The purpose of this thesis is to produce a deeper understanding of the main motives and actors involved in Taiwan's political transition from authoritarianism to democracy, and to provide answers to the central questions concerning the connection between economic development and democratization, the role played by the ruling Kuomintang elite in bringing about political reform, and the means used by this elite to guarantee its hold on power. These questions are examined from the perspective of theoretical writings on the subject of political transitions, democratization, and political elites.

The main theoretical framework of this study is Samuel P. Huntington's The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century, which represents an integration of the two main approaches to the study of democratic transitions, the structural, and procedural approaches. Using the particular structural approach of modernization theories and testing it in Taiwan's case, this research will question the notion commonly encountered in scholarship on the subject of democratization that economic development has a direct causal connection to democratic transitions. A procedural approach will be then applied to the material in order to examine how democratization was a conscious leadership decision made by the ruling KMT elite, who was able to maintain its authoritarian rule mainly through the politics-economy interlock which it managed to create in Taiwan.

This paper has been structured in four parts. After considering Taiwan's historical development, the first section illustrates the beginning of KMT's authoritarian rule and the party-state's penetration of every aspect of Taiwanese society. The second section explores the different theories of political transition, many of which will be directly applied in the next two sections in order to gain an insight of the nature of Taiwan's democratization. The third part analyzes the nature of the close link between politics and economy, explaining Taiwan's economic miracle not just from a purely economic but also (and especially) from a political perspective. The fourth section examines this paper's main hypothesis that the KMT leadership was the most important causal factor of Taiwan's transition to democracy. This period of political reform will be studied within the framework provided by Huntington's model of "transformation" processes.

Avainsanat-Nyckelord: modernization, political elite, Kuomintang, Taiwan, democratization, economic development, Taiwan, demokratia, taloudellinen kehitys, Taiwan, uudenaikaistuminen, poliittinen eliitti, Taiwan

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Additional information