



# Journal of Social and Political Sciences

**Ma, Ziyi. (2020), The Impact of Landlord Classes on Economic Improvement and Political Stability of China, Korea, and the Philippines: A Comparative Study. In: *Journal of Social and Political Sciences*, Vol.3, No.3, 901-911.**

ISSN 2615-3718

DOI: 10.31014/aior.1991.03.03.222

The online version of this article can be found at:  
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Published by:  
The Asian Institute of Research

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# The Impact of Landlord Classes on Economic Improvement and Political Stability of China, Korea, and the Philippines: A Comparative Study

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## Abstract

As an indispensable part of Feudalism, the landlord classes contributed significantly to the local dominance of the central authority; however, with the collapse of feudal regimes, the landlord classes were widely regarded as obstacles towards the economic modernity and political stability. From the 1910s to 1950s, Korea(colonial Korea, later the Republic of Korea), Republic of China, and Philippines(the colonial Philippines, later the Republic of Philippines), countries shared a similar historic trait, from a feudal state to a foreign colony, then to an independent republic, all under the influence of the USA. Landlord classes in respective countries played an essential role in their historical development and fluctuated their roles with different authorities. The countries all put in efforts towards eliminating or controlling landlord classes to achieve new economic and political models. Using historical data and referencing to the previous analysis, this paper would demonstrate and compare the historic changes pursuing economic and political prosperity that concerned landlord classes of each country to prove the fact that two strategies can be adopted for local state building to achieve economic progress and political stability in that period: either destructing the landlord classes and carrying out land reforms, or having the absolute control of landlords and reaching co-option with them.

**Keywords:** Landlord Classes, Economic Improvement, Political Stability, China

## Republic of China:

### 1. *Sun Yat-Sen's Early Land Policy*

The early attempt to eliminate the landlord classes to reach the equal distribution of land originated from Sun Yat-Sen's three principles of people---the *Minsheng* principle. The *Minsheng* principle incorporated two most essential elements: the "equalization of land rights" and the "control of capital," in which the "equalization of land rights" has an agrarian land tenure reform connotation, and has often been associated with land redistribution, some of its alternative translations being "equitable redistribution of the land"(Cambridge, Mass., 1954). Learning from the ideas and principles of industrial and social revolution in the west, Sun Yat-Sen realized that China could use the Late-developing Advantage to prevent the Western world's chaotic condition

through a socialist strategy. "Where Western material achievement had left a legacy of social disorder, China could simultaneously reap the benefits of both the industrial and social revolutions." (Harold, 1957) Furthermore, based on the theory of Henry George, the author of *Progress and Poverty*, Sun explained the basic meaning of the "equalization of land rights"--- governmental appropriation of all future increases in land value subsequent to the success of the revolution and the modernization of China (Harold, 1957). According to one of the earliest interpreters of the *Minsheng* doctrine, Feng Tzu-yu, the first stage of the *Minsheng* doctrine should be the national socialism that was highly based on land nationalization (Sun Yat-sen, 1953), which, if thoroughly implemented, would be able to eliminate the landlord classes. The state, in turn, could prevent the monopoly and the excessive profits of the landlords, directly collect taxes, and control the land. Quite surprising though, after the resign of Sun, the single tax policy and land nationalization were then inherited by Yuan Shih-k'ai. An American newspaper reported that he would "urge the new cabinet to impose a land or single tax in order to raise money for the government." (Chicago Sunday Tribune, 1912)

However, these particular policies did not bring China a peaceful society, a progressive economy, or a stable political environment. The reason behind it is that the proposals from Sun Yat-Sen (and the implement of Yuan Shih-k'ai) went off-track and failed to point to the landlord classes directly on the executive level. In 1924, the excesses of rural landlordism and the maldistribution of landholdings finally prompted Sun publicly to declare a "land to the tiller" policy (Hu Han-min, 1930), but that was then proved to be a slogan never implemented. This sad fact can be clearly seen from the interpretation of *Minsheng* principle from Feng Tzu-yu, where he did not direct his attack against present-day Chinese landlords-it is still future speculation in land, especially urban land, which is his chief target, which was precisely what Sun Yat-Sen had in mind. The socialist approach he proposed and the aggressive advance from Hu Han-min inevitably aroused the landlords' opposition. Instead of directly solving the problems, Sun avoided directly collision with the local bullies. In Sun's speech in 1912, he assured his audience that "equalization of land rights" did not imply actual land division or nationalization, and in these presentations, the land problem is not identified with prevailing social ills in China; the land problem arises only when land is suddenly made valuable as a result of progress-urbanization, industrialization, and the development of communications (TLCS, VI, ts'e 1, 97.). The interior, agrarian land, on the other hand, was not the problematic land in Sun's mind that time because he finds that the ordinary people can use land freely, "without any restrictions," and in general, "there are no masters who monopolize land." (TLCS, VI, ts'e 1, 224.) Furthermore, the government's option to purchase the land was never meant for an agrarian land tenure reform, and the land nationalization proposal (later proved to be nothing more than George's socialization of rent.) was only for "indispensable land" like railways, highways, and other public development projects (TLCS, VI, ts'e 1, 81), with agrarian land excluded. However, the neglect of landlord classes could be attributed to Sun's great need to compromise when it came to the reconcile of various stakeholders in China; for example, the fund of establishing the government was raised among oversea merchants, which made it especially difficult to attack the landlords. Nevertheless, having failed to either directly eliminate the landlords or gain complete control over them and lose sight of the distinct form of rural injustice in China, this administration lead by Sun, although bearing a visionary intention to conduct land reform, could not stop the ongoing political chaos and economic inflation in the 1920-30s China.

## 2. Cooperative Movement in Guangdong

Inheriting the legacy of the *Minsheng* principle proposed by Sun Yat-Sen, the nationalist government of China initiated yet another land-related policy---the state-scale cooperative movement, most notably in Guangdong province, led by General Chen Jitang. In other provinces like Hebei, Henan, and Shandong (LLOYD E, 1974), similar cooperative movements failed because of the subversion of the local elites---the landlord classes. On the other hand, the condition of Chen's Guangdong was different. Due to the Nationalist Party's factious conflicts, Chen Jitang gained a significant amount of autonomy under Wang's administration in Guangdong in 1931. Even after the abolish of Wang's government because of the 9.18 incident, Chen still had full control of Guangdong province. Unlike most warlord leaders, who usually represent the alliance of local elites and wealthy landlords, Chen Jitang, in order to maintain the political stability and collect higher revenue from rural areas, stabilized local banks, pursue tax reforms, and promoted the development of urban industry and infrastructure (WEISS, LINDA, and JOHN HOBSON, 1995). Right after Chen took office in Guangdong, he put in his efforts in overcoming the resistance against his reform from the "local bullies and evil gentry"---the landlords (however, indirectly), which, in comparison to Sun Yat-sen's early policy, was more assertive and incisive. The major political task of the cooperative movement, as Lin Yizhong, the minister in charge of the Cooperative

Commission, explained, was to reduce the power of “local bullies and evil gentry” in village administration(LIN, 1934). Guangdong's lifeline industry---silk, at that time, was profoundly struck by the worldwide economic depression. By 1934, the sector's incomes in the sector had fallen significantly from 1925 levels, from ¥0.60 to ¥0.20 per worker per day. All six firms that remained in business reduced their demand for sericulture products by drawing on accumulated reserves of cocoon and silk thread(WATSON, 1994). In order to revive the economy to regain the political stability, Chen decided to employ planned economy policy to make up the excessive dependence on external markets and absence of nonfamilial peasant organizations, strengthening the state intervention in local economic affairs by organizing villages, corporatizing village life, corporatizing production, and socializing distribution(ZHEN, 1934), which made the elimination of landlord classes was inevitable. However, Chen soon encountered resistance from not only the landlords but also the peasants who feared that this “good government” aimed to confiscate their capital and assets for military dominance as the Communists did. Even though various methods, including the evening classes to explain the nature of this movement, were adopted, the rumor made up by the local elites associating the movement with the Communists were still widespread, and the incentives of the peasants were still fragile(LIN, 1935). Nevertheless, Chen continued his plan. Based on the *Minsheng* principle, the Cooperative Commission was overseeing a total of 532 state-sponsored village cooperative by August 1935, which served as an integral part of a national scale movement(CEN, 1935). Unlike the European cooperative movement that aimed to build self-reliant villages, this movement was at the cost of local autonomy for a more collective system, fundamentally hostile to the landlord classes. Strict investigation before the application of cooperatives, cooperative education on the cooperativization of land, and the infrastructure improvement were adopted to better achieve its goal.

However, despite all the positive intentions and efforts above, this very movement could hardly be regarded as successful. To start with, the aims of this movement were not entirely for complete land reform. A large part of its purpose was to prevent the central intervention from Nanjing and Communist elements meddling with local affairs, which distorted their efforts less directly towards the landlords. Among the policies presented by Chen Jitang, none of them was targeted on the reclaim of land authority or equal redistribution of land, causing the long-term lack of incentives among the peasants and serious hindrance agitated by the landlords. Without a proper guideline against the landlord classes, the limits against the subsequent policies were everywhere. The peasants were highly influenced by the landlords' mindsets, thereby hindering the development of the cooperative movement; to be more specific, in Shunde county, many of the 41 farmers who pledged membership of the Dongxiang Yunlu Unlimited Liability Credit, Silkworm-Raising, and Consumer Cooperative Society failed to raise their ¥10 membership fees in time for the inauguration of their cooperative(LIN, 1935). Although a total of 532 state-sponsored village cooperatives were founded by August 1935, only 185 of them were fully functional(CEN, 1935). The failure could also attribute to the bureaucratic origin of Chen's regime, manifested by its inner sluggishness and lack of willingness to expand the networks, which could also explain its avoidance of the direct attack against landlords(WEN, 1935). Furthermore, Chen's lack of strong political authority and sufficient fiscal budgets forbade him to eliminate landlord classes or absolute control of them, which needed more than a warlord regime could provide(Fitzgerald, 1997). The lack of effective regional control made the opposition from the merchants of local capital out of hand, which further prevented the substantial improvement of the economy in Guangdong; for example, the Tobacco Manufacturers Guild imposed a ban on the supply of tobacco products to the cooperative and persuaded other manufacturers and suppliers, including the Firewood and Charcoal Guild, to withhold their supplies as well(FANG, 1934). Resembling the efforts done by Sun Yat-sen, Chen's ideology was ahead of his time, resulting in a visionary but unsuitable policy to China at that time. Chen managed to solve parts of the problems for sure; however, conducting cooperative movements without collateral land reform or full compliance from the landlords, Chen Jitang could not bring economic progress and political stability to Guangdong.

### 3. Land Reforms in Taiwan

The post-war environment gave the Nationalist government a once-in-lifetime chance to eliminate the landlords and carry out the land reform. Taiwan, now a developed economic entity, ranks as the seventh-largest in Asia and 22nd-largest in the world by purchasing power parity (PPP). None of those would be possible without the land reform conducted, which ruled out the landlord classes and laid a concrete foundation for the

industrialization and economic boost. Instead of aggressive actions to outlaw the landlords, the Nationalist martial government took a three-step approach: farm rent reduction in 1949, sale of public farmlands in 1951, and land to the tiller in 1953(THOMAS R, 1961). Among the reform actions, the way the Nationalist government reclaimed land from the landlords. Rather than direct compensation from the state to the landowners, the Nationalist government converted 70% of the land price into "Land bonds" and 30% into the public stock shares, which could reach an effect of converting investments in the land into industrial assets and laying a foundation for the industrialization of Taiwan(THOMAS R, 1961). This relatively mild way of land reform not only eliminated the landlord classes but also converted them into a future contribution to the industrialization of Taiwan, paving the way to becoming one of *the Asia tigers*. This particular land reform also fulfilled the dream of Sun Yat-sen's *Minsheng* principle, achieving the scenario of the *land to the tillers*. With the elimination of landlords and the redistribution of land, the economic outcome was remarkable. Food production since 1950 has been increased at an average annual rate of five percent, exceeding the yearly increase in population. Individual crop increases since 1952 have been as follows :

Sweet potatoes	24 percent
Rice	29 percent
Tea	30 percent
Sugar cane	36 percent
Peanuts	63 percent
Citronella oil	97 percent
Hogs	106 percent
Pineapples	115 percent
Wheat	118 percent
Soybeans	154 percent (THOMAS R, 1961)

Along with the agriculture production was experiencing unprecedented success, the livestock production and forestry were also improving. The percentage increase in livestock production during the past five years exceeds the gain in any other agricultural products, while timber production exceeded 140,000,000 seedlings annually(THOMAS R, 1961). Over the 1950s, Taiwan's economic growth was at a constant rate that was never lower than 6%, and the trend continued in the following decades(行政院主計處, 2020). Moreover, the reform also contributed to the reduction of unemployment and universal education in Taiwan(Koo, 1966). All of the sectors mentioned pushed forward the industrialization of Taiwan, which in turn strengthened the nationalist government's legitimacy. The skillful way adopted to eliminate the landlord classes by the Nationalists set up a modern example of land reform and proved that the elimination of landlords indeed paved the way to the economic improvement and political stability.

## **Korea:**

### *1. Colonial Korea*

Although the Japanese colonial authority was indisputably cruel and evil, it did have a lasting influence on Korea's political and economic pattern; besides, its skillful manipulation of the landlords in colonial Korea substantially proved that regarding the national economic growth and political stability, the elimination of landlords was not a "must"; instead, having absolute control over them could achieve an equally effective outcome. Before the Japanese occupation, the capacity of the Yi dynasty in Korea had dropped to its lowest. This administration, lack of the ability and resources to exert control over the landlords (not to mention eliminating them), faced a severe fiscal crisis because they could not collect taxes on agrarian incomes, especially from the powerful Yangban elite, Korea's landowning official class(Palais). The hereditary system and examination system, similar to feudal China, enabled landed power to be deeply embedded throughout the Korean state(Wagner, 1974), which also thoroughly penetrate the local administrative forces. The maladministration finally made people, especially the peasants, victims to suffer, and the Korean government "takes from the people directly and indirectly, everything that they earn over and above a bare subsistence, and gives them in return practically nothing."(Grajdanzev, 1944)

The Japanese colonial power, on the other hand, managed to turn the game around. Its impact successfully transformed once scattered Korea into a well-organized and progressive country. Unlike the mode of Britain, France, and other western colonists, Japan's colonies were relatively close, and Japanese authority played a more direct and decisive role in the national management(Kohli, 2004). Widely regarded as a Korean version of the Meiji Restoration, the reforms conducted in colonial Korea by the Japanese was also highly authoritarian and state-led, with a high level of state intervention similar to those of the attempts discussed above in the Republic of China. However, different from contemporary Nationalist China, the Japanese acquired utter and absolute dominance over Korea by its developed military capacity, creating a Japanese-controlled efficient bureaucratic system. Not only did the Japanese maintain central control, but also they formed highly bureaucratic periphery and local management; for example, the colonial police force was designed along the lines of the Meiji policy insofar as it was highly centralized and well-disciplined and played a significant role in social and economic reforms(Spaulding, 1920). Under such a system, the Japanese authority chose to ally with the Korean landlord classes, mainly in tax collection and local governance. While Japanese civil servants supervised regional projects, Korean landowners cooperated and eventually benefited; local land-investigation committees, for example, responsible for investigating the "ownership, location, boundaries and class of land," were composed of "landowners themselves."(Government General of Chosen, 1911) Although losing some of their regional autonomy, the landlords still maintained strong influence and considerable profits. The state, in this way, further guaranteed its stable tax revenue--- land revenue in 1905, the year Japanese influence in Korea began to grow, was some 4.9 million yen; by 1908 this had jumped to 6.5 million yen, or a real increase of some 30 percent in three years(Kohli, 2004)--- which laid the fiscal foundation of Korea's early industrialization. Not only did the landlords help the state with the economy, but they also contributed to rural stability. The Japanese regime incorporated the landlords into its executive branch to reach the state's goal. With the expansion of controlled land (a reward from the state) (Government General of Chosen, 1911), the landlords help local agents like the police to better maintain control over peasants. The stability in rural areas then created a hospitable environment for the Japanese to implement their agricultural plans. Although primarily for the war cost of the Japanese Empire, the agriculture output of colonial Korea indeed had an impressive increase; for instance, the overall rate of growth in rice production per unit of land for the colonial period (1910–40) averaged on the order of 2 percent per annum(Suh, 1967), which set a concrete basis for economic growth and following rapid industrialization(Park, 2000).

To conclude, the absolute control and skillful manipulation of Korean landlord classes by the Japanese colonists did bring economic progress and political stability under the colonial governance, proving that "The presence of a landowning class does not necessarily inhibit the formation of a powerful "developmental" state. Much depends on the specific relationship of the state and landowners."(Kohli, 2004)

## *2. Rhee's Korea and Land Reforms*

After World War II, Syngman Rhee stepped into the peak of Korean politics. To achieve political and economic stability, Rhee maintained the Japanese-styled bureaucracy and management approach, recruiting former civil servants in the colonial period(Kohli, 2004). Therefore, like the Japanese colonial authority, the Rhee administration formed a highly centralized state, especially with the introduction of martial law. Even as late as in 1968, 75% of higher civil servants came out of the colonial service(Cho, 1975). In the presidency of Syngman Rhee, economic development was not the priority of executive goals, especially the agricultural sector; thus, the early attempt of redistribution of land by the Americans was vehemently opposed by the Rhee administration. However, the Korean War proved to be the game-changer. As the north going straight down to the South, it redistributed the land it captured; when the South took the land back, the Americans, in turn, formalized the distribution made by the North(Kohli, 2004), initiating the following land reform. In the pre-reformed era, the peasants suffered from a high tax rate not only from the colonial government but also from the landlords who possessed a considerable amount of agrarian land, which caused social instability on a local level, especially without the dominant forces of the colonial state. The multiple collective peasant protests in the 1920s and red peasant union protest movements(Shin, 2014), a central form of peasant activism in the 1930s might replicate

themselves if there were not land reforms. Therefore, out of the concern of political stability, the Rhee administration, at last, started the land reform.

This land reform focused on abolishing the land tenure system, created new incentives for agricultural productivity, and eliminated the absentee landlords. In fact, before the establishment of the Republic of Korea in 1948, the American Military Government carried out the South Korea Land Reform Law to lower the peasant tax and redistribute the government-vested land, which consisted of 13.1% of the total farmland in Korea (Bank of Chosun, 1948). Significantly influenced by this early attempt, the subsequent land reform followed a similar pattern with the Land Reform Act of Korea in 1950. The Korean government purchased the land from absentee landlords by Land-value Bills that divided the payment into five years associating with annual output and price of crops (Shin, 1950). The government-purchased land, together with the government-vested land (mainly previously Japanese-owned), was distributed to the peasants for production. However, flaws did exist. For example, the Land Reform Act allowed so many exceptions that many landlords could manage to evade the reform; besides, the peasants, even though they eventually possessed agrarian land of their own, had to pay part of their income for the compensation of the landlords (Shin, 1950). That being said, despite all the flaws exposed, the land reform did receive a significant achievement. The deeply-rooted land tenure system was officially abolished, and land-to-tillers was finally reached. From 1955 to 1961, the rice production was in a steady annual increase of 2.62% averaged (Deok, Kim, 2000), contributing to the next level of agriculture development. More importantly, with the lost-out landlords taking their compensations, savings, and energy and throwing them into both industry and education (Kohli, 2004), the land reform directly prompted the industrialization and the "Miracle on the Han River" in Park Chung Hee's administration, which resulted with an annual increase of 10.7% in GDP (1963-1978) under Park's rule (World Bank, 2020).

## **Philippines:**

### *1. Colonial & Pre-Marcos Philippines*

Compared to the two countries above, the Philippines were a negative example of the control of landlord classes. Under the Spanish authority, the basic mode of the landlord-tenant system, the Kasama system (tenants sharing farm expenses and incomes with landlords), was established. Somewhat similar to the Japanese colonists in Korea, the Spanish preserve the local structure and position of local headmen, known as the "caciques," granting them privileges on land occupation; meanwhile, the Spanish also advocated individual ownership of land (Phelan, 1959), which, together with the power local leaders possessed, prompted the reduction of free landholders and accumulation of available lands by influential individuals (Pelzer, 1945). However, unlike the Japanese colonists in Korea, the Spanish authority could not gain absolute control over the landlords; thereby, the early industrialization and the increasing agricultural output did not happen on the Philippines' soil.

Land reforms in the Philippines had a twisted journey, reoccurring but superficial. During the American occupation era, efforts were made to paint the basic sketch of land reforms; for example, the American authority managed to negotiate with the under-protection Spanish friar and persuade them to sell part of their land for redistribution. Moreover, the Commonwealth Act granted the president of the Philippines to purchase, sell, and lease portions of large landed estates, which, together with the Public Act that meant to promote the well-being of tenants and the production of rice, were never enforced on the local level because of the influence the landlords exerted on the executive branch (FRANCIS J, 1972). From that, we can see how deeply the landlords penetrate Philippine politics. Due to the lack of absolute regional authority, the landlords' intensive objections were out of control, with the landlords dismissing tenants deliberately through the amended Act (Pelzer, 1945), which clearly failed to preserve political stability. The Americans then came up with yet another way towards the problems---resettlement on public lands, which the Philippines inherited even after World War II (Sacay, 1963). However, without sufficient funds, excellent management skills, and strong central power, together with the landlords' unrest, this very attempt end up with little success.

After the independence of the Philippine Republic, the Quirino-Foster Agreement was reached between the Philippines and the USA, obliging the Philippines with social reforms in exchange for American aids (Wurfel,

1959). Plus, the following Huks rebellion accelerated President Ramon Magsaysay's subsequent agrarian reforms, in which he promoted its publicity to the barrios, receiving great supports from the peasants (Starnier, 1961). Magsaysay encouraged basic land reforms and fair tenancy practices, including the appeal to redistribute large estates (Starnier, 1961). However, along with the decrease of the Huks rebellion, the pace of the reform went stagnant. Plus, the Congress was reluctant towards the proposal from Magsaysay, and the Supreme Court decisions had interpreted the power to expropriate as limited to those areas where there was unrest (FRANCIS J, 1972), like what the Americans once regulated. With such limitation, the effects were disappointing, and the key issues remained unsolved, resulting in only 300 hectares of land was justified agrarian unrest. Moreover, under the political influence of landlords, this reform was eventually suspended by the Magsaysay administration (Starnier, 1961). Magsaysay's failure once again proved that what mattered most in the reforms was not plain reclaims, but eliminating the hindrance. The lack of incentives for the landlords to sell their lands and the lack of the central capacity to eliminate or control the landlords would only cause continuous opposition against the reforms, no matter how many concessions had been made by the government.

Regardless, the struggle continued. The Agricultural Land Reform Code was introduced by President Macapagal's administration, which placed productivity improvement as a priority to counter the increasing population (Ruttan, 1966). However, no matter how the slogans changed, the same problems were always there, untouched like a forbidden treasure. There were still no proper policies to motivate the landlords and no political power to dismantle the deep-rooted landlord monopoly. Unlike Taiwan and South Korea, the inability to convert landlord capital into industrial one prohibited the Philippines' future development. Although the Code meant to first transform Kasamas to leaseholders, then transfer landownership to cultivators (FRANCIS J, 1972), history proved that with the limits above, the best it could do was to reach a leasehold relationship (tenants taking expenses themselves and paying a fixed rate to landlords), which turned out to be another failed attempt without a competent government that could replace the function of the landlords, including loans, security, etc (FRANCIS J, 1972). There was also one similarity between this attempt and the cooperative movement in Guangdong. Both reforms experienced the reluctance from the peasants. The unwillingness could again be the best evidence that without the central authority being efficient and replacing the landlords, the peasants could easily be overwhelmed by landlords' propaganda and their long-lasting dependence on landlords, thereby rejecting the reforms.

All the pre-Marcos endeavors neglected, or unable to pay attention to, the core problem of the whole issue---the elimination or the control of landlords. None of the policies were directly targeted at the landlords, which sharply contrasted with Rhee's Korea. Also originating from American efforts, the Korean land reforms were much better than those in the Philippines. The direct attack on the tenure land system in Korea brought back the Korean economy's soar, while the Philippines were still stagnant.

## 2. *Marcos' Philippines*

The nation-building under Ferdinand Marcos made this nation more like ruled by a landlord company across the country. As soon as Marcos took office, he promised to bring the land to all tenants farming rice and corn (Association of Asian Studies, 1974). One of the most progressive actions he did was to devise proper policies to compensate the landlords, providing them with incentives to cooperate: Landowners will be compensated either by the former tenants directly in 15 annual installments plus 6 percent interest or through one of several other plans in which the government acts as a middleman (Daily Express, 1973). The Marcos administration also came up with a multi-stage approach, with the focus first on landlords owning over 100 hectares, then 50-100, finally 24-50 (Times Journal, 1974), along with 1.2 billion pesos prepared to reimburse landowners (Estrella, 1973).

However, these attempts were yet another shimmering mirage with broken promises. Like the previous attempts, this reform's main purpose was to suppress existing and potential agrarian unrest, maintaining temporary political stability. Similar to the cooperative movement in Guangdong, the reform under Marcos was most directly targeted to the threat of communist groups in rural areas; thus, his reform was only superficial, and it will push agrarian reform only far enough to keep unrest below a tolerable level or until land reform threatens



other policies of the regime that had higher priority (Benedict J, 1974), which could be manifested by a USAID report, "...the land reform program was found to be in its seventh year of operation with fewer than 2 percent of the nation's small farmers having received any tangible benefit from the program." (USAID, 1971) With such a superficial intention and showcase enforcement, this land reform led by Ferdinand Marcos, one of the largest landholders in the Philippines, was doomed to fail. Aside from Marcos' political agenda, the most fundamental reason why the reform ended up a failure was the landlords' control over Philippine politics. I guess you still remember how the reform led by President Magsaysay failed. Despite all the concessions he made, the pressure exerted by the local elites eventually crushed down the whole project. Similar cases happened to Marcos. Although regarded as a martial-law government, Marcos administration heavily relied on landowners' military forces (Richardson, 1975), preventing the reform from going to the next level. Moreover, in order to hinder the process of the reform, private armies were sent to harass the civilians advocating land reforms, neglected by the law enforcement; just like previous attempts, the agrarian reform agencies, such as Central Bank, Philippine National Bank, and DAR, were generally in the hands of the local elites (Benedict J, 1974), obstructing the entire procedure. Besides the political and military dependence on the landlords, the Marcos regime also relied on the landlords' economic revenue. In Marcos' land policy, commercial crops like sugar cane were exempt from the reform, which benefited half of the country's millionaires who were sugar barons (Sionil Jose, 1970); therefore, to evade the reform, landlords could just turn the rice lands into sugar ones. More concessions were made to cater to the landlords: the government revised its earlier retention limit of 7 hectares up to 25, leaving only 16% of all the tenants still included under the program (Benedict J, 1974). Even for the tenants who actually got the certificate for land ownership, the excessively high tax rate and corrupted officials gradually made the peasants unable to pay for the land, which eventually caused land loss and the return of being tenants. This particular situation brought the peasants back to the Kasama system's vicious cycle, where constant indebtedness forced peasants to surrender their lands (FRANCIS J, 1972). In addition, the supporting infrastructure and service were insufficient and incomplete; for example, government loans were so unreliable and slow that the peasants consequently turned back to landlords for a much quicker and reliable loans (Panganiban, 1972). The only beneficiaries of this land reform were the absentee landholders who were willing to convert their lands into significant monetary assets.

Overall, instead of calling this movement a land reform, it is better called a mere option presented to the landowners to either keep the land or sell it for a considerable amount of money. Besides, this reform changed literally nothing of the overall structure of the Philippine agrarian system. In fact, the central authority was like a parasite relying on the local landlords, which prevent them from either eliminating them or controlling them. As a result of the failure of land reform, the industrialization and economic aspects remain stagnant. While South Korea was creating economic miracles after the land reform, the GDP of the contemporary Philippines averaged 5.46% yearly (World Bank, 2020), only half of that in Korea.

## Conclusion

The landlord classes hindered agricultural outputs mainly in two ways as I suspected. Like what happened in colonial Korea. The existence of landlords put on much more burden to the peasants. Not only must the villagers pay taxes to the state, but also they faced the exploitation from the landlords, causing their incentives of production to the lowest. On the other hand, with land reforms came agrarian reform. In order to raise the agricultural productivity, the central government that conducted land reforms always carried out infrastructure projects simultaneously, including irrigation, fertilizer, and pesticides. Local elites were hardly able to provide up-to-date techniques and methods to prompt the agricultural production, incapable and unwilling. Therefore, there was no chance for the peasants to raise their capability in agricultural industry. Without sufficient agricultural outputs as a basis, the industrialization and economic improvement would automatically be an illusion.

From the analysis of the three countries' cases, we can clearly see that without the nation-building of elimination or control of the landlord classes, economic prosperity and political stability could not be insured. The early attempts of Sun Yat-sen and Chen Jitang in the Republic of China neglected the effects of the landlords, and the central government did not have the capacity to resolve this very issue, resulting with a sad fact that Nationalist China continued to suffer from regional instability and economic inflation; however, after the WWII, the

martial-law government of Taiwan, using skillful tactics, successfully removed the obstacle and reached land-to-tillers, bringing back not only agricultural productivity but also industrial capitals from the landlords. Taiwan then became one of the most developed regions in Asia. Japanese colonists in Korea presented us how the absolute authority could incorporate the landlords and make their puppets to achieve the national goals, ending with an efficient bureaucratic system, early industrialization, and economic development; subsequently, Rhee's Korea carried out land reforms that successfully eradicated the absentee landlords, transferred their capitals into industry and education, and improved agricultural outputs, paving the way to one of the most remarkable economic feats---the miracle on the Han River. The Philippines, despite its continuous efforts on land reforms, changed nothing in particular. Highly correlated with the landlord classes, the Philippine government carried out no policies to challenge landlords' monopoly; in contrast, these policies only made the landowners even stronger. With absolutely no authority over the landlords, the Philippines could not catch the chances of the post-war environment to industrialize and improve the economy.

Landlords, not only did they hinder the land reforms, but also, and more importantly, they remained an obstacle to agriculture improvement, without which industrialization and economic prosperity would not be possible. Regional instability resulting from the tenant-landlord conflicts will always be a threat to the nation's political stability. This comparative study on the three countries that shared an extraordinarily similar historic track and post-war environment (martial law, American assistance, and once Japanese colonies) clearly and thoroughly explained the evolution of policies concerning landlord classes and their outcomes in respective countries, which showed that to achieve economic prosperity and political stability, the nation-building of either eliminating the landlords through land reforms or placing absolute control over landlords by powerful central authority has to be a prerequisite.

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