

Taiwan's Democratization **A Critical Test for the International Dimensions Perspective**

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Abstract

Taiwan's twenty-year domestic history of democratic transition and (relative) consolidation fits quite comfortably within the standard parameters of the comparative democratization literature. But the trajectory and eventual outcome of the island's regime change is in fact far from standard, because the international dimensions of this democratization are so crucial and so distinctive. In fact, the Taiwanese case constitutes a critical test for several key assumptions about the role of international factors. This paper reexamines the literature on waves; snow-balling; decolonization; external conditionality; contagion; modernization; and popularity sovereignty and consent, all in the light of the crucial deviant case. The conclusion draws some inferences about democratization theory in general, including the assertion that in many cases such processes can remain "open-ended" long after the basics of regime change have been decided. In the Taiwanese case, this open-endedness has big implications for the eventual future of democracy not only on the island but also throughout the Chinese-speaking world.

Introduction: Democracy and Democratization in Taiwan

According to the most recent rating exercise by Freedom House in 2006, Taiwan was ranked as one of only four political systems in East Asia that could be considered "free." In fact, it was accorded a top rating of "1" on the one to seven score for civil rights, and a "2" for political rights (down from "1" in 2005). This put it roughly on a par with Japan and South Korea (both rated "2" for civil rights and "1" for political rights). The only other country in this group was Indonesia (with a "3" for civil rights, and "2" for political rights). The "partly free" countries of the region were the Philippines (with a score of "3" and "3" for civil and political rights, respectively); East Timor (with a "4"

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and a “3”); Malaysia (with “4” and “4”); and Singapore (with a “4” and a “5”). There were also seven “not free” countries including China (scoring “6” and “7”) and Vietnam (with “5” and “7”). Hong Kong was not included among the 193 political systems in the main assessment, but that Special Administrative Region of the PRC would be classed as partly-free in the absence of direct elections by universal suffrage for the chief executive and the whole of the Legislative Council.

On the face of it, therefore, Taiwan’s political system has more or less arrived at its “democratic end-point,” like Japan and South Korea. These countries are in the vanguard of their region, and provide the yardstick by which the progress of political development in other East Asian countries is assessed. Although it is possible to fault the Freedom House assessment,¹ and although scholars are divided on the applicability of the term “consolidation” to democratic regimes, any reasonable evaluation must recognize the cumulative progress of domestic political reforms in the past twenty years, their current solidity and broad conformity with what the relevant literature regards as the standard components of democratic regime change. No doubt, Taiwan has displayed some intriguing political eccentricities (such as its single nontransferable vote [SNTV] system, its five yuan constitutional framework, and its closely fought and contentious presidential election of 2004), distinctive internal features that deserve careful comparative analysis. However, they are not so out of line with the specificities of other secure democratic regimes (such as Britain’s House of Lords, the United States Supreme Court, or Canadian bi-national constitutionalism) as to constitute a critical test for standard ideas about democracy and democratization. Overall, then, on the domestic front, Taiwan’s experience falls within the normal range of variance.

When it comes to the role of international factors in democratization, the focus of this analysis, Taiwan’s experience poses more of an analytical challenge. For a start, of the 193 political systems rated in the latest Freedom House assessment, 192 are members of the United Nations. They are, in other words, internationally recognized sovereign states (even though the population of Palau is only 20,000, and North and South Korea remain technically at war as rival claimants to the sovereignty of a single Korean nation). The only non-UN member on the list is Taiwan. Taiwan is not the only non-UN member whose democratic credentials might be worth evaluating—Hong Kong, Puerto Rico, the Palestinian National Authority, the Republic of North Cyprus, and Macau are all significant political jurisdictions that could be assessed in the same way—but Taiwan is by far the most important (demographically, economically, and in terms of political strength and autonomy). It is probably

¹ Some Asian observers might bridle at a New York-based institution that so favorably rates countries occupied or protected by the United States., but they should note that in 2006 Iraq was rated “not free” (6.6).

on the Freedom House list in part because—unlike all the others—it was a member of the United Nations when that rating exercise first began. However, international recognition of its claims to sovereignty has eroded progressively since 1972 and continues to diminish (in June 2007, Costa Rica became the most significant democracy in awhile to defect from the dwindling ranks of Taiwan’s international partners). In summary, then, the contrast between the regime’s internal democratic solidarity and its external isolation is becoming ever sharper. This makes it a critical test (a “limit case”) for theories regarding the international dimensions of democratization.

The literature on such international factors has proliferated since Samuel Huntington introduced his metaphor of the “third wave,” at the beginning of the 1990s. The focus here is on Taiwan, rather than on the global debate, so it will address only a limited selection of the major themes that have most bearing on the dynamics of this particular case. Most of the analysis consists of a review of seven such themes, each reassessed in the light of the Taiwanese experience. The conclusion draws some inferences about democratization theory in general. In particular, it reflects on how the island’s special “international predicament” may reinforce the “open-endedness” of its current political trajectory. The aim is to enrich theory by reference to a testing example, and to use comparative insights to illuminate the dynamics and prospects of democratization in Taiwan. The underlying assumption is that while most islanders are understandably preoccupied with their own political arrangements, more is at stake here than just a set of internal arrangements. The outcome of this process will be highly consequential for democrats and democracy in East Asia as a whole, and for that reason, for the prospects of democratization as a global project.

Seven General Themes and One Special Case

The “Third Wave”

If, as Huntington argues, democratization is a global process that has evolved over three, long-term successive “waves,” then the democratization of Taiwan very clearly belongs to the “third wave,” which the overthrow of the Portuguese dictatorship in April 1974 initiated, and which peaked with the collapse of the Soviet bloc around 1990.² Huntington has never subsequently clarified whether that wave is still in process, but Larry Diamond and others have suggested that it may have begun to subside with the fall of democracy in Pakistan in October 1999.³ Whatever the precise dates marking the beginning and (possible) end of this hypothetical wave, Taiwan is in the middle of it. Martial Law on the island was promulgated in 1949 and rescinded on July 14, 1987 (probably a world

² Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993).

³ See *Journal of Democracy* 2, no.3 (July 2002).

record for this particularly harsh form of authoritarian rule). The transition occurred in stages but, with hindsight, there is little doubt that the reforms put in place by 1992 were more than just a “liberalization” of authoritarian controls. The final confirmation that this was a genuine change of regime came with the election of a presidential candidate from the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) opposition in 2000. So, if there was a global “third wave,” Taiwan was clearly a part of it.

However, is the wave metaphor just a convenient short-hand, or does it actually denote a discrete process (or a cluster of national processes) with an identifiable structure subject to empirical analysis? What, in other words, does the fall of the Portuguese dictatorship have to do with the termination of martial law in Taiwan, or the dismantling of the Berlin Wall? How has Huntington persuaded the political science community that all these developments should be bracketed together as a single “wave”? The major unifying theme in this period was the winding down and conclusion of the Cold War. During the first phase of Huntington’s “wave,” the authoritarian regimes that succumbed to democratization were almost all anticommunist dictatorships. This was certainly the case of Portugal, Spain, and Greece (the 1974 forerunners) and also the Philippines, Taiwan, and South Korea (the East Asian regime changes initiated in 1986). From 1989 onward, the focus shifted to the other side of the ideological spectrum, to communist-governed states in the Soviet bloc, and African one-party regimes, quite a few of which had been aligned with Moscow. In an article of 1994, Huntington had denied that communist-ruled countries could democratize from within,⁴ so one might have expected him to argue for two waves rather than a single “third wave.” However, all these transitions can be seen as responses to the disappearance of a bi-polar international system, and to the rise of a single dominant power committed to universalizing a version of its own domestic political values and structures. This is not an entirely satisfactory vindication of the “third wave” metaphor. It can hardly accommodate such important instances of regime change such as those of Nigeria, South Africa, Bangladesh, and indeed Pakistan; it can be faulted for disregarding other international dynamics, such as decolonization, and for attributing a global unity to patterns that were in fact more regional than universal. Still, setting such general doubts aside, let us examine more closely how well the “third wave” fits with the case of Taiwan.

The essential idea behind the Cold War-focused interpretation of democratization is that, when the bi-polar conflict was at its height, neither the United States nor the USSR could allow democratic niceties to interfere with their struggle for global supremacy. Thus, if Chile or Guatemala democratically elected to switch sides, Washington would have to endorse military power

⁴ Samuel Huntington, “Will More Countries Become Democratic?” *Political Science Quarterly* 99, no. 2 (Summer 1984): 193-218.

seizures to keep those allies on its side. Similarly, Moscow could never allow Hungary or Poland to “liberalize” to the point of slipping out of Soviet bloc control. This logic extended throughout the world (Algeria versus Morocco; Angola versus Zaire). After 1974, however, the bi-polar conflict began to wind down (there was the experience of the Helsinki Process), and once Gorbachev took control, these conflicts lost their sting. Thus, to Kissinger’s surprise, Washington discovered that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) could cope with a democratic Greece and Portugal, notwithstanding the legitimate grievances that these elected governments were likely to feel concerning the West’s previous lack of regard for popular sovereignty. By the early 1980s, even President Reagan had learned (from the Argentine experience) that it was both necessary and surprisingly not very costly for Washington to climb onto the prodemocracy bandwagon whenever an authoritarian ally was about to founder. His last minute shift on the Philippines in 1986 represents a vivid illustration of this new approach. For Moscow, the change of gears was slower and not as smooth, but after the experience of backing martial law in Poland in 1981, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) did begin to search for less brutal alternatives. By 1988, the two sides agreed on the establishment of universal suffrage in Namibia (a victory for Moscow’s ally, the South West African People’s Organization [SWAPO]). This was the time when Gorbachev began promoting *glasnost* and *perestroika* inside the Warsaw Pact, which led to the collapse of the Soviet bloc. However, before that result became obvious, Moscow already was trying to promote prodemocracy factions in Beijing and Havana (and perhaps also in Belgrade), as well as within its sphere of military control. This, then, provides a reasonably clear and specific account of the genesis and expansion of the “third wave,” as seen from the perspective of the rival superpowers. As elaborated elsewhere,⁵ it is a theory that privileges variations in great power “control” as the major explanatory variable.

However, a great power control version of the “third wave” argument has little purchase on the Taiwanese case. The anticommunist dictatorship in Taiwan was not threatened by Moscow. On the contrary, the Kuomintang (KMT) had initially paid the CPSU the high compliment of accepting its guidance and indeed imitating not a few of its practices. For a quarter century prior to the lifting of martial law, Taipei had monitored closely Beijing-Moscow frictions. The worse that relations between the USSR and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) became, the less reason there was for Taiwan to be anti-Soviet. Similarly, the closer Washington became to the post-Mao leadership in Beijing, the more the KMT needed to move out of the Cold War orbit of the United States and refound the legitimacy of its rule on a different basis. In short, the

⁵ Laurence Whitehead, *International Dimensions of Democratization: Europe and the Americas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), especially 8-15.

fading of the Cold War may provide a (loose) analytical framework accounting for a more permissive attitude toward unruly democracies within the spheres of influence of the two major great powers, but this imposes a bi-polar logic that greatly over-simplifies the geopolitical context confronting any individual state. In the specific case of Taiwan, what really mattered was avoiding control by mainland China (or better still, to control mainland China from Taipei) rather than resisting Moscow or proving undying loyalty to Washington.

“Snowballing”

Huntington adopted a second metaphor derived from homely observations about the natural world. As a snowball rolls downhill, it grows in size as it gathers the snow around it. Something similar occurs as a result of interaction between a small number of close neighbors (rather than the grand strategy of dominant powers). The “snowballing” metaphor correctly draws attention to an important truth about recent processes of democratization: that they rarely occur in isolation. The so-called “third wave” began with three regime changes in southern Europe (Portugal, Greece, and Spain in 1974-1975); the early South American redemocratizations were also nearly coterminous (Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil, in 1978-1984); the same applies to the post-communist transitions in Eastern Europe (concentrated between 1989 and 1991), and the displacement of a succession of African one-party regimes at around the same time. Most relevant for the purpose of this essay was 1986-1987, which went into reverse with the crackdowns on democracy in Burma and the PRC in 1989, during the democracy sequence in East Asia (the Philippines, Taiwan, and South Korea). The “snowballing” metaphor draws attention to such regional sequences and their possibly cumulative dynamics.

However, “snowballing” is not a very appropriate metaphor. Elsewhere, I have preferred the less vivid but more noncommittal language of “clustering.” The snowball image seems to imply that once a larger country democratizes, it will tend to sweep up its smaller neighbors in the same process. Yet, if we consider the clusters listed above, it was often the reverse: Portugal and Greece (for separate reasons) both came first, with Spain following on behind; in South America, Ecuador and Bolivia preceded Argentina and Brazil; in the Soviet bloc, Hungary came first and Russia came last; and in East Asia the snowball never reached the largest polity (i.e., mainland China).

This observation raises a larger problem with the snowballing imagery. There may well be interaction effects between neighboring countries, but this does not mean that such effects are uniform and cumulative. Portugal exerted far more influence on Spain than on Greece. And the main effect was not to encourage emulation, but rather to provoke resistance. The “rupture” of the old order in Portugal spurred Spanish actors to make a transition “pact,” precisely to avoid repetition of the neighbor’s experience. Similarly, Ecuador had virtually no bearing on the Brazilian transition, but Argentina certainly did, as the rupture in Argentina dramatically illustrated for the Brazilian military the dangers it

might face if it did not withdraw from government in good order. This line of thought raises the following questions about the “East Asian” cluster: When martial law was rescinded in Taiwan, was the leadership of the KMT at all influenced by the wish to pre-empt disturbances such as those of the preceding year’s democratic revolution in the Philippines, or by immediately preceding developments in South Korea?⁶ When the leadership of the PRC decided to crack down in Tiananmen Square, was it making a purely internal decision, or was it also reacting to patterns of disorder detected in their neighborhood? If so, which neighbors? (My guess, here, would be that Moscow counted far more than Manila or Taipei). By answering such questions, we could trace the regional dynamics of this East Asian cluster of democratizations. Whatever the answers, it seems unlikely that the snowballing metaphor can shed much light on this sequence of regime choices.

Decolonization

The wave and snowball metaphors discussed thus far draw attention to international processes affecting democratization, which reflect the power that some states can exercise over internal political arrangements among their allies or neighbors. Instead of viewing democratic transition as something freely chosen or negotiated by domestic elites, these metaphors suggest that regime change is heavily determined by the prior choices of great powers or of influential neighbors. Perhaps the word “choice” over-emphasizes the element of deliberate intentionality here, but the focus is on powerful governments pursuing their interests and strategies with consequences that (planned or not) shape and constrain the possibilities for authoritarian or democratic regime practices in secondary jurisdictions. Both the “wave” and “snowball” metaphors attempt to reconcile the normative attractions of democratization with an analysis grounded in the realities of international power relationships.

Elsewhere, I have argued that the main process by which dominant powers have actively and deliberately promoted democratization in secondary jurisdictions is by granting colonies independence, on condition that they accept forms of government approved by the decolonizing power. The “wave” and “snowball” metaphor divert attention from this empirically prevalent pattern of democracy-promotion or -transmission. The literature on comparative democratization somehow manages to disregard the most global and successful of all these processes—the establishment in India of a stable and effective democratic regime, despite its vastness, its backward or at least uneven development, and its huge social inequalities and divisions. Decolonization also goes far to account for a broad range of other improbable democratizations (the list is extensive and includes Dutch and French as well

⁶ As a response to popular protests, the Chen dictatorship announced a democratic opening on June 29. Just sixteen days later, martial law was lifted in Taiwan.

as British former colonies). Of course, there have been many failures as well, notably in sub-Saharan Africa. But even former Portuguese colonies such as Mozambique and East Timor can now be included. From my standpoint, the Soviet bloc was also a quasi-empire, and what Gorbachev and Yeltsin both attempted was also a process of decolonization that included the possibility of leaving new democracies in the wake of the withdrawal of the Red Army. In a significant number of cases, Russian decolonization produced democratic success, with probably as high a ratio as any other European imperial power.

In East Asia, the record is mixed. The United States attempted to create an American-style democracy in the Philippines, and over the past twenty years that aspiration has been substantially fulfilled. The British and Portuguese failed to democratize Hong Kong and Macau before decolonization, and the French and Americans failed in Indochina. The Dutch deserve little credit for the democracy that emerged many years after their expulsion from Indonesia. The American military occupation of Japan did pave the way for the establishment of a successful democracy there, but the American presence in South Korea was less constructive. The British left some positive legacies in Malaysia and Singapore, but they fell far short in India. The USSR and the PRC can be said to have “decolonized” North Korea in the 1950s, but the regime they left behind was as undemocratic as the regime that replaced the British in Burma.

Where does Taiwan belong in this panorama? First, of course, it was Japan rather than a European empire that imposed colonial rule on the island (a feature shared with Korea, although in other respects, the political history of these two territories was quite different).⁷ The goal of Tokyo’s political model was hardly to promote eventual decolonization or to democratization (although it should not be forgotten that Japan did operate a multiparty electoral system at least during the 1920s, and that the Taiwanese practice of holding elections under the SNTV was borrowed from Japan).⁸ It might be interesting to speculate how Western imperialism might have developed, and whether it might eventually have led to democratic decolonization in the absence of an overlay in Japanese expansionism. But any such counterfactuals must be highly speculative. In reality, it was the outright defeat of Japanese militarism that restored the island to Chinese control in 1945. Thus, “decolonization” did not signify the achievement of national independence, and it was not based on any choice made by the islanders. At the Teheran conference of

⁷ Indeed, just before Japanese troops took over control of the island in 1895 (under the Treaty of Shimonoseki accepted by a defeated Peking), local Taiwanese leaders proclaimed a “Democratic Nation of Taiwan” in a revolt that lasted for ten days.

⁸ Until the 1990s, SNTV prevailed in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, but it promotes factionalism within the dominant party, and so was phased out. However, it was subsequently adopted for the upper chambers in Indonesia and in Thailand, and is used in the parliamentary elections in Vanuatu. See Ben Reilly, *Democracy and Diversity: Political Engineering in the Asia-Pacific* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 99-100.

November 1943, the Allies had promised Chiang-Kai-shek (who was present as the leader of China) that, with the defeat of Japan, control over Formosa, Manchuria, and the Pescadores would be his. Hence, far from empowering the people of Taiwan, the transfer of control from Tokyo to Nanking was viewed by many on the island as the substitution of one external ruler for another. This is the crucial backdrop to the divisions created by the “February 28, 1947” incident and the imposition of martial law, as the KMT government and its entourage of mainlanders decamped from China to Taiwan under the protection of the U.S. Navy. According to the new orthodoxy—imposed with authoritarian inflexibility—the government in Taipei was not an expression of Taiwanese popular sovereignty; rather, it was the government of the entire Republic of China, theoretically reflecting the popular sovereignty of electors on the mainland, temporarily relocated to a safe haven. Given these extremely distinctive features, the democratization of Taiwan over the past twenty years can be said to have included a substantial dose of decolonization, as islanders used elections to capture the highest offices of state and reorient the activities of government from a theoretical preoccupation with the needs of the mainland to a practical engagement with their own aspirations. In short, here, too, democratization and decolonization were closely associated. However, in contrast to all the other processes of decolonization considered here, the source of the metropolitan power obstructing democratic self-government was located not in some distant imperial capital but in what was for long the tallest building in Taipei, the Zongtong Fu (The Office Building of the President), and the adjoining Guomindang Zhongyangdang Dalou (The Building of the KMT Headquarters). Even more than elsewhere, decolonization in Taiwan consisted of a reallocation of domestic power, responsibilities, and public purposes.

In general, I have characterized most democratizing decolonization processes as instances of external “control.” According to this model, imperial authorities agree to negotiate the relinquishment of their acquired political powers, in exchange for assurances of legal continuity and approved forms of democratic representation compatible with self-government. It could perhaps be said that this is what the mainland-dominated KMT agreed to do in the 1980s. Still, if so, it was internal, not external, control that it relinquished. Tokyo and Peking were never parties to such negotiations for the “decolonizing democratization” of the island. That makes this a “limit case.”

External Conditionality

Various forms of “control” are considered in the available taxonomy of international factors affecting democratization, but other possibilities also require attention. There is scope for other types of externally constructed inducements and sanctions that powerfully affect the calculus of domestic political actors, even if regime change is not simultaneous with independence, or wrought by massive external pressure that overwhelms domestic considerations. The most compelling form of external conditionality in the last

twenty years has been provided by the EU. This is not “control” in the sense that sovereign states may respond or not as they prefer, but the Copenhagen Criteria for EU membership contain precise and detailed requirements of democratic performance, along with other legal, economic, and administrative conditions. The EU also (with less success) has extended this model of democratic conditionality to its negotiations with nonmember states, hoping to negotiate association agreements with this powerful regional bloc of democratic states. Political conditionality along similar lines can also be found outside the European Union, including that linked to the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), the Commonwealth, and the Pacific Island Forum. The United Nations also has tried to associate its humanitarian interventions with democratic conditionalities, and some international financial institutions (IFIs) have come close to adopting the same stance (under expansive interpretations of the notion of “good governance”). Some aid agencies and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have also gravitated in this direction. As this brief summary of a complex panorama suggests, some variants of democratic conditionality verge on “control” (the Helms Burton Law, directed toward Cuba by the United States Congress, is an example), while others are much more flexible and subject to interpretation (moving toward the category of “contagion” considered below). The broader implications of this type of diplomacy raise many issues that cannot be considered here. What does require attention is the potential effectiveness of democratic conditionality and how it impinges on the East Asian regional context.

To start with, there is no EU or its equivalent in East Asia. Perhaps the course of democratization in East Timor may be (slightly) influenced by the conditions for membership of the EU Cotonou Treaty. Beyond such very marginal possibilities, the major counterpart to the EU in the region must be democratic Japan. However, given the history of Tokyo’s “Co-Prosperty” initiative before 1945, and the continuing controversies elicited by its pre-occupation record of militarism, there is no scope for a self-confident assertion of Japanese democratic conditionality in the region. After the departure of the British and the French in the 1950s, it was only the United States that might have led such a project. However, the consequence of American participation in the Korean and Vietnamese wars was that Washington embraced anticommunist military dictatorships from Indonesia to Korea, passing through Thailand and including Taiwan.⁹

In summary, there is no regional equivalent to the EU, or even to the FTAA or the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR). The Association of

⁹ There remains the possibility that this could be classed as a long-term prodemocracy choice, because the United States supported capitalist “modernization” in countries that eventually reached a level of development cogent with democratization. Since this is a modernization and not a conditionality argument, it will be considered below.

South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) are composed indiscriminately of authoritarian as well as democratic regimes, and promoting regime change among member states is not among their major objectives. Even if this were to change, its significance for Taiwan is doubtful since any strong regional association would have to take into account the views of mainland China, and would therefore be off-limits for Taipei.

In addition, the states of East Asia are not subject to the same degree of external conditionality as were Latin America and East-Central Europe, and even most of Africa. Their massive foreign exchange reserves testify to their dislike of dependence on foreign economic goodwill. The image of Suharto inflecting before the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in January 1978 is engraved on the consciousness of the region's political elites. China and Thailand never completely lost their sovereignty, although they experienced multiple humiliations at the hands of Western powers. Korea and Vietnam both endured extraordinary sacrifices in the course of resisting what communists and nationalists saw as external impositions. Malaysia, like Indonesia and South Korea, reacted to the Asian financial crisis a decade ago by resolving never again to display such vulnerabilities.

An underlying assumption of the political conditionality literature is that some democratic regimes are secure and dominant, and can set conditions for others to meet, while target regimes are malleable and dependent condition-takers rather than condition-makers. Yet, this schema does not fit the Taiwanese case. When the Republic of China was the internationally recognized government of the whole of China, it was accustomed to pursuing a very active foreign policy of rewarding friendly states and punishing defections. Over a sixty-year period, it progressively slipped from its initial dominance to its current politically vulnerable position. Nevertheless, it continues to reward its external allies in exchange for their recognition and support as actively as ever. It no longer demands acceptance of its "one China" pretensions as the key test of partners' commitment. What it seeks now are partners who value the *de facto* democratic legitimacy established on the island above PRC *de jure* claims to sovereignty over it. This active and, indeed, assertive diplomacy constitutes an exceptional case of defensive democratic political conditionality.

Finally, and most crucially as far as Taiwan is concerned, the political conditionality that matters most in the region emanates not from any one democracy or bloc of democratic states, but from the Communist-led People's Republic of China. The conditionality that really counts and shows every sign of becoming more intense is of a democracy-thwarting rather than a democracy-promoting variety. Communist China was strong enough to displace the ROC from China's permanent seat on the UN Security Council even when Chairman Mao was still alive. By the 1980s, it was able to secure British and Portuguese consent to the "one country two systems" formula for reintegrating Hong Kong and Macao without first democratizing them. Since 1997, it has succeeded in continuing to block the promised introduction of universal suffrage for the

governorship of Hong Kong (placing “stability above reform”), and it has made considerable progress in containing the risk of democratic contagion from the peninsula by the selective application of various types of inducements and sanctions (through negative democratic conditionality). The attempts to use the same instruments to curb the spill-over effects of democracy in Taiwan have produced more mixed results thus far, but the desire and intention is clear, and the capability of the PRC to act in this way may be still growing. In sum, if external conditionality is a significant factor among the international factors that can promote democratization, the particular configuration of pressures and incentives affecting Taiwan’s new democracy is highly atypical. Once again, the island presents a “limit case” to us.

Contagion

All the international factors reviewed until now involve strategies and processes that are essentially the international choices of national governments. They fit within the broad framework of “realism” in international relations. However, governments are always pursuing other objectives that compete with the goal of democracy promotion. There are consequential trade-offs, the selective application of declaratory principles, and temptations to manipulate definitions of democracy so that allies can be indulged and enemies castigated, regardless of real regime characteristics. For all these reasons, traditional realists find it difficult to take seriously democracy promotion as a foreign policy priority. Yet, the normative appeal of democratic practices has a clear international effect. Some constructivist and idealist thinkers have even concluded that it is the undirected and unintended attractions of a successful democratic example that constitutes the driving force of democratization at the international level. This is the idea behind the “contagion,” “spill over,” or “demonstration effects” strand of analysis. According to this view, what democratized East Germany was not so much the Helsinki Process, Ostpolitik, or a Russian decision to decolonize; the essential dynamic was the irresistible attraction that the West German democratic model exercised over the imagination of ordinary East German citizens. A similar effect was what undermined Franco and Salazar, and the same could apply to Cuba (the magnet of Miami) or North Korea.

There may be some examples of pure contagion. However, as the above list suggests, it is more likely that, under certain limited conditions, demonstration effects work with other international factors, so that deciding which is dominant involves fine judgment. In any particular case, there is likely to be overlap among the various dimensions: control, conditionality, and contagion may all be present to differing degrees. Moreover, the normative attractions of democracy as a political regime may be difficult to distinguish from the more material advantages of joining a prosperous market economy (as per modernization discussed below). The East German case does not necessarily establish that demonstration effects from the west were essentially democratic—nationalism also could have worked with similar results (not the

case in Cuba), and material incentives might have been stronger than political ideals.

However that may be, in the case of Taiwan and East Asia, the two most obvious sources of democratic contagion are both somewhat problematic. Japan may be a flourishing East Asian democracy, but there are strong nationalist reasons why others in the region might be reluctant to take that as an unvarnished model for emulation. These reasons are particularly compelling for China and Korea. The most powerful of all democratic magnets is, of course, the United States and it would be impossible to understand the recent evolution of politics in East Asia without recognizing the impact of its societal and cultural model, and the strength of its “soft power.” This is particularly true of Taiwan. However, the United States is far away across the Pacific (not next door, like West Germany or Florida); there is no prospect of extending the formal political structures of American democracy beyond Hawaii (in contrast to the south and eastward expansion of the EU); and, indeed, the United States may be physically retreating from the region (from Okinawa, and from bases in the Philippines and South Korea). However attractive the American model of democracy may be, most East Asians perceive that they need to forge their own distinctive political arrangements, and that these cannot be a simple reflection or importation of practices from elsewhere. The “Asian Values” debate of the 1990s was one expression of this ambivalence over normative issues, and other strands can be detected in South Korea (with a stirring of nationalism that is inevitably questioning the role of the United States as well as of Japan) and elsewhere. Perhaps only the Philippines is truly open to “contagion” by the American model of politics, and Manila’s political model exerts little pull on its more immediate neighbors.

Once again, then, China and Taiwan need to be studied as “limit cases,” or, indeed, as exceptions. It is true that the students in Tiananmen Square rallied to an image of the Statue of Liberty, but it is uncertain whether that symbol meant to them what it means to most Americans. In any case, the Chinese Community Party (CCP) subsequently made every effort to block any such democratic contagion on the mainland. It also is true that a majority of the electorate in Hong Kong expresses support for the democrats, and in other ways signals its attachment to the Western democratic norms that were diffused through the British colony, even as the government in London resolved to postpone *sine die* their practical implementation on the island. Further, it is also evident from the vitality of democratic life in contemporary Taiwan that Western political models have melded with a constitutional and democratic strand in China’s history (traceable back to Sun Yat-sen), and with popular aspirations on the island, to root the principles of civic freedom and competitive politics under the rule of law in the consciousness of this particular East Asian society.

Granted all that, democratic contagion needs to be studied in a cultural context. It can be expected to operate somewhat differently across the Chinese-speaking world than, for example, within the Arabic or Lusophone communities

of nations. Standard theory would expect Taiwan to exert a powerful influence over the aspirations and collective imagination of citizens in the other parts of this culture zone. It is unclear the extent to which either mass or elite opinion in the PRC may be swayed by the attractions of this example. Perhaps, despite short-term resistance, there is a long-term process of conversion at work. That was apparently the case in East Germany, and may eventually prove true of South Korea. But the PRC is extremely large, strong, and successful—unlike the German Democratic Republic (GDR) or the Democratic Republic of Korea (DRK). It has the advantage that patriotism works in its favor. Contagion can operate in both directions. Peking evidently hopes that, over the long run, the attractions of its model will draw the “renegade province” back from its current political defiance. It hopes to reintegrate Taiwan progressively through an extension of the “one country, two systems” model that it offers as an attractive alternative to the temptations of permanent secession, independence, and endless discord. My provisional impression is that Taiwanese democracy is not yet so compelling that Taipei can be confident of winning this normative contest (this “long war” of political positions); equally, the political model of the PRC is not yet sufficiently reassuring to overcome well-founded Taiwanese fears and resistance. One way to test progress in this competition between rival democratic and patriotic versions of contagion is to observe which way interested third parties are tilting. Neither Hong Kong nor Singapore provide much evidence that the Taiwanese democratic model is on track to prevail over the mainland alternative.¹⁰ But, barring an open test of military strength which would be dangerous if not disastrous for both sides, this battle of rival demonstration effects can be expected to persist for a long time to come. It is not clear which side is most likely to lose its resolve or prevail first.

A final observation: “contagion” has been identified as an undirected and unintended effect of pursuing a successful political model. However, even if this happens elsewhere, the war of ideas outlined above is far from spontaneous. It is hardly necessary to stress the extent to which the PRC engages in deliberate and highly articulated strategies of propaganda and intimidation. It would be contrary to communist theory and understanding of politics to leave the transmission of influences to chance, or to expect the merits of any regime to just “speak for itself.” But this would be equally contrary to KMT tradition and to Taiwanese state practice. Although there must be some significant “demonstration effect” in both cases that would operate even in the absence of political direction, pure “contagion” is not a likely feature in East Asian political struggles. State authority and government initiative are much too

¹⁰ Since the Hsing Kuang (starlight) cooperation program was launched in 1975, Singapore Armed Forces personnel have trained in Taiwan—currently about 7,000 per year. But Singapore’s sense of estrangement from the ethnic homeland has since faded, and the costs of this tie to Taiwan are increasingly resisted.

active for that. In this respect, also, Taiwan seems to present a “limit case” in contrast to the tenets of standard democratization theory.

Modernization

Beyond the possible normative attractions of a democratic political model, the standard literature also deals with the long-run democratizing potential of cumulative economic growth and the emergence of a stronger rights-oriented

Table 1. Income and Liberty Rankings in Pacific Asia

Countries Ranked Per Capita GNI (\$US 2003)	Freedom House Rating
Singapore	4.5 PF
Brunei	5.5 NF
Taiwan	1.5 F
Republic of Korea	1.5 F
Palau	1.0 F
Malaysia	4.0 PF
Nauru	1.0 F
Marshall Island	1.0 F
Fiji	3.5 PF
Thailand	2.5 F
Micronesia	1.0 F
Tonga	3.0 PF
Samoa	3.0 PF
Burma	7.0 NF
Vanuatu	2.0 F
China	6.5 F
Philippines	2.5 F
Kiribati	1.0 F
Indonesia	3.0 PF
Solomon Islands	3.0 PF
Papua New Guinea	1.0 F
Vietnam	6.5 NF
East Timor	3.0 PF
North Korea	7.0 NF
Laos	6.5 NF
Cambodia	5.5 NF

Source: Adapted from Benjamin Reilly, *Democracy and Diversity: Political Engineering in the Asia-Pacific* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 37.

“middle class.” The reason why this line of “modernization” analysis needs to be included in any discussion of international factors is that rising prosperity and the diffusion of consumer (and some citizenship) rights, particularly with current conditions of globalization, is thought to be produced by multinational processes rather than by purely state-led initiatives. East Asia provides a key testing ground for this debate, since modernization has proceeded at an exceptionally rapid pace in the region, even when state-led initiatives have been most active. The always problematic linkage between modernization and democratization with all its complexities is apparent here. Table 1 above illustrates the general point that the relationship between levels of prosperity and advances in democracy in Asia Pacific is highly unclear.

Since our focus is on East Asia, we might prefer to disregard the Pacific Island cases (which tend to raise the proportion of low-income countries with good democratic ratings). Even so, limiting ourselves to major Asian “developmental states,” the results of this simple cross-sectional exercise would not seem very promising for modernization theorists:

Table 2. Income and Liberty Rankings of Major Developmental States in Asia

Singapore	4.5
Taiwan	1.5
South Korea	1.5
Malaysia	4.0
Thailand	2.5
China	6.5
Philippines	2.5
Indonesia	3.0

If Hong Kong is added to the list, this only accentuates this picture. (It would rank second, with a score of 5.0). In summary, then, whatever the general merits of modernization theory, it does not seem to explain the distribution of democratic regimes among the currently most dynamic developmental states of East Asia. One recent refinement of the theory states that, above a certain threshold of income per capita, a democratic transition is not likely to be reversed. In the current tabulation, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea have exceeded that threshold, whereas the other five fall below it. That Thailand experienced a reversal in 2006 may offer minor confirmation of the theory, and few can doubt that the Philippines and Indonesia are also potentially vulnerable. However, the applicability of this “law” depends upon confirmation of irreversibility in Taiwan and South Korea.¹¹

So what assurance can we derive from Taiwan's high level of per capita income and its well-developed "middle class" as guarantees of the security of its democratic regime? The fact that Singapore and Hong Kong rank even higher on the proxy for modernization, without much prospect of early democratization in either case, must be somewhat discouraging (if inconclusive). The additional fact that China claims ultimate sovereignty over Taiwan, and the combined income per capita of a reunited China would be far below the threshold for democratic irreversibility, constitutes another source of doubt. It could still be argued that modernization theory postulates no more than a very indeterminate and long-term relationship between rising prosperity and secure democracy. On that basis, it may be difficult to refute the assumption that some time in the future—when income per capita in China has risen fivefold, shall we say—the theory will eventually be vindicated. For Taiwan, the problem remains that, until that indeterminately distant and imprecise prediction is confirmed, the survival of the already established democratic regime will be threatened by a geopolitical logic that is excluded from the terms of the modernization analysis.¹²

In synthesis, Taiwan's exceptional "modernization" achievements can be related to its distinctive insertion into the global division of labor, and may help to explain the success of its recent democratization process. But the specifications and predictions of the theory are quite elusive, even in general terms. When applied to the very unusual and distinctive circumstances of contemporary Taiwanese democracy, it is difficult to have much confidence in its applicability. Whether or not this "theory" is unusable in general terms, its weaknesses are all too apparent when it is extended to this awkward "limit case."

Popular Sovereignty and Consent

It is not hard to understand why popular sovereignty and consent are such an essential concern for students of democracy and democratization. What may be less clear is how they fit into an analysis of international dimensions. Still, I would insist that they must be included and, indeed, that it is essential to underpin all the other considerations discussed above.

Every democracy derives its legitimacy from the sovereign will of the people, the consent of its "demos." But that process of legitimization is not purely domestic. If the members of a political community construct a democratic regime, they seek and expect the recognition of their sovereign

¹¹ The significance of the Thai defection is diluted when one includes the Pacific islands that rank lower in the initial table.

¹² There are only two new East Asian democracies covered by the "guarantee" of modernization. The average per capita income of a united Korea would fall severely, although not below the precious threshold. Does that guarantee the irreversibility of Korean democracy?

will from neighboring states. Yet, international endorsement of a domestic claim cannot always be taken for granted. A good case in point is the American occupation of Iraq: some claim (and there are domestic procedures to support the assertion) that the current administration in Baghdad rests on popular sovereignty and the consent of the Iraqi people; others (both within the jurisdiction and externally) reject such claims. Thus, there is an ongoing international struggle over the identity and wishes of the Iraqi demos, and there is similar disagreement over the identity and wishes of the Palestinian demos, and over the sovereign identities of Serbia and Kosovo, just to give some examples. The point is that a stable and legitimate democracy requires a solid basis of internal consent, supported by international acceptance of the identity of the demos in question and the legitimacy of its declared choices. If any of these conditions is absent, then the resulting lack of international recognition (or the international endorsement of discordant factions) is liable to destabilize whatever internal processes of democratic construction may be in progress. In short, a solid democracy requires international recognition and support.

In the case of Taiwan, over the past twenty years, huge progress has been made in constructing an island-wide “demos” committed to the legitimization of an insular democratic regime. Taiwan is no longer actively seeking to overthrow the communist regime on the mainland, nor is it seeking external recognition for the earlier KMT claim to represent the true “demos” of all of China. It is simply seeking international acceptance as the legitimate expression of the political will of the islanders. Whether that will include full independence remains a contentious issue, but even the domestic actors keenest on an eventual reunification with the mainland now fully accept that this would require the voluntary assent of the now well-established Taiwanese demos.

However, at the same time that domestic opinion on the island has reached agreement on the principle of popular sovereignty there, the international recognition and support once lavished on Taipei continues to recede. Western democratic governments that hitherto saw no difficulty in endorsing the KMT’s claim to represent all of China, and were content to look the other way when that regime trampled on the democratic aspirations of the (far smaller) number of subjects under its physical control, now look the other way when its democratic credentials have been upgraded to the highest standards available in East Asia (in fact, to the highest standards demanded by any international yardstick of democratic conditionality). There is no more striking illustration of the extent to which the domestic and the international components of democratic legitimization may diverge. Thus far, the progressive erosion of Taiwan’s external political support has not yet weakened the solidity of internal commitment to popular sovereignty on the island. Perhaps it never will. The concluding section of this essay will explore the theoretical implications of this unusual configuration, and put forward some tentative thoughts about the island’s prospects. Here, we can conclude with the same observation about consent as was previously stated about control, conditionality, and contagion:

on all these international dimensions of democratization Taiwan remains an extremely deviant “limit case.”

Implications and Prospects of Taiwan’s “Limit Case”

The case of Taiwan is important. It matters to the Taiwanese, of course, but it is also of global normative and theoretical significance. It is one of nearly thirty high-population, good-quality democratic regimes currently in existence, and one of only six in East Asia. The preservation of the system in Taiwan is almost certainly of greater benefit to the cause of democracy worldwide than the reckless project of attempting to coerce Iraq into conformity with Western demands, or the costly and uncertain enterprise of “locking” Romania into the political framework of the EU. If democracy were to fail in Argentina or Mexico (not to mention in Italy or Spain), the reverberations would be global. If Taiwan’s current regime were to be asphyxiated by pressures from outside the island, the normative implications would be equally grave.

I have dealt here with the exceptional international factors operating on what I assume to be a domestically well-grounded and good-quality democratic regime. As indicated by its lack of membership in the UN, Taiwan is a “limit case” as the only major democratic regime lacking secure international recognition. Although the timing of its regime transition situates it firmly in the middle of what is widely referred to as the “third wave,” its international trajectory at the end of the Cold War sets it in a category apart from the standard pattern of rising great power support for democratization with the replacement of the bipolar world order by a unipolar system. Although it may have been prodded into initiating democratization as part of an East Asian “snowballing” process, this was a region where the cumulative momentum was quickly reversed. There were no further regime transitions in its neighborhood after the lifting of martial law (at least none until 1998, when the Indonesian dictatorship collapsed for other reasons). In the Chinese-language world, attempts to democratize were blocked from 1989 onward, not only in the PRC, but also in Hong Kong and Singapore. It is not unreasonable to detect an element of delayed decolonization within the dynamics of regime change in the case of Taiwan, but the metropolitan power required to relinquish its ascendancy was located inside the island rather than in some distant imperial capital, and its far-flung pretensions were an artifice of discourse rather than an authentic imperial structure. In contrast to other large world regions where democratic conditionality consists of incentives and sanctions developed by leading established democracies to win wavering states over to their system, the political conditionality operating in East Asia is less effective, and also different in sign. In particular, Taiwan has long been a giver, rather than just a taker, of incentives for others to change their political behavior—incentives directed at strengthening the island’s claims against the CCP on the mainland, rather than at rewarding democratic developments beyond its shores. Currently,

the strongest variant of political conditionality directed toward the island comes not from any democracy but from Beijing, and is directed toward elevating patriotism and reunification above the value of democratic self-government. In this discursive war of influences, there is little scope on either side for pure “contagion,” unmediated by official direction. In any case, the long-run potential demonstration effects produced by Taiwan’s political openness and freedom seem to be countered quite effectively by an alternative demonstration effect from the mainland, to the effect that order and stability produce benefits that should not be jeopardized by excessive emphasis on the right to dissent, let alone on the right to secede. This is not just a clash of political models, but also a debate about how best to promote rising prosperity throughout China. Although standard modernization theory may suggest that the developmental achievements of Hong Kong and Taiwan should first entrench democracy in those jurisdictions and then eventually spread its provisions across the mainland, this is not an approach to modernization accepted by the CCP. And, at least for the short-term, it is the mainland, rather than these coastal economies, that is taking the lead in generating China-wide modernization. Finally, all the foregoing international dimensions of a possible process of democratization depend on the establishment of a “demos” that is domestically constitute as well as externally recognized, and which must grant its consent in order to legitimate any democratic regime. However, the Taiwanese “demos” is not the beneficiary of such solid external recognition, and is still subject to some significant internal cleavages concerning the final basis of popular sovereignty. For all these reasons, although evaluating international factors is essential in order to understand Taiwan’s process of democratization, standard assumptions about how those factors operate are wide of the mark in this instance. In fact, we have shown that it is a “limit case,” stretching the established explanatory models to a breaking point.

Perhaps this is not surprising. The academic toolkit of democratization studies was assembled to work on different experiences in other parts of the world. Not only Taiwan, but also the East Asian region as a whole, displays a number of major characteristics that were not evident when comparative scholars first considered Latin America and Southern Europe, or even when they revised their techniques to accommodate developments in Africa and the former Soviet bloc. Although many key ideas from that literature work well in the Caribbean and Pacific Island states, few can be transferred without major modification to the Middle East. And as regards East Asia, more work is needed before we can be clear about which components of the democratization literature apply in this region and which do not.

The analysis of some major international components here has thrown up a number of reasons for thinking that these operate somewhat differently in this regional context; thus, for example, the legacy of Japanese military expansionism overlays the substratum of European colonialism and changes the distribution of regional alignments and cleavages; the survival and current

renaissance of an unbroken Chinese tradition of autonomy and of civilizational “apartness” (perhaps even sovereignty) also differentiates this region from other experiences of European expansionism; the cohesion and strategic ambition of East Asian state-led projects of modernization also sets East Asia apart from other large world regions.

Given all this, it is hardly surprising that somewhat self-serving Western ideas about how “our” democratic norms and arrangements can be made universal tend to encounter a degree of resistance, and even some relatively effective counterblasts. Rather than passively receiving what many in Europe and North America view as their political gift to humanity, many East Asian elites respond by actively selecting, and then transmitting, those features of Western democracy that best serve their independently given purposes. Nationalism can play an important role in filtering offerings that seem useful, and blocking others deemed inconvenient or inappropriate. For all these reasons, the receptiveness of East Asia to Huntington’s “third wave” has so far proved partial, ambivalent, and contested. No doubt this is also true of the Middle East and South Asia, but perhaps leading East Asian countries have, more than others, had more autonomy and more grounds for confidence in their capacity to mix and match rather than to simply accept or reject.

What are the main theoretical implications for students of comparative democratization in light of this interpretation of East Asia’s regional distinctiveness, and of Taiwan’s unique international predicament? The material reviewed here tends to reconfirm the assertion that close attention to the international component of democratization is an essential requirement for any comparative account that aims either to explain variance or to capture the main dynamics of specific cases. It also reinforces the point that the domestic-international boundary is a very approximate distinction that should not be reified. Much of the explanatory work requires attention to processes such as conditionality and contagion that cross that artificial barrier and are not adequately covered by the abstractions of “linkage” theory.

Moreover, the history and culture (I would say the “context”)¹³ of each large region matters, as it selects and refracts the way global tendencies feed into local practices. For this reason, regional “clusters” deserve more attention than universal “waves” (if there are waves, they follow different rhythms in different regions, as in Southern Europe in the 1970s, and in Eastern Europe in the 1990s). The linkages between state formation, nationalism, the constitution

¹³ This argument is developed elsewhere (Laurence Whitehead, “Afterword: On Cultures and Contexts,” in *The Cultural Construction of Politics in Asia*, ed. Hans Antlov and Tak-Wing Ngo [Richmond, UK: Curzon Press, 2000]), where the issue of Asian values—neglected here—is explored. See also the excellent recent thesis of Y. F. Cecilia Wong, “Confucianism and Democratization,” (D.Phil. diss., University of Oxford, 2007), which contains a thorough analysis of the Taiwanese case (among others) and a denial of all directly causal interpretations.

of a demos, and democratization have already received extensive consideration in the literature, but recalibration is needed in the light of strong distinctive connections present in contemporary East Asia. Japanese militarism, Chinese communist borderlines, those popular wishes intersubjectively constructed by a demos, and the energetically transformative rather than merely stabilizing and reflective roles assumed by many East Asian state elites all stretch and complicate the standard model. Nowhere is that more apparent than in the case of Taiwan, where a localized demos and an insular nationalism seem to clash head on with an all-China project of national reunification, which threatens to over-ride the democratization achieved in just one part of its claimed jurisdiction. The long-run state-led strategic activism of both the Taipei and the Beijing political regimes make this clash a dynamic duel with many rounds rather than just a mere static impasse. To analyze state formation and democratization in such a context requires close attention to the weight of history and to the symbolic and imaginative aspects of identity construction. There can be no “end of ideology” or elimination of history in this situation. Regime change cannot be reduced to a merely mechanical question of good institutional design. Over-generalized causal theories are unlikely to pick up the critical details of the interactions between opposing schools of thought, or the strong presence of contingency (what O’Donnell and Schmitter, quoting Machiavelli, referred to as *fortuna*) that can contribute so much to shaping a given political trajectory. It may be that loose, long-run structural tendencies such as modernization, globalization, or the rise of a right-oriented middle-class can provide some broad framework within which such contests can be framed, but this is unlikely to produce a strong general determination of outcomes. In summary, the East Asian and Taiwanese cases reviewed here tend to reinforce the position of those (such as myself) who regard democratization not as a highly predictable and narrowly constrained single step-change, but rather as a complex under-determined, long-run, relatively open-ended, and even potentially reversible, historical process.¹⁴

¹⁴ The general position is developed at length in my *Democratization: Theory and Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).