meltdown and remain stable Market-Leninist dictatorships. International finance has again become effusive. The World Bank has held up China as a model, both for its rapid growth and poverty elimination efforts. [3] A 1999 World Bank survey which pointed to a sharp decrease in poverty in Vietnam in the mid-1990s made the country the international financial community's latest "poster country," which other developing countries should imitate. [4] Singapore is still the richest non-oil producing country in the world which is not a democracy. Foreign investors crave it as a safe haven, free from terrorist attacks and democratic "excesses" (particularly organized labor). In Malaysia, the post-Mahathir era has been made safe for continued pseudo-democratic rule. Political succession from Mahathir to the new prime minister Abdullah Badawi occurred smoothly while capital controls have been lifted and foreign investors are returning, contributing to rapid economic recovery there.

4   By contrast, the new democracies in the sub-region Southeast Asia — Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand — have been politically unstable and slower to recover economically. They face continued protest by civil societies demanding good governance and rapid development after the end of developmental dictatorships. Viewed in isolation, the recent military coup in Thailand — the 18th in 74 years — seems part of an endless cycle, much like what the ancient Greek's termed "eternal recurrence" in history. [5] Seen from a regional, comparative perspective, however, the Thai experience fits a pattern also characteristic of political developments in the Philippines and, to a lesser extent, Indonesia. In this article, I argue that the new democracies in Southeast Asia are following a similar political trajectory that results from a dialectic of good governance and democracy. Initially invoked during anti-dictatorship struggles, the good governance discourse has been directed against democratic institutions in reaction to the rise of money politics and populist challenges.

5   The upper and middle classes are what is called in German the *Träger*, the "bearer" of this discourse. Urban-based, politically ascendant and culturally hegemonic, this elite has demonstrated its insurrectionary prowess through a number of popular uprisings in the region. Electorally, however, the upper and middle classes have found themselves out-numbered by the poor, particularly in the "backward" rural areas. In such situations, the middle class in the new Southeast Asian democracies has proved itself politically disloyal to democratically elected leaders, as the recent Thai coup demonstrates.

6   The first part of this article suggests that the Pacific Asia began as an "imagined community" of developmental dictatorships. This made authoritarian development into the "original position," particularly for the middle class that grew up under a developmental political economy against which democracy is critically judged. The second section argues that in Southeast Asia, the upper and middle classes turned on self-proclaimed developmentalist regimes less out of democratic conviction than due to the fact that after financial crisis weakened neo-patrimonial rule authoritarians were no longer seen as "fathers of development" (one of Suharto's official titles) but as the gravediggers of good governance. The third section focuses on the weakness of the new, middle-class based reformist governments, the prevalence of corruption, and the rise of populist politics. The fourth part concerns the reformist reaction from the middle class that led to the toppling of democratically-elected governments as well as with the failures of a renewed round of reformism. The final section makes some brief comparisons between Southeast Asia, on the one hand, and South Korea, Argentina, and Venezuela, on the other.

7   Two notes on method are helpful at this point. The first is that the middle class is more subjective social construct than objective structural category. Like E.P. Thompson's working class, one can speak of the "making" of the middle class. [6] This is done less in terms of organization (particularly unions) and socialist movement-based activities than to common educational experiences, consumerist lifestyles, similar moral horizons, etc. But there is a structural component involved in understanding this class as well. The "middle class" discussed in this paper is what is often known in the literature as the "new middle class" and not the "old" one of small shop keepers and petty clerks. Among "new" elements, the emphasis here is on higher paid professionals and administrators, as well as on students, intellectuals, and NGO activists whose status is defined largely via education and may not necessarily be wealthy. The middle class does not "act" politically, strategic groups do. I understand strategic groups — loosely following the concept of Hans-Dieter Evers and Tilman Schiel — to be social networks connected by a common interest in the expropriation of key resources (not only material) capable of collective action. [7] Within the "middle class," key strategic groups are technocrats, independent professionals, students and intellectuals, and NGO activists. But if we bear this reservation in mind, it will be more convenient throughout this paper to speak simply of the middle class.

8   Secondly, as already mentioned above, this paper postulates a trajectory of democratic revolution, populist challenge and reformist reaction that has destabilized Southeast Asia's new democracies. It is driven by the dialectic of the "good governance" discourse which has underpinned opposition to dictatorships but also has been instrumentalized by middle class movements opposed to *democratically* elected

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[33] D. McCargo, "Democracy under Stress in Thaksin's Thailand," *Journal of Democracy*, 13, no. 4 (October 2002), 112-126.

[34] On the Philippines, see C. Lande, "The Return of 'People Power' in the Philippines," *Journal of Democracy*, 12, no. 2 (April 2001).

[35] M. R. Thompson, "*Presidentas* and People Power in the Philippines," *Philippine Political Science Journal*, 28, no 51 (2007), pp. 1-32.

[36] For background on Chamlong, see the study by D. McCargo, *Chamlong Srimuang and the new Thai Politics* (London: Hurst, 1997).

[37] On moral capital, see J. Kane, *The Politics of Moral Capital* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[38] Thompson, "Presidentas and People Power."

[39] Of the numerous writings on the *Minjung* Movement see, for example, K. Wells, ed., *South Korea's Minjung Movement: The Culture and Politics of Dissent* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1995).

[40] Han S.-J. Han and Park Y. C., "South Korea: Democratization at Last," in Morley, *Driven by Growth*, pp.163-192.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 174.

[42] For an interesting, though in my opinion overdrawn, comparison between corrupt authoritarianism in the Philippines and South Korea see D. C. Kang, *Crony Capitalism: Corruption and Development in South Korea and the Philippines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). On the Weberian concept of "sultanism" (actually "neo-sultanism") applied to modern dictatorships see H. Chehabi and J.J. Linz, *Sultanistic Regimes* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1998).

[43] W. Vennewald, *Singapur. Herrschaft der Professionals und Technokraten. Ohnmacht der Demokratie?* (VS Verlag, 1994).

[44] H. Kelsen, *Vom Wesen und Wert der Demokratie* (1920).

[45] This is what I understand to be the argument of C.-I. Moon and Y. Kim, "A circle of paradox: Development, politics, and democracy in South Korea," in A. Leftwich (Ed.), *Democracy and development: Essays on theory and practice*. Cambridge, MA: Polity, 1996), 139-167.

[46] See Kim M.-J., "Korean Civil Society Campaign to Eliminate Corruption: Reform of the Political Campaign Financing" at www.needs-network.org/pdfs/jakartaForum/PSPD-partycampaignfund-KIM.pdf (accessed 24 Sept. 2006).

[47] See http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi2007/sc_chart.asp (accessed 31 July 2007).

[48] Cited in Han and Park, "South Korea: Democratization at Last," p. 185.

[49] B. Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon, 1966).

[50] Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*. In fact, labor emerged as one of Thaksin's major opponents through a series of strikes, with Thaksin warning that the Thai economy would suffer and the stock market would crash if union wage demands were met.

[51] For an interesting discussion of Aristotle's critique of democracy in *The Politics*, see B. S. Strauss, "On Aristotle's Critique of Athenian Democracy," in *Essays on the Foundations of Aristotelian Political Science*, ed. C. Lord and D. K. O'Connor (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1991), pp. 212-233.