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Are Structure or Agency Based Approaches More Persuasive to the Study of Democratization?

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Abstract

The existing literatures in the study of democratisation are dominated by two types of approaches. The structure-based approaches emphasize the importance of the requisites that are conducive to democracy; and the agency-based approaches focus on the role of political actors and the influences of their behaviors. By pointing out their intrinsic problems, this paper suggests that both types of approaches have failed to provide convincing explanations for the cause of democratization.

This paper also argues that, because of the mutual misunderstandings, both the structure-based and agency-based approaches have made inappropriate criticism against each other. As a respond to this situation, some recent works had tried to reconcile the disputes between structure-based and agency-based approaches. This paper indicates that such efforts for striking a theoretical convergence have also confronted great difficulties. Nonetheless, the path-dependent approach, where the role of the actors is taken into account with the inspection on the structural constraints, is a relatively successful attempt.

Keywords: Democratization, Transition to Democracy, Path-dependent

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I. Introduction

Accompanying the emergence and evolution of 'the third wave' democracies in the past three decades, the course of democratization has attracted immense academic interests.[1] Comparative political scientists have conducted a great amount of researches to explore the factors and conditions that brought about the spreading of democracy throughout Southern and Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, Latin America, Africa, and South and East Asia. These academic efforts have brought up and developed a host of arguments to address the complicated phenomenon of democratization.

In spite of the variety of the terms attached to these arguments,[2] it is possible to dichotomize the theoretical approaches adopted in the literature, namely the structure-based approaches and the agency-based approaches. To the general understanding, the structure-based approaches emphasize the importance of the preconditions and requisites that are conducive to democracy, whereas the agency-based approaches place the spotlight on the role of political actors and the influences of their behaviors. Such a dichotomy, however, is not invented just for the convenience of discussion. In fact, this dichotomy represents a meaningful distinction between different perspectives in the study of democratization. As their contentions being reviewed in this article, the difference between the two types of approaches will become apparent.

This article will also suggest that, due to either the problems intrinsic in their

1 The term 'the third wave' is used here in accordance with the general understanding of Samuel P. Huntington's definition. Huntington, Samuel P. *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991)

2 For example, Potter, Goldblatt, Kiloh and Lewis proposed a trichotomy of the modernization approach, the transition approach, and the structural approach. Potter, D., Goldblatt, D., Kiloh, M. and Lewis, P. (eds.) *Democratization*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), pp. 10-22.

point of view or the misunderstandings towards each other, both the structure and agency approaches are not capable of providing satisfactory explanations. In search of more convincing arguments, some recent works had attempted to reconcile the disputes between the structure-based and the agency-based approaches. Although such efforts for striking a theoretical convergence were also confronting difficulties, a few of them have been more successful than the others. These efforts certainly deserve a discussion in this article as well.

II. The structure-based approaches

The exploration of the preconditions of democracy has been widely recognized as the task of scholars who work with the structure-based approaches. According to the existing literatures, these preconditions are usually classified into four categories: economic wealth, social structure, cultural factors, and external contexts.[3]

Economic Wealth

The first sort of precondition is economic wealth, which is often regarded as the primary precondition of democracy by those who endeavor to explore the relationship between socioeconomic development and democracy. This perspective is also known as the modernization approach. The most famous hypothesis in this approach is Seymour Lipset's proposition, which states that 'the more well to do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy.'[4] In a nutshell,

3 Sorensen, G. *Democracy and Democratization* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1998), pp. 24-26; Huntington, S. P. "Will More Countries Become Democratic?" *Political Science Quarterly* 99, no. 2 (1984), pp. 198-209.

4 Lipset, S. M. "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Development and Political Legitimacy." *The American Political Science Review* 53, no. 1 (1959), p. 75. See also Lipset, S. M. *Political Man* (London: Heinemann, 1960), p. 31. Robert Dahl, a famous political

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modernization theorists argue that economic development could create widespread higher education, strengthen the middle class, create a vigorous civil society and thus make democracy feasible and sustainable. In addition, economic wealth can also provide the resources needed to mitigate the tensions produced by political conflict.[5]

Social Structure

Social structure, especially certain types of class structure, is the second kind of favorable precondition of democracy. In his classic research on the relationship between class structure and regime types, Barrington Moore made the conclusion that 'no bourgeois, no democracy.'[6] On the contrary, Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens held an opposite view. They argued that bourgeoisie is generally inimical to democracy. Instead, working class mobilization, combined with the middle-class support, may be the real impetus toward democracy.[7] Although these authors preferred different class compositions for promoting democracy, they all agreed that it is the class structure that determines the regime type in a given territory. In addition, while placing class structure in the core of their analyses, these structuralists also implied a close linkage between socioeconomic conditions and class structure. For Moore, economic development could create the bourgeois, which is crucial in pushing the state into democracy.[8] For Rueschemeyer, Stephens

scientist who tries to explore broad historical paths and general structural conditions for the development and maintenance of democracies, also indicates that 'the higher the socioeconomic level of a country, the more likely that it would be a democracy.' See Dahl, R. *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 65.

5 Huntington, "Will More Countries Become Democratic?", p. 199.

6 Moore, B. *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), p. 418.

7 Rueschemeyer, D., Stephens, E.H. and Stephens, J.D. *Capitalist Development and Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

8 Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. pp. 430-431.

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and Stephens, economic development creates a dense civil society. A dense civil society in turn can strengthen the organizational capacity of the lower class, thereby changing the balance of class power.[9]

Cultural Factors

The third kind of precondition for democracy is cultural factors, which may include religion, values, particular historical experiences, and so forth. For example, some suggested that societies with consummatory cultures, where intermediate and ultimate ends are closely connected, are less favorable to democracy. Islam, where a distinction between religion and politics does not exist, is a typical case. Confucian values are also less conducive to democracy. On the contrary, the Hindu tradition in India is relatively tolerant of diversity; hence it is compatible with democracy. It has also been argued that Protestantism supports democracy whereas Catholicism in general works against it.[10] In terms of historical experiences, researches pointed out that Anglo-American, mainly British colonial legacies could lay the foundation for democratization, while colonial experiences under French, Dutch and Portuguese rule are less encouraging to democracy.[11] This is because that the Anglo-American colonists had 'helped to socialize many of their colonial peoples in democratic politics by providing systems of electoral representation and local governance prior to independence, native participation in the civil service, and primary and sometimes secondary education in the vernacular languages.'[12]

9 Rueschemeyer (*et al.*) *Capitalist Development and Democracy*.

10 Huntington, "Will More Countries Become Democratic?" pp. 207-208.

11 Ibid., pp.205-206; see also Bollen, K. A. and Jackman R. W. "Economic and Noneconomic Determinants of Political Democracy in the 1960s'." *Research in Political Sociology* 1 (1985): 34-41; and Weiner, M. "Empirical Democratic Theory and the Transition from Authoritarianism to Democracy." *PS* 20, no. 4 (1987), p. 862.

12 Lipset, Seong and Torres, "A Comparative Analysis of the Social Requisites of Democracy." *International Social Science Journal*, no. 136 (1993), p. 168.

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External Factors

Some scholars also suggested that external factors, like economic assistance and diplomatic pressure from the international society, could make certain impact on domestic politics. International assistance, especially 'generous U.S. support' could have laid the foundation for self-sustaining growth and have helped keep economic stability or growth in countries like Colombia, Costa Rica and Botswana, thus can benefit democracy.[13] This point of view is closely connected with the argument that economic wealth is beneficial for democracy. Besides, other aspects of the Western influences are also considered beneficial for the promotion of democracy in the third world. For example, the human rights initiatives of the United States since the Carter government has pressed some Latin America and Asian countries take a step towards democratization.[14] Similarly, the European Economic Community had also set up democratic conditions for its membership. This policy has provided the pressure for democratic transition on authoritarian regimes in Greece, Spain and Portugal.[15] Finally, the 'snowballing' or 'domino effect' is another contributor to democratization, since the differentiation of successful examples in some countries may encourage democratization in other countries.[16]

One structuralist scholar asserts that 'leadership and meaningful choice played no role in the outcomes.'[17] While it will be indicated later in this paper that this is

13 Diamond, L. "Beyond Authoritarianism and Totalitarianism." *The Washington Quarterly 12* (1989) p. 154.

14 Some cases of this kind are Argentina, Dominican Republic, the Philippines, and South Korea.

15 These cases lead Huntington to the conclusion that 'The extension of democracy into the non-Western world,…, has thus been largely the product of Anglo-American efforts.' Huntington, "Will More Countries Become Democratic? " p.206.

16 Huntington, *The Third Wave*, pp.100-106.

17 Gregory Luebbert reached this conclusion after his study of regime change in the interwar period. This sentence is quoted from Kitschelt, "Political Regime Change", p. 1024.

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not a typical attitude of the structure-based approaches, yet attacks from the camp of agency-based approaches still mainly focus on this point of view.

III. The agency-based approaches

An early effort of the agency-based approaches was Dankwart Rustow's challenge on modernization approach. Rustow pointed out that modernization theorists have only attempted to find out the factors that can preserve or enhance the health and stability of a democracy, and did not deal with the question of 'how a democracy comes into being in the first place'.[18] While analyzing the process of democratic transition, Rustow argued that there is a first transition or decision phase when inconclusive struggles eases, compromise achieved, democratic rules adopted and political parties gain some share in the polity. After that is the second transition or habituation phase, when a new generation of elites become habituated to democratic rules and believe in them.[19]

Rustow's perspective inspired further developments within the circle of the agency-based approaches. The decision phase of transition has been developed into the concept of 'elite pacts', which are the means whereby different camps of political elite negotiate with each other and achieve a compromise or consensus on the rule of game in democratic politics.[20] This is an idea that occupies the essential part of the agency-based analyses on the third wave democracy. Though some scholars are more conservative about the future of democracies achieved by pacts and suggest that it might be appropriate to reexamine the assumption that pact making may lead to more stable democratic regimes, the importance of elite pact is

18 Rustow, D. "Transitions to Democracy." *Comparative Politics* 12 (1970), pp. 337-363.
19 Ibid.
20 O'Donnell, G. and Schmitter P. *Transition from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 37.

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still not denied by those who are cautious about it. The worry is that a democratic system produced by undemocratic means would not be able to be successful and durable, and such undemocratic means should be avoided in the process of pact making.[21]

Rustow's second phase of transition, namely the habituation phase, has also been evolved into the concept of 'elite settlements', through which a consensual unity can be achieved and thus make a regime democratic and stable. It is advocated that regime change is preceded by elite transformation, and researchers of regime change must focus on the role of elite and seeking recent or historical evidence of an elite transformation.[22] According to their notions, it is clear that neither the concept of elite pacts nor the idea of elite settlements reserves the space for structural factors. Although they might recognize that religion, class, ethnicity, technology, demography, geography, economic development, and the demonstration effects of other countries may affect elite relationships and the forms of political regimes, the agency-based camp asserts that it is national elites who filter these structural forces and make transitions or breakdowns take place.[23]

The agency-based approaches deny that structural forces will 'lead inexorably to democratic transitions or breakdowns.'[24] They see 'determinism' as the major problem in the analyses of the structure-based approaches, and the list of

21 Hagopian, F. "Democracy by Undemocratic Means? Elites, Political Pacts, and Regime Transition in Brazil." *Comparative Political Studies* 23, no. 2 (1990), pp. 149-150, 165-166. See also Karl, T. L. "Petroleum and Political Pacts: The Transition to Democracy in Venezuela." in *Transitions From Authoritarian Rule: Latin America.* G. O'Donnell, P. Schmitter, and L. Whitehead (eds.) (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986.), p. 218; and Cohen, Y. "Democracy From Above: The Political Origins of Military Dictatorship in Brazil." *World Politics* 40 (1987), pp. 47-48.

22 Higley, J. and Burton M. G. "The Elite Variable in Democratic Transitions and Breakdowns." *American Sociological Review* 54, no. 1 (1989), pp. 21, 28.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid. p. 29.

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prerequisites is a poor guide to action as well.[25] Lenin's success in the Russian revolution has been taken as a good example to illustrate the subjectivity and autonomy of the actors over the structure. For those who work with the agency-based approaches, this case well demonstrated that by choosing to act, democracy could also be possible even when structural conditions or prerequisites are not mature or even not existing.[26]

IV. Unconvincing explanations

Although both the structure-based and the agency-based approaches have attempted to provide convincing explanations, both of them failed to do so.

Structure-based Explanations

As far as the structure-based approaches are concerned, it is certainly not difficult to find some cases to challenge the modernization approach. The oil-rich countries, where economic wealth did not bring democracy, are some of the best counterexamples. Interestingly, they are excluded from the samples in the analyses of some modernization theorists.[27]

25 Weiner, "Empirical Democratic Theory and the Transition from Authoritarianism to Democracy", p. 863. See also Di Palma, G. *To Craft Democracies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 4-8.

26 Di Palma, G. *To Craft Democracies*., p. 5.

27 Lipset, S. M., Seong K. R. and Torres J. C. "A Comparative Analysis of the Social Requisites of Democracy." p. 163. Huntington tries to rectify this flaw. While stressing the importance of economic development, he argues that the source and distribution of wealth are also important, and this is not the case in the oil-rich countries because the oil revenues accrue to the state, reduce the need for taxation and hence increase the power of the state. And "the lower the level of taxation, the less reason for publics to demand representation." Huntington, *The Third Wave*, p.65. Tatu Vanhanen stresses the importance of distribution and equality of wealth as well. See Vanhanen, T. "Social Constraints of Democratization." in Vanhanen, T. (*ed.*) *Strategies of Democratization*, (Washington DC: Taylor and Francis, 1992), p. 23.

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Another query on modernization approach is that its explanations established only correlations, not causal mechanisms, between economic wealth and democracy.[28] From the modernization theorists' point of view, however, causal explanations are achievable. For example, Diamond had indicated the intrinsic vulnerability of contemporary authoritarian regimes and thus demonstrated the causal linkage between economic growth and democratization. He argued that "if they (authoritarian regimes) do not perform, they lose legitimacy because performance is their only justification for holding power. However, if they do perform in delivering socioeconomic progress, they tend to refocus popular aspirations around political goals for voice and participation that they cannot satisfy without terminating their existence."[29]

But even one accepts that all these conditions can contribute to democratisation, there is still a problem that the modernization approach cannot solve. That is the question of timing. Why did transition to democracy not happen until 1986 while Taiwan has kept delivering good performance in economic growth and distribution of wealth since the late 1950s?[30] This is a question that modernization approach does not, and cannot explain.

Furthermore, in addition to the query on the function of socioeconomic conditions, the explanatory ability of cultural factors also seems doubtful. Since the success of transition to democracy in South Korea and Taiwan, the argument that

28 Potter (*eds*.) *Democratization*, p.12.

29 Diamond, L. "Beyond Authoritarianism and Totalitarianism: Strategies for Democratization." p. 150. Gill also made a progress on building a causal linkage between socioeconomic development, the emergence of civil society and the cause of democratization. See Gill, G. *The Dynamics of Democratization: Elites, Civil Society and the Transition Process* (London: Macmillan, 2000).

30 There is still a dispute over the question that whether 1986 was the beginning of democratisation in Taiwan. This problem will be tackled later in the paper. But undoubtedly 1986 was a year of importance. It was the year when the first opposition party was formally established. Some major reforms were also introduced by the KMT government since that year.

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Confucianism does not favor democracy has become highly questionable. Meanwhile, the experiences of democratic transitions in Latin America also showed that Catholicism is not necessarily incompatible with democracy.

Agency-based Explanations

As mentioned previously, the agency-based approaches have criticized the determinism that involved in the structuralists' attempts to explore the preconditions and prerequisites of democracy. However, this criticism might not be a proper one. In fact, the criticism against the determinism is derived from the misinterpretation that the task of the structure-based approaches is to seek for the preconditions of democracy. This is because the agency-based approaches always concentrate their critiques on modernization approach.

Although it is understandable that the agency-based theorists mainly focus their attacks on the modernization approach because it is a major part of the structuralist camp, it is wrong for the agency-based camp to see the modernization approach as a kind of determinism. Even Lipset, the doyen of modernization approach, had never made a deterministic argument. Have a look at his well-known sentence again. What he said was 'the more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy.' Talking about the chances, what really suggested by the socioeconomic indicators is the probability, not the certainty, of countries becoming democratic. Thus determinism should not be the term attached to structure-based approaches.[31]

As far as the agency-based approaches are concerned, while underlining the advantages and benefits that elite pacts and crafting can bring, it seems that the

31 Lipset, S.M., Seong, K.R. and Torres, J.C., "Comparative analysis of social requisites of democracy." p. 158. Only a few structuralists proposed deterministic propositions. A typical case is Barrington Moore's argument of 'No bourgeois, no democracy'.

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agency-based approaches are providing feasible measures, rather than explanations, for transitions to democracy. Some even asserts that more attention should be paid to the strategies available to those who seek a democratic transition.[32] Besides, scholars who work with the agency-based approaches also contend that it is elites who filter the structural factors, not the other way round.[33] However, there is no interpretation about how actors can filter structural factors. There even is not a sentence to explain what 'filter' means. This is the ground where the structuralists criticize the agency-based theorists for neglecting the point that pacts and elite behaviors are just means toward institutionalizing democracy. Whether they emerge or hold is linked to probabilities associated with the presence or absence of conditions.[34]

The agency-based approaches are also bothered by another problem. Although it is easy to say that democratization is brought about by the decisions of political elites, it is difficult to prove that such decisions are made without any calculation or concern on the environment and structure in which the elites act. This is a common flaw in the analyses of the agency-based approach. The case of Russian revolution mentioned earlier is an example. It is the truth that Lenin's success surprised everyone. But why dare Lenin made the decision to launch the revolution? Was not it because the context in which he acted has provided some conditions favorable for the revolution? Was not it because Lenin's calculation that made him to expect the success? Even if Lenin did not take any contextual or structural factors into account, can we say that his success was purely achieved because of fortune? Probably the answer to the last questions is no. The influences and effects of the structure cannot

32 Weiner, M. "Empirical Democratic Theory and the Transition from Authoritarianism to Democracy." p. 863.

33 Higley, J. and Burton M. G. "The Elite Variable in Democratic Transitions and Breakdowns." See also Di Palma, G. *To Craft Democracies*.

34 Lipset, S.M., Seong, K.R. and Torres, J.C., "Comparative analysis of social requisites of democracy." p. 158.

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be denied simply because they are not perceived by the actors. Structural influences always exist even if the actors are not aware of it.

Let up take another case. The role of the late President Chiang Ching-kuo has also been mentioned as an explanatory variable of Taiwan's democratisation. Some scholars attribute Taiwan's democratisation to the sincerity and correct decision of Chiang. Some stress the importance of the Taiwanisation policy initiated by him. Others focus on Chiang's effort to keep military from political intervention.[35] These contentions are derived from the point of view of agency-based approach, which pay much attention to the crucial role of political leaders and their subjective and decisive actions in the process of democratic transition. Speaking to a group of editorial writers from the United States in May 1987, the then Premier Yu Kuo-hua insisted that all political reforms since 1986 stemmed from President Chiang's conscious decision to pursue democratisation rather than simply a hasty response to external pressures. Yu also revealed that the issue of political reform has been fully discussed within the ruling KMT leading elites since the mid-1970s.[36] If all Yu mentioned are the truths, it seems that Taiwan's democratisation really was achieved because of Chiang's decision.

There is no doubt that Chiang's judgement and insight was crucial to regime transition in Taiwan. It is also the truth that political leaders played a big part in

35 Discussions like these could be found in Tien, Hung-mao "Transformation of an Authoritarian Party State: Taiwan's Development Experience." in Cheng Tun-jen and Haggard S., *Political Change in Taiwan.* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992), p.39; Lee, Kuo-hsiung. "How Democracy is Discussed and Understood in the U.S., Taiwan, and Mainland China." Web page available at http://www.claremont.org/publications/lee000814.cfm; Rigger, S. *Politics in Taiwan: Voting for Democracy*. (London: Routledge, 1999); Lin, C.L. "Explaining Taiwan's Democratization." in Lin C.L. and Chiu T.C. (eds.), *The Party-State System and Democratic Development in Taiwan and China.* (Taipei: Yuei-Dan, 1999.); and Chou, Yangsun and Nathan A. J. "Democratizing Transition in Taiwan." *Asian Survey* 27, no. 3 (1987): pp.277-99.

36 Yu's words here are quoted form Tien, Hung-mao "Transformation of an Authoritarian Party State", p.38.

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Taiwan's democratisation. However, even with full credit to Chiang's contribution to Taiwan's democracy, it is still hard to argue that his decision was the real cause of Taiwan's democratisation. This is because the question that why he decided to take the first step is not explained. In other words, the factor that made Chiang to initiate reforms toward democratisation at that certain time point is not explored.

Yu's words also lead to some questions that need further explanations. First, why did the issue of political reform need to be discussed in mid 1970s? Second, if Chiang did have the aspiration for democracy, why did he not initiate reforms until 1986? Furthermore, what happen between mid 1970s and 1986? Why did it take ten years to move from the original stage of discussion to the very first step of transition? Unless these questions are provided with satisfied answers, the perspective which attributes Taiwan's successful transition to democracy to Chiang's personal merit will never be a convincing explanation.

In contrast to this, some see the role of political opposition as a variable which can better account for Taiwan's democratisation. This approach suggests that democratisation was indeed the result of the opposition's long-term struggle. But similar to the ruler-oriented approach, this opposition-oriented approach also encounters difficulty in forming a persuasive explanation. For example, the opposition activities in Taiwan have been existing since the 1950s, even before the unsuccessful attempt to organize a political party in the 1960. Why did it take twenty years for the opposition to get better performance in the elections in late 1970s? Why could the opposition obtain more steady support from the people and start to put more pressures on the authoritarian regime? The role of the opposition might be inarguably important, but the condition by which it can survive and the context in which it could grow up need to be clarified.

From here, therefore, one can see that the major problem of the agency-based approaches is 'voluntarism'. Some suggests that even elites who have held power in an authoritarian state may be moved to demolish the system because their 'concern

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for future reputation' compels them to do so since this concern 'can be as powerful a motive as the desire for immediate satisfaction.'[37] However, how could this concern and motive be proved? How could personal consciousness in other's mind be verified by those who are not the actors themselves? Even some agency-based theorists have acknowledged the fact that some of the uncertainty about the transition process will probably never be reduced because of the fact that 'so much of the decision making relevant to democratization takes place behind closed doors.'[38] Thus it is difficult for scholars who are not participants in the decision making process to uncover the scenes behind closed doors. It is equally, maybe more, difficult for researchers to know the feeling and passion of individual actors.

Others argue that democracy could become a 'preferable alternative' because of the painful learning induced by the failure of authoritarian regimes and their repression. In other words, democracy is chosen in place of authoritarianism because of the dismal personal experience.[39] Here the term 'preferable' raises questions. To whom does democracy become preferable? In most cases, democracy is preferable to the opposition, but it is not often the case that transition to democracy is a preferable alternative to the authoritarian incumbents. And once it is claimed that democratization is indeed the preferable alternative which derives from the authoritarian leaders' passion for democracy or concern of personal future reputation, it goes straight back to the problem of the difficulty and incapability of confirming the inner mind of individual actors.

While indicating that structural analyses failed in predicting whether specific

37 O'Donnell and Schmitter, *Tentative Conclusions,* p.25

38 Nancy Bermeo, "Rethinking Regime Change." *Comparative Politics*, 22:3 (1990), p. 368.

39 Adam Przeworski argues that an authoritarian breakdown will not happen just because its lack of legitimacy. What matters for the stability of any regime is not the legitimacy of it but the presence or absence of preferable alternatives. See Przeworski, "Problems in the Study of the Transition to Democracy." In O'Donnell, G., Schmitter P.C. and Whitehead, L. (eds.) *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule.* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 51-52.

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opposition leaders will succeed in choosing and presenting democracy as a preferable alternative model of rule,[40] the agency-based analyses are equally unsuccessful in making such predictions. The agency-based analyses provide 'only an intriguing psychological description of the possible frames of mind in which the various actors find themselves.'[41] The agency-based approaches would not be able to make the large-scale theorization of social and political change 'if all depends upon the whims of individuals and groups.'[42]

V. Theoretical Convergence?

Since Lipset's famous modernization hypothesis and Rustow's first challenge, the debate between the camps of structure and agency-based approaches has never stopped. However, the diversity of the experiences of the third wave democracies has also caused reflections upon the arguments of existing approaches. As illustrated above, both approaches have their limits and deficiencies in providing persuasive explanations for the complicated reality of democratization. This cognizance stimulated some academic attempts to seek a balance between the two approaches.

One kind of opinion suggests that structure-based approaches and agency-based approaches do not actually really compete with each other. This perspective reckons that the two types of approaches are actually dealing with different issues respectively. On the one hand, the structuralist perspective is good at accounting for the general causes of regime breakdown. On the other hand, the agency-based analysis may help to explain the timing of breakdown and transition.[43] This kind of opinion seems to suggest that different approaches could

40 Nancy Bermeo, "Rethinking Regime Change." p. 368.
41 Kitschelt, "Comparative Historical Research and Rational Choice Theory: The Case of Transitions to Democracy.", *Theory and Society*, No. 22 (1993), p. 424.
42 Gill, *The Dynamics of Democratization*, p. 45.
43 The terms Kitschelt uses are structure-oriented and 'process-oriented' approaches.

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be adopted to answer different sorts of questions in the study of transition to democracy. It also seems to offer a chance for both approaches to extricate themselves from the shortcomings they possess and the criticism they receive.

However, this is just like passing the buck to the other while one cannot solve the problem encountered. Since the goal for scholars from both camps is to provide convincing explanations for the complexity of democratization, they must face either the question of general background or the issue of timing, and give the interpretations from their point of views. In a nutshell, theorists should strive for something more ambitious to answer the questions with a consistent theoretical stand.

Some scholars attempt to achieve an aspiring goal – a theoretical convergence. They suggest that it is not necessary to make an 'either-or choice' between approaches based on structure and agency as they are complementary.[44] But the situation here is quite complicated. How can a theoretical convergence be achieved? Are structure-based approaches and agency-based approaches really complementary? If they are complementary, then in what sense, and to what extent, are they complementary to each other? As discussed in the last paragraph, shifting between different approaches while facing different questions is not the way which can represent the mutual complement of different approaches. Moreover, if structure and agency-based approaches are not complementary to each other, how could a theoretical convergence be possible?

According to Kitschelt's paragraph, the primary interests of process-oriented scholars are the actors' manipulation of their own and their adversaries' cognitive and normative frames. Hence there is no inappropriateness to equate process-oriented approach to agency-based approach. See Kitschelt, H. "Political Regime Change: Structure and Process-Driven Explanations?" *The American Political Science Review* 86, no. 4 (1992), pp. 1028-29. For similar statement, see Sorensen, *Democracy and Democratization*.

44 Lipset, S.M., Seong, K.R. and Torres, J.C., p.158. Potter also claims that different approaches could be integrated toward a theoretical convergence. See Potter (*et al.*), *Democratization*, pp. 22-23.

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Those who do not recognize and address these problems are naive. They take it so simple and say that 'for a full understanding one must study the interplay between these conditions on the one hand, and the choices made by political actors on the other.'[45] However, this ambiguous sentence does not tell us on what basis should the structure factors and the actors' behaviors be understood? Are they going to be understood alike from a single theoretical position or they can be understood respectively by different perspectives, like the shifting between different approaches?

Some believes that Huntington's 'The Third Wave' is a work that combines structured-based and agency-based approaches.[46] But in fact, Huntington did not really integrate the two approaches. What he did was to categorize the key factors that caused the third wave democracies. Although some of the factors are structural and others are agency-based, there is not a theoretical convergence. Even Huntington himself did not mean to form an integrated theory.[47] Linz and Stepan also had a try, but also failed to develop a kind of theoretical balance. They acknowledged that the uncertain enterprises of democratic transition are contingent upon elite strategy and choice as well as institutional, cultural and economic circumstances. Placing structural factors in the background, they also accepted the argument that the difficulty of inhospitable contexts could be surmounted with perspicacious leadership and correct institutional choices. [48] However, this point of view did not lead to a unified theory because the authors did not formulate testable hypotheses and operable variables. A great part of their work has been spent to

45 Sorensen, *Democracy and Democratization*, p. 24.
46 Kitschelt, "Political Regime Change" p.1033.
47 See Huntington,.*The Third Wave.* Huntington even says in the preface that this book is neither a work of theory nor a work of history.
48 See Linz, J. J. and Stepan A. *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe.* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

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illustrate the importance of particular factors by analyzing individual cases respectively. This method could be helpful to identify crucial factors in each case, but it lacks the assessment of the relative impact of variables. In other words, the authors did not build a theoretical model and applied it to examine all the selected cases consistently. Without specific hypotheses, 'the analyses of cases cannot test the validity of specific variables in the model or demonstrate the utility of the approach as a whole.'[49]

VI. Reconsidering the Structure

Despite the many efforts and appeals which urged the development of a theoretical convergence of different approaches, this paper would like to argue that it is not only difficult, but indeed impossible, to achieve such a theoretical convergence. The reason for this is because the basic assumption of the structure-based approaches and agency-based approaches are totally different.

Both structure-based approaches and agency-based approaches agree that structure is ubiquitous, though the composition of structure may vary from time to time, place to place, and case to case. They also agree that actors always behave and act in a set of given structures. Thus what both approaches try to provide is an understanding of the relation between the structure and the actors. But it is their understanding that manifests the very difference. For structure-based approaches, on the one hand, actors can enjoy only relative autonomy because they cannot ignore the possible affection and consequences brought by the structure. On the other hand, the agency-based approaches believe that actors enjoy full autonomy without regard to the structure constraints. This distinction is not simply about choosing an approach for explaining democratization; it involves the fundamental perception in

49 Kullberg, J. "A Unified Theory of Democratic Change." *Mershon International Studies Review* 42 (1998): p. 125.

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doing research of social sciences. If one believes in the actors' capacity and possibility to carry out full autonomy, then structure means nothing.

On the contrary, this paper accepts the idea that structure cannot and should not be neglected just because its nature of omnipresence. But the scope and notion of structure-based approaches need a modification. In the study of democratization, attentions should be switched from the search for conditions and requisites for democracy to the analysis of the influences that structural factors might bring when actors make their calculations and choices. It is assumed that even though actors may have own interests and motives, their choices can only represent calculations depending upon given structural constraints.[50] Though the agency-based perspective may remind us of the collective decisions and political interactions that have largely been underemphasized in the search for preconditions, their understanding of democracy 'has the danger of descending into excessive voluntarism if it is not explicitly placed within a framework of structural-historical constraints.'[51] The historically created structures do not determine the decisions that actors may choose, but they do function as the confining conditions that restrict the range of options available to decision-makers or even predispose them to choose a specific option. To analyze real cases, one should go further to see 'how such structural changes become embodied in political institutions and rules which subsequently mold the preference and capacities of individuals during and after regime changes.[52] This approach not only excludes the determinism from its analysis, it also avoid the risk of falling into voluntarism.

50 See Kitschelt, "Political Regime Change.", p. 1028. The statement is originally extracted from Theda Skocpol's *States and Revolutions* (1979).

51 Karl,. "Dilemmas of Democratization in Latin America", p.6.

52 Ibid., p. 7. See also Karl, T. L. & Schmitter P. C. "Modes of Transition in Latin America, Southern and Eastern Europe." *International Social Science Journal*, no. 128 (1991): 271-272; see also Diamond, "Beyond Authoritarianism and Totalitarianism", pp. 147-148, 151-153.

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In fact, there are structural elements in some of the agency-based arguments. For example, Hagopian argued that 'pacts that preclude socioeconomic reform undermine democracy, not by neglecting to enact redistributive policies, but by removing issues on which ordinary citizens may wish to express preferences from the arena of legitimate discussion.'[53] This argument attempted to underline the importance of socioeconomic reform not in terms of the structural preconditions of democratization, but in terms of the cognition and actions of individual agents. However, if socioeconomic reform is carried out to provide the chance of political participation, which is a situation conducive to democracy, it is also saying that such a reform is conducted to create a favorable condition, though not precondition, for democracy.[54]

53 Hagopian, "Democracy by Undemocratic Means", p.153.

54 Adam Przeworski, who tries to give priority to agency-based analyses over structural conditions, was also compelled to make use of structural factors. Kitschelt called Przeworski's unsuccessful attempt 'a theory comes full circle.' See Kitschelt, "Comparative Historical Research and Rational Choice Theory: The Case of Transitions to Democracy.", *Theory and Society*, No. 22 (1993): p. 424.

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VII. Conclusion

This paper has reviewed the arguments of and criticism on both structured-based approaches and agency-based approaches. This paper also inspected some academic works that seek for a theoretical convergence between competing approaches, and suggested that none of them is successful to establish an integrated theory. Thus a modified structural approach, or in Karl and Schmitter's term, a 'path-dependent approach', is introduced.

Some might criticize that the path-dependent approach not only fails to make such integration but also failed to form any testable hypothesis for generalization. As a respond to this criticism, this paper would like to argue that it is very likely a fundamental misunderstanding to expect that a social science built on generalizing propositions can ever fully explain particular events. More and more scholars find that seeking for generalization might not be a realistic goal. Lipset warned us that 'the record of social scientists as futurologists is not good.'[55] Linz also pointed out that no single model of regime transition could explain all cases of democratization.[56] What law-like propositions try is to identify necessary, not sufficient, conditions explaining certain historical process in a probabilistic perspective.[57] In comparison to other works, the path-dependent approach has developed the logic of analyzing. This logic, which can connect the various factors, is capable of interpreting the interactions between structure and actors that can explain the dynamics of democratization. It is on the base of this perspective and

55 Lipset, Seymour Martin. "The Social Requisites of Democracy Revisited: 1993 Presidential Address." *American Sociological Review* 59, no. 1 (1994), p. 17.

56 Linz, Juan. "Some Thoughts on Democratic Transition", in Lin, Chia-Lung and Chiu, Tze-chi (eds.) *The Party-State System and Democratic Development In Taiwan and China*. (Taipei: Yuedan Publishing Company, 1999), pp. 3-24.

57Kitschelt, "Comparative Historical Research and Rational Choice Theory.", p.424.

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logic that future hypotheses should be established.

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民主化研究中結構取向及行為者取向研究途徑之爭論

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中文摘要

關於民主化研究的文獻可依其研究途徑區分為兩大陣營。「結構取向」的研究途徑強調有利於民主的先決條件，而「行為者取向」的研究途徑則關注於民主化過程中行為者之影響力。藉由探討其內在缺陷，本文認為，不論是結構取向或行為者取向之研究途徑，二者皆未能提出令人信服之解釋來說明民主化如何且為何會發生。

同時，本文也將指出，由於此二研究派別彼此之間的一些誤解，導致二者皆對對方做出了一些有失公允的批評。為此，一些學者已試圖調解結構取向及行為者取向研究途徑之間的爭端。僅管此類理論整合的工作並不容易，但其中「途徑依賴」的研究途徑仍不失為一個較為成功的嘗試。

關鍵詞：民主化，民主轉型，結構，行為者，途徑依賴

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