

# Democratization in East Asia: The Role of Regime Endogeneity and Geopolitical Currents

Hsin-Che Wu<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** This study examines how a regime's endogeneity (its internal origins independent of significant external support) and international pressures shape democratization trajectories in East Asian Confucian societies. Challenging simplistic cultural determinism, the article argues that while classical Confucianism is not inherently anti-democratic, "ruler-made legacies" from the imperial era can hinder or facilitate democratic change depending on the ruling elites' strategic choices. Comparative analysis of Singapore and South Korea illustrates this: Singapore's highly endogenous regime effectively resists external democratic pressures and controls modernization to bolster non-democratic rule. Conversely, South Korea's exogenous regime, lacking deep internal legitimacy and facing sustained international pressure, was compelled towards democratization. Modernization's democratizing potential, therefore, depends on the regime type and geopolitical environment.

**Keywords:** Democratization, East Asia, Confucianism, regime endogeneity, international pressure

---

1. Department of Political Science, National Taiwan University

**Correspondence** Hsin-Che Wu (hsinchewu@ntu.edu.tw)

## Introduction

The enduring and often contentious intellectual debate concerning the inherent compatibility or, conversely, the fundamental incompatibility of Confucian tradition with the principles and practices of democratic governance remains a central and persistent focal point within contemporary East Asian political studies. This academic inquiry is far from merely theoretical; it delves into the lived realities and diverse political destinies of societies across the region. While the aspirational embrace of democratic ideals has undeniably expanded globally, gaining widespread acceptance as a preferred form of political organization (United Nations, 2025), its concrete manifestations and complex historical trajectories within the culturally and historically distinct tapestries of East Asian nations reveal a reality that is far from monolithic, instead presenting itself as multifaceted, nuanced, and often strikingly divergent. Historical records, stretching back to profound antiquity, unequivocally indicate that early Confucian scholars, despite their deep immersion within the prevailing imperial structures of their time, meticulously articulated tenets of “rule by the people” as fundamental to legitimate governance, thereby implying a philosophical compatibility with democratic aspirations that, in some respects, predates Western conceptualizations (Legge, 1861a, 1861b; Tu, 1993). Such classical ideas, rooted in texts like the *Mencius*, emphasized the paramount importance of the welfare of the populace and underscored the inherently conditional nature of the ruler’s mandate, thereby implying a reciprocal and accountable relationship between the governed and the governor (Legge, 1861a, 1861b; Tu, 1993). The classical Confucian emphasis on the moral self-cultivation of the ruler and the well-being of the people provides a normative foundation that, some argue, can be reinterpreted to align with democratic ideals of accountability and public service (Bell & Hahm, 2003; Kim, 1994). This perspective posits that the emphasis on *minben* (people as the root) in classical Confucianism could provide a fertile ground for popular sovereignty, if correctly understood and implemented (Kim, 1994). However, the protracted historical dominance of centralized, often absolute, imperial power throughout East Asian history, coupled with the strategic and frequently opportunistic interpretation, and indeed manipulation, of classical Confucian doctrines

to buttress and legitimize autocratic rule, has for centuries fueled profound and persistent skepticism regarding this presumed congruence between Confucianism and democracy (Huang, 1981; Weber, 1968). This pervasive practice of distorting original philosophical tenets for the sake of political expediency and the consolidation of imperial authority became a deeply ingrained and recurrent pattern throughout the long imperial history, profoundly shaping both institutional forms and public expectations regarding the nature of political power. The very longevity of imperial systems, often justified by these reinterpreted Confucian ideals, created a powerful historical legacy that continues to influence modern political development, making the transition to new forms of governance particularly challenging.

In recent decades, the undeniable success of democratic transitions observed in several East Asian nations has critically and fundamentally reshaped the academic discourse surrounding this topic. The conversation has decisively moved beyond a simplistic, binary inquiry into whether democratization is even possible in a Confucian context, evolving instead towards a far more intricate exploration of the precise causal mechanisms that differentiate those societies which have successfully navigated the path to democratization from those which have steadfastly maintained non-democratic systems. This article endeavors to make a substantial and nuanced contribution to this continually evolving scholarly conversation by proposing a core and distinctive argument: the **endogeneity of a regime**—a concept understood here as its genesis through genuinely internal elections or deeply rooted revolutionary struggles on native soil, critically independent of substantial and continuous external backing—and the **international pressures** to which it is exposed are the paramount determinants influencing the trajectory of democratization within the broader East Asian Confucian cultural sphere. This argument seeks to move beyond conventional explanations that tend to privilege either the inherent nature of Confucian culture as a static, monolithic entity or the singular degree of modernization as primary drivers of political change. Instead, this study contends that the influence of these more widely discussed factors (culture and modernization) is, in fact, significantly mediated and modulated by a regime's unique internal origins and its susceptibility to the shifting currents of geopolitical forces. The interaction between these internal and external dynamics

creates unique pathways for political development, often leading to outcomes not easily predicted by single-factor explanations. Through a meticulous comparative analysis of Singapore, which serves as a compelling exemplar of an endogenous regime characterized by its deep local roots and self-generated legitimacy, and South Korea, which stands as an archetypal case of a regime whose very foundation and subsequent development were deeply intertwined with substantial external support and subject to considerable international pressures, this article aims to demonstrate a crucial insight: while traditional legacies inherited from the imperial past can indeed pose formidable obstacles to democratic development, their ultimate impact is not absolute. Fundamentally, it is the dynamic interplay between a regime's mode of genesis and its specific geopolitical environment, rather than a monolithic cultural essence or a rigidly linear path of modernization, that profoundly shapes the diverse and often divergent political trajectories observed across East Asia.

## **Re-evaluating Theoretical Foundations: Political Culture, Traditional Legacies, and Modernization**

To unravel the intricate dynamics of political change within East Asian Confucian societies, a robust and refined theoretical framework is indispensable. This study builds upon established conceptualizations of political culture, traditional legacies, and modernization theory, meticulously re-evaluating their intricate interplay through the critical lens of regime endogeneity and the international pressures to which a state is subjected. This comprehensive theoretical engagement allows for a deeper and more granular understanding of the complex causality at play in varying democratization outcomes across the region.

Political culture, frequently conceptualized as the internalized political system reflected within a population's cognitions, affections, and evaluations, exerts a profound and pervasive influence on political behavior and systemic stability (Almond & Powell, 1978; Almond & Verba, 1989). This complex construct is not static but constitutes a cumulative outcome of sustained processes of political socialization, embodying a nation's collective memory, which, in turn, informs individual attitudes and guides future political actions (Almond &

Powell, 1978; Almond & Verba, 1989). It shapes the very expectations citizens have of their government and their roles within the political system. These expectations can range from passive obedience to active participation, influencing the demands placed upon the state and the accepted boundaries of political discourse. For the genesis and subsequent perpetuation of a democratic regime, it is imperative to secure not only the initial commitment of political elites to democratic rules and institutions but also the enduring and robust support of a democratic political culture among the broader populace (Diamond, 1999; Gunther et al., 1995; Inglehart, 1990; Pridham, 2000; Shin, 1994). This foundational cultural bedrock is essential for the long-term consolidation of any democratic system, extending far beyond mere procedural adherence to encompass a deep-seated acceptance of democratic norms and values, such as tolerance, compromise, respect for minority rights, and a belief in the legitimacy of electoral processes as the sole path to power (Dahl, 1989; Diamond, 1999). This cultural support provides essential resilience against economic downturns or political crises, preventing backsliding into authoritarianism, as citizens will remain committed to the democratic framework even during challenging times, seeing democracy itself as the “only game in town” (Linz, 1990). However, the political culture prevalent across East Asia is frequently perceived as discordant with established Western democratic values. Scholars like Samuel Huntington have vociferously contended that Confucian heritage, characterized by its emphasis on “authority, order, hierarchy, and the supremacy of the collectivity over the individual,” inherently impedes democratic progress (Huntington, 1996). This perspective posits that Confucian societies, by their very nature, lack a historical “tradition of rights” that could empower citizens to effectively challenge state authority, fostering instead a harmonious, group-centric social fabric that actively discourages overt dissent and pluralism (Huntington, 1991). Consequently, this perceived cultural predisposition is often argued to lead to the emergence of “illiberal democracy” or various forms of “liberal autocracy,” where civil liberties are curtailed, and the rule of individuals or a select group supersedes the impartial application of the rule of law (Bell et al., 1995). The crucial element here is whether such cultural traits are immutable obstacles to democratic development or amenable to change under differing political and international conditions, or indeed, whether they are merely selective

interpretations used by authoritarian regimes to justify their rule and suppress alternative political orders.

A crucial and often overlooked distinction must be meticulously drawn between the lofty ideals of classical Confucian thought and the “traditional legacies” that concretized and became entrenched during the long imperial era. While classical Confucianism, particularly as articulated by Mencius, passionately championed a people-centric approach to governance and the profound notion that a ruler’s legitimacy fundamentally derived from popular endorsement, advocating for benevolent rule and the right of the people to overthrow tyrannical rulers (Legge, 1861a, 1861b; Tu, 1993), the imperial system systematically and often brutally distorted these foundational principles in practice. The philosophical debate concerning human nature between Mencius (who posited inherent goodness and the innate capacity for moral self-cultivation) and Xun Zi (who argued for inherent evil and the necessity of strict laws and rituals to cultivate virtue) played a pivotal, albeit complex, role in this historical divergence. Xun Zi’s emphasis on human evilness and the need for strong governance to cultivate virtue provided a philosophical justification for centralized authority, which later rulers readily adopted and manipulated to their advantage. This provided an intellectual basis for the concentration of power in the hands of the ruler, moving away from the more reciprocal model of early Confucian thought. Dong Zhongshu’s influential reinterpretation of Confucianism, decisively adopted by Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, strategically shifted the emphasis from the “people’s will” to “heaven’s will” as the ultimate source of monarchical authority, thereby solidifying the emperor’s supreme and often unchallengeable power. This shift fundamentally altered the classical notion of a conditional mandate, making the ruler answerable to a distant Heaven rather than directly to the people, effectively removing popular accountability and placing it within a divine, unchallengeable realm. This profound historical transformation led to the deep entrenchment of several traditional legacies that are fundamentally at odds with the tenets of modern democratic principles. Hierarchical politics, for instance, fostered a rigid, top-down political structure where unquestioning obedience to authority was paramount, thereby actively stifling individual agency and severely limiting any meaningful participation in political decision-making (Huang, 1981;

Weber, 1968). This enduring emphasis on hierarchy shaped not only the state apparatus but also permeated social structures, influencing interpersonal relations and expectations regarding authority. The very concept of the “Son of Heaven” solidified the emperor’s position as a divine, unquestionable authority, fundamentally altering the classical notion of a conditional mandate and concentrating all power at the apex of the system, rendering any challenge to imperial authority as a challenge to the cosmic and social order. The vast bureaucratic system, meticulously organized along hierarchical lines and designed for efficient control and resource extraction, reinforced these patterns of top-down governance, establishing clear chains of command and discouraging horizontal accountability among officials, who were primarily answerable to their superiors rather than to the public. The imperial examination system, while seemingly meritocratic in principle by allowing social mobility, largely served to produce loyal scholar-officials steeped in the official interpretation of Confucian texts, thereby reinforcing centralized control and ideological conformity, rather than fostering independent thought or critical inquiry that might challenge the existing order. This system thus created a compliant elite beholden to the imperial power. The phenomenon of *Guanxi* (connections and factions), while acknowledging the importance of social bonds and interpersonal networks in classical thought, often manifested as pervasive cronyism within bureaucratic systems during the imperial period, demonstrably capable of undermining the meritocracy and the rule of law that are essential for democratic governance (Kao, 1993; Kim, 2002). These informal networks, based on personal loyalties rather than universalistic rules, could bypass formal institutions and create systems of favoritism, leading to inefficiency, corruption, and a lack of impartial justice, thereby eroding trust in formal state mechanisms and promoting personalistic rule. Furthermore, the imperial emphasis on social harmony, ostensibly rooted in classical ideals of a conflict-free society, often translated in practice into the systematic suppression of dissent and a strict prioritization of collective interests over individual rights, thereby severely limiting the development of robust civil society and pluralism (Chen, 2002; Fairbank & Goldman, 2006). This preference for ostensible social cohesion frequently meant that open political debate and the articulation of diverse interests were suppressed, leading to a diminished public sphere where conformity

was implicitly or explicitly enforced, and challenges to authority were viewed as inherently destabilizing and anti-social. These deeply ingrained legacies, having become part of the collective memory of Confucian societies through centuries of continuous political socialization, continue to exert significant influence on contemporary political dynamics, offering non-democratic rulers powerful tools to consolidate their authority and exert pervasive control over public discourse.

Modernization theory posits that socio-economic development drives political evolution, leading inexorably to more open and democratic societies. Key drivers in this transformative process typically include robust economic development, the emergence of a thriving middle class, and widespread access to education (Huntington, 1968, 1971). Industrialization and increasing national wealth are generally believed to foster greater political tolerance, mitigate social conflict, and facilitate the emergence of a substantial middle class (Lipset, 1959, 1960). This class, with its heightened civic awareness and stake in a stable, predictable environment, often pushes for institutional reforms, demanding greater transparency and accountability from the state (Hsiao & Koo, 1997). The logic here is that economic independence translates into a desire for political autonomy, as a self-sufficient middle class is less reliant on the state for its livelihood and more willing to demand rights and greater say in governance. This independent economic base reduces their vulnerability to state coercion, making them less susceptible to manipulation and more prone to demanding political voice. Universal and unbiased education systems are considered vital for cultivating democratic values, empowering individuals to critically analyze information, and effectively challenging authoritarian rule (Glaeser et al., 2006; Shi, 2004). Increased literacy rates and broader exposure to diverse intellectual currents are expected to erode traditional values and promote a more secular and rational worldview, fostering a critical citizenry capable of independent thought and informed political participation. This expansion of knowledge and critical thinking abilities makes it harder for authoritarian regimes to maintain ideological control, as citizens become more discerning of state propaganda. Post-modernization theories further suggest that as societies achieve higher levels of affluence and basic needs are increasingly met, a discernible generational shift occurs, with younger cohorts prioritizing self-expression and individual autonomy over mere

survival values—a profound cultural transformation considered highly conducive to the long-term development and deepening of democratic values (Inglehart, 1990, 1997; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Tan & Wang, 2007). This theory emphasizes that value changes, rather than simply structural changes, are crucial for democratic consolidation, suggesting a slow but inevitable cultural evolution towards democratic norms as new generations, shaped by different material conditions, increasingly value post-materialist goals.

However, the application of modernization theory in East Asian Confucian societies presents complexities that challenge simplistic linear interpretations. While early modernization theories often presented a unilinear, Western-centric model of development, subsequent theoretical refinements acknowledge the multiplicity of paths to modernity and the potential for traditional and modern elements to not only coexist but even to complement each other. Critically, this re-evaluation opens the door to understanding how non-democratic regimes can actively co-opt and strategically manipulate these very factors to their profound strategic advantage. This article argues that the inherent capacity of a regime to effectively control and channel modernization processes is deeply intertwined with its endogeneity and the specific international pressures it confronts. An endogenous regime, being less beholden to external dictates or foreign patrons, inherently possesses greater autonomy to dictate the terms and pace of its modernization. Such a regime can strategically leverage economic growth and educational expansion not primarily to foster democratic opening, but rather to bolster its own legitimacy and enhance its mechanisms of control. This allows for a unique form of “authoritarian modernization” where economic development serves to strengthen, rather than undermine, the existing political order, by creating a satisfied populace and a co-opted elite. This model can also involve selective economic liberalization without corresponding political liberalization, thus maintaining political stability while reaping economic benefits. Conversely, a regime that is highly dependent on external support or subject to significant international pressures may find its modernization strategy severely constrained by the demands of its international patrons, who might explicitly advocate for democratic reforms as a condition of continued aid, military alliance, or diplomatic recognition. This external influence fundamentally alters the domestic

political calculus and the pathways of modernization, often pushing such regimes towards liberalization even if the ruling elite initially resist, demonstrating that external forces can compel internal political change. The interaction between internal political will and external leverage becomes a critical factor in shaping modernization's political outcomes.

## **Key Factors: Regime Endogeneity and International Pressure in Democratization Dynamics**

This article's core argument posits that the key to explaining the divergent democratization trajectories observed across East Asian Confucian societies lies not primarily in the inherent nature of Confucian culture itself, nor in the singular degree of modernization achieved, but rather in the intricate and dynamic interplay between a **regime's endogeneity** and the **international pressures** it confronts. This framework allows for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the complex and often counterintuitive outcomes of political development in the region, providing a richer explanatory power than monocausal theories.

**Regime endogeneity** refers fundamentally to the manner in which a political regime is generated and the depth of its roots within the indigenous social fabric of its own territory. An endogenous regime is one that has emerged through genuinely internal processes, such as successful revolutionary struggles, movements for national independence, or through domestic electoral victories that reflect authentic popular mandates, with its legitimacy primarily derived from the sustained support of its own populace or from significant, internally recognized historical events within its own national narrative. Such regimes, having forged their existence and authority through internal struggles and popular mobilization, typically possess a significantly stronger capacity for social control and greater ideological autonomy, allowing them to more effectively resist and deflect external pressures that might seek to impose alternative political models or democratic conditionalities. Their self-generated and deeply embedded legitimacy provides a robust internal buffer against foreign influence, enabling them to pursue a path of development largely on their own terms, including the design and

implementation of their preferred political system. This internal strength grants them considerable resilience against external normative or coercive attempts at political transformation.

Conversely, **international pressure** encompasses the multifaceted political, economic, military, or normative influences exerted by the external world upon a given regime. This pressure can originate from a variety of sources, including powerful international organizations (e.g., the United Nations, human rights bodies), major global powers (particularly the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War era, whose ideological competition often involved promoting or suppressing certain political systems), or broader global trends promoting democracy and human rights (United Nations, 2011). International pressure can manifest in various forms, such as diplomatic sanctions, economic conditionalities attached to aid or trade agreements, military deterrence or intervention, or the powerful, albeit sometimes subtle, normative force of global democratic discourse. Such external pressure can significantly constrain the repressive means available to non-democratic regimes, limiting their ability to crack down indiscriminately on internal dissent, create and expand crucial spaces for democratic opposition movements to operate and organize, or compel reluctant regimes to undertake political reforms in exchange for continued international support, access to global markets, or to alleviate external condemnation and diplomatic isolation. The degree to which a regime is susceptible to such pressure is often inversely proportional to its endogeneity; a regime with shallow internal roots and a strong reliance on external patronage will be far more vulnerable to international demands for political change.

When these two critical factors—regime endogeneity and international pressure—are combined and analyzed in conjunction, they yield distinct pathways for democratization, offering a more nuanced and powerful explanation for the diverse political outcomes observed across East Asia:

***High Endogeneity, Low International Pressure:***

Regimes falling into this category possess robust indigenous roots and encounter minimal interference from external actors seeking to influence their internal political affairs. Due to their strong internal

legitimacy and lack of external dependencies, these regimes are typically capable of more effectively controlling their societies and managing their modernization processes on their own terms. This allows them to maintain their non-democratic forms of governance with relative stability and without being forced into substantive political liberalization. Even when confronted with internal demands for democracy, they possess the capacity and autonomy to respond by promoting alternative political models, such as “democracy with Chinese characteristics” or the “Singapore model,” thereby avoiding substantive democratization while often retaining popular support through impressive economic performance or appeals to deeply ingrained national identity and social cohesion. Their autonomy allows them to selectively adopt and adapt aspects of modernization to serve their own authoritarian ends, without facing significant external demands for political liberalization that might undermine their control. Their self-generated legitimacy provides a strong buffer against external normative pressures, allowing them to define democracy on their own terms.

### ***Low Endogeneity, High International Pressure:***

Conversely, regimes in this category often derive their fundamental legitimacy or even their very existence from external support, meaning their roots within the indigenous social fabric are not particularly deep or are historically contested. Simultaneously, they face considerable and sustained external pressure advocating for democratic change. Such regimes typically possess a weaker capacity for comprehensive social control and may find their repressive tools severely limited by external scrutiny, human rights conditionalities, and the threat of diplomatic isolation or economic sanctions. In these circumstances, the non-democratic regime is far more likely to be compelled to undertake processes of liberalization and even eventual democratization, often in exchange for continued external support, military assistance, or to alleviate international condemnation and diplomatic isolation. Their external dependency creates a profound vulnerability that can be exploited by pro-democratic international actors, making political change more probable even against the initial will of the ruling elite. This dynamic highlights how external leverage can override internal

authoritarian preferences when the regime's survival depends on external patrons.

This framework allows us to move beyond generalized claims about cultural determinism or the automatic effects of modernization, providing a more precise analytical lens through which to examine the specific political trajectories of countries like Singapore and South Korea. It emphasizes that political outcomes are not predetermined but emerge from the complex interplay of a regime's internal characteristics and its external environment.

## **Comparative Analysis: Singapore and South Korea's Divergent Paths Shaped by Regime Endogeneity and International Pressure**

The comparative experiences of South Korea and Singapore<sup>1</sup> offer compelling empirical evidence for the argument that a regime's endogeneity and the international pressures it confronts are central to understanding its democratization trajectory. These two nations, while both deeply embedded in the Confucian cultural sphere and having undergone significant modernization, embarked on markedly distinct political paths. Their differing experiences provide a rich ground for analyzing the interplay of internal and external factors in political development.

### ***Singapore: The Resilient Endogenous Regime and Controlled Change***

Singapore stands as a prominent exemplar of a highly successful, politically stable, and economically prosperous nation that has consistently maintained a non-democratic system under the long-standing leadership of the People's Action Party (PAP). A crucial element distinguishing Singapore's political development is the profound degree of its **endogeneity**. The PAP did not emerge from a foreign imposition or through substantial external backing; rather, it ascended to power through a series of local elections and a determined, internally driven struggle for self-governance and eventual independence (Lee, 2011).

This process established a deep-rooted legitimacy for the regime, derived directly from its indigenous origins and its demonstrable success in the challenging and often perilous project of nation-building amidst geopolitical vulnerabilities. This strong *bèntū gēnjī* (local roots) and self-generated legitimacy have afforded Singaporean leaders significant and enduring autonomy in charting their unique political development, largely insulating them from the direct impact of external democratic pressures (Kausikan, 1997). The absence of a fundamental reliance on foreign powers for its very existence has allowed Singapore to define its own political system without being compelled to conform to Western democratic norms. Its strategic geopolitical location and economic prowess have further reinforced its ability to project autonomy on the global stage, allowing it to carve out a distinct identity and political model that prioritizes stability and prosperity above extensive political freedoms. This self-reliance and geopolitical acumen have been central to its ability to resist external normative pressures for political liberalization.

The ruling elite in Singapore, most notably its iconic founding father Lee Kuan Yew, articulated a vision of democracy not as an ultimate end in itself, but rather as a pragmatic “mechanism of government” meticulously designed and implemented to ensure the nation’s survival and its enduring prosperity (Lee, 2011; Ng, 1997). This unique “trustee model of democracy” explicitly positions the government as a sagacious and strict paternal figure, conscientiously assuming the profound responsibility of making decisions that are perceived to be in the long-term best interests of its citizens (Kausikan, 1997). This paternalistic approach is deeply ingrained in the state’s self-conception and communicated consistently to the populace through various state-controlled channels, including pervasive public campaigns and tightly regulated media outlets. Within this meticulously constructed framework, elections primarily serve as a periodic “vote of confidence” for the ruling party, allowing the populace to “re-authorize” the PAP’s mandate to govern (Bell, 2000). While competitive in form, the electoral system incorporates features such as Group Representation Constituencies (GRCs), which dilute opposition votes and facilitate PAP dominance by requiring multi-member teams, and restrictions on political activism that tend to favor the incumbent party and limit the growth of effective opposition, ensuring the PAP’s continued dominance. Opposition parties

are frequently characterized by the state as disruptive forces that prioritize short-term, self-serving interests, thereby posing a tangible threat to national stability and progress (Bell, 2000). This pervasive perspective has historically manifested in various forms of political interference, restrictive legislation like the Internal Security Act (ISA), which allows for detention without trial, and legal actions against critics, effectively limiting genuine political contestation and the robust flourishing of civil society. Due to its deeply endogenous nature, the Singaporean regime has been remarkably successful in resisting significant direct external pressure for democratic reform, thereby maintaining full autonomy over its chosen political development model. There are few, if any, historical instances where external actors could impose democratic conditionalities that Singapore was compelled to accept, given its economic indispensability and strategic alignment with Western interests in the region that did not inherently demand a Western-style democracy, but rather stability and a pro-Western stance.

Singaporean leaders have systematically and strategically employed traditional legacies and meticulously controlled all aspects of the modernization process to consolidate their non-democratic rule. The “father knows best” ethos, deeply embedded within Singapore’s political system, is operationalized through the PAP’s unwavering top-down control. This manifests in strong executive authority and a highly centralized decision-making process, with limited checks and balances on the executive, as legislative power is often dominated by the ruling party. The Constitution itself contains explicit provisions that permit significant limitations on freedoms of speech, assembly, and association in the perceived interest of “security,” “public order,” or “morality,” thereby directly reinforcing the government’s hierarchical authority (Singapore Attorney-General’s Chambers, 2012). This legal framework allows for broad discretion in regulating public life and political expression, often interpreted broadly by the state to maintain social order and prevent dissent, including censoring media and restricting public gatherings. The fervent emphasis on meritocracy in civil service selection, while ostensibly impartial, inadvertently reinforces a hierarchical structure by ensuring that only individuals deemed “best” by the ruling party occupy positions of power. This cadre of highly-trained and often well-compensated civil servants and political leaders forms the backbone of the

state's administrative capacity, ensuring efficient policy implementation and minimal internal dissent within the bureaucracy, thus creating a technocratic elite firmly aligned with the regime. Unlike contexts where clientelism might flourish, Singapore has actively and strictly prohibited cronyism and personalistic *Guanxi* within the government apparatus, aligning with its unwavering commitment to a clean, efficient, and meritocratic government (Bell, 2000). This resolute anti-corruption stance, while widely seen as contributing positively to good governance, also has the effect of centralizing power within the formal party-state structure, thereby limiting alternative avenues of influence and consolidating control over all key sectors of society, including the economy and social organizations. Furthermore, given Singapore's multi-racial and multi-religious societal composition and its historical context of reluctant independence, the government has vigorously promoted "shared values" (often referred to as "Asian Values") that underscore national unity, social cohesion, and the prioritization of community interests over individual desires. Principles such as "Nation before community and society above self" and "Consensus, not conflict" are actively disseminated through state-controlled media and public education to mitigate social divisions and discourage overt dissent. The family unit is explicitly utilized as a primary conduit for transmitting these core values to younger generations, thus reinforcing a group-oriented ethos (Tu, 1984). This deliberate cultural engineering aims to shape public opinion and reduce the likelihood of political challenges, ensuring a compliant and cooperative populace, deeply imbued with the state's preferred values.

Modernization in Singapore has been a meticulously state-controlled process, strategically engineered to align with the PAP's long-term political objectives. Rapid and sustained economic growth serves as the cornerstone of the PAP's enduring legitimacy (Lee, 2011; Quah, 1994). The government actively plans and guides economic strategies, implementing policies that have successfully attracted foreign investment and transformed Singapore into a global commercial and financial hub. This state-led development model has allowed for rapid industrialization and diversification of the economy, providing tangible benefits to the population, including high living standards and extensive public services such as healthcare and public transport. The prevailing

narrative unequivocally asserts that the PAP's astute leadership is directly responsible for Singapore's unparalleled prosperity, implying that any deviation from their governance model would jeopardize economic success and national stability. This economic success is presented as the tangible proof of the effectiveness of the PAP's governance model and its superiority over Western democratic alternatives in the specific context of Singapore. Crucially, Singapore's endogenous regime has enabled it to fully dictate its economic development path, largely free from external pressures to liberalize in ways that might challenge its political control. This autonomy has allowed the state to maintain significant ownership and control over key industries and financial institutions, providing a powerful lever for economic steering and strategic resource allocation that would be difficult for an externally dependent regime. The Singaporean government has also demonstrably cultivated and successfully co-opted its burgeoning middle class. Policies such as extensive public housing programs, heavily subsidized by a mandatory national savings system (Central Provident Fund, CPF), not only fulfill basic housing needs but also foster a profound sense of shared ownership and allegiance to the existing political system. This effectively ties the economic well-being of the middle class directly to the stability and continued rule of the PAP regime. The government further provides controlled channels for middle-class participation, including the nominated member of parliament system, allowing them to voice opinions within carefully managed parameters, thereby effectively mitigating potential widespread dissent (Tamura, 2003). This strategy has largely succeeded in securing the loyalty of the middle class, a testament to the regime's endogeneity allowing it to effectively implement these co-optation strategies without undermining its core power. Moreover, the education system in Singapore is overtly utilized to instill "National Education" and diligently promote the government's "shared values". Curricula and textbooks consistently highlight Singapore's success story under PAP rule, reinforce a distinctive national identity, and subtly discourage Western individualism. This carefully controlled educational environment is designed to cultivate "loyal and efficient citizens" who internalize the official ideology, thereby maintaining social order and political stability. The regime's endogeneity allows it to maintain full autonomy over educational content, unburdened by external democratic pressures that might advocate for a more

pluralistic curriculum, ensuring ideological conformity from a young age and across generations.

Empirical data from the Asian Barometer Survey (Wave 2, 2006) provides crucial insights into public perceptions and support for Singapore's political system. A substantial majority of respondents (91%) perceive Singapore as a democratic country, although a significant portion (71%) acknowledges minor problems within the system. This finding strongly supports the argument that the government's concerted efforts to define and promote its unique democratic model are remarkably successful, reflecting a high level of public acceptance, even if not alignment with liberal democratic definitions. Public attitudes reveal strong support for traditional legacies, particularly harmony and group-orientation, consistent with government promotion of "shared values." These values are deeply ingrained through constant reinforcement. Conversely, *Guanxi* is largely rejected by the populace, aligning with the government's robust anti-corruption stance, indicating the success of state efforts to curb informal networks that might lead to corruption or factionalism. Critically, the data indicates that economic development, a key modernization factor, is positively correlated with support for traditional legacies, empirically demonstrating the government's success in linking prosperity with its governance model and traditional values. While education shows some potential to foster democratic values, overall democratic values in Singapore remain comparatively low, suggesting that a robust democratic political culture, as understood in Western terms, has not yet fully materialized. This outcome is precisely attributable to the PAP's strategic control over modernization and its emphasis on specific traditional legacies, directly facilitated by its endogenous nature that renders it largely immune to external democratic pressures. This controlled environment limits the independent formation of pro-democratic civic groups and alternative political narratives, ensuring that popular satisfaction is channelled into support for the existing non-democratic order. This reinforces the notion that an endogenous regime, with its strong domestic legitimacy, has considerable latitude to shape the political implications of modernization to its advantage, fostering a unique blend of efficiency and control.

### ***South Korea: The Exogenous Regime and the Democratizing Force of International Pressure***

South Korea presents a distinctly contrasting narrative to Singapore's, where **international pressure** exerted by its external patron and its **exogenous regime genesis** played a pivotal role in its democratization. Unlike many nations emerging from colonial rule that forged their independence through internal struggles, South Korea was **established** as a democratic republic under the direct guidance of the United States and the United Nations (Oh, 1999; United Nations, 2011). This foundational "foreign-imposed" democratic premise, though initially suspended by personal dictatorships and military juntas, meant that successive non-democratic rulers continuously faced a fundamental crisis of legitimacy in the eyes of their populace (Linz, 2000). Their authority was perceived by a significant portion of the population as illegitimate, particularly after they systematically dismantled democratic processes. This inherent legitimacy deficit created a fertile ground for dissent and challenge that more endogenous regimes might not experience, as the public could always point to the original, externally-sanctioned democratic mandate as the true source of legitimate rule, undermining any claims of indigenous authoritarian legitimacy. This external origin meant the regime was always vulnerable to accusations of being a foreign imposition, eroding its internal authority and making it susceptible to calls for a return to the initial democratic promise.

South Korean non-democratic leaders, such as Syngman Rhee and Park Chung-hee, initially sought to consolidate power through national security legislation and an unwavering focus on rapid economic development (Robinson, 2007). However, critically, they lacked a deeply ingrained, indigenous official ideology that could provide a robust justification for their non-democratic rule, unlike the ruling parties in more endogenous regimes. Their very existence and perceived legitimacy were inextricably intertwined with the Cold War geopolitical context and the sustained support of the United States. This dependence meant that while they could employ repressive measures, they were simultaneously constrained by the demands and normative expectations of their external patron. The U.S., as a global advocate for democracy and a key Cold War ally against communism, exerted continuous, albeit sometimes subtle, pressure for liberalization and eventual democratization. This

external influence provided a critical lifeline for nascent opposition movements and limited the extent of state repression, preventing the total eradication of political dissent. The constant challenge from an increasingly mobilized civil society meant that the “cost of suppression” for these rulers escalated, while the “cost of toleration” became an increasingly unavoidable reality. The impending 1988 Seoul Olympic Games further exacerbated this pressure, severely limiting the military government’s ability to employ brutal force against pro-democracy movements due to intense international scrutiny, which was amplified by the U.S.’s role in supporting South Korea’s geopolitical standing. This confluence of formidable internal demands and external constraints ultimately compelled the military junta to engage in negotiations with opposition forces and agree to sweeping democratic reforms, including the reinstatement of direct presidential elections (Kihl, 2005; Robinson, 2007; Shin et al., 2007). This strategic “exit guarantee,” as conceptualized by Huntington (1991), allowed the military rulers to cede power while ostensibly securing their future safety and preserving a degree of institutional autonomy for the military. This transition was significantly shaped by the external pressures exerted by the U.S. and the broader international community, a luxury not available to more endogenous regimes that could more easily ignore such pressures.

The role of traditional legacies in South Korea’s democratization trajectory also differed significantly from their role in more endogenous, non-democratic contexts, largely due to the nature of the regime and its external ties. While hierarchical politics was certainly present during the military regimes, the absence of a strong, indigenous ideological justification for this rigid hierarchy meant it faced incessant opposition from various societal actors. Classical Confucian tradition, which generally elevated scholars above military figures (Weber, 1968), inherently undermined the legitimacy of military rule. The military’s seizure of power was seen as a deviation from established civilian rule, not a natural extension of a culturally ingrained hierarchy, thereby reducing the legitimacy of their top-down approach and making it vulnerable to cultural critiques. This inherent tension within the Confucian framework paradoxically fueled resistance against the authoritarian state rather than consolidating military power. In South Korea, *Guanxi* often manifested along geographical lines, with distinct

regional voting patterns reflecting historical power bases. However, rather than impeding democracy, this regionalism became a fundamental basis for political mobilization and party competition within the evolving democratic framework. The clear division between different regional populations, and their consistent support for opposing political groups, demonstrated that *Guanxi* could be integrated into, and even contribute to the dynamics of, a competitive political system, providing a predictable basis for electoral politics and party alignment. Furthermore, while promoting national unity, group-orientation in South Korea frequently found expression in nationalism directed against perceived external influences, such as historical Japanese colonialism or the US's perceived support for authoritarian regimes. This "anti-Americanism," inflamed by events like the Gwangju Democratization Movement, paradoxically strengthened democratic movements by unifying large segments of the populace against the non-democratic regime and its foreign allies. This illustrates how a traditional legacy like group-orientation can be reinterpreted and mobilized to serve overtly pro-democratic objectives, particularly when the regime's legitimacy is externally tied and can be challenged on nationalist grounds.

Modernization factors in South Korea largely conformed to theoretical predictions, acting as catalysts for democratization, and their impact was amplified by the exogenous nature of the regime and international pressures. The rapid industrialization, largely orchestrated by the military governments, led to the formation of a substantial and increasingly vocal middle class (Lipset, 1959, 1960). While initial economic growth did offer a degree of legitimacy to the authoritarian regime, the increasing wealth and sheer size of the middle class directly translated into escalating demands for greater political participation. Due to the U.S.'s consistent advocacy for economic liberalization and greater political openness as part of its Cold War strategy, the Korean government's control over the economy was never absolute, allowing for the rise of independent economic actors and ultimately fostering a middle class that actively challenged the regime. The burgeoning middle class, alongside students, religious organizations, and labor unions, emerged as a potent force for democratic change, actively participating in protests and advocating vociferously for expanded political freedoms (Shin et al., 2007). Their organized and sustained resistance significantly increased

the “cost of suppression” for the military juntas, eventually forcing them to make substantial concessions, a dynamic shaped by the external pressures from the U.S. Moreover, South Korea’s education system, influenced by its foundational democratic establishment and the constant ideological struggle against a clear communist adversary, incorporated democratic values from an early stage. This exposure to democratic ideals empowered students and intellectuals to become formidable challengers to the authoritarian regime, establishing them as pivotal actors in the pro-democracy movements spanning from the 1960s to the late 1980s. The U.S.’s role as an ally subtly, and sometimes overtly, encouraged the promotion of democratic values in education to differentiate South Korea from its communist adversary, further facilitating the growth of pro-democratic sentiment.

Statistical analysis of South Korean data from the Asian Barometer Survey (Wave 1 in 2003 and Wave 2 in 2006) provides empirical support for the argument that popular support for democratic values was rising. While some traditional legacies, such as harmony and group-orientation, still retained a degree of societal support, overall support for core democratic values demonstrably increased (Park & Shin, 2004). A significant majority of South Koreans perceived their country as a democracy, even acknowledging minor problems, suggesting a high level of expectation for democratic performance. Critically, the data reveals that younger generations consistently exhibit stronger democratic values and a weaker attachment to traditional legacies compared to their older counterparts (Tan & Wang, 2007). Education consistently emerges as a statistically significant factor in promoting democratic values. These findings collectively underscore the consolidation of a democratic political culture, primarily driven by evolving generational values and educational advancements, a process significantly facilitated by the exogenous nature of the regime and the international pressures it faced. The data supports the notion that even in a Confucian context, when external pressures align with internal demands, a robust democratic culture can take root and flourish. This evidence suggests a profound shift in political culture, driven by both internal societal changes and external geopolitical forces, demonstrating the limits of authoritarian control in a context of external dependency and internal contestation.

## **Conclusion: Rethinking East Asian Political Trajectories**

The comparative experiences of South Korea and Singapore compellingly illustrate that the democratization trajectories in East Asian Confucian societies are not solely determined by the inherent nature of their traditional culture or their degree of modernization. Instead, the **endogeneity of a regime** and the **international pressures** it faces emerge as the primary drivers explaining divergent political outcomes. This analysis challenges simplistic “culture is destiny” arguments and offers a more nuanced understanding of political change in the region.

Classical Confucian thought, with its emphasis on people-oriented governance and conditional legitimacy, is not inherently anti-democratic (Tu, 1993). The actual impediments to democracy in Confucian societies are rather “ruler-made legacies” that evolved during the imperial period and have been selectively re-employed by contemporary non-democratic regimes. The capacity of these legacies to either hinder or facilitate democratic change is heavily contingent upon the strategic choices of the ruling elites, which are, in turn, shaped by their regime’s endogeneity and the international pressures it confronts. These legacies, though drawing on historical roots, are fundamentally instrumentalized by current regimes to serve their contemporary political objectives, transforming them from philosophical concepts into tools of statecraft and ideological justification.

The case of Singapore demonstrates how a highly **endogenous regime**, deriving its legitimacy from internal struggles for independence and subsequent economic success, can effectively resist external democratic pressures. The PAP’s strong indigenous roots have allowed it to maintain extensive control over modernization processes, strategically leveraging economic development, a cultivated middle class, and a state-controlled education system to reinforce its non-democratic rule. Traditional legacies like hierarchy, harmony, and group-orientation are actively promoted and integrated into the official ideology, contributing to a political culture that prioritizes stability and collective welfare over individual liberties and pluralism. Singapore’s ability to chart its own course, unburdened by significant international democratic conditionalities, exemplifies the resilience of endogenous non-democratic

regimes. Its economic success provides a powerful source of legitimacy, reducing the internal appetite for radical political change, and its strong state capacity allows for effective top-down control of social and political life, including the suppression of dissent through legal and informal means. The state's control over key economic sectors and its active management of national identity further solidify its position, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of legitimacy and control, making it a model for other states seeking to maintain authoritarian rule amidst modernization.

Conversely, South Korea's path to democracy underscores the powerful democratizing force of **international pressure** on an **exogenous regime**. Established as a democratic republic under U.S. and U.N. guidance (Oh, 1999; United Nations, 2011), South Korea's non-democratic rulers constantly battled a fundamental legitimacy deficit in the eyes of their populace. Their reliance on external support for security and economic development meant that they were susceptible to international pressures, particularly from the U.S., which periodically advocated for democratic reforms. This external constraint, combined with rising internal demands from a modernized middle class and a politically conscious student body, significantly increased the "cost of suppression" for the military juntas. Traditional legacies, far from bolstering these regimes, were often reinterpreted or actively challenged by pro-democracy movements. The exogenous nature of the regime and the continuous international scrutiny ultimately forced the military government to concede to democratic reforms, illustrating how external forces can critically influence the calculus of authoritarian rulers, particularly when their foundational legitimacy is derived from outside sources. The inability to fully control the political implications of modernization, due to external conditionalities and internal dissent, led to a liberalization that ultimately paved the way for full democratization.

Modernization, while a universal process, therefore yields ambiguous results in the context of East Asian democratization. It does not automatically lead to democracy (Inglehart, 1990; Huntington, 1991). Instead, its democratizing potential is activated or suppressed depending on the type of regime and its geopolitical environment. Endogenous regimes, like Singapore, can effectively control modernization to strengthen their non-democratic grip, by channelling economic benefits and social advancements into regime support. This means that economic

prosperity, rather than breeding a desire for political freedom, can reinforce the existing authoritarian bargain. Meanwhile, education can be tailored to foster loyalty and specific values that bolster the regime. Conversely, exogenous regimes, like South Korea, might find modernization creating forces (such as a burgeoning middle class and educated populace) that are difficult to contain, especially when amplified by international pressure. In these contexts, modernization can empower civil society and strengthen demands for political rights, leading to eventual democratic transitions, as the state's capacity to suppress becomes outweighed by the costs of doing so.

However, the analysis also reveals a long-term, underlying dynamic that may challenge even the most resilient non-democratic regimes: the evolving values of younger generations and the transformative power of education. Across East Asian societies, younger cohorts generally exhibit less adherence to traditional legacies and stronger support for democratic values (Tan & Wang, 2007). This generational shift, though gradual, suggests that over time, the political culture may evolve to place increasing pressure on non-democratic rulers. This means that while regime endogeneity and international pressure are critical in explaining past and present political trajectories, the long-term prospects for democratic evolution may still hinge on these profound societal transformations. Even endogenous regimes, with their formidable control, may eventually face a citizenry whose fundamental values have shifted significantly towards greater autonomy and political participation, potentially leading to demands for liberalization or more substantive democratic reforms. Such studies would need to track subtle changes in public opinion and societal demands, examining how these might accumulate to challenge even the most entrenched political systems. The ongoing interaction between these long-term societal shifts and the short-term dynamics of regime endogeneity and international pressure will continue to shape the diverse and fascinating political landscapes of East Asia.

## Notes

\* This article is adapted from a condensed version of Hsin-Che Wu's doctoral

dissertation.

1. This article does not use Chinese society (traditional Confucian society) and Japan as cases. Chinese societies, such as mainland China and Taiwan, also fit the classification of this article, but there are already many related studies. It is difficult to identify Japan as a traditional Confucian society.

## References

- Almond, G. A., & Powell, G. B. (1978). *Comparative politics: System, process, and policy*. Little, Brown.
- Almond, G. A., & Verba, S. (1989). *The civic culture: Political attitudes and democracy in five nations*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Bell, D. A. (2000). *East Meets West: Human rights and democracy in East Asia*. Princeton University Press.
- Bell, D. A., & Hahm, C. (2003). Introduction: The contemporary relevance of Confucianism. In D. A. Bell & H. C. (Eds.), *Confucianism for the modern world* (pp. 1-28). Cambridge University Press.
- Bell, D. A., Brown, D., Jayasuriya, K., & Jones, D. M. (1995). Towards a model of illiberal democracy. In D. A. Bell, D. Brown, K. Jayasuriya, & D. M. Jones (Eds.), *Towards illiberal democracy in Pacific Asia* (pp. 163-167). St. Martin's Press.
- Chen, G. M. (2002). The impact of harmony on Chinese conflict management. In G. M. Chen & R. Ma (Eds.), *Chinese conflict management and resolution* (pp. 3-18). Ablex Publishing.
- Dahl, R. A. (1989). *Democracy and its critics*. Yale University Press.
- Fairbank, J. K., & Goldman, M. (2006). *China: A new history* (Second enlarged ed.). The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Glaeser, E. L., Ponzetto, G., & Shleifer, A. (2006). *Why does democracy need education?* (NBER Working Paper Series: No.12128). National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Gunther, R., Puhle, H. J., & Diamandouros, P. N. (1995). Introduction. In R. Gunther (Ed.), *The politics of democratic consolidation: Southern Europe in comparative perspective* (pp. 1-32). The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Hsiao, H-H., & Koo, H. (1997). The middle class and democratization in East Asia: Comparison of Taiwan and South Korea (东亚的中产阶级与民主化: 台湾与南韩的比较) (P-H. Lin, Trans.). In H-M. Tien, Y-H. Chu, L. Diamond & M.
- Huang, R. (1981). *1587, a year of no significance: The Ming Dynasty in decline*. Yale University Press.
- Huntington, S. P. (1968). *Political order in changing societies*. London: Yale University.
- Huntington, S. P. (1971). The change to change: Modernisation, development, and politics. *Comparative Politics*, 3(3), 283-322.
- Huntington, S. P. (1991). *The third wave: Democratization in the late twentieth century*. University of Oklahoma Press.
- Huntington, S. P. (1996). *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*.

- Simon & Schuster.
- Inglehart, R. (1990). *Culture shift in advanced industrial society*. Princeton University Press.
- Inglehart, R. (1997). *Modernization and postmodernization: Cultural, economic, and political change in 43 Societies*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Inglehart, R. F., & Welzel, C. (2005). *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kao, J. (1993). The worldwide web of Chinese business. *Harvard Business Review*, 71(2), 24-36.
- Kausikan, B. (1997). Hong Kong, Singapore, and 'Asian Values': Governance that works. *Journal of Democracy*, 8(2), 10-23.
- Kihl, Y. W. (2005). *Transforming Korean politics: Democracy, reform, and culture*.
- Kim, D. J. (1994). A response to Lee Kuan Yew: Is culture destiny? The myth of Asia's anti-democratic values. *Foreign Affairs*, 73(6), 189-194.
- Lee, K. Y. (2011). *From the third to first: Singapore and the Asian economic boom*. Harper Business Publishers.
- Legge, J. D. D. (1861a). *The Chinese Classics: With a translation, critical and exegetical notes, prolegomena, and copious indexes in seven volumes, Vol.2: The Works of Mencius*. Trübner & Co.
- Legge, J. D. D. (1861b). *The Chinese Classics: With a translation, critical and exegetical notes, prolegomena, and copious indexes in seven volumes, Vol.1: Confucian Analects, the Great Learning, and the Doctrine of the Mean*. Trübner & Co.
- Linz, J. J. (1990). Transitions to democracy. *Washington Quarterly*, 13(3), 143-164.
- Linz, J. J. (2000). *Totalitarian and authoritarian regimes*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Lipset, S. M. (1959). Some social requisites of democracy: Economic development and political legitimacy. *American Political Science Review*, 53, 69-105.
- Lipset, S. M. (1960). *Political man: The social bases of politics*. Doubleday & Company, Inc.
- M.E. Sharpe. Kim, S. J. (2002). The genealogy of Confucian moralpolitik and its implications for modern civil society. In C. K. Armstrong (Ed.), *Korean society: Civil society, democracy and the state* (pp. 174-192). Routledge.
- Ng, M. (1997). Hong Kong, Singapore, and 'Asian Values': Why Asia needs democracy? *Journal of Democracy*, 8(2), 10-23.
- Oh, J. K-C. (1999). *Korean politics*. Cornell University Press.
- Park, C-M., & Shin, D. C. (2004). Do Asian values deter popular support for democracy? The case of South Korea (Asian Barometer Working Paper Series: No. 26). Program for East Asia Democratic Studies.
- Plattner (Eds.), *Consolidate the third wave democracy (巩固第三波民主)*(pp.501-532). Taipei: Chang Yung-Fa Foundation, Institute for National Policy Research and Yeh Chiang (业强) Publisher.
- Pridham, G. (2000). *The dynamics of democratization: A comparative approach*. Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd.
- Quah, J. S.T. (1994). Political consequences of rapid economic development: The Singapore case. In S. S. Nagel (Ed.), *Asian development and public policy* (Chapter 1). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Robinson, M. E. (2007). *Korea's twentieth-century odyssey: A short history*. University

- of Hawaii Press.
- Shi, T. (2004). Economic development and political participation: Comparison of Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong (Asian Barometer Working Paper Series: No. 24). Program for East Asia Democratic Studies.
- Shin, D. C. (1994). On the third wave of democratization: A synthesis and evaluation of recent theory and research. *World Politics*, 47(1), 135-170.
- Shin, D. C. (2007). *Why East Asians react differently to democratic regime change: Discerning their routes to becoming authentic democrats* (Asian Barometer Working Paper Series: No. 45). Program for East Asia Democratic Studies.
- Shin, G. W., Chang, P. Y., Lee, J., & Kim, S. (2007). *South Korea's Democracy Movement (1970-1993): Stanford Korea Democracy Project Report*. The Korea Democracy Foundation & Shorenstein Asia Pacific Research Center, Stanford University.
- Singapore Attorney-General's Chambers. (2012). *Constitution of the Republic of Singapore*.
- Tamura, K. T. (2003). The emergence and political consciousness of the middle class in Singapore. *The Developing Economies*, 41(2), 184-200.
- Tan, E. S., & Wang, Z. (2007). Are younger people in Asia more pro-democratic: Lifecycle effects or generational changes? (Asian Barometer Working Paper Series: No. 36). Program for East Asia Democratic Studies.
- Tu, W. M. (1984). *Confucian ethics today: The Singapore challenge*. Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore.
- Tu, W. M. (1993). *Way, learning, and politics: Essays on the Confucian intellectual*. State University of New York Press.
- United Nations. (2011, October 27). *Global Issues: Democracy*. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/democracy>.
- Weber, M. (1968). *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism* (H. H. Gerth, Trans. and Ed.). The Free Press.

---

## 东亚民主化： 政权内源性与地缘政治潮流的作用

---

**摘要：**本研究探讨政权的内生性(其独立于重大外部支持的内部起源)和国际压力如何塑造东亚儒家社会的民主化轨迹。文章挑战了简单的文化决定论，认为虽然古典儒家思想并非本质上反民主，但帝国时代的“统治者制造的遗产”可以阻碍或促进民主变革，这取决于执政精英的战略选择。对新加坡和韩国的比较分析说明了这一点：新加坡高度内生的政权有效抵制外部民主压力，并控制现代化以巩固非民主统治。相反，韩国外生的政权，由于缺乏深厚的内部合法性并面临持续的国际压力，被迫走向民主化。因此，现代化的民主化潜力取决于政权类型和地缘政治环境。

**关键词：**民主化、东亚、儒家思想、政权内生性、国际压力

---

## 동아시아의 민주화: 체제 내생성과 지정학적 흐름의 역할

---

**초록:** 본 연구는 정권의 내생성(중요한 외부 지원과 무관한 내부적 기원)과 국제적 압력이 동아시아 유교 사회의 민주화 경로를 어떻게 형성하는지를 탐구한다. 본 논문은 단순한 문화 결정론에 도전하며, 고전 유교 사상이 본질적으로 반민주적이지는 않지만, 제국 시대의 '통치자에 의해 형성된 유산'이 민주적 변화를 방해하거나 촉진할 수 있으며, 이는 통치 엘리트의 전략적 선택에 달려 있다고 주장한다. 싱가포르와 한국에 대한 비교 분석은 이를 잘 보여준다. 싱가포르의 내생성이 높은 정권은 외부 민주화 압력을 효과적으로 저지하고, 현대화를 통제하여 비민주적 통치를 공고히 하였다. 반면, 한국의 외생적 정권은 깊은 내부 정당성이 부족하고 지속적인 국제적 압력에 직면하여 민주화로 나아갈 수밖에 없었다. 따라서 현대화의 민주화 잠재력은 정권 유형과 지정학적 환경에 따라 달라진다.

**주제어:** 민주화, 동아시아, 유교 사상, 정권 내생성, 국제 압력

---

## 東アジアにおける民主化: 政権の内生性と地政学的潮流の役割

---

**要旨:** 本研究は、政権の内生性(重大な外部支援に依存しない内部的起源)と国際的圧力が、東アジア儒教社会の民主化の軌跡をどのように形成するかを探求する。本稿は単純な文化決定論に異議を唱え、古典的儒教思想は本質的に反民主的ではないものの、帝政時代の「統治者によって形成された遺産」が民主的変革を阻害または促進し得ると論じる。これは統治エリートの戦略的選択に依存する。シンガポールと韓国の比較分析は、これを実証している。シンガポールの内生性が高い政権は、外部からの民主化圧力を効果的に阻止し、近代化を統制することで非民主的統治を強化した。一方、韓国の外生的政権は、深い内部的正当性を欠き、継続的な国際的圧力に直面したため、民主化へ移行せざるを得なかった。したがって、近代化がもつ民主化の潜在力は、政権の種類と地政学的環境によって左右される。

**キーワード:** 民主化、東アジア、儒教思想、政権内生性、国際圧力

## **Author biography**

**Hsin-Che Wu** is an Associate Professor at Department of Political Science, National Taiwan University. He received his Ph.D. (2013) from the University of Durham. His research interests are China studies, East Asian politics and Democratization. His publications have appeared in *Journal of Contemporary China*, *Asian Survey*, *Nations and Nationalism*, *Social Science Quarterly*, *Journal of Asian Public Policy*, *Political Science*, *Journal of Local Self-Government*, *Taiwanese Journal of Political Science*, and *China: An International Journal*, etc.