explain why no single theory adequately explains regime change and continuity in this region. Obstacles to democratization are many, one of which is the fact that traditional and undemocratic institutions remain strong and that transitions to civilian rule remain vulnerable to other powerful state institutions, most notably the armed forces.

Keywords: *South East Asia, Dictatorship; Electoral Authoritarianism, Democracy, Democratization, Liberal Democracy.*

INTRODUCTION

This paper tried to present a relevant subject in political and scientific terms in the field of comparative studies about Southeast Asia political regimes, democracy and democratization.

It based on a fair balance between theoretical references and empirical data, using classical and contemporary categories to analyze political categories. In addition, it considered different factors that influence political process (civil society engagement, economic development, political elites, external powers and culture). The core question of the paper is to demonstrate "why no single theory adequately explains regime change and continuity in this region" as the paper's main hypothesis. By using a balanced theoretical references and empirical published data, we adopted the classical methodology comparatively.

DEMOCRATIZATION[1] VIS UNDEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENTS

The sensitivity of democracy and the process of democratization are always difficult to define

and operationalize. One way to deal with this challenge is to define democracy in liberal terms and assess democratization as a liberal process. We may define democracy, in this respect, as a conceptual contrast of dictatorship.

Dictatorship as a system of government refers to rule unrestrained by law. Rulers not held accountable to their citizens, as they have not elected representatives. Changes of government only come about when dictators die or by revolution, coup d'état, war, and so on. Dictators control public institutions, such as the military, the judiciary, the legislature, and the mass media. They contempt active opposition and cover up their absolute rule with ideological rationalization. Civil society does not exist; if it does, it remains tremendously weak or lacks political independence and relents to state control[2].

The Japanese political system that existed until the end of World War II, in Nigeria until 1975, and in Myanmar until 2010, and Egypt until

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[1] The author would advance his notion of democracy and democratization that there is very essential difference between democracy and democratization in Definition and Process.

[2] The author argue that authoritarianism, for instance, has several forms, but it can be either 'hard' or 'soft,' depending on the level of political repression and violence. Dictatorship can be military, monarchical, personality, civilian, or radical.

2011, and Tunisia until 2011and in Sudan until 2019 can considered military dictatorships during which military juntas ruled unchallenged[3].

The greatest example of monarchical dictatorship or absolutism is the "personal rule of King Louis XIV of France", who regarded himself as "The state, that's me!")[4]. The Philippines under President Ferdinand Marcos, for instance, can interpreted as an example of personalization dictatorship. However, radical dictatorships are those in which the proletariat (working class) or a communist party rules and does not allow any opposition parties to compete in elections.

In addition, electoral authoritarian regimes allow a degree of political openness through electoral inter-party competition, though the hegemonic party is always certain to win any elections and dominate the political arena. Such regimes have also been described as "competitive authoritarian"[5] "pseudo-democratic", and "virtual-democratic"[6]. According to Larry Diamond, a hegemonic party system is one in which a relatively institutionalized ruling party monopolizes the political arena, using coercion, patronage, media control, and other means to deny formally legal opposition parties any real chance of competing for power[7]

In addition, elections are un-free and ensuring hegemonic parties win most of the seats. The system of "institutional checks and balances" exists but remains extremely weak. The legislature and the judiciary are subject to influence by the executive whose power monopolized by the hegemonic party. Hegemonic parties also incline to use instinctive force to maintain their dominance rather than more subtle techniques, such as bribery, co-option, or forms of mild persecution or harassment[8]

A more democratic form of government may labelled as *illiberal model*[9]. In delegated democracies, basic democratic standards generally met, but levels of accountability remain low. Opposition parties can be expected to gain more seats due to freer and fairer elections and to have more influence within the legislature; they are, however, predictably unable to decisively defeat the incumbent. Elections only serve to back the ruling elite's strategy for development and to continue legitimizing its performance, not to remove the incumbent from power. As far as procedural issues are concerned, democracy largely viewed as a means to "justify" the dominant party's electoral victory. The individual does not *fully* enjoy certain liberties, such as freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, demonstration and strike[10]. The system of checks and balances fails to constrain elected officials as they seek to stay in power[11]

Democracies are liberal not only because they hold regular, free, and fair elections with a degree of outcome uncertainty (not unpredictable but also because laws govern them designed to protect individual human rights and freedoms, most notably political rights and civil liberties. Elections are a political mechanism designed to ensure free and fair competition for power, but they do not make countries liberally democratic unless elected leaders represent citizens' interests.

Liberal democratic regimes have several basic features: first, elections are contestable in a free and fair manner[12]. Samuel Huntington's procedural definition of democracy provides a starting point. In his words: "a twentieth-century political system [is considered] democratic to the extent that its most powerful collective decision makers are selected through fair, honest, and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote" [13].

However, free and fair elections alone do not make a society democratic. Elections are "only one step, an important virtue of governance, but

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[3]We provided other examples from other regions to show the dilemma of democracy and democratization as new democratic challenges factor facing world today.

[4]We have added from the political history civilian dictatorships include Nazi Germany, where the armed forces supported the democratically elected dictator Adolf Hitler. Personality dictatorships are characterized by family members or friends of the dictator ruling with the latter (Beki 2000)

[5](Lewinski and Way 2002).

[6](Diamond 1999: 15–16).

[7](Diamond 2002: 25).

[8](Levitsky and Way 2002: 53).

[9]For further analysis of this type of political regime is similar to the "delegated democracy" look at which advanced by A. Guillermo O'Donnell (1994).

[10]For example, the rule of law, the protection of political and civil liberties, and the institutional separation of powers may exist in theory but not in practice.

[11](Zakaria 1997).

[12]According to Diamond (1999: 13–15).

[13](Huntington 1991: 6–7).

are not the only one virtue" (Zakaria 1997: 40). Second, there must a peaceful transfer of power after elections. The losers must accept the results and let the winning party form a new government. Third, civil liberties, one of the three dimensions of procedural democracy identified by George Sorensen (1993) defended.

To conclude, democracy is liberal only if it based on "constitutional liberalism". Whereas the term "liberal" emphasizes individual liberty, the term "constitutional" is associated with the individual rights to life and property and other forms of freedom such as religious freedom and free speech. These individual rights and freedoms secured by "checks on the power of each branch of government, equality under the law, impartial courts and tribunals, and separation of church and state" (Zakaria 1997: 26). Fourth, elected representatives possess real authority to govern without being subject to undemocratic acts of subversion, such as military coups, insurgency movements and terrorism.

Our arguments, here, is based on that democratization as a process of political development towards liberal democracy is often disorganized and not lined[14] . Thus, we can choose to talk about the "quality" of democracy, as does William Case (2002). Still, we can define liberal democratization as the process of transition from illiberal to liberal democracy and the consolidation of liberal democracy.

In another term, democratic consolidation has defined in different ways. Adam Przeworski, for example, makes this argument: "Democracy is merged when under given political and economic conditions a particular system of institutions becomes the only game in metropolis, when no one can imagine acting outside of the democratic institutions. In addition, when all losers want to do is to try again within the same institutions under which they have just lost (Przeworski 1991: 26). which none of the major political actors, parties, or organized interests, forces, institutions consider that there is any alternative to democratic processes to gain power, and that no political institution or group has a claim to veto the action of democratically elected decision makers" (Linz 1990: 158).

Larry Diamond (1999: 20) advances a *behavior*-based perspective, arguing, "The essence of democratic consolidation is a behavioral and attitudinal hold of democratic principles and methods by both elites and masses."

Others view democratic joining in maximalist terms, which consists of the establishment of a civilian political regime that is responsive and accountable, that has full control over the military, that guarantees basic civil rights, and that presides over a Tocquevillian social democratization[15].

CULTURALISM APPROACH VIA DEMOCRATIZATION

Although different theoretical perspectives on liberal democratization have been reviewed (Case 2002: 10–25; Frolic 2001), none has adequate explanatory power. Culturalism, economic, class-based perspectives help shed light on the challenges of liberal democratization, but their insights are limited. As will be seen, economic and political elites and their power relations vis-à-vis, social actors as well as external powers also matter.

Democratization is constrained by the limits of institution building in a context where non-elected members of the armed forces remain powerful.

Culturalism perspectives remain popular in terms of their ability to explain regime continuity and the limits of liberal democratization in Southeast Asia, but they still have difficulty clarifying varying degrees of democratic development in East Asia. Culturalisms reject Francis Fukuyama's 'end of history' claim about the triumph of liberal democracy over all other cultural and ideological rivals. Even scholars who previously advanced structural functionalism modified their thinking. For example, Huntington came to recognize the importance of cultural factors. Non-liberal traditions like Islam and Confucianism resist democratic values[16]. Culturalisms do not claim that no state in East Asia has become democratic. Rather they argue that democracies in the region (Indonesia, Japan,

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[14]You may look at the Author's first citation (no 1)

[15]However, we argues that liberal democracy merged not only when it becomes the "only game in town" (i.e. when elections are free and fair, when the transfer of political power takes place peacefully, when civilian governments have effective control over the armed forces, and when democratic institutions are stable and face no serious subversive activity from undemocratic forces). However, when elected governments represent the interests of those who vote for them and protect civil liberties for all citizens (which includes economic freedom but not socio-economic equality).

[16]Huntington (1993, 1987, and 1984).

South Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines) have not become truly liberal.

Democracy in East Asia also characterized as "Asian style" or simply "illiberal" (Bell et al. 1995). The term "Asian-style democracy" has coined to make the point that this system is anti-liberal (Case 1996). Western-style democracy has made no serious bath into East Asia because of its anti-liberal values (Kausikan 1998). William Case predicts, "Politics [in the region] will probably evolve in the direction of semi-democracy rather than towards greater regime openness"[17]. Cultural perspectives have difficulty explaining why democracy emerged in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand (until May 2014), and Timor-Leste and why it has become more liberal. Cultural factors do matter, but they are usually subject to interpretation and change as de Barry and Saad argued[18].

Indeed, ruling elites to justify their authoritarian rule can in fact, use economic development. Richard Stubbs and other scholars, for instance, make a forceful argument that growing prosperity in fact helps legitimize the "staying power of soft authoritarianism" in Southeast Asia (Stubbs 2001). Singapore, for example, has been able to remain authoritarian because of economic development – though the severe financial crisis that began in 1997 helped, undermine Suharto's New Order. Despite economic development appearing to help states consolidate their democracy, affluence *per se* does not seem to be the key prerequisite for democratic transition.

In the main time, there is some truth to the argument by Adam Przeworski et al., who contend, "Transitions to democracy are unsystematic with regard to the level of development"[19].

In an addition, they agree with Lipset that liberal democracies that enjoy an annual per capita income of more than USD 6,000 "are impregnable and can be expected to live forever"[20]. Southeast Asia cannot counted as a falsifiable case, however, because none of the democracies in

this region has achieved an annual per capita income of more than USD 6,000. However, democracy in more economically advanced and prosperous states in Northeast Asia (such as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan) seems to be consolidated, healthy and booming.

Nonetheless, socio-economic class-based perspectives still raise the question of why non-political elites in economically less-developed states such as Thailand (at least until May 2014 when the military staged a coup) are more liberal from those in states like Singapore, which are economically more advanced. Nevertheless, even in the case of Thailand, the capitalist class has not been successful in promoting or consolidating democracy.

While there seems to be no clear correlation between economic development and liberal capitalist-class empowerment, economic classes may be empowered by non-economic factors, such as the growth of civil society and elite politics. However, research on developing civil societies in the region shows a positive relationship between civil society and democratization[21]. The growth of the ASEAN economies led to the growth of a middle class that "has indeed engendered or minimally provided the condition for the growth of NGOs and CSOs"[22]. For example, in the Philippines and Thailand the NGO communities have engaged in high-profile activism. In fact, NGOs played leading and coordinating roles in the events of 1991 and 1992 [in Thailand] that in due course led to the demise of a military government.

Rodan further contends that the greatest potential of civil society to act as a force for liberal political change derives from its potential to institutionalize the rights of organized citizens to influence the decision-making process. Faced with political repression but with recourse to web-based information and technical channels of communication increasingly available.

CIVIL SOCIETY AS THE PRIMARY INSTRUMENT OF DEMOCRATIC TRANSFORMATION IN ASIA

Some evidence questions the significance of the impact of NGO communities and social movements on political development, which varies from country to country. These social actors have played an increasingly active political role in countries like Taiwan and South

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[17](Case 1996: 438)

[18](De Barry 1983; Saeed 2011).

[19]Przeworski et al. 1996: 39–55),

[20]Such idea helps explain why liberal democracies in Southeast Asia states (whose annual per capita income is lower than USD 6,000), such as Thailand, have experienced obstructions sometimes ago ((Przeworski et al. 1996: 41).

[21](Majid 2010; Saravanamuttu 2001; Rodan 2001).

[22](Saravanamuttu 2001: 100)

Korea, but a subordinate role in Southeast Asian countries like Singapore and Malaysia. In the first half of the 1990s, for instance, "hundreds of NGOs emerged in South Korea and there are now more than twenty environmental organizations alone"[23]. Even though they play an influential role in politics, civil society does not help transform or consolidate democracy.

For Instance, civil society organizations in Thailand has not disallowed military coups, nor has it made any significant or sustainable impact on the politicized Constitutional Court, which is capable of deposing elected governments. Civil society organization in Indonesia was larger and stronger during the 1950s and 1960s than it was in the 2000s. Yet it did not play an effective role in promoting democracy during President Suharto's rule. When Suharto overthrown in the late 1990s, civil society had actually become weaker. The Philippines has one of the largest, best-organized civil society networks in the world, and yet it does not have a consolidated democracy. In fact, after the death of popular former president Corazon Aquino in 2009, President Gloria Arroyo suppressed mass mobilization politics and entrenched an electoral politics that strengthened the "guns, goons, gold" mentality of those seeking to defend their dominance[24].

Consequently, it seems that neither economic elites nor civil society actors *per se* are forces sufficient for democratic consolidation. The critical question is *how strong* civil society actors are *in relation* to political and military elites. As noted earlier, neither the Philippines nor Thailand has achieved democratic merging. Moreover, the independent variables explaining democratization in Southeast Asia discussed so far still depend on other variables, such as elite politics and external influence[25]. Economic classes (middle and capitalist) and civil society forces are more likely to increase their political influence in democratic politics if they can become more united and political elites become politically less interconnected and internally weaker (and thus unable to maintain hegemonic control)[26]. The weakening of political elites makes democratization more likely – which appears to have been the case in Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, and Indonesia.

In Taiwan, for example, denominational politics within the ruling nationalist party (the Kuomintang) helps explain democratization in the country. Although initially obsessed with the dream to reunite all of China under nationalist rule, the Kuomintang regime gave in to intra-party political pressure exerted by "a patient but persistent opposition that driven by sub-ethnic opposition and the hope of democracy"[27].

Richardson highpoints political disintegration and discordance to contradict the common conception of Japan's semi-authoritarian and consensual state led by a government bureaucracy. According to Richardson, "bargained democracy" in post-war Japan was possible because "power is fragmented, conflict is frequent, and issues are contested by parties, interest groups, and organs of governments." In his words, "Political power in Japan is fragmented and pluralistic. The parties are horizontally fragmented and partially decentralized'[28].

Furthermore, Southeast Asia's democracies remain unconsolidated because their armed forces and other elite groups that support them remain powerful and can undermine civilian rule by various means, which includes controlling the executive and legislative bodies of government and the conformist media[29].

For instance, in the case of Thailand, the military has dominated politics since 1932[30].

Moreover, many political leaders in Timor-Leste are former military commanders and the military and police forces have a history of struggles for power (Shin 2007). The current president, *José Maria Vasconcelos*, was a former guerrilla leader and later an East Timor military commander. Timor-Leste's current Prime Minister, *Xanana Gusmão*, was also a senior military commander during the 24-year armed resistance against Indonesian colonial rule. Since the turn of the century, military officers in the Philippines have remained politically active, limiting democratic leaders' ability to enforce democratic rules and protect human rights.

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[23](Rodan 2001: 77).

[24](Abinales 2010).

[25]This refers to the paper hypothesis' variables.

[26](Chambers 2014b)

[27](Hood 1997: 3).

[28]Richardson 1997: 240)

[29]Look at (Dressed and Bunted 2014) and (Majid 2010) for further insights.

[30]During the 1960s and 1970s (except a short period from 1973 to 1976), "the military ruled with dictatorial power" for more analysis look at (Bunbongkarn 1999: 162). In addition, as we noted, there have been two recent military coups from 2006 to 2014.

Although elected leaders in Indonesia seem willing to comply with democratic rules and human rights norms, "they are either powerless or unwilling to fully reign in the military and the paramilitary groups that help elites stay in power" (Freedman 2007: 214). In contrast, the armed forces in consolidated democracies like Japan have been subject to effective civilian control[31].

Marginal factors have also influenced politics in East Asia. More states in various regions of the world joined the "third wave" of democratization following the collapse of dictatorial socialism, the emergence of the United States as the only superpower, and the United Nations' transition into a more active player in the process of democratization in post-conflict countries. Regional organizations like the European Union have also played a role in promoting democracy.

DEMOCRATIZATION AND THE EXTERNAL ROLE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Suggestions, from the previous analysis, show that external influences help shed light on democratization in states like Japan, South Korea, Thailand, and the Philippines, which are close allies of the United States. This does not mean that politico-military alliances, with the United States automatically transform states into democracies after all, certain US allies remain authoritarian. Nevertheless, following the Cold War (1989) some scholars stressed the virtues of international engagement aimed at promoting democracy.

Cambodia and Timor-Leste, for example, might not have moved towards democracy had external actors (especially the United Nations and major Western democracies) not pushed it. The military regime in Myanmar also might not have moved towards civilian rule had the pro-democracy movement not received democracy assistance from the EU states and, to some extent, ASEAN" despite the different positions among its members'[32].

Nevertheless, other researchers oppose that we cannot assume external actors always help promote democracy as part of their foreign policy obligation (Peou 2007). In the case of Southeast Asia, external powers have often pursued their security interests at the expense of democracy. China has supported the ruling elites in "Cambodia and Myanmar", while the United States has, for example, sent US military advisors to work hand in glove with the Philippine armed forces, which were responsible for impeding democracy (Alexander 2006). Unless external democratic actors stay involved in already politically fragmented or pluralistic states like Japan[33].

GENERAL REMARKS AND CONCLUDING NOTES

This paper tried to present a relevant subject in political and scientific terms in the field of comparative studies about Southeast Asia political regimes, democracy and democratization.

It based on a fair balance between theoretical references and empirical data, using classical and contemporary categories to analyze political categories. In addition, it considered different factors that influence political process (civil society engagement, economic development, political elites, external powers and culture). The task of the paper provided evidences to demonstrate "why no single theory adequately explains regime change and continuity in this region" as paper's main hypothesis.

Consequently, as most theories from the Western academic circle cannot wholly justify and/or explain distinctive democracy or democratization models initiated by leaders among Southeast Asian states after the Second World War, we attempt to answer one question: Does the meaning of authoritarianism remain unchanged in the discourse of democracy? Socialism pursues equality in theory, but leads to poverty and red tape in practice; capitalism embraces work efficiency in theory, but results in wasting of resources, and social inequality in practice.

Both political democratization and democracy, a particular example discussed and analyzed in this paper, their art of authoritarian governance would be more or less able to help speed up the "Pareto" improvement among party, state and society, by having most, if not all, stakeholders as winners in such way of democracy fully based on universal values.

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[31](Katzenstein and Okaware 1993

[32](Beatty 2010; Haacke 2008).

[33]Democratization will not flourish. In addition, unless pro-democracy actors help create such political structures within authoritarian states, liberal democratization is also unlikely to be emerged as some observers argue.

In an Asian society with a lower degree of politicization, so that once being required to choose from either Western-style democracy or authoritarianism, the model of having such way of democratization in the lead of a "clever" authoritarian leader seems to be advantageous because of its lower cost in governance. Seemingly, history already showed there were always spaces for political investigation, and hardly did unfounded forecasts or predictions have any pragmatic values. In addition, we may argue, to some extent, that this field of study is still alive today, especially when we study political regimes in Southeast Asia a region where uneven political development presents a theoretical and empirical challenge to the academic study of regime change and continuity.

Furthermore, this study interpreted why no single theory adequately explains regime change. The political regimes of Southeast Asia include an undemocratic state under military rule (Myanmar), one under monarchical rule (Brunei), those with one-party communist systems (Laos and Vietnam), non-liberal democratic countries that maintain hegemonic-party regimes (Singapore, Malaysia, and Cambodia), and democratic states in the liberal sense of the term (*Indonesia, Thailand (until May 2014), the Philippines, and Timor-Leste*) [34].

Moreover, not any of the major theoretical perspectives on liberal democratization advanced up to now adequately captures the complexities of regime continuity and change. Several theoretical insights show that liberal democratization as a process of political liberalization depends on the interests of and power relations between social and political actors at different levels, and how these actors manage to preclude one another from subverting democratic rule.

In short, the political governments of Southeast Asia show that they do not remain static or unchanged and the changes that have taken place are far from rapid or irreversible. Nations that used to be under colonial and dictatorial rule have become more democratic and liberal, but some such as Thailand have experienced setbacks. Those that remain undemocratic are not as repressive as they used to be, though

change has come about slowly. Moreover, cultural viewpoints help explain regime continuity or the slow pace of regime change, but they fail to account for the extent that democratic dynamics has taken place in several countries across the region.

In addition, "modernization theory" helps explain why economic development and democratization seem to have a positive relationship, but it raises the questions of whether economic development results from democratization and why prosperity has not produced some states to become increasingly democratic and liberal?

Actually, when all said, economic development might help to ensure political stability, whether in democratic or authoritarian states. Democracy often appears to emerge after crises, which was the case for Japan after the Second World War including Indonesia and Thailand after the 1997 financial crisis. Such crises, however, have to result in political breakdown and factionalism to the extent that no political group emerges as the hegemonic party. Civil society organizations play a positive role in the process of democratization development only, but the extent of its effectiveness remains questionable.

From the previous analysis, suggestion shows a positive relationship between "democratization, civil society, elite fragmentation and democracy", how exactly political elites fragment to the point where they lose hegemonic control, remains a subject of speculation and requires further research.

[35]Democratic transition can be reversed and democracy is likely to deconsolidate when political elites regain cohesion and hegemonic control, or when the military establishment restores its power through coups d'état or by keeping social movements in check. External democratic forces do play a positive role, but they often support the armed forces in unconsolidated democracies for geostrategic reasons. As the case of Southeast Asiapolitical regimes shows, various factors may have to interface in complex ways before liberal democratization take off and become merged.

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[34]These democracies, however, is far from combined.

[35]Here it should note that one of the critical challenges to democracy in Southeast Asia states of today is the armed forces' refusal to give total control to civilian leaders.

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