



**Imelda Marcos' Diplomacy:
The Transformation of the Role of a First Lady**

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Introduction

Imelda Marcos is one of the most well-known Philippine presidential spouses, mostly due to her luxurious lifestyle. However, during her constant international travels, she actually functioned as the foremost diplomat of the Philippines during the Marcos era, regardless of having no formal training or designation in the Foreign Service. Despite all her diplomatic achievements, Imelda is not given much attention in Philippine diplomatic history. Her contributions to Philippine foreign relations are either unknown to many, belittled or ignored. This research sought to address the steps Imelda Romualdez-Marcos took in contributing to the foreign relations of the Republic of the Philippines and in transforming role of the First Lady.

The researchers were inspired by the theory of structuration developed by Anthony Giddens. This framed the study's analysis of Imelda Marcos' role in Philippine Foreign Relations and how she reconstructed the role of the First Lady. Structuration theory has several unique nomenclatures to explain the relationships that the human "agency" has with institutions or "structure". It is unique in a sense because of how he described the delicate association of structure (external forces) and agency (internal forces).

Figure 1.1. Conceptual Framework

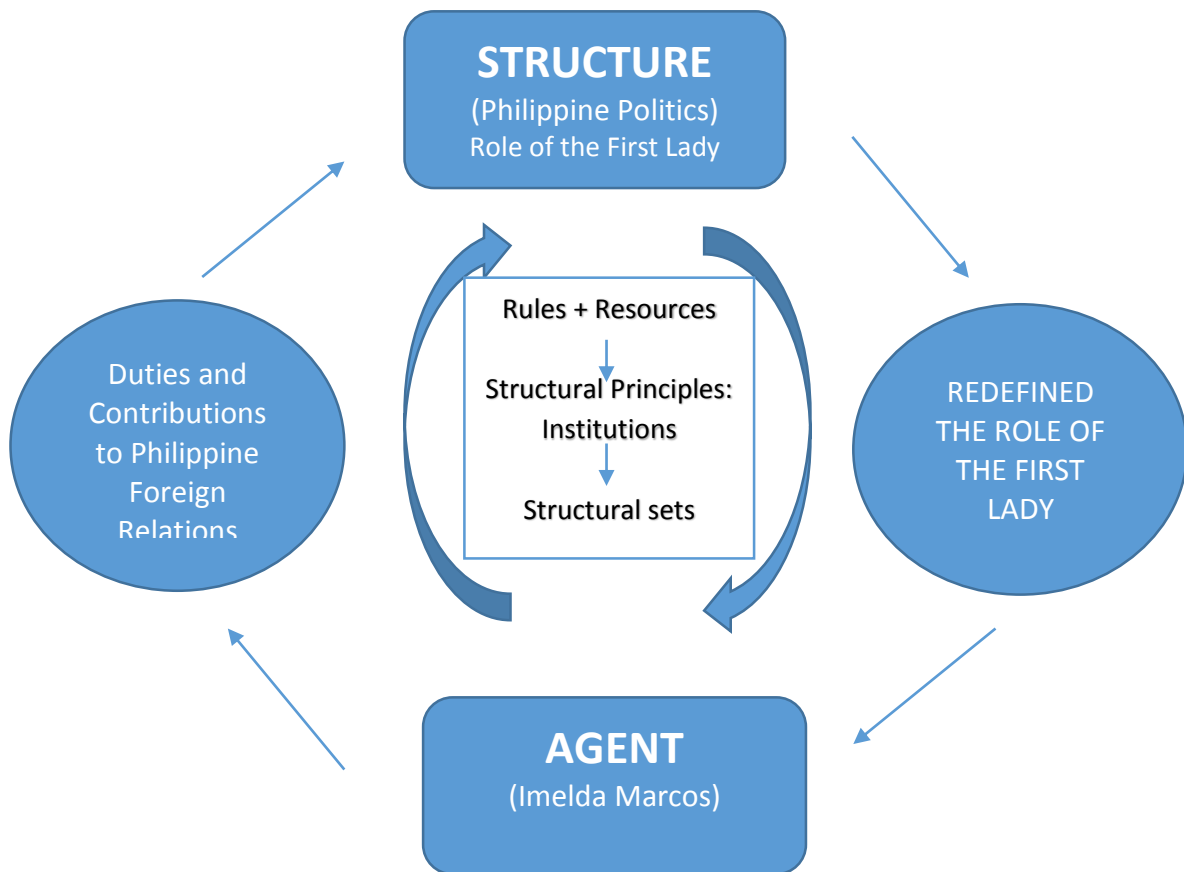


Figure 1.1 illustrates the conceptual framework. The structure pertains to Philippine politics. Philippine politics consists of many roles that are fulfilled by different agents. The role focused on this research paper is the first ladyship of Imelda Marcos. The structure consists of rules and resources which are produced and reproduced over time due to interactions. These rules and resources characterize the roles that the agents have under the structure, and as such they all exist under the structure. The structural principle, institution, encapsulates the embedded practices that lasted the longest in the duree or duration of time-space. Structural sets are bundles and configuration of rules and resources that creates an established form of the structure.

The role of the first lady, being part of the structure, both constrains and enables the agent, Imelda Marcos, to do the practices that make up the structure. In turn, her actions, in particular those of her duties and contributions to Philippine foreign relations, feed back into

the structure. This creates changes in the structure that allow the transformation and enrichment of the role of the first lady, leading to it being redefined. The changes in the agent's practices cause modifications in the rules and resources that lead to subsequent changes in the structural principles, institutions and structural sets. This allows the constant transformation of the role of the first lady to take place.

The researchers utilized a qualitative research design which employed the historical method. The gathered data was divided into primary and secondary sources; the primary consisting of firsthand accounts, newspaper reports written during the Marcos regime eyewitness accounts, interviews, speeches, and compilations and records of Philippine diplomatic activities in the appropriate time period as well as accounts of her activities as First Lady; and secondary including biographies, newspaper articles after the Marcos administration, books written about Imelda Marcos as well as the Marcos regime, writings on foreign policy and bilateral relations of the Philippines before, during and after the Marcos administration and other materials since some actors involved in the study are still alive. Thematic analysis was used to process the gathered data. The researchers were not able to obtain an interview with Imelda Marcos so archival research was utilized to fill in the gaps of the study that were supposed to be answered through the interview.

The Transformation of the Role of the First Lady

The Traditional Definition of A First Lady and Her Role

The term "first lady" originated from the United States, referring to the wife of the incumbent President of the state or to the female relatives of single or widowed presidents assigned to take the role of hostess of the country. The role existed usually by virtue of marriage to the president. The role is ambiguous since there existed no constitutional functions designated to be acted upon by the first lady. No official documents defined the role, its

limitations and its boundaries, thus reflecting the ambiguity of the structure. As a result of having no constitutional functions, she held no public office. Thus, she was not accountable to the people as she was not in the position by election or appointment. She did not get a salary. She was first and foremost a wife, her first duty was to her husband and her children. Second, as the first lady of the state, her primary role was a hostess of the home of the president, catering to private guests – world leaders and foreign representatives – as well as the general public in open-house events.

Figure 2.1 below further explains how Giddens' structuration theory is applied to the data presented in this research. It shows the role of the first lady inside the structure. This describes the elements of the structure that stood out in the gathered data. Philippine politics is the structure. The role of the first lady before Imelda Marcos was a product of production and reproduction of social actions. Structure refers to rules and resources. Rules were inherently transformational. The continuous presence of the first lady in the government but without a government position produced a set of rules that continued to exist across time and space which led to the overall expectations of what a first lady and her role were. The rules were procedures that were expected to be followed by these women. The traditional first lady was the one who ran the household of the president. In Philippine context, she managed the Malacañang. She was firstly the wife of the president and the mother of her children, then a hostess. Her hostess duties were one of the embedded responsibilities that existed in the role for a long period of time. With this, she entertained guests ranging from world leaders to foreign dignitaries.

Another rule was that she was expected to be loyal to the president. Moreover, first ladies were also observed to be supportive of their partners' goals and ambitions. They showed approval of their husband's ambitions and even helped them achieve it. First lady advocacies were also expected during their husband's tenure. People came to the first lady to lobby

advocacies. First lady advocacies were prevalent, but they had to raise their own funds since they held no official post in the government.

If these procedures were not followed, sanctions were imposed on these first ladies. The negative public reaction would have also harmed the president's administration and would have led to dissatisfaction and lack of confidence towards her husband.

Marriage to the president was a resource since she used this to gain support for their advocacies. The intimacy the first lady had to the power made her advocacies possible and put into motion. Moreover, people lobbied advocacies to them since they were close to the president. They also used this to create or adopt advocacies for themselves. Good public reaction could have been the motivation behind considering the lobbied interests of the people. Another resource was her connection with world leaders. With their hostess duties, first ladies were able to meet a lot of foreign dignitaries. Not only that, through this, they were able to meet local leaders and gain connections and friendship with them. These formed acquaintances resulted in funds for their advocacies

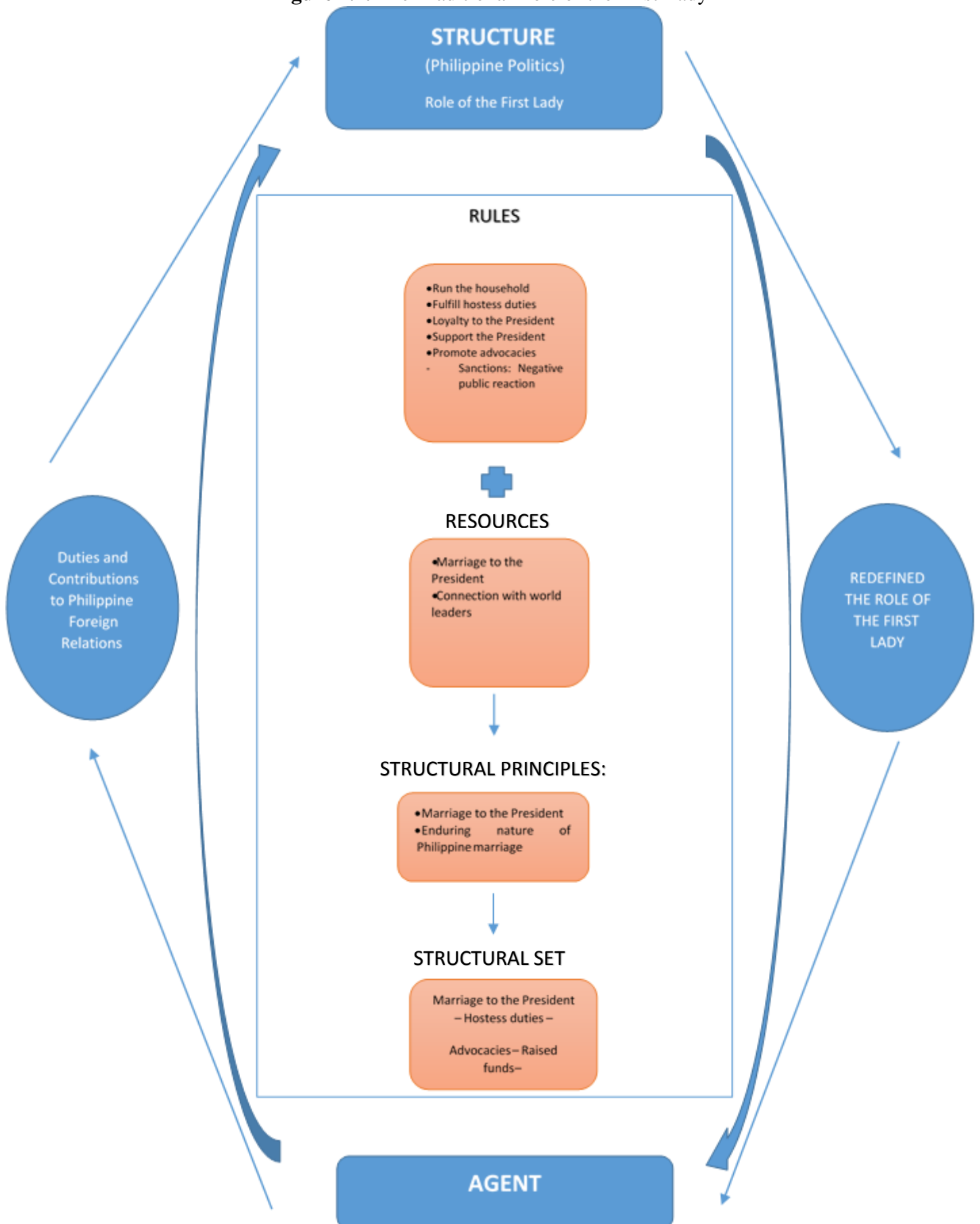
Structural principles are deeply embedded properties implicated in the reproduction of societal totalities. Institutions are practices that have the greatest time-space extension. This means that the institutions present in the structure had long existed and were already firmly fixed in the structure. The continuous *durée* or duration of the institution somehow makes the identity of the structure.

The deeply embedded property that existed in a long-term *durée* in time and space is the marriage to the president. Marriage allowed them to play the role in the first place. Another institution present in the structure was the enduring quality of Filipino marriage. There was no way out of marriage if men undertook extramarital affairs.

Structural sets are bundles and configuration of rules and resources that create an established form of the structure. Institutions – such as marriage to the president – enabled

these first ladies to undertake hostess duties for the government or administration. With these hostess duties, they were able to meet people, their husband's constituents, and these people came to her to lobby their interests or advocacies. Because of this, the first ladies were able to create advocacies that in return gave good public reaction.

Figure 2.1. The Traditional Role of the First Lady



Imelda Marcos' Understanding of the First Lady and Her Role

Imelda Marcos, the former first lady of the Republic of the Philippines during Ferdinand Marcos' administration was a notable woman. Imelda, being an agent within the structure, knew for a fact that the first ladyship was ambiguous, with no limitations and boundaries that explicitly and specifically defined the role. Mrs. Imelda evidently knew that she was not a government employee. In this case, she did not hold any official government seat. Imelda understood that she held no political role in the government. Furthermore, she knew the embedded traditional responsibilities she had when she undertook the role of the first lady. Although she performed the traditional role of the first lady, the role was eventually transformed and more responsibilities were added to the first ladyship.

Transformation of the Role of the First Lady

The role was transformed through two events: Ferdinand's initiative to mold her into a political person that he wanted her to be, and the scandalous Dovie Beams affair of the president himself. Since structures were transformational and she changed something in the structure, she was able to redefine the role and make it something advantageous to her. As rules were malleable through resources and power, the agent – Imelda Marcos – used every means she could get her hands on to further her range of actions.

1. Ferdinand Marcos' Molding of Imelda

Ferdinand Marcos kept steady pressure on Imelda to mold her into the ideal wife that he wanted her to be. He controlled everything concerning his wife. He created a perfect model to be idolized by people. It was because of Ferdinand that she became a political person. In an interview with Quijano de Manila, Imelda Marcos confirmed that she had to learn a lot of things

for Ferdinand Marcos in the areas of economics, foreign affairs, and politics, to achieve a mental rapport with the former president.

The agent was now politicized. Through the influence of Ferdinand Marcos, new rules emerged. Ferdinand imposed rules on her and this was seen during the politicization process. The new rules established were the following: dressing up, staying in a certain weight, and the others already mentioned. If she would not comply, sanctions include negative public reaction and Ferdinand's disapproval. This was a sanction as the data showed that Imelda cared about what Ferdinand thought of her and to also secure her position as his wife. She chose to be useful to him and became his biggest asset in the campaign.

2. Dovie Beams Scandal

She was not at her utmost potential – as a political person – in this stage yet. A more aggressive and demanding Imelda emerged during the occurrence of the Dovie Beams-Ferdinand Marcos scandal. Dovie Beams was an American actress cast in a movie entitled 'Ang Maharlika'. Ferdinand was immediately interested in the blonde and long-legged actress the first time he saw her at the movie's cocktail party. She eventually became his lover. They were able to successfully hide it for two years. Imelda, however, knew about the affair with the American actress through her spies. Imelda Marcos was heartbroken and humiliated as soon as she knew about it.

Sterling Seagrave wrote that some said Imelda Marcos became more aggressive and uncontrollable in the government following the scandal. The President then lost whatever control he once had over her. Moreover, according to Stanley Karnow, one of her friends told him [Karnow] that it was a turning point. He [Ferdinand] could no longer control her, and she went crazy with power and greed. Ferdinand Marcos gave her more power in return for staying with him. Others said the former first lady started building her domain after her husband's relationship with Beams.

Imelda was the aggrieved party. To atone for Ferdinand's marital sins, she extracted from her husband a “hands-off” relationship in which she indulged herself limitlessly – and he made no effort to stop her. A new duty that she had acquired for herself was embarking on different diplomatic visits. Furthermore, she assumed a regal autonomy, acquiring more roles and duties for herself and became a relevant member in political meetings. In 1975, she was made Governor of Metro Manila and Minister of Human Settlements, both positions she demanded from her husband.

With the experiences she gained since marrying Ferdinand, she gained a level of policy and decision-making capabilities. The more she embarked on successful missions, the more value the president put on her, which then led to him giving her everything that she wanted. The actions were motivated by the different rewards she got out of doing diplomatic activities even when undertaking diplomatic missions was not a necessary responsibility of the first lady. These rewards included having more high-profile acquaintances and friends, shopping all over the world, and probably also making a name for herself. These actions were made possible by resources such as money and gifts, as well as power. These motivations were for her to transform the role to acquire more resources and power, since the more she used these, the more she would acquire.

Figure 2.2. shows the transformed role of the first lady. As mentioned earlier, the structure was Philippine politics. Under Philippine politics are the roles to be fulfilled to make up the entirety of it. The first ladyship existed inside the structure because of the fact that the agent was dragged into Philippine politics when her husband won the presidency. However, this did not mean that she had to perform politics. Politics in this study is defined as those activities that could influence the policies of the government. The first ladyship was supposed to be an apolitical role inside a political structure. The politicization of the role was through

the two events discussed above – Ferdinand’ s molding of Imelda and the Dovie Beams scandal.

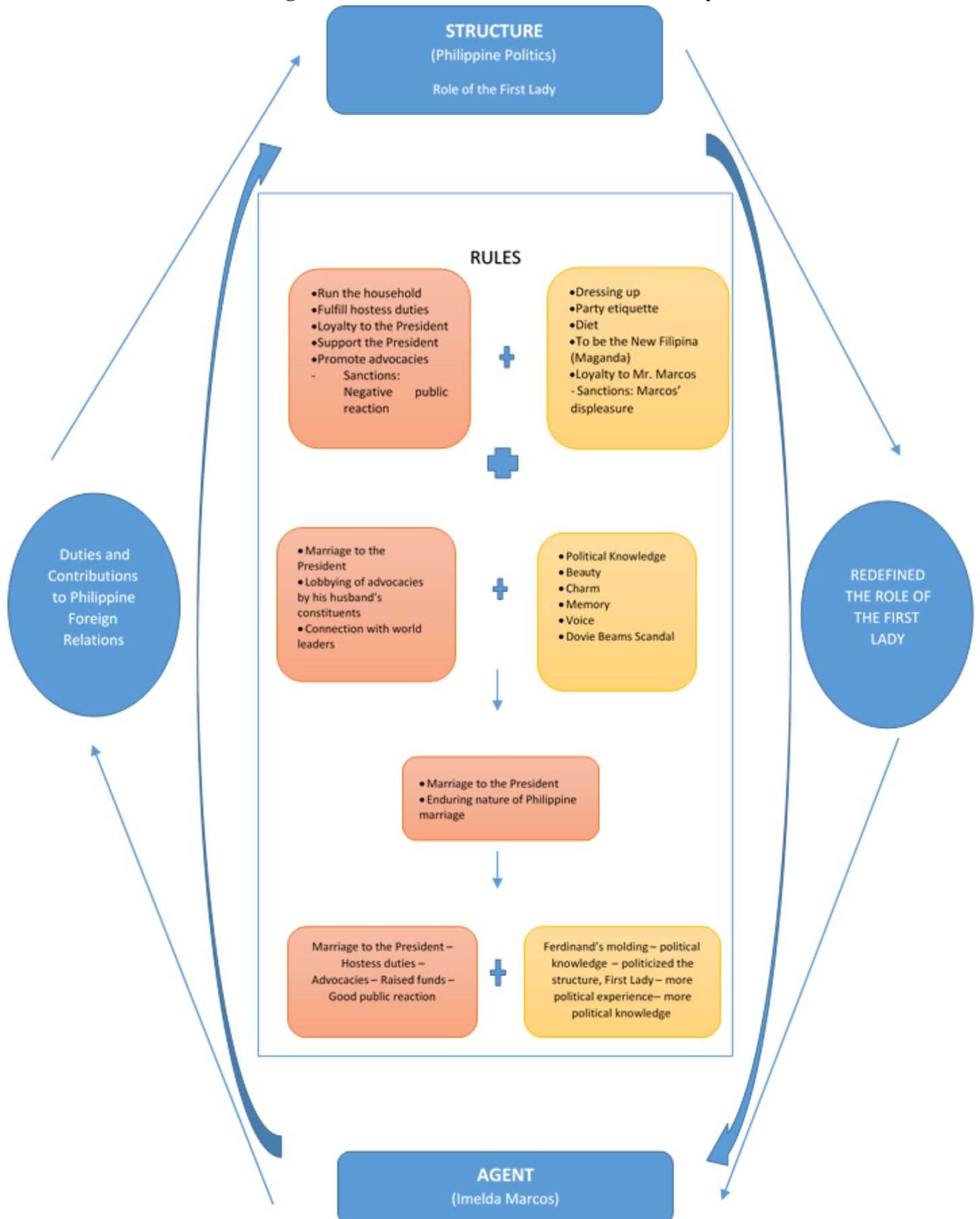
Ferdinand’ s molding of Imelda led to the politicization of the agent. The rules consisted mainly of what Ferdinand imposed on her. She was expected to dress up in a way that impressed the people around her. Moreover, she was taught how to present herself in parties and how to create a dramatic impact on the audience. Imelda Marcos was the Maganda of the partnership Malakas at Maganda. She was expected to carry herself in a manner wherein she represented a proper Filipina. Stemming out from the Malakas at Maganda, she was expected to be loyal to the President. However, it had detrimental effect on the president’ s administration. One example was negative feedback from the media. It also had a negative effect on their marriage, giving her issues and the need to securitize her position as his wife and first lady.

The resources presented are her marriage to the president, political knowledge, beauty, charm, memory, and the scandal. Resources are divided into two: allocative and authoritative. Allocative resources allow agents to control material objects, while authoritative resources allow agents to control people. All of resources are authoritative. Her marriage to the president is seen as a resource because this was the means wherein she was able to create advocacies and other projects during his administration. With Ferdinand Marcos’ initiative to mold Imelda, she gained political knowledge that was evident during the campaign period during 1965 and 1969 elections. She used her beauty, charm, voice, and excellent memory to coax the people into voting for her husband. This was the start of her politicizing herself, then eventually the role. On her husband’ s behalf, she even pursued other politicians to persuade them into teaming up with Ferdinand in the elections. The Dovie Beams scandal was also her resource since she used this opportunity to demand more roles and assert the politicization of the first lady, which led to the creation of the structure, the first lady diplomat.

The institution in the transformed structure is still the marriage to the president and the enduring quality of traditional marriage, which was discussed earlier. Imelda was well-aware about Marcos' affairs even before Dovie Beams. Marcos had a common law wife before her. She knew about it after they already consummated their marriage. Pedrosa said that Imelda regarded herself as a damaged good already which was why she cannot just leave Marcos. The enduring quality of Filipino marriage is very evident in here.

As rules and resources are transformed by agents into general structural principles - marriage to Marcos and his approval and consent - and structural sets - "Ferdinand's molding - political knowledge - politicized the structure, first lady - more political experience - more political knowledge. Through Ferdinand's molding of Imelda, she gained political knowledge that politicized the role of the first lady. With the continuous use of the structure, she gained more political experience, which in turn provided more political education to the agent.

Figure 2.2. The Transformed Role of the First Lady



There were similarities in the traditional definitions and Imelda's understanding of the first lady and her role. She was politicized with Marcos' molding of her and when her husband won the presidency, she then politicized the role of the first lady. She acquired more responsibilities for herself when the Dovie Beams scandal broke out. With this, she began being more vocal and assertive with what she wanted and eventually became the most important Philippine representative during the Marcos administration. She then had more diplomatic missions, which influenced Philippine foreign relations in the later years. Because of the enhanced role, the role was enriched. More rules were imposed, more resources were used, and more motivations were prompted.

Imelda Marcos' Role in Philippine Foreign Relations

The Start of Imelda's Diplomatic Career

Imelda's diplomatic career was the next step in her political activities as a first lady. This was another avenue to increase her involvement in Philippine politics, and it occurred due to three circumstances. The first was her husband's, Ferdinand Marcos', molding of her. The political awareness that her husband had inculcated in her had allowed her to gain more from the diplomatic trips that the Philippine president had taken abroad, of which he had brought his wife with him. Before Imelda's first official trip as a diplomat of the Philippines, she and her husband had gone on a tour of South-East Asia, visited the US and attended the Australian PM's funeral in Canberra. Her skill in politics, awakened by her husband and practiced in the Presidential campaign and in her duties as the first lady, was now honed in the context of international relations and diplomacy.

A pivotal event in Imelda's becoming a diplomat was the Dovie Beams scandal. This incident changed the power relations between the couple. The personal embarrassment to the first lady had given her leverage against her husband. As the position of the first lady is derived

from her husband's presidency, there is an inherent imbalance in the power relations between the two positions. Furthermore, the limits of the first lady role are crafted by her and her husband. This imbalance in power was still true in the relations between the agent and Ferdinand Marcos. Imelda's mind and skill for politics were manifestations of this imbalance, as it was Ferdinand who had taught them to her. He had wanted a first lady who could be his accomplice in running the country, and so he educated her enough that she would be able to do so, thereby also allowing her to gather political power. This, however, backfired on him after the scandal broke out. Imelda's embarrassment in front of the whole nation was astronomical, and Ferdinand knew that he had to appease her. In this way, the incident and the personal embarrassment it had caused had become a resource for Imelda; it allowed her to give demands to her husband, and one of those was to become a diplomat of the Philippines. Allegedly, Imelda's desire to become not merely a way to get back at her husband. According to the author Carmen Pedrosa, Imelda had been snubbed by the local aristocratic society of women in Manila; a transgression that Imelda never forgot. She may have sought the diplomatic position in order to find a 'better,' more international set of friends than the women who ignored her. This analysis is notable as it matches a component of the Structuration theory called the unconscious dimension. Imelda's decision to take up diplomatic duties was an effect of her unrealized need to make up for the rejection that she had experienced. Her experiences of rejection were sources of ontological insecurity for Imelda. Taking up diplomatic duties, then, were a source of ontological security for her.

In any case, Imelda's decision to become a diplomat had fortuitous timing. At the time the Philippines was experiencing domestic unrest, and President Marcos was unable to leave the country in order to focus on the troubles at home. At the same time, the international arena was in the middle of the Cold War, and positioning the Philippines at that time was tricky. President Marcos had recognized of the possible dangers a staunch US-ally being in close

geographical proximity to a Communist country, the Republic of China. As such, the president had acknowledged the need for a reorientation of the Philippines' foreign policy to be less US-focused and cultivate friendships with other countries – even Communist nations. Since Ferdinand Marcos could not do it himself, he needed someone he could trust with enough political skill to navigate delicate international politics while being socially gracious enough to create friendships with countries that were, in the past, considered as the enemy. He found that person in his wife, Imelda.

Imelda's Role in Philippine Foreign Relations

The success of Imelda's first official diplomatic mission to the Soviet Union in 1972 set a precedent and sent her to more Communist countries. Her most important diplomatic missions were ones that fostered relations between the Philippines and other Communist states. She would go on to undertake more than 40 diplomatic trips to 16 countries in her tenure as first lady, twice as many trips as her husband.

During her trips abroad, her status as a diplomat was recognized and addressed using titles such as 'Her Excellency' in Cuba. In China, she was called "an ambassador extraordinary and envoy Plenipotentiary," and also as the "personal representative of President Marcos." This indicates the depth of the trust accorded to her as an actor – in the Structuration theory sense of the word – by the Chinese diplomatic team. She was also cited as "H.E. the First Lady Madame Imelda Romualdez-Marcos," showing that she was recognized for both positions and that the two roles were not found to be incompatible. The acknowledgment would have signaled to Imelda that she was a capable diplomat, and this acknowledged capability would have fed back to the role, thereby cementing the continuance of her diplomatic activities. With this, the structure of the First Lady has now been modified, with additional practices enriching the structure.

Imelda Marcos had two roles in the Philippines' foreign relations, the first of which was as a hostess and an extension of her traditional first lady duties. In this, she would have functioned as how previous first ladies did – a hostess for foreign dignitaries coming into the country. She was in charge of making their stay comfortable in the hopes of increasing their favorable impression of the country and perhaps inculcate a personal friendship with these dignitaries. Another extension of her first lady duties was to accompany her husband on state visits abroad. She would be his escort as he promoted Philippines' relations in foreign trips.

Imelda's second role in Philippine Foreign Relations was as her husband's envoy and as a foreign relations manager for the Philippines. In this aspect, the actor went beyond what previous first ladies were able to do. Instead of just being a hostess and an escort, she was able to function as her husband's emissary abroad. It is interesting to note that Imelda did not see herself as merely her husband's representative; rather, she was representing the Philippine government as a whole. Imelda was also effective as a foreign relations manager of the Philippines. Imelda's beauty and sophistication generated much attention in the places she visited, which boosted the country's reputation and recognition.

Among Imelda's diplomatic missions, a few patterns are evident. For one, she was the diplomat sent to deal with Communist states. President Marcos reoriented Philippine foreign policy to enable the opening of relations with them as a measure to increase the Philippine's geopolitical security. Creating ties with such states was even more delicate for such a US-oriented country as the Philippines, and Imelda succeeded in doing so. Another pattern was the fact that Imelda was the one who met with other world leaders. This is traditionally the purview of her husband. It is a novel aspect of the new first lady-diplomat role and is an excellent supplement to her traditional first lady role. The friendships and acquaintances that she made while hosting foreign dignitaries or while she accompanied her husband could be deepened through her diplomatic trips, to the benefit of the Philippines' foreign relations.

All of the high-profile missions given to the actor showed the trust accorded to her as a diplomat. It then leads us to the question of why exactly she was entrusted with so much. According to Isabelo Crisostomo, the reorientation of the Philippines' foreign policy would have been hard to enact for other diplomats at the time due them being so used to working with the US and treating the Communists as the enemy. Someone then who did not have the ingrained biases was needed, and Imelda fulfilled that need. Furthermore, her status as a first lady supplemented her effectiveness as a diplomat, as she had an easier time gaining access to other heads of state. Imelda had also implied that her particular sensitivity to people, possibly the result of years of honing her social skills, allowed her to function well as a diplomat. Lastly, Imelda had stated that since she was seen as merely relating her husband's position to other foreign leaders, he would not be overly implicated if she said something wrong. Being a wife and a woman, she seemed to have been given different treatment as compared to male diplomats. Anything she said could have been easily recanted by her husband, which worked to the couples' favor.

Overall, Imelda seemed to be regarded as a capable diplomat. Comments from local and international media seemed to be favorable to the actor. Quotes from the agent indicate that she aware of her potency, and this awareness would have fed back into her practices as first lady and diplomat and thus changing the structure. Another component to her changing the practices making up the structure of the first lady is her diplomatic style, which was based on her resources.

Imelda's diplomatic style relied a lot on her beauty and charm. With the attention that dignitaries and the media accorded her physical looks, Imelda became aware that her beauty was as useful a tool in international politics as it was in the Philippines. She sought to highlight her beauty and dressed accordingly; her wardrobe was a fundamental part of her diplomatic style. She paired her beauty with potent personal charm. Effusive with praise and always poised,

she tried to ensure that her hosts' impression of her – and by consequence that of the Philippines – was favorable. It helped that Imelda had an excellent memory. Apparently, upon preparing for a trip, rather than reading, she would call experts to give her oral reports on the destination. She supplemented these by keenly observing the local practices upon arriving and emulating them. She also paid indirect compliments to her hosts by observing their innovations and copying them in the Philippines. Her last resource was her political awareness. Cultivated in her by her husband, this gave her the ability to handle international politics.

The First Lady Diplomat Role

Figure 3.1 depicts the role of the first lady diplomat. The role of the first lady changed due to the modifications in the practices that the agent, Imelda Marcos, did under the role. The role of the traditional first lady was modified and politicized due to the personal qualities and change in practices of the new first lady. After the agent had started her diplomatic missions, the role was once again transformed, creating new rules for the role with much of the same resources.

The intersection of the three events, her husband's molding of her, the Dovie Beams scandal and the increasing domestic problem in the Philippines, opened up an opportunity for the agent to change her role in structure. The Dovie Beams affair, the leakage of the news and the subsequent scandal hugely embarrassed and hurt Imelda as the agent. It made her insecure and became her motivation to garner more power to make up for that lack of security. She gained the resource of his consent, especially for the position of a diplomat of the Philippines.

This change in the practices – in truth an addition to the variety of practices – that Imelda did under the limits of the first lady role enriched it. It resulted mainly from a change in the encounters that Imelda experienced and the changes in the rules that made up those encounters. The resources that led to her politicization of the role remained mostly the same.

The routinized encounters that expanded the role of the first lady were those of her diplomatic missions abroad. Undertaking more than 40 missions in a 9-year period made her an experienced agent of the first lady diplomat role.

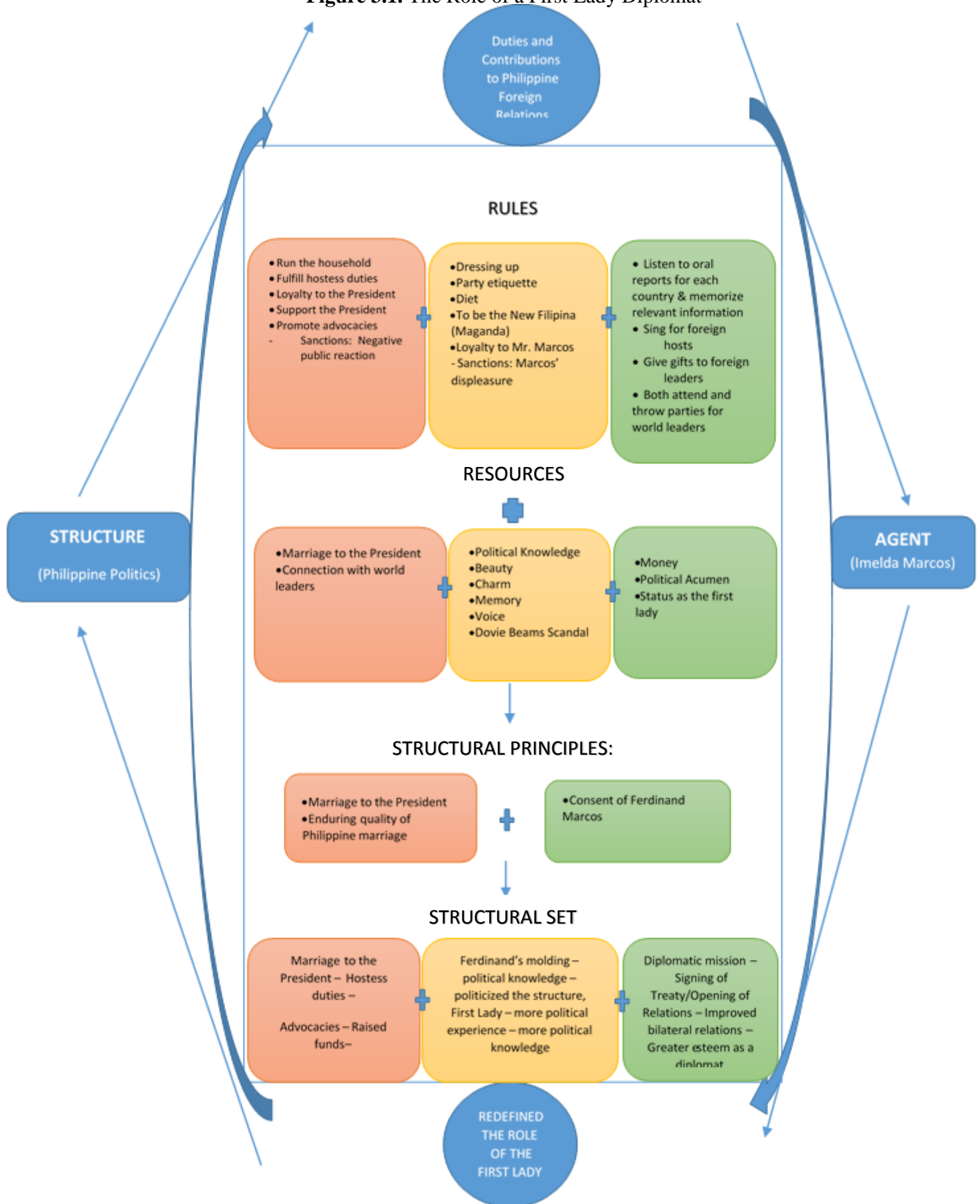
The new, additional rules of the first lady diplomat role deal mainly with the procedures the agent followed when undertaking a mission abroad. The first involves her preparations, which involved making use of her fantastic memory to remember the oral reports on her mission. Upon reaching the destination, she dressed to highlight her beauty and charmed those she met to soften their perception and response to her. She also made use of singing voice, a clear soprano. Gift-giving, same as in local politics, was something she also put to use in her diplomatic missions. Lastly, as an overlap with her traditional first lady duties, she used her parties to socialize with the foreign leaders she had gotten to know. Evidently, many of the rules that helped turn the role political were also used in the international arena and allowed the inclusion of diplomatic practices into the structure.

Imelda's resources in local politics were still of use in the international arena. The first is her sharp memory. This authoritative resource allowed to effectively remember and adapt to a particular country's traits. Her charm, beauty, and voice were authoritative resources that enabled her to influence the way people responded to her. This was a potent weapon in her diplomatic style, which had a heavy emphasis on personal interaction. There is also the money she gained from being the wife of Ferdinand Marcos, an allocative resource that enabled her to exercise diplomacy. Her status as a first lady was both an authoritative and allocative resource. Authoritative, as it gave her easy access to the higher levels of another country's political hierarchy, and allocative in giving her the means to undertake those negotiations through state provisions, such as funds and staff. Last is her political acumen, refined during her time as a first lady. It is then evident that the first lady-diplomat role is causing greater changes in the agent by increasing her political knowledge, just as the agent is changing the role. The

politicization of the role and its enrichment with diplomatic practice fed into each other. The new encounters and experiences coming from her diplomatic practices increased the agent's political education, thereby maintaining and perhaps even increasing the president's trust in our agent as both as a political and diplomatic actor. This occurs due to the inherent reflexivity of the actor; the new experiences add to the stocks of knowledge that affect her actions on a day-to-day basis.

The institutions of the first lady diplomat role are the marriage to the president and the consent from Ferdinand Marcos. The consent was also an institution as it was necessary for Imelda's undertaking of diplomatic activities. It allowed the First Lady to undertake more practices than what is traditionally allowed. The consent from Ferdinand would have created a structural set that allowed the recursive practices that changed the role to happen. From the consent, Imelda would have been sent to various diplomatic missions on behalf of the Philippine government. Her diplomatic success would have proven her ability. It would have then fed into the role, allowing Imelda to proceed with more diplomatic trips. It would also have removed the first lady role's sanctions – negative public reaction – from surfacing, as people would have gotten used to a political first lady as they see that it worked. The continued success of her missions ensures the recursive quality of the diplomatic practices that modified the politicized role into the first lady diplomat role. With this, we see how the role and its practices also create conditions that allow the recursive quality of the practices.

Figure 3.1. The Role of a First Lady Diplomat



Imelda, whose personality and inclinations differed greatly from her precedents, responded to the challenges and opportunities unique to her circumstances as first lady. This was a fortunate event for the Philippines, considering the breadth of her contributions and the role she played in the country's foreign relations. The uniqueness of her actions as compared to her precedents led to the enrichment of the first lady role with diplomatic activities.

Imelda Marcos' Contribution to Philippine Foreign Relations

PH-Moscow relations

Philippine's status as an ally of the US brought with it the risk of getting caught in the middle if an actual armed conflict had broken out between the two powers. Furthermore, opening relations with communist states tied in nicely with his aim of crafting a foreign policy that was independent of US influence. Creating relationships with eastern powers balanced the power relations the Philippines had with the two power blocs. This was the national interest of the Philippines.

With this changing global situation, Ferdinand needed someone who was capable of undertaking important diplomatic missions. This is where Imelda's agency comes in. Though Ferdinand was the one who redefined the Philippines' foreign policy, Imelda Marcos was the one who executed it. Imelda was sent to open relations with these powerful states. Her first solo diplomatic visit was to the United Soviet Socialist Republic on June 1, 1972, wherein she came under the guise of a cultural visit. This led to the opening of relations between the two countries. Mrs. Marcos went to Moscow city and was received by Mayor Vladimir Feodorovich. They deliberated on common problems and interests regarding City Administration and Mrs. Marcos, showed her agency through the resource of her position as chairman of the RP-USSR friendship society. Her motivation in this visit was to compare Manila to another city and see what information or inspiration she could get from this. Not only did she use her own

motivation in this visit, but she also held cultural talks to promote the Philippines, all through her capacity as the chairman of the PH-USSR society.

On another visit to Moscow on March 14 to 19, 1972, Imelda was on a special mission to discuss the establishment of diplomatic trade and cultural relations upon invitation of the presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet. The Philippines and the USSR formally established diplomatic relations during a state visit to the USSR by both the President and Mrs. Ferdinand E. Marcos from 31 May to 7 June 1976. On June 2, 1976, the Joint Communiqué on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations was signed. Imelda's visit to Moscow in 1972 as an invited representative of the Philippine Government allowed Imelda to show her agency as she was able to discuss diplomatic trade and cultural relations with the Soviet premier through her role as a first lady diplomat. Imelda's initial visit was the starting point of opening relations with the USSR. During another meeting with the Soviet Premier in 1978, Imelda had talked with her host for more than two hours and claimed to have strengthened the relationship between the Philippines and Russia. Imelda made use of Communication skills as her resource to strengthen the relationship between the Philippines and USSR. Imelda's communication skills allowed her to influence the head of Russia into having a favorable impression of the Philippines. With communication skills, agents can interact with each other and share ideas. This can be considered a resource as it was a means for Imelda to assert her power and influence leaders into making decisions. Also, by using this resource, she was able to engage in a longer discussion with the Soviet Premier, gaining a stronger relationship with the USSR.

Ties with the US did not stop the Philippines from progressing with relations with Moscow. Although the U.S saw communism as a threat and were not too keen on the Philippines' reaching out to a communist country, the Philippines pushed through with strengthening relations with Russia. It may have been that Ferdinand had chosen to send Imelda

for this express purpose; as a first lady, Imelda was not in a political position in the eyes of the American politicians.

First ladies are apolitical, and the Philippine first lady position would have been the same if Imelda had not politicized it. As such, her visit to the USSR had less political overtones than if a member of the cabinet or Ferdinand himself had gone. Imelda's visits were ignored and given less importance. It became an asset for the Philippines as she was able to covertly form relations with the communist giant, and thus the Philippines was able to balance its relations with the Soviet Union and the United States. The USSR relationship was also beneficial in terms of the assistance it gave to the Philippines. Aside from this, the Soviet card was a useful one for the Marcos government to show that the Philippines was still an independent country.

In her 1982 visit to the USSR, Imelda spent two hours with Foreign Minister Andrew Gromyko, in addition to meetings with other members of the politburo, signing trade, scientific, and cultural agreements. These meetings allowed her to strengthen PH-Soviet relations through the signing of agreements, while at the same time bringing to the Philippines the systems and infrastructure that she had seen and taken a liking to abroad. In Imelda's discursive consciousness, she knew that she was going to the USSR to put into play the new track of foreign relations that her husband had wanted to enforce. She knew that by interacting with Soviet leaders, she would be able to establish, then strengthen relations with the USSR. This would then allow her to execute Ferdinand's wish to balance powers, further securing the Philippines. Without Imelda as his envoy and diplomat, Ferdinand would not have been able to carry out this new foreign policy, as she was the agent who had put all the pieces into place. Relations with the USSR continues even when the USSR was dissolved on December 26, 1991, and the Russian Federation took over, the Philippine government sent in its formal recognition of the new nation state two days later on December 28, 1991.

PH-China relations

Imelda also went on to open relations with China, a great communist power in East Asia. China had recently come out from a long period of isolation, which gave the Philippines a chance to establish bilateral relations. The actor – Imelda Marcos – served as a component that enabled the creation of China-PH relations. On an 8-day visit to Beijing, from September 20 – 29, in 1974, Mrs. Marcos met with Chairman Mao, Premier Chou En Lai and Vice-Chairman and Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping of China. This mission was created to acquire increased cooperation from China. China warmly welcomed Imelda and emphasized the significance of her visit to Philippine-China relations. Her audience with Chairman Mao paved the way for the exchange of diplomatic relations between the Philippines and the People's Republic of China. Following Imelda's meeting with Chairman Mao, diplomatic relations were formally established with President Marcos's state visit on June 9, 1975. Her negotiation of a preliminary trade agreement came with the resulting establishment of formal relations and steady supply of oil to the Philippines in return for its purchase of major Philippine export like copper, coconut products, and sugar.

Philippine's geographic closeness to the Communist giant – China – was a liability to the Philippines. In Imelda's discursive consciousness, she had been able to rationalize her conduct of creating of ties with China with the enhancement of the security of the Philippines. Imelda visited China under the premise that she would discuss relations, but had in mind the security benefit this visit would give the Philippines. Creating ties with China also distanced the Philippines from the sphere of influence of the United States and rendered it a more neutral entity in the international arena. The promotion of friendship with the Communist giant would lessen the risk of an attack if an actual physical confrontation between the US and communist states had broken out.

Having a first lady diplomat go to China was a way for the Philippines to play safe. Also, her being the first lady made her reception different; while other diplomats would have had to wait to negotiate for access to the top levels of the Chinese political hierarchy, Imelda was able to immediately meet with them. There was a softer approach to Imelda which perhaps stemmed from the patriarchal quality of Chinese society. Imelda was given priority over other heads of states such as Africa, and that she had been entertained when the Chairman of China had been limiting audience with heads of state. This shows China's recognition of the importance of relations with its Asian neighbor. It also highlights the difference in treatment of other heads of states compared to Imelda.

What made this visit an exception from other contributions is that Imelda had opened up relations with a country that had kept itself closed for so long. She went to a country with which the Philippines had no diplomatic relations and having the full intention of deliberating bilateral relations between countries got the end result of signed agreements. There are some acts that cannot occur unless the agent intends them. Had Imelda not gone to discuss bilateral relations, relations with China would not have been established. Also, with Imelda's visit to Beijing, President Marcos' "increasing our options" policy was carried out. She was able to reach out to a communist neighbor, which came as beneficial to the Philippines' security and foreign relations.

Tripoli Agreement

The indigenous Muslim population – the Moro – and the Government of the Republic of the Philippines had engaged in armed conflict since 1972. The creation of the MNLF was a reflex against the perceived danger posed by the declaration of Martial law. The government turned to peace negotiations, specifically the creation of the Tripoli agreement. Imelda's involvement in the prior negotiations led to the Tripoli agreements existence. With her

capabilities and own diplomatic style, she was able to stop the shipment of arms to the Moros and reduced the level of conflict with an agreement between the Philippine government and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). Besides from this, Imelda also secured relations with Libya, a country that supported and sympathized the cause of the MNLF.

The conflict in the Philippines had started getting international attention, specifically from Islamic states in the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) which pressured the Philippines into resolving the issue. In the January 1974 Islamic conference in Kuala Lumpur, the Philippine government was urged to meet with the leader of the MNLF – Nur Misuari – to negotiate terms and arrive at a peaceful solution for the Moro-Philippines government conflict. This, however, was not successful Misuari had wanted a public declaration agreeing to the creation of an autonomous region with a separate government and army as a condition for the success of the talks. Misuari's demands could not easily be met by the Philippine government.

Imelda played an important role in the peace process. In March of 1975, she met with a delegation of Islamic States. Here, she conferred about attempts at making peace with the Moros of the Philippines. The Marcos government considered granting the Moros autonomy, though the Philippines needed a ceasefire to do such. Since Libya had been providing the weapons that made it possible for the MNLF to have its military capability, it was imperative that the Marcos government negotiate with the Libyan government to stop its supplying of arms. Imelda visited Libya from November 14-18, 1976, to do such. She negotiated with President Gaddafi by pleading the cause of national peace, getting him to visit Philippines, and quit supplying arms to Moros. Although she did not yet gain a signed agreement, she had gotten President Gaddafi's cooperation in halting the shipment of arms to the MNLF. Not only did she get promises from Gaddafi, but this meeting also gained her a talk on bilateral relations. By being able to intervene in such an important process, she was able to gain more power as a first lady diplomat.

On November 17, 1976, diplomatic relations were established and a general agreement for economic, technical and scientific cooperation was signed. This was also followed by a signed agreement on cultural relations on November 19, 1976. Imelda's capability of being an effective agent eventually led to the signing of the Tripoli Agreement which was finally signed on December 23, 1976, by MNLF chair Nur Misuari and Defense Undersecretary Carmelo Barbero - a month after Imelda Marcos's visit to Gaddafi. Had Imelda not intervened in stopping the shipping of arms to the Philippines by conferring with President Gaddafi, the Tripoli Agreement would not have come into being. The Tripoli Agreement ended the bitter war between the MNLF and the Philippine government. It gave the Moros autonomy, and the Philippine government the peace that it had been negotiating for so long.

Conclusion

Imelda's uniqueness as first lady that was also a political actor allowed her to transform the role by initially politicizing it and later by enriching it with diplomatic activities. The use of the Structuration Theory shed light on the role of the first lady in the structure of Philippine politics and the modifications brought to the role by an actor incredibly different to her predecessors. The researchers were able to show how Imelda Marcos's practices transformed the role, what her role in Philippine foreign relations was, and what contributions she brought as a first lady diplomat. The use of structuration in International Relations (IR) studies gives a new importance to the influence of the individual on the foreign relations. Looking at the contribution of Imelda Marcos in foreign relations gave us a new perspective that is very much different than the usual state-centric view of foreign relations.