

# Democratizing Reform of Authoritarian Politics in Asia in the Perspective of Comparative Politics: A Comparative Analysis of Japan and the Philippines

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**Abstract.** The “end of life” is viewed as authoritarian politics’ unavoidable fate. Since the Second World War, Southeast Asia has struggled with the transition from authoritarian to democratic governments. The political system of Southeast Asia, including authoritarian politics, has played a significant role in the emergence of many of these nations. Conversely, democracy has been the prevailing norm in most of these nations, despite their being no universally accepted definition of it. The historical relationship between authoritarianism and democracy has been both unpredictable and ever-changing, either mutually beneficial or fatal. This paper attempts to introduce new variables for contemplating the democratic paths of latecomer countries through a comparison of authoritarian reforms in two countries and the paths of democratic development. It draws on examples of authoritarian-democratic transitions in the East Asian nation of Japan and the South Asian nation of the Philippines. In order to gain a thorough understanding of the transition process and uncover new insights, the study also examines the challenges that have come up during this process.

**Keywords:** Comparative politics, authoritarianism, democratic reform.

## 1. Introduction

Authoritarian politics, as a relatively specific political form, took shape in the early modernization process of late-developing countries. After the Second World War, although the political processes of Asian countries were not synchronized, they almost invariably developed authoritarian models. Generally speaking, authoritarian political form has a strong transitional character, and this political form is bound to gradually transition to democratic political form with the economic and social development [1]. Authoritarian politics has therefore played a very important role in promoting democratization reforms in Asian countries.

However, countries have selected very different models in the process of obtaining their own democratization, much in the same way that autocracy gave way to democracy. Political scientists have paid particular attention to the authoritarian political development models and democratic reform pathways of Japan and the Philippines among them because of their distinctive features. The author will use Japan (1945–1951) and the Philippines (1972–1992) as real-life cases in this research and perform empirical analysis about the democratization process of authoritarian politics in the two countries at various points in time. By comparing the similarities and differences between the continuation of authoritarianism and the development of democratic transformation in the two countries, it also has a new practical significance for the deepening of democratic reforms in late-developing countries.

## 2. Literature Review

In Western countries, the role of authoritarian political models in democratic transformation has extended a long history of research and has resulted in a variety of research paths. The most important of these are the two paths of structuralist research and behaviourist research. Structuralist studies have analysed the process of democratic transition at a macro, external and structural level, and have found the motive force of democratic transition in the changes of structural elements caused by authoritarianism, and then explained the process of democratic transition. From the perspective of

structuralism, the change of democratic politics is closely related to economic development, social development, cultural background, external environment and so on. If a country has a high degree of economic development, a strong social diversity, a strong power, a strong cultural environment, and an incentive to export democracy outward, then it is easier for the country to achieve democratic transformation. On the contrary, it is highly susceptible to the formation of authoritarianism, which adversely affects political development.

Western academics like Lipset and Huntington are among those who best reflect this point of view. Lipset explored the prerequisites for a stable democracy from two angles in his 1960 book *The Political Man: democracy and legitimacy and democracy and economic development*. Lipset claims that the wealthier a nation is, the more likely it is that democracy will flourish. He states, "Development in the economy is important for democracy's durability, but so are its efficacy and legitimacy. In addition to economic growth, a democracy's durability also rests on its effectiveness and legitimacy [2]." The key finding of this book, according to Lipset, is that gradual change promotes "a common political culture of long-term continuity," which is a necessary prerequisite for democracy to remain stable and legitimate, as well as a crucial litmus test for a system's legitimacy.

The behaviourist school of researchers, including Schmitter, Stepan, Baloylaki, and O'Donnell, concentrated on political participants, such as the general public, political elites, opposition parties, and so on, as they were intrinsic elements involved in the transition from authoritarianism to democracy. Political figures bargained and made concessions for their personal ends, resulting in "expedient institutional compromises" [3]. This line of research examines political actors' strategic decisions through their methods, games, and compromises.

O'Donnell and Schmitter co-authored "The Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies," which is considered the first comprehensive, in-depth, and systematic use of comparative methods to study the transition to democracy. It introduced a general theory of transition, which is called a seminal work in the study of transition [4]. The book outlined in four main routes in the transition from authoritarian: first, authoritarian disintegration, open liberalization, the conclusion of the agreement, the formation of enlightened dictatorship; into the democratization, the conclusion of the agreement, the formation of a limited democracy; and then the conclusion of the agreement, the establishment of the democratic mechanism, the end of the transition. The second route is the dissolution of authority, the opening of liberalization, the formation of an enlightened dictatorship, and the end of the transition. The third route is the dissolution of authority, a coup d'état, the formation of a populist dictatorship, the latter then a coup d'état, and the restoration of the dictatorship. The final one is authoritarian dissolution, with the adoption of democratic forms and the formation of a populist democracy. According to O'Donnell and Schmidt, "in regime change, the political process is not governed by overall static causality, but is a highly uncertain process in which 'political actors' often influence the outcome of this uncertain process" [4, 5].

### **3. From Authoritarianism to Democracy: Tracing the Origins**

When the author specifically analyses the similarities and differences in the democratization reforms of authoritarian politics in Japan and the Philippines, one of the first steps that should be done is to provide essential context regarding the historical origins and political foundations of the two countries.

#### **3.1. Reforms to Democratize Authoritarian Politics in Post-Second World War Japan: Mutual Constraint and Promotion**

In the entire East Asian region, the process of political democratization in Japan started the earliest, lasted the longest and experienced several twists and turns. From 28 August 1945 onwards, 460,000 American troops led by MacArthur entered Japan one after another and took control of major cities and strategic locations. From the day they landed in Japan, the American occupation forces forced

Japan to implement democratic reforms, including “banning all extremist groups with militaristic ideology, depriving 200,000 military personnel of their official positions, banning all decrees on freedom of thought, religion, speech, publication, assembly and association, abolishing most communist political prisoners, freezing the royal family’s property, disbanding the Zaibatsu, resuming the land, enacting various laws protecting the rights and interests of laborers and safeguarding their rights and interests, including voting on the new Constitution and related legislation were voted on, and parliamentary democracy was realized” [6].

At the same time, the one-party ruling model of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) took root in the soil of post-war Japan’s democratization reforms. The LDP remained in power alone for 38 years, a political phenomenon impossible to appear in Western-style constitutional democracies, where multiple parties take turns in power [6], and exhibited a strong authoritarian colour [7]. In short, the democratization reforms in post-war Japan gave rise to a political arrangement that was “mild authoritarianism” in nature [6].

Although the reform of this political system was influenced by “external pressure” (the United States), the most important factor was that the active promotion of the reform by the Japanese people and various sectors of society, who fought against conservative forces with their own efforts [8]. After Japan’s defeat in the war, the development and restoration of the economy was the top priority for the country. This practical need provided a profound reason for the existence and development of authoritarianism. As a result, “nationalism and economic development were used as the basis for the legitimacy of the regime, i.e., the promise of national rejuvenation, modernization of the country and improvement in the living standards of the people were exchanged for public acceptance of authoritarian political rule” [9]. Eventually, through democratic reforms within the framework of authoritarian politics and the implementation of a new constitutional government, post-war Japan greatly advanced in the democratization of its political system.

### **3.2. Democratizing Reforms in Authoritarian Politics in the Philippines in the Third Wave of Democratization: Life Towards Death**

The Philippines was an early adopter of the democratic process and has been described as the “showcase of democracy” in South-East Asia. As the first experimental base of neo-colonialism by the United States, the “American-style” political system became the main model of political practice in the Philippines. However, this so-called democratic system, ostensibly imitating the American model, was actually subject to the authority of the United States [10]. The shortcomings of this “grafted” political model became increasingly obvious: the Philippine government’s capability for management and crisis handling was weak, the country’s development lagged behind other Southeast Asian nations, and numerous issues plagued the nation. The Philippines was on the verge of failure [10].

Frustrated with “American-style democracy”, Marcos issued martial law in 1972 in an attempt to establish a “new society” centred on the interests of the people, citing opposition to the communist revolt and the oligarchy. All classes were opened up to society, and democratic principles and democratic revolution were deeply implemented to build a genuinely different democratic society from American democracy. In reality, however, such a democratic political system was not established. The real purpose of Marcos in promoting the “new society” was to attempt long-term stability under the control of an authoritarian government. Marcos repeatedly stressed his desire to democratize the system through a peaceful constitutional revolution by restructuring the constitutional system and amending its provisions, which theoretically confused the Filipino people, but, in practice, served as a tool to maintain authoritarianism [11].

Marcos was solely responsible for establishing an authoritarian system of political repression under the cover of “democracy.” This led the poor Filipinos through a series of difficult situations. The severe economic, political, and social challenges that followed, particularly the authoritarian government’s bizarre behaviour, led to intense public unrest, a significant opposition movement, and

even violent conflicts. With the support of the populace, the opposition seized the chance to compel the tyrant to cede power.

Under the tremendous pressure and impact of the democratization movement, the authoritarian government headed by Marcos eventually collapsed [12]. In 1986, Corazon Aquino, the first female president of the Philippines, came to power and announced her official takeover of the country's power. In 1987, a new constitution was adopted; provincial and municipal elections were held throughout the country; she granted amnesty to political prisoners and restored freedom of speech to citizens. These measures were embraced and championed by the people, providing the new government with a broader popular base. During Mrs. Aquino's administration, she courageously destroyed the Marcos-era dictatorship and carried out a series of political reforms to democratize domestic politics.

#### **4. Japan V. S. Philippines: Similarities and Differences in the Persistence of Authoritarianism and the Development of Democratic Transformation**

The two countries share similarities in differences and differences in similarities in the paths of democratization reform and transformation, and have a composite nature of consistency and differences, according to an overview of the processes of authoritarian politics' democratization and reform in Japan and the Philippines. The author will methodically contrast the parallels and contrasts between the two nations as they alter their authoritarian politics in order to become more democratic in the paragraphs that follow.

From the perspective of the historical origin of authoritarianism, at the beginning, Japan and the Philippines suffered from the external impact of "American-style democracy", and the United States had a strong guiding role in the emergence of authoritarian politics in the two countries. However, the subsequent behaviour of the two countries was very different. After the war, Japan, which was completely taken over by the U.S. military, resisted the attack of American-style democracy, and while being forced to carry out democratization reforms, it also developed an authoritarian system of one-party rule by the LDP, which was uniquely Japanese. The Philippines, on the other hand, faced with the fervour of American-style democracy, in order to overthrow the rule of American-style democracy in the Philippines, the former President of the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos, "rose up", seemingly promoting and advocating the democratic politics of the "new society" and "constitutional revolution", but in fact, it was the democratic politics of the "new society" and "constitutional revolution" that he was advocating. He appears to be promoting and advocating a "new society" and a "constitutional revolution" of democratic politics, but in fact, he is imposing authoritarian and authoritarian political rule.

A deeper look at the catalyst for authoritarian politics in Japan and the Philippines - "American democracy" - reveals that U.S. policy in East Asia has gone through tremendous changes, and that "American democracy" has gone through several twists and turns. Prior to the 1980s, the promotion of democracy and human rights played a secondary role in U.S. foreign policy. In East Asia, out of the need to resist the Soviet Union, the United States adopted a policy of supporting and even fostering the authoritarian regimes, but after the 1980s, with the change of the international situation, the promotion of democracy and human rights, and the promotion of Western values and social systems gradually became the focus of U.S. foreign policy. At this time, the existence of authoritarian regimes in East Asia not only lost its value to the United States, but also became a stumbling block to its so-called human rights and democratic diplomacy and the realization of its new strategic intentions. As a result, the U.S. drastically adjusted its East Asian policy, radically changed its attitude towards the authoritarian regimes in East Asia, and turned to continuously exerting political pressure on the authoritarian regimes to force them to carry out or accelerate political democratization and reform [13]. Therefore, it seems that Japan after World War II and the Philippines in the third wave of democratization both suffered from the assault of American-style democracy and formed

authoritarian regimes and went in the same direction, but the essence of American-style democracy is very different, which is worth discerning.

In terms of the type of authoritarianism, development model and sustainability, Japan is a moderate authoritarianism with one-party dominance and stable, positive sustainability, while the Philippines is radical authoritarianism with individual dictatorship and short-lived, weak sustainability [14]. Japan was influenced by the democratization reforms carried out by the United States of America, which in turn gave rise to the authoritarian institutional arrangement by one-party rule. To its credit, party rule has done an excellent job of mitigating the dangers of authoritarian states inducing dictatorship. The fact that political parties, rather than individuals, have been in power for a long time is a unique feature of Japanese authoritarianism. This determines that it is more rational, peaceful and stable, and thus a “mild authoritarianism.” This term reflects a transitional form of political system orientation [6].

The Philippines, on the other hand, has been under the oppression of American-style democracy for a long time, and although the mood of the country and its people is high, it fell into the trap of authoritarianism under a radical personal dictatorship. Worse still, the Philippines is still mired in corruption in the post-authoritarian era. Family politics is both the trigger and the backbone of corruption in the Philippines, and it is a persistent problem that is difficult to cure no matter what type of government the Philippines is in place. Rooted in traditional patronage relationships in Southeast Asia and class solidarity during the Spanish colonial period, family politics in the Philippines did not naturally subside in the post-authoritarian democratization process, but it rather intensified, leading to a more entrenched power structure, in which political power is distributed within a few extended families.

The British liberal guru Acton stated in his book *Essays on Freedom and Power* that “power leads to corruption, and absolute power leads to absolute corruption” and that it is challenging to enact fundamental change for the better due to vested interests that are challenging to restrain and the political influence they hold [15]. A large portion of this enormous asset is used by family politicians to buy the media, including television, radio, and newspapers, in order to hype up all kinds of topics related to themselves in order to increase the popularity and attention [16]. According to the World Bank, approximately 40% of the national budget of the Philippines is lost due to corruption. Individual authoritarianism, the grip of corruption, and other factors have driven the Philippines to find a solution to its democratic impasse and, in some ways, predetermined the country’s authoritarian politics would not survive for long.

In terms of the timing of democratization reforms and the path of transition, Japan’s democratization reforms have been exogenous and accompanied by authoritarian politics, while the Philippines’ democratization reforms, on the other hand, have been lagging behind and internally driven. Japan’s democratization reforms were led by the United States, which led to the birth of a moderate authoritarian political system, and the promulgation and implementation of the 1947 Constitution, followed by the reforms of the political system, such as the parliamentary system, the executive system, the judicial system, the bureaucratic system, and the system of local self-government, which led to the establishment of a bourgeois parliamentary cabinet system in Japan. The Constitution of the State of Japan abolished the House of Peers, the Imperial Diet was renamed the Diet, and the constitutional monarchical political system centred on the emperor was replaced by a bourgeois parliamentary democracy modelled on that of Europe and America. The political system centred on the constitutional monarchy of the emperor was changed to a bourgeois parliamentary democracy modelled on that of Europe and the United States, and a parliamentary cabinet system based on the principle of the separation of powers between the legislature, the judiciary and the executive was confirmed. Under the new constitution, a mechanism of checks and balances on power was established, and the legislative, judicial, and executive branches were freed from the control of the emperor’s authoritarianism, and became independent and autonomous in their own right. So far, Japan’s post-war democratic reform and the new constitutional system has greatly advanced the democratization process of Japanese politics [8].

Therefore, it is easy to draw the conclusion that authoritarian politics predominated democratization reforms in Japan, and these two forces mutually reinforced each other. Authoritarian politics and democratization reforms occurred at the same time. The democratization reforms in the Philippines, on the other hand, were implemented after the complete collapse of the authoritarian regime. They can be viewed as a new strategic decision that followed authoritarian rule. In other words, in the Philippines, democratization measures were motivated by authoritarian rule while they lagged behind it.

## 5. Conclusion

Even among neighbouring Asian countries, the development models of authoritarian politics and the routes of democratization reforms have significantly differed due to variances in subjective and objective variables, such as the country and the era. It is important to note that authoritarian politics exist on a spectrum, and they are not entirely without merit. A country stands a chance for long-term development if leaders of authoritarian politics relinquish the detrimental habits of dictatorship and arbitrariness, while embracing both authoritarian politics and democratization reforms in tandem. However, if they adopt a radical and personalized authoritarian rule and disregard democracy, the country may be headed for a catastrophic disaster. The only viable option for national revitalization is to anticipate the emergence of fresh democratization measures. As Huntington noted in "The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century," "History does not move in a straight line, but it does move forward when it is driven by wise and determined leaders." This observation underscores the dynamic and complex nature of political change and democratization processes in different contexts.

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