Do Transnational Organizations
Promote Civil and Political Liberties?

Cross-National Evidence from Southeast Asia, 1978-2002

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ABSTRACT

We explore the impact of a growing presence of transnational organizations upon civil and political liberties. Building upon previous world-polity research we evaluate qualitative and quantitative evidence from Southeast Asia between 1978 and 2002. We extend world-polity research by statistically evaluating the hypothesized influence of transnational organizations upon civil and political life, net of other explanations. We also provide a qualitative case comparison of the Philippines and Thailand to elaborate upon the historical moments of dramatic shifts in political and civil liberties in each country and how they are related to the presence of transnational organizations. In both analyses we find compelling evidence that a large presence of transnational organizations is significantly associated with social change. We then extend our findings to other cases in Southeast Asia and a larger sample of Asian countries. The extension of our model continues to find strong support for world-polity hypotheses, but our discussion of the results from all of the analyses and a mapping of the current distribution of transnational organizations across cities in the region suggests that the effects are contingent upon economic growth, urbanization, and the globalization of local interests, specifically local NGOs and the state. In our discussion we offer a synthesis of the literature and theory about the role of global cities for affecting changes within nation-states and suggest a revised model for future research through analyses of both quantitative and qualitative data.

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INTRODUCTION

Recent work on the world-polity emphasizes how networks of transnational organizations carry world culture (Beckfield 2003; Meyer et al. 1997; Boli and Thomas 1997). Nation-states adopt the world culture norms and civil liberties increase (Meyer et al. 1997). By contrast, world-systems accounts of social change emphasize conflict, power interests, and global hierarchies but recognize the potential for transnational organizations to carry world-culture in the service of global capitalism (Chase-Dunn 1998). A number of ethnographic studies have emphasized how networks of transnational organizations promote social change (Akami 2002; Parmar 2002; Stone 2002). Because these descriptive analyses of social change might be confounded, e.g. countries with more transnational organization offices or ties may be more open societies and more willing to enact civil and political liberties, the effect of transnational organizations upon political and civil liberties cannot be discerned without longitudinal, cross-national evidence.

We offer evidence on the relationship between transnational organizations, political, and civil liberties in Southeast Asia between 1978 and 2002. Because the mechanisms for social change are likely to vary from one region to another, world-trends are not analyzed (Cf. Centeno and López-Alves 2001), although we also test our model on a larger sample of Asian countries. The dramatic economic changes that have occurred in Southeast Asia during the latter part of the 20th century have been documented, as well as compared and contrasted with East Asia and Latin America (Evans 1995; Amsden 1989). However, the sources of social and political change in the region are less well studied.
We extend world-polity analyses by exploring how growing numbers of transnational organizations can affect an increase in political and civil liberties over a twenty year period, net of other conditions such as economic growth, world system position, urban concentration, and population size. Our analysis builds on the models described by Meyer et al. (1997) and Boli and Thomas (1997) to statistically evaluate their hypotheses. We also build upon Beckfield’s (2003) evidence and theory about the importance of inequality in ties and its relationship to power in the world-system and cultural regimes. We add nuance to Beckfield’s (2003) findings and show a dynamic pattern in the concentration of transnational organizations throughout Southeast Asia. Further, we show that at particular levels of world-polity capital then nation-states are effectively challenged by local citizenry and subsequently become more democratic and open. Consequently, our results and analyses also address the literature on the relationship between associations and democracy (Fong 2003) and in our conclusions we offer a new direction for future research which integrates these studies with world-systems and global cities studies and world polity studies.

Our empirical evaluation is combined with a two-case comparison of the Philippines and Thailand. The case studies, several illustrative examples of how transnational organizations affect change “on the ground” (from the authors’ experiences), and the empirical results suggest that transnational organizations have a profound effect upon political and civil liberties. However an extension of our model to a larger sample of Asian countries and our consideration of competing explanations forces us to consider the role of the city and economic growth in relation to the nation-state and the world-polity. In doing so, we also extend models of competing explanations for
democratic transitions, namely the role of foreign capital penetration and economic growth. In our discussion we return to our examples from Southeast Asia when these historic moments are most highly correlated with a concentration of transnational ties in particular cities in the region. As the data show, the concentration of transnational organizations is not static, and their movement creates a political and social dynamic between the city and the nation-state. We suggest that world-polity theory might be modified by explicitly theorizing how the location, movement, and spread of transnational ties across countries and within countries affect the distribution of power between the nation-state and the global city. In our conclusion we draw upon Sassen’s (2002) argument to propose that global cities can also be defined by their transnational organizational ties or world-polity capital (as well as by their financial capital and financial ties) and that the concentration of world-polity capital or transnational ties can build a local citizenry well-versed in the language and means of globally defined citizenry. With these globally defined discursive frames, local NGOs may be capable of challenging the national status quo in unprecedented ways and moving the nation-state towards increasing civil and political liberties. Hence, our analyses begin to draw a linkage between world polity studies and studies of associations and democracy (Fong 2003; Putnam 2000; Skocpol 1999).

**WORLD-POLITY AND WORLD CULTURE**

According to the world-polity perspective, there are cultural norms shared by global institutions and a growing number of nation-states that emphasize individual rights to civil liberty and political freedom. Nation-states have little choice but to enact these
norms, at least on paper. At times these norms are enacted through the establishment of institutions enhancing and protecting these rights. Enactment is essential if a country wants to participate in a world economy and global culture of exchange. Defiance of world-polity values risks abrogation and censure by the world-polity and possible internal strife among the citizenry (Meyer et al. 1997). Just as states are held accountable for their action in relation to their citizenry by a world polity that upholds norms of civil liberties and political freedoms, so are local citizens emboldened by world polity discourses (conveyed via media or “on the ground” interventions) that provide coherent frames of reference regarding individual rights and interests. For example, citizens can defy the laws of the nation-state in their daily practices (Cf. gay rights activists, etc) because these acts of resistance are enabled through the world polity institutions and norms that certify such actions as legitimate (Ibid.).

Transnational organizations and the norms they carry is the subject of recent scholarship (Beckfield 2003; Boli & Thomas 1997; Meyer et al. 1997) as a result of innovative efforts to make available extant data collected by the Union of International Associations. The structure of the world-polity has been sketched from 1875 to 1973. From a low of 200 organizations at the beginning of the 20th century, international non-governmental organizations numbered almost 4,000 in 1980 (Boli & Thomas 1997). These organizations are neither state-sponsored rule makers nor democratically elected bodies, yet Boli and Thomas argue that they have integrated the world into a singular polity over the last hundred years (Boli & Thomas 1997: 172). Countries with regional headquarters of international nongovernmental or international governmental organizations were significantly more highly correlated with having greater citizenship
rights specified in their national constitutions (Boli & Thomas 1997: 178). We extend Boli and Thomas’ (1997) claim about the importance of transnational organizations by estimating a regression model on twenty years of data from countries in Southeast Asia.

The world-polity theorists also offer more circumstantial evidence for how transnational organizations affect political and civil liberties. These theorists have identified the types of norms circulating through transnational organizations:

[Transnational organizations] are loci of transnational contextual knowledge….

[T]hey supply the purposes and meaning of action; they provide models for global organizing, forms of discourse and communication, and avenues for influencing states and other actors. [Boli & Thomas 1997: 180]

These world-culture norms offer the denizens of nation-states other ways of organizing their domestic and international political affairs. Isomorphism among national institutions increases as more nation-states come under the sway of world-culture norms (Meyer et al. 1997; Meyer & Hannan 1979). Transnational organizations are, by their account, the loci for the world-polity’s cultural capital.

Based on our combined working experiences in Bangkok, Thailand and Manila, Philippines, we find considerable support, at least anecdotally, for the claim that transnational organizations influence the policy scripts of nation-states (Cf. Steinmetz 1998). However, we observe that the road to a universal norm of political and civil liberties that is also universally institutionalized is much more bumpy and circuitous. Based on field experiences, we suggest that an important aspect of any account of how world-polity ties affect social and political change must include a characterization of the global city and its citizenry in relation to the nation-state, the national polity, and
international ties to other global cities or nation-states. Just as the control posts of
economic capital are concentrated in select global cities (Sassen 1991, 2000), we suggest
that the ideological control posts of world polity occupy similar sites. And at particular
moments in history, the concentration of transnational organizations within global cities
affects social and political change. To date, world-polity theorists have not identified the
city locations of transnational organizations as important for the enactment of world-
culture norms. Yet, the world-system and global cities theorists demonstrate why cities
are important for affecting social and economic change.

It is likely that cities are also a locale for explaining how transnational
organizations might be important for the circulation and enactment of world-culture
norms. In this paper we extend world-polity studies by bringing global cities into focus.
The paper also extends world-polity studies by integrating world-system perspective so
that power, competing interests and conflict can be included in a model that often appears
to predict or explain an ahistorical cultural consensus (DiMaggio & Powell 1983).
Finally, in our conclusions we develop a conceptual place in world-polity theory for
linking localities (specifically local associations and the state) to the world polity.

**WORLD-SYSTEM POSITION**

World-systems theorists also recognize the role of transnational organizations (TNOs) for
promoting world-culture norms. As countries move from the periphery towards the core,
they are more likely to become political democracies (Bollen 1983). However, world-
culture is not the cause of these transformations but rather a byproduct of power struggles
in the world polity. Those with the most to gain from the adoption of liberties are the
ones to put into motion the policy scripts that yield expansive liberties. Transnational organizations are in the service of global capitalism and act as the coordinating committee for the world capitalist class (Chase-Dunn 1998). This proposition has found support beyond world-systems theorists. For example, Bourdieu (2001) warns that the world-polity strengthens its networks and homogenizes the norms shared by nation-states in order to facilitate capitalist domination.

The fact that transnational organizations have supported civil liberties that are sometimes at odds with unfettered market interests has led some world polity theorists to denounce the pure capitalist motive perspective of the world-system theorists. However, before denouncing the role of power and interests, this paper suggests, as did Merton, that some goals may be emergent and may also differ in their effects and outcomes from the original intentions of their instigators (Merton 1957). Disentangling material interest effects from world-polity culture effects in this line of reasoning may be difficult, especially if they are highly correlated. By selecting a longitudinal panel study of Southeast Asian countries we attempt to maximize variation in world-system position and concentration of world-polity culture in order to distinguish the differences in effects.

Chase-Dunn (1998: 319) also suggests that cities drive social change within the world systems but concedes that data on cities are scarce. The world city system is a nested hierarchy within the world system; its detection and measurement might shed light on economic and social development. World-systems theorists have said little about cities because of the scarcity of data, not because cities are theoretically irrelevant. This paper explores how global cities harbor transnational organizations and how world-culture norms become epidemics in these harbors. Faced with data limitations, this paper
uses cross-sectional data and “on the ground” qualitative observances to examine the role of cities as harbors for transnational organizations. Time series data are not readily available with city-level data. Most analyses are conducted at the level of the nation-state, but the cross-section shows that transnational organizations are presently concentrated in global cities and are likely to have been so for a long time.

GLOBAL CITY CONCENTRATIONS OF WORLD CULTURE

Sassen (1986: 85) defines global cities as those sites that serve a coordinating role for global economic activity while also serving as “sites for the production of a large array of inputs and ‘organizational commodities’ necessary for global control and coordination.” Later Sassen ([1991] 2001) labels New York, London, and Tokyo as global cities. By extension Sassen and Portes (1993) write of second-rank global cities, such as Miami, that operate on a regional scale. The global city model marks a specific socio-spatial historical phase and emphasizes “the ‘production’ of the global economic system. It is not simply a matter of global coordination but one of the production of global control capacities” (Sassen 2001: 349).

The global networks that bind global cities share their concentration of financial capital and occupy distinct command posts for coordinating economic activities across the globe. The institutions, management and workings of these cities are not limited to the nation-state-- the functions of multinational companies headquartered within these global cities reaches well beyond the jurisdiction of the nation-state to other cities and nations. Hence, the material and political interests of these cities are not national, but international and may, at times, be at odds with those of the nation-state within which
they are spatially located. These analyses of linked cities focus on their economic rather than cultural, political, and ideological functions within the international system. However, economic capital is just one of several types of capital. Indeed, a transnational field composed of political and cultural capital also links global cities.

The global city is “the culmination of a process of concentration of different species of capital: capital of physical force or instruments of coercion…, economic capital, cultural capital…, and symbolic capital” (Bourdieu 1999: 57). Our description of the global city uses Pierre Bourdieu’s formulation of the state. We substitute “the global city” for “the state” in order to emphasize the historical role of cities. Cities have long acted as sites for the accumulation of capital and coercion (Tilly 1990). They continue to serve this function. By example, we focus on two regional cities in Southeast Asia, Bangkok and Manila to argue that more attention could be paid by world-polity and world-systems theorists to the role of regional global cities as catalysts for social change within nation-states and internationally. We map the concentration of cultural power across countries and within countries across cities to bring power back into explanations of world polity and to make a more general empirical and theoretical connection to the literature on civil society and democracy.

Southeast Asia presents several contradictory cases of development, democracy and civil society. There are relatively weak or intermittently strong states (Thailand, Philippines, and, more recently Indonesia), on the one hand, and very strong states (Singapore, Malaysia, Burma), on the other. More recent entrants to the field include Vietnam and Cambodia and have contributed less to theory and research on the topic. Although an “Asian Values” debate persisted through the 1980s and early 1990s, since
then several dramatic economic and political events have called this cultural explanation into question. The contradictions in these cases suggest an alternative explanation for political and social change. We suggest that the explanation lies in the public space created for civil society through the global cultural ties generated by transnational organizations, but that the creation of a vibrant civil society in this manner is historically contingent and dynamic.

**DEMOCRACY, DEVELOPMENT AND THE STATE IN ASIA**

Much of the literature on governance in Asia focuses upon its relationship to development. There are many contrasting models for understanding the relationship. A variety of different state forms and development processes abound from the mainland examples of India and China to the island nations of Indonesia and the city-state of Singapore. Making generalizations is extremely difficult. Particularistic explanations focus upon historical specificity and colonial legacies, universal explanations focus upon the role of technocracy and authority for directing growth. Although in a general sense development is seen as a precursor to more democracy, the extent to which it matters whether there is a strong state with active economic intervention in the management of the development process has been debated. Further, there continues to be some debate about whether successful developmental states will ever become democracies (Khondker 1996; Thompson 1996).

To date, the role of civil society and international non-governmental organizations for mediating the relationship between development, governance, and civil and political liberties has not been addressed systematically in Asia. There are some indications that
local non-government organizations (NGOs) are important actors for creating the civic space challenging regimes in Thailand and the Philippines (Ingavata 1990; Lara and Morales 1990; Misztal and Misztal 1986; Shatkin 2000; Siriyuvasak 1996). Further, some argue that in the case of Malaysia and Singapore, the strength of the state has so diminished civil society that any democratic governance in the near future is extremely limited (Lee 2002; Jesudason 1995; Manan 1999). But, there is no literature on the role of transnational non-governmental organizations for affecting the politics and society of a locale. In the cases, that follow, we begin to draw a connection between TNOs and civil society in a particular locale. Our story is somewhat speculative and will require more evidence to be definitive. Nevertheless, our longitudinal, quantitative analyses demonstrate the strength of the relationship between TNOs and political and civil liberties, net of other developmental processes.

THE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF WAR AND ITS AFTERMATH

In order to discover these strategic centers of accumulation for world culture, this paper discerns the “conscious motivations for social behavior… [from] its objective consequences” (Merton 1957: 60). Dominant countries such as the United States have financed transnational organizations such as the United Nations and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank). Primary motivates of the United States were the desire to expand markets, to obtain cheap materials and labor, and to maintain influence over geopolitics through stable rules structures, and stimulating commerce in the international system. As unlikely as it might seem, these manifest
motivations have given way to their latent function: the generation of world culture norms.

The history of transnational organizations makes these two points clear: 1) The goal of establishing transnational organizations in Southeast Asia was not to promote world culture norms but was an attempt by dominant groups to consolidate their power. And 2) the Philippines and Thailand did not become centers for transnational organizations because they were already more sympathetic to democratic values but rather because they fit the geopolitical concerns of a core country, namely the United States.

The Second World War’s end led to the establishment of two international bodies: the Breton Woods Institutions (the World Bank and International Monetary Fund) would promote the rebuilding of a war-torn Europe and ensure stability within the international economic system; the United Nations would promote international peace and security and encourage cooperation in social, economic, and cultural affairs.

Southeast Asia experienced two more military ruptures and two more historical opportunities for the emergence of multilateral coordinating bodies: the Vietnam and the Indo-Chinese Wars. The Vietnamese War was a war against communism. Ideology emerged as the major threat to the international economic system. In 1961 President Kennedy responded to that threat by sending the first American troops to Vietnam. Cambodia and Laos found themselves bombed by the Americans in response to their ideological contagion. America’s friends in the region found themselves inundated with development assistance and anti-communist ideology. Regional development organizations emerged as part of the new ideological infrastructure to rebuild Southeast
Asia. Where the United States established a strong military presence, development aid and transnational organizations followed.

Notably, two other regional bodies also emerged in the 1960s. The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) was founded in 1965 and is headquartered in Bangkok. It was founded after a meeting of the Ministers of Education from Laos, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, the Republic of (South) Vietnam as well as the chairperson of UNESCO National Commission (Philippines) and the Special Adviser to the President of the United States. Likewise, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was founded after a 1967 meeting in Bangkok attended by its five founding members. Although ASEAN has its current headquarters in Jakarta, the Philippines and Thailand were two of the five founding members. ASEAN’s objective is to “accelerate economic growth, social progress, and cultural development in the region” (www.asean.org, 9 January 2003). Either the Philippines or Bangkok generally served as the sites for regional coordination.

**TWO ILLUSTRATIVE CASES**

The history of freedom and transnational organizations in the Philippines and Thailand are illustrative of the manifest and latent functions that transnational organizations serve. Together these two countries reflect very similar trends towards increasing freedom. They both entered the modern era, post World War Two, with the establishment of strong ties to the United States, which grew stronger throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Their economies and populations were a similar size following the war and both endured brief Japanese occupations during the war. However, they were also quite different and
remain different. One is an island nation with many ethnic groups and more than 100 languages and the other is based in mainland Southeast Asia with few ethnic minorities and few distinct language groups. The economies of each have grown at very different rates with Thailand’s reaching double-digit growth during much of two decades since the war and the Philippine economy struggling. Democracy movements have been sporadic in each country, but at two different and distinct points in time each moved toward participatory democracy and the relinquishment of military influence in the affairs of political and civil society with little subsequent reversal in these trends. These junctures both occurred after city-based, middle-class, religious and student coalitions joined forces to oust longstanding governments. The Philippines and Thailand have now become the longest persisting democracies in Asia (Case 2001). Why have these two countries achieved this status and why did they achieve this status when they did?

In this section we briefly describe the political and economic contexts of each country since the 1950s and what we know of the moments in history that led to significant shifts in political and civil liberties. After doing so, we propose an explanation for the timing and form of these particular junctures in each country and then test our proposition with a multivariate analysis of a longitudinal, cross-national data file.

**The Philippines**

In the Philippines, the Second World War gave rise to the Huk rebels, former guerilla warriors who had resisted the brief Japanese occupation of the archipelago. Mostly rural tenant farmers, the Huk were no communists. They wanted better working conditions and to be treated with respect by the landowners. And after centuries of domination by
the Spaniards and then the Americans, they were unwilling to accept a third occupying force without a fight. And fight they did.

The Filipino government squelched the brief rebellion in 1953 with the assistance of the U.S. government. As the US strengthened the hand of the Filipino military to obliterate potentially “red” elements in the population, a military and economic elite crystallized. At first, few within the country dared contend with such a well resourced, coercive apparatus. Except for sporadic student movements in the late 1960s and early 1970s, there were few challenges to the status quo. There is no evidence that the masses were clamoring for freedom. Table 1 briefly summarizes political change during the last fifty years of the twentieth century (Dolan 2003; Krinks 2002; Wurfel 1988).

-- Table 1 About Here --

The most recent movement of the Philippines toward democracy has its roots in the 1965 election of Ferdinand Marcos. Marcos came to power democratically but quickly moved to consolidate his power. In his first term Marcos initiated many expensive and high profile public works projects, garnering support from both the general public and his friends who profited from lucrative, state-financed contracts. It was the beginning of his second presidential term that the winds of change began to blow.

By the time Marcos won the dubious 1969 elections, government corruption was growing, economic growth slowing, urban crime and violence peaking, conflicts between Muslims and Christians, mounting; and a communist insurgency as well as a Muslim
separatist movement were spreading. Martial law was declared in 1972, and by the early 1980s, the Filipino economy had shrunk as neighboring economies took-off.

The 1983 assassination of opposition leader, Benigno Aquino, set fire to a diverse opposition movement that had slowly coalesced against Marcos. The opposition became known as the “People's Power” movement, included rural farmers, but largely took place in the urbanized portions of the country. How did this coalition form and what role did transnational organizations play?

First, the transnational ties of the church were important for generating elements of the opposition. Liberation theology traveled along transnational ties through church missions, infecting local parishioners with a sense that corrupt leaders such as Marcos no longer had a legitimate right to rule. Second, Marcos’ coercive apparatus, the military, had been contaminated with the ideals of bureaucratic professionalism. As the US and some European countries trained army officers for the purposes of eliminating the communist insurgency and stabilizing the region, the trainings necessarily inculcated the officers with the world-culture values of bureaucratic professionalism. A highly trained cadre of army officers now saw their advancement as dependent on well-financed international exchange programs rather than on the financially weak and morally corrupt regime. Finally, the business elite could look at the success of their neighbors to verify that their potential financial gains had been forgone and that a more stable set of rules might facilitate more foreign direct investment. With the church, the people and the military disaffected, Marcos’s attempt to claim victory in the 1986 election lacked support. Through non-violent means the People’s Power movement ousted him.
In his place came Corazon Aquino in 1986. Under her administration, democratic processes were revitalized and civil liberties propagated. Since 1986 democratic processes and civil liberties have persisted. Social movements still hold sway over government excesses. Despite numerous coup attempts and economic volatility, civil society has remained vigilant. When President Estrada tried to suspend impeachment hearings against him (He was being charged with corruption.), mass demonstrations forced him to resign. Moreover, the transition to Arroyo’s administration was fairly smooth, and regular elections are scheduled for 2004.

The tradition of democracy and the vigilance that supports it have emerged in the communications between elements of civil society and elements of the transnational community. As bureaucratic institutions, transnational organizations employed many urban Filipinos and introduced them to the world-polity ideals of social rights and obligations. The work culture and job training provided by transnational organizations created a local constituency that expected and demanded similar rights for their nation-state as they were granted in their organizations. Numerous indigenous non-governmental organizations emerged. Some mimicked the organizational templates of the transnational organizations; others defined themselves in opposition to these outside influences; and still others remained close to their local organizing traditions, while selectively borrowing from transnational models. Although these extra-organizational outcomes were not intended by the first set of transnational organizations to enter the Philippines, they were nonetheless the objective outcomes of that entry.

Figures 1 and 2 show the trends in both number and concentration of transnational organizations in Southeast Asian countries from 1980 to 2002. As others have shown the
number of transnational organizations\textsuperscript{2} has grown dramatically over the last two decades. Quite clearly the Philippines was the dominant center for secretariat location, especially during the 1980s. The Philippines reached its dominance as the focal point for the most transnational organizations across Southeast Asia with 30 percent of secretariats located there in 1982. From that point onward its dominance diminished as Thailand and Singapore dramatically increased the number of transnational organizations located in their countries. By the end of the 1990s Thailand had become the country with the most transnational organization secretariats in Southeast Asia.

\begin{center} -- Figures 1 and 2 About Here -- \end{center}

Initially these transnational organizations were sited in one country but not another because of the United States’ geopolitical concerns. Thailand and Philippines did not stand out for their democratic traditions in the 50s and 60s, but they did stand out as strategic sites for war. Therefore, any analysis of the world-polity must keep world-system conflict on the same footing.

\textit{Thailand}

In 1950 Bhumibol Adulyadej ascended the throne as the ninth regent of the Chakri dynasty (King Rama IX), following considerable turmoil. Since the 1932 coup and the establishment of the constitutional monarch, the monarchy had variously negotiated its

\textsuperscript{2} We measure transnational organizations that fall into the following types defined by the \textit{Union of International Associations}: federations of international organizations (Type A); universal membership organizations (Type B); intercontinental membership organizations (Type C); limited or regionally-defined membership organizations (Type D); and organizations having a special form, including foundations or funds (Type F).
relationship to the military, the elite, and the masses. Throughout Thai modern history, the military had frequently reasserted itself at the helm of the country’s economic and political leadership. King Rama IX is the longest reigning monarch in Thai history and, as did his predecessors, presided over seven different constitutions, numerous governments, and eight successful and unsuccessful military coups. Table 2 summarizes the dramatic changes in government since 1950.

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Many of these dramatic changes in government occurred as the interests of the merchant elite, the monarchy, and the military sometimes converged, sometimes conflicted. In 1992 the interests of the urban populace became manifest in the May protests. These protests culminated in the deaths of at least 50 protesters and the dramatic display, televised around the world, of the two instigators, representative of military and civilian elites, groveling on their knees in apology to the King. The aftermath of May 1992 yielded the longest period of freely elected civilian governments in Thailand as well as a new constitution (ratified in 1997) with the most civil and political liberties the country has ever known. How did this dramatic shift toward democracy happen and why did it happen when it did?

One explanation might be that economic growth gave rise to an emerging middle class and business elite that depended upon economic stability and civil rights. Economic growth in Thailand was indeed dramatic, preceding the May 1992 protests. Between 1985 and 1995 the Thai economy grew by 10% per year (Bello, Cunningham, and Poh
1998; Warr and Nidhiprabha 1986). However, the growth that occurred in Thailand was fueled by the nation-state’s emphasis on low wage, low skill manufacturing. Production technologies were not upgraded, and the economic infrastructure did not expand (Bello et al. 1998; Phongpaichit and Baker 1998). The state spent little on education, and the country remained predominantly rural (Muscat 1994; Thailand Development Research Institute). Furthermore, as the gross national production grew so too did income inequality (Phongpaichit and Baker 1998).

In an earlier historic period, dramatic economic growth also preceded a student-based movement in the 1970s. During the mid- to late 1960s and early 1970s the Thai economy grew on average 8% per year. This growth, the student protests, and the new civilian government did not yield a persisting democratic government. The movement only precipitated a short-lived flirtation with civilian government.

Improved economic conditions were necessary but not sufficient conditions for the emergence and persistence of democracy in Thailand. The ideological infrastructure also had to be in place. By 1988 Thailand had the fastest growing establishment rate of transnational organizations. Thailand shared with the Philippines the distinction of ranking first in the number of secretariats among Southeast Asian countries (Figures 1 and 2). By 1997 Thailand had the largest number and proportion of secretariats in the region. The coincidence of the dramatic and growing concentration of transnational organizations with dramatic changes in political outcomes cannot be ignored. Similar to the Philippines in the 1980s, transnational organizations in Thailand created a cultural and civic milieu supporting the expansion and expression of political and civil liberties.
Pathways of Influence: Some Examples

What were the transnational organizations doing to promote change? Several anecdotes highlight the four functions carried out by transnational organizations: the management of global capital, the creation of alternative voice mechanisms, the provision of legitimacy for the discontent, and the creation of civic institutions and civil society expectations.

Case 1: Management of Global Capital. Development organizations have discovered that their interlocutors use a different set of signifiers and follow a different code of behavior. “Yes” does not always mean “yes,” depending, instead, on the context. Those best prepared to understand these signs and to respond appropriately are those who share such understandings. One World Bank official in the Bangkok Office remarked that their office offers assistance to a number of neighboring countries whose ministries of finance are preparing loan applications. The Thai staff understood how to interact with the Cambodians and the Lao, for example, much better than any consultant sent from Washington, DC. The Bangkok office thereby brings neighboring bank operations into adherence with the expectations of the head office in Washington. Pressure is applied in culturally appropriate ways; consent is obtained; the relevant actors become responsive; and money moves into Central Banks (Author observations 1999, 2001).
Case 2: Alternative Voice Mechanisms. The Asia Foundation supported forums and trainings for the new 1997 Thai Constitution. As a nongovernmental organization, the Asia Foundation focused on increasing the amount of information that citizens had about how new, democratic constitutions have been developed across the globe. They also promoted the democratic practice of forums and town hall meetings. With an office in Bangkok but with ties to cities across Asia and the United States, the Asia Foundation can mobilize political and cultural capital that would otherwise remain dormant (Author observations 1997).

Case 3: Legitimacy for the Discontent. In 1982 the World Bank agreed to a large loan disbursement to the Philippines for agricultural and forest resource development. The loan required that confiscated lands be returned and redistributed to peasant farmers. Ironically, these loan conditions reinforced the legitimacy of local claims made by both former Huk rebels and their contemporaries. Furthermore, the Bank required that young, mid-level government officials in the Ministries of Agriculture and Natural Resources be trained in the local empowerment. As elements of world-culture values, local empowerment principles were being spread by the same organization promoting the nearly unfettered flow of financial capital. The training programs facilitated relationships between urban-based bureaucrats and the leaders of local communities. These bureaucrats carried their observations and sympathies back to the city and shared these values with family and friends. (Author observations 1983).
Case 4: Creating Civic Institutions

The Ford Foundation opened its Bangkok office in the 1960s with the purpose of strengthening democratic values, reducing poverty and injustice, promoting international cooperation, and advancing human achievement. In the process it has funded numerous government agencies, universities, research institutes and non-governmental organizations. Explicit in its grant packages to each recipient is the requirement that the grantee address issues of diversity including gender, race, and all other members of society in its work and the day to day operations. For example, in the 1970s early collaboration with the Population and Community Development Association (PDA) to promote contraceptive use and family planning has now generated a regional NGO that tackles health, community empowerment, voter’s rights, economic development, and housing issues in Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia. By the early 1990s the founder and chairman of PDA served as a Member of Parliament and advisor to the government shortly after the 1992 massacre. From small NGO to regional actor, PDA and its founder were inculcated with generalized norms about women’s rights and community empowerment through economic development as a result of their interactions with the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency), USAID, and various branches of the United Nations. PDA has spawned numerous centers throughout Thailand and Vietnam in local communities, former employees
have moved on to work with other NGOs or establish their own, and local villagers affiliated with PDA centers are more knowledgeable about social, economic and political processes. (Author observations 1991-2000).

These case studies highlight the relevant aspects of social change and illustrate how transnational organizations provide voice mechanisms, legitimacy to citizens promoting social change, and support or build institutions. The cases also highlight how transnational organizations continue to function as managers of global capital. The cases do not assess the magnitude of how significant transnational organizations are for political and civil liberties. Furthermore, the anecdotes are not intended to portray transnational organizations as non-economic, benevolent guardians of the world-polity. Instead, these anecdotes capture the types of interactions that occur where transnational organizations enter local life. The motivations of the transnational organizations do not always square with the objective consequences of their actions. As bureaucratic actors, their actions are sometimes contradictory and the consequences thereof unanticipated.

A danger of interpretation looms. The immediacy of the anecdotes might lead the researcher to assume that transnational organizations are crisscrossing the entire globe as political and civil liberties blossom in their wake. Testing whether transnational organizations have a significant effect on political and civil liberties requires a more systematic approach.
EXPLAINING THE EMERGENCE AND PERSISTENCE OF DEMOCRACY IN THE PHILIPPINES AND THAILAND: TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AS CARRIERS OF WORLD-CULTURE

Building on the brief comparisons of the Philippines and Thailand, we examine whether the growth and concentration of transnational civic organizations predicts the emergence and persistence of civil as well as political liberties. Our analyses profit from measures of transnational organizations not previously available to researchers that or organized by country and year, yielding a longitudinal, cross-national dataset. Measures of political and civil liberties not usually used by sociologists but rather by political scientists are also employed.

This section begins with a descriptive account of political and civil liberties, as well as trends in economic growth and urbanization in Southeast Asia over two decades, 1980-2000. Bivariate comparisons will demonstrate the independence of transnational organizations from patterns of economic growth in the region. Finally, several multivariate models evaluate the importance of world-polity hypotheses relative to alternative explanations.

POLITICAL AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

We use measures of political and civil liberties developed and collected by Freedom House. Since 1978, Freedom House has published *Freedom in the World*, an annual comparative assessment of the state of political rights and civil liberties in 192 countries and 18 related and disputed territories. The survey uses a multi-source approach to determine scores for political and civil liberties, including regional experts, consultants,

3 More information about the measures are available at: [http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/index.htm](http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/index.htm)
human rights specialists, journalists, and political figures (of all persuasions) familiar with conditions in their respective countries. In addition, the survey uses information from published materials, ranging from the reports of other human rights organizations to regional newspapers and journals.

Political liberties are measured on a seven-point scale with a score of one representing full political liberties and seven, the absence of political liberties. Countries are scored on ten items that fall under three categories: fair electoral process, political pluralism and freedom of participation and openness of government functions (relative freedom from corruption and independence from foreign and military influences). Civil liberties are also measured on a seven-point scale with a score of one representing full civil liberties and seven, the absence of civil liberties. Countries are scored along eleven items on four topics: freedom of expression and religious beliefs, freedom of association and the right to assemble in public places, the rule of law and human rights, and personal autonomy and respect for property rights (more information is available from: http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/index.html).

The Freedom House measures have been used by a number of political scientists (Bollen 1993; Burkhart and Lewis-Bark 1994; Huntington 1984; Kegley and Herman 1994). Despite some concerns with heteroskedasticity the measures have been found to be reliable and valid indicators of democracy and to accurately reflect shifts in political and civil liberties over time (Bollen 1993; Burkhart and Lewis-Bark 1994). Figures 3 and 4 show the trends in political and civil liberties from 1980 to 2001 in the Southeast Asian countries analyzed in this study. There is variability across countries and across time, although some countries show more variability across time than do others. The
mean score over the time period is 5.04 for political liberties and 4.81 for civil liberties. On average both Thailand and the Philippines have the lowest mean scores for the entire period, but both countries show significant variation over time.

The near miraculous transformations of Thailand and the Philippines were mirrored by increasing civil liberties in South Korea and Indonesia. Notably, Malaysia saw a reduction in civil liberties, and the dominant state of Singapore was largely unchanged. The political changes in Southeast Asia prompted President Ronald Reagan to declare, “The winds of freedom are blowing in Asia” (cited in Johnson and Um 1986: 10). What caused these changes to sweep across the region and why in some countries but not others?

**TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

To measure the presence of transnational organizations we use information from the *Yearbook of International Organizations* published by the Union of International Associations (UIA). In its annual publication the UIA provides information on international secretariats by country. These secretariats operate in at least three countries and perform a variety of functions. Although organization-based raw data are not available for public use, the Union of International Associations prepared a derivative country-year file and city-year file for a select set of types of organizations for countries in Asia between 1982 and 2002.
The secretariats counted in the data files include five types: 1) federations of international organizations (Type A); 2) universal membership organizations (Type B); 3) intercontinental membership organizations (Type C); 4) limited or regionally-defined membership organizations (Type D); and 5) organizations having a special form, including foundations or funds (Type F). Table 3 gives examples of these various types of secretariats found in Thailand in 2000.

Table 3 About Here –

The *Yearbook* data file used in our analysis contains data from all the years between 1980 and 2002 (Cf. Beckfield 2003) and extends the work of Boli and Thomas (1997) whose analysis ends in 1973. The descriptive trends are available in Figures 1 and 2. On average countries have about 35 secretariats over the time period, but some, like the Philippines and Thailand, have almost twice as many for much of the period and others, like Vietnam and Burma, have very few. But in all cases the rate of growth of transnational organizations is dramatic (Figure 1), particularly in Thailand and Singapore. Also, the modal concentration of secretariats relative to all secretariats in Southeast Asia, shifts from the Philippines to Thailand over the time period (Figure 2).

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4 In 2000, our selection of organizations represents 20.5% of all international organizations in the UIA database. Not included in our counts of secretariats are: organizations emanating from places or persons or other bodies (type E); internationally oriented national organizations (type G); special types (dissolved organizations, subsidiary and internal bodies, national organizations, religious orders and secular institutes, multilateral treaties and intergovernmental agreements, and disbanded conventions and treaty organizations). In 2000, more than two-thirds of these special types of organizations are dissolved organizations or inactive conventions or treaty organizations. Net of these dissolved organizations our selection of organizations reflects 36% of all international organizations.
**WORLD-SYSTEM POSITION AND GLOBAL CITY STATUS**

We employ two measures of the world system. The World Bank’s cross-national time-series provides data on foreign direct investment (FDI) and gross domestic product (GDP) (World Bank 2002). Foreign direct investment (FDI) is measured in our analyses as the net inflow of US dollars. Gross domestic product is also measured in current US dollars and captures the growth and size of the economy. We do not standardize either measure, since we also include population size as a control in our multivariate models. This eases our interpretation of the respective effects of each factor in our multivariate estimation. Figures 5 and 6 show the yearly trends in each of these variables for each country in the region. Net inflows of foreign direct investment vary considerably across countries and time. Gross domestic product grows dramatically for most countries in the region, especially Thailand (keeping in mind relative population sizes). Thailand and the Philippines have similar population sizes at the beginning of the period.

The test for how global cities affect political and civil liberties is indirect. This paper emphasizes those global cities that also concentrate cultural and political capital. Transnational organizations embody such capital, but they are not necessarily located in global cities. The paper includes a measure of the proportion of the population living in urban areas because urban dwellers are more likely to have been exposed to world-polity values. Furthermore, urban areas have long been hypothesized as the sites for political and social change. Figure 7 shows the percent of the population living in urban areas. There is less variability across time for most countries, with Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines exhibiting the greatest growth rates.

-- Figures 5-7 About Here --
BIVARIATE COMPARISONS

Table 4 shows the relationship among the measures of political and civil liberties and the other explanatory variables. The upper half of the table shows the correlations for countries in Southeast Asia. The lower half of the table includes estimates for all countries in Asia for which data are available. First, the measures of political and civil liberties are highly correlated with each other in the Southeast Asian region and even more so for all of Asia. The number of transnational organization secretariats in a country is also positively associated with greater political and civil liberties (the sign is negative in the table because a higher score on the liberty scales indicates less freedom). The number of transnational organizations in each country is strongly correlated with the other measures of economic position and urban status. And, of all the explanatory variables, the number of transnational organizations is the one most strongly associated with increases in political and civil liberties. To explore the strength of these after controlling for other factors, a multivariate model is needed.

MULTIVARIATE MODELS

To determine the extent to which transnational organizations might predict the level of political and civil liberties net of other factors, a multivariate ordinary least squares regression model is evaluated separately for political and civil liberties. The equation for the full model follows:

\[ \text{Liberty}_t = f(\text{TNOs}_{t-1}, \text{FDI}_{t-1}, \text{GDP}_{t-1}, \text{URBAN}_{t-1}, \text{POP}_{t-1}) \]
All of our right-hand side variables are lagged by one year to address possible concerns of endogeneity. A random effects estimator controls for the possibility of within-country correlated errors and unobserved heterogeneity, and consequently adjusts the standard errors upwards. The models are estimated on evidence from six Southeast Asian countries over a twenty-four year period (1978-2002). Then the model is replicated on a larger sample of Asian countries over the same period. Similar patterns are found in the larger sample. We also test for interactions between the measure of transnational organizations and each of the other explanations in the model.

CIVIL AND POLITICAL LIBERTIES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Tables 5 and 6 show the results of the multivariate analyses for countries in Southeast Asia. Model 1 displays the results for a regression including country-level effects and transnational organizations, controlling for population size. The number of transnational organization secretariats is negatively and significantly associated with civil liberties. Since civil liberties are coded in reverse, the interpretation of the effect is such that an additional secretariat increases civil liberties by one-hundredth of a point. Ten new secretariats established in a country would reduce the civil liberties score by one-tenth, leading to a significant shift, but not a dramatic one. Such an increase in transnational organizations is observed, though, for Thailand where every two or three years there was a 10-unit increase in the number of secretariats.

-- Tables 5 and 6 About Here --
The number of secretariats of transnational organizations has similar effects upon political liberties as it does upon civil liberties in Southeast Asian countries. As the number of transnational organizations increases the limitations on political liberties are significantly reduced or eliminated. The size of the effect is similar to its effect upon civil liberties. In a reduced form model (Model 1), an increase of ten secretariats yields a one-tenth of a point reduction in the limitations to political liberties.

In model 2, the logged value of foreign direct investment and GDP show no significant relationship with political liberties (Table 6), while foreign direct investment increases civil liberties (Table 5). A one percent increase in net inflows of foreign direct investment increases civil liberties by more than two-tenths of a point. This is a rather large effect given the observed movement of net inflows of foreign direct investment. In model 3, urbanization has positive effect upon civil and political liberties, but only approaches statistical significance in relation to political liberties (Table 6). A one percent increase in the urban population increases political liberties by three-one hundredths of a point.

When we include all of the measures predicted to influence civil and political liberties (see Model 4), we find that the effect of transnational organizations grows three-fold and remains statistically significant for both civil and political liberties. None of the interaction effects are statistically significant for either political or civil liberties.

When the results are replicated on the larger sample (Tables 7 and 8), the relationship between transnational organizations and political and civil liberties does not hold in the reduced form model (Model 1). Instead, the effects only become significant when other measures of world system position and urbanization are included (Model 4).
For the larger sample of Asian countries GDP is a more consistent predictor of civil liberties and becomes very important for predicting political liberties in Models 3 and 5 (Table 8). To note in these models is the increasing strength of the TNO coefficient from Model 1 to Model 7. There are also two significant interactions in Tables 7 and 8. In Table 7 the interaction between TNO and urbanization significantly improves the model (Model 7). And, in Table 8 the interaction between GDP and TNO is also significant (Model 5). To interpret these effects we estimated predicted y’s for each equation and graph the results in Panels A and B of Figure 8.

In Panel A of Figure 8 we observe that with an increasing presence of TNOs in a country civil liberties increase and increasing urbanization also increases civil liberties. But, the rate at which each increases civil liberties declines as urbanization or numbers of transnational organizations increase. The effect is quite small but relatively observable over the range of possibilities. Similarly, as transnational organization secretariats increase their presence in a country political liberties increase, and as GDP increases then political liberties also increase. As both GDP and TNOs increase then their respective effects on civil liberties are diminished, but only very slightly and hardly observable within a realistic range of values.
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: EXPLORING THE DIALECTIC BETWEEN GLOBAL CITY AND NATION-STATE

The analysis began with a qualitative exploration of how transnational organizations carried and reinforced world-culture values into the Philippines and Thailand, resulting in their political and civil liberties at particular moments in time. These qualitative results were confirmed by a quantitative analysis of cross-national data from 1978-2002. The quantitative analysis provided evidence in support of our qualitative observations: Transnational organizations do function as carriers of world polity as they might be translated into political and civil liberties. But culture does not tell the whole story. Economic status and levels of urbanization played an important role in tandem with the influence of transnational organizations. When the analysis was extended to include a larger sample of countries from Asia, the effect of transnational organizations vanished in a reduced form model and only reappeared when other explanations were included. For political liberties, TNO presence matters only when controlling for economic and urban conditions. TNO presence matters even more when the model explicit conditions the effect of TNOs upon the size of the economy (gross domestic product). For civil liberties in the larger sample, the effect of TNOs is conditional upon the level of urbanization.

What can be concluded from these results? First, the regional differences in the organization of material production and civil society are significantly different in East, South, and Southeast Asia. These differences might significantly diffuse any effects transnational organizations on social and political development (Centeno and López-Alves 2001).
Second, the measures deployed in this analysis lack the necessary refinement for examining how the world-culture values carried by TNOs affect nation-state policies specifically. In fact, the measures of urbanization and gross domestic product are likely conflating other aspects of the internal organization of societies. For example, greater wealth or concentration of urban population may spawn the resources and need for local civil society actors. Our case studies and field experiences would suggest this possibility, especially as the levels of each interact with particular concentrations of transnational organizations. Third, we suggest that the influence of TNOs depends on their concentration in cities, but not just any city. Based on the authors’ field experiences and the literature on global cities, we argued that specific regional cities may have sufficiently strong global ties to enable the city and its dwellers to challenge the nation-state.

In a first attempt to sketch this variability in the size, number, distribution, and concentration of transnational organizations within cities, we map the within-country concentration and distribution of transnational organizations in Southeast Asia for 2002 (the date for which we have the most reliable information by city). This variability may be a significant factor for explaining the timing and possibility for social change in the national polity as driven by a dialectic between the city and the nation-state. In the case of Thailand and the Philippines, both countries have large urban metropoles and few other cities. This is not the case in other countries in the region. Malaysia and Indonesia have several large and dispersed cities that attract transnational organizations. A next step in the analysis is to take into account this variability in the context of cities relative to their nation-states.
Even though world capital flows predict increases in civil and political liberties (the world-system position), we conclude that following the flow of financial capital is not enough. Instead, more attention must be paid to the cities where ideas about both global commerce and global values about rights and responsibilities reside and grow. Future research should explore more fully the city’s cultural and social ties that extend beyond the nation-state. In so doing, one can assess how a city’s populace finds the resources and the legitimate will to challenge the political and civil hierarchies within a nation-state through the creation of civic social space. This civic space is likely created as a result of the presence of transnational organizations that both translate and demonstrate civic rights and responsibilities and the needs and resources of an urban populace.

These conjectures draw upon the evidences from our lived experiences in two places that experienced city-based, successful upheavals of a nation-state’s political order and from a quantitative analysis of cross-national data. Nevertheless, our conjectures about the crucial role of cities and the creation of civic space composed of both transnational and local actors remains a conjecture, given our data limitations. Questions that remain include: How are the city-based TNOs connected to other organizations in the world-polity and how does this world-wide distribution of ties affect the capacity of these cities to challenge a nation-state’s political hierarchy? What is the role of the city relative to other cities within its nation-state? As more data become available and empirical
measures become more refined, the processes of social change as well as the previously unrecognized drivers of that change may come to light.

Finally, our analyses extend a vibrant, but primarily North American-based literature, about the relationship between associations and democracy to two different realms. First, we conceptualize transnational organizations as another form of association that conveys similar sorts of information and exemplars to a locality and individual members of a locality (Fong 2003: 518-521) with regards to democratic participation, decision-making, and organization. Second, we explore how these associations might influence the political and civil liberties in a location outside of North America. Except for Paxton (2002), we know of no other study that takes a cross-national approach in evaluating these ideas. In the case of Paxton (2002), her analysis was confined to local associations, not transnational ones. Future research might extend ours and her analyses by combining information about local and transnational organizations for understanding the growth and spread of political and civil liberties.
REFERENCES


