A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE CHALLENGES AND DRIVERS OF ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION IN THE PHILIPPINES (2000-2025)
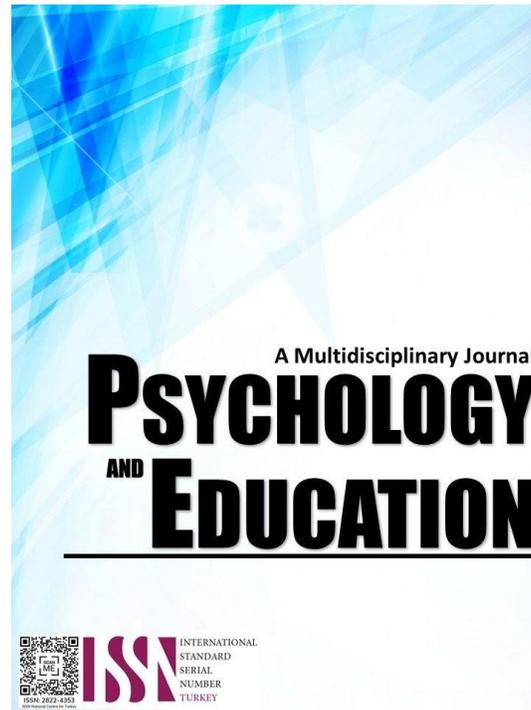
A Systematic Literature Review on the Challenges and Drivers of Economic Transformation in the Philippines (2000-2025)

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Abstract

Digital transformation and structural change are reshaping pathways to inclusive and sustainable growth in the Philippines, yet the country's shift from a services-dominated economy to diversified, higher-productivity activities remains incomplete and spatially uneven. This systematic literature review synthesizes studies from 2000 to 2025 across economics, development studies, and policy analysis to map the drivers, mechanisms, and outcomes of economic transformation. The central finding is that while digitalization and institutional reforms have emerged as critical accelerators of productivity, resilience, and market access, their uneven adoption and weak manufacturing linkages continue to constrain inclusive transformation. By employing a systematic literature review, this study addresses the fragmentation of existing scholarship, integrating quantitative macro- and micro-evidence with qualitative case research to highlight common drivers, underexplored themes such as regional disparities and informality, and methodological gaps. The review recommends place-sensitive IPI (institutions, policy, investment) packages, strengthened digital infrastructure and skills programs, safety nets for transition losers, and greater data openness to support policy design that balances productivity, equity, and sustainability.

Keywords: *economic transformation, digital transformation, Philippines, structural change, institutions, innovation, regional disparities, systematic review*

Introduction

Economic transition is the process by which economies shift from an agricultural to an industrial and service-based economy. In the Philippines, this has been an uneven and marked evolution, punctuated by lingering structural problems. The Philippines has experienced sustained growth over the last few decades; however, the country's shift to a diversified, industrialized economy has yet to be fully realized, with services as the dominant sector in terms of output and employment (Custodio & Sombilla, 2025).

Since the 2000s, the Philippines has implemented measures to enhance competitiveness, improve infrastructure development, and attract foreign investment (Medina, 2023). These include fiscal restructuring, trade liberalization, and industrial upgrading. Despite these initiatives, the Philippines continues to face challenges in achieving inclusive growth, including addressing regional disparities and low manufacturing growth rates (Business World, 2025).

Recent scholarship has examined the structural transformation of the Philippines in the context of technological change and globalization. Lanzona (2022) argues that the adoption of technology has led to productivity gains in some industries, but not in general industrial development. Pelkmans-Balaoing and Mendoza (2024) also note that the growth of the services sector has been rapid, but industrial upgrading has been sluggish, leaving the economy vulnerable to external shocks.

Political compact and institutional configuration equally shape economic change in the Philippines. Felipe et al. (2023) emphasize that rents and pacts in the political economy have influenced the pace, direction, and extent of structural change. This approach emphasizes the role of governance and institutions in promoting lasting change, rather than focusing solely on economic or technical considerations.

The literature frequently highlights innovation, digitalization, and human capital as core drivers of change, suggesting that science, technology, and innovation are key drivers of resilience and competitiveness. However, although these themes are beginning to command widespread attention, it is not yet clear how they interact with conventional drivers of change, such as industrial policy, trade, and labor market forces.

While there is an increasing number of publications and synthetic reviews discussing the economic transformation of the Philippines across the literature, there are still very few. The existing studies are scattered, pointing to industrial upgrading on the one hand, policy reform on the other, and by political economy considerations on yet another hand. This fragmentation makes it challenging to compare the transformation trajectories across studies and to identify commonalities, discrepancies, and potential areas for future research.

This paper fills this gap by conducting a systematic review of the literature on economic transformation in the Philippines, with a primary focus on the period from 2000 to 2025. Combining studies from economics, political science, and development studies, it provides an integrated account of the country's transformation into a middle-income state. The central argument advanced here is that while digitalization and institutional reforms have emerged as critical accelerators of productivity and resilience, their uneven adoption and weak manufacturing linkages continue to constrain inclusive transformation. A systematic literature review is the necessary methodology to address the fragmentation of existing scholarship, as it enables the transparent synthesis of diverse findings, highlights underexplored themes such as regional disparities and informality, and identifies standard drivers and mechanisms that can inform

coherent, evidence-based policy design for sustainable and equitable growth.

Literature Review

To ensure methodological alignment with the systematic literature review approach, this section synthesizes findings from a curated set of 25 peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and institutional reports published between 2010 and 2025. These were identified through structured searches in Google Scholar, Philippine E-Journals, Ateneo de Manila University Press, University of the Philippines publications, and Asian Development Bank (ADB) reports. This scope provides a balanced mix of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method studies, forming the basis for the thematic synthesis that follows.

Research on the Philippine economy has observed a slow but uneven structural transformation in the last two decades. Elloso (2025) employed input–output analysis to demonstrate how intersectoral linkages evolved from 2006 to 2018, highlighting the industries that played a crucial role in driving growth and the weak backward linkage in manufacturing. Consistent with this, Felipe et al. (2023) argue that the direction of economic transformation is driven by political settlements and rent distribution, suggesting that institutional arrangements play an equally important role as sectoral dynamics.

The upgrading of industries remains a key theme in the literature. Hansl (2017) also highlights the lack of labor-absorptive opportunities in the 1980s-90s, noting that productivity, driven by technological change, led to improved performance across sectors, though not through industrialization, resulting in a service-dependent economy. Meanwhile, Pelkmans-Balaoing and Mendoza (2024) argue that re-industrialization is a necessary condition for achieving higher-end diversification and strengthening resilience against external shocks.

On the other hand, policy-focused studies emphasize the importance of reform in driving transformation. The Importance of Trade and Industrial Policy, in reference to the Philippines' Institute Developmental Studies Research Agenda (2020–2025), which identifies industrial policy, trade liberalization, and preparation for the Fourth Industrial Revolution as key factors in ensuring sustainable growth (Lamberte et al., 2019). Meanwhile, Monteverde et al. (2025) emphasize the importance of place-based policies to address inequality and regional disparities, as national reforms often fail to address local or regional development issues.

Moreover, the Intellectual Property Office of the Philippines (2025) presents science, technology, and innovation as "drivers of economic transformation," considering the country's performance in the Global Innovation Index. This literature highlights the role of innovation and human capital in driving change. Empirical work should thus confirm this by relating innovation ecosystems and education reforms to long-term competitiveness, for instance, to highlight the necessity of long-term investments in knowledge-based sub-sectors.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) design to synthesize existing research on economic transformation in the Philippines. The SLR approach ensures transparency, replicability, and rigor by following structured procedures for identifying, selecting, and analyzing relevant studies. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines served as a framework for the review process.

A structured search strategy was implemented across multiple databases, including Google Scholar, Philippine E-Journals, Ateneo de Manila University Press, University of the Philippines publications, and Asian Development Bank (ADB) reports. Search strings combined keywords such as "economic transformation," "structural change," "industrialization," "Philippines," "economic development," and "policy reforms." The search encompassed publications from 2010 to 2025 to capture contemporary developments.

Procedure

Data was collected from Google Scholar, Philippine E-Journals, Ateneo de Manila University Press, University of the Philippines publications, and Asian Development Bank (ADB) reports. Major global databases such as Scopus and Web of Science were also consulted during the initial scoping phase. However, because these databases yielded relatively few Philippines-specific studies on economic transformation, they were used primarily to cross-check coverage and ensure that internationally indexed publications were not omitted. The final protocol prioritized regionally relevant repositories (Philippine E-Journals, UP Press, ADB) alongside Google Scholar, which captures most Scopus/Web of Science–indexed outputs, thereby balancing comprehensiveness with contextual relevance.

The inclusion criteria for the literature review were met if they satisfied the following conditions. Focused on the Philippines or included the Philippines in comparative analysis, addressed themes of economic transformation, including industrialization, structural change, labor market shifts, or policy reforms. Published between 2010 and 2025, to capture contemporary developments, Peer-reviewed journal articles, books, book chapters, and credible institutional reports. As for the Exclusion Criteria, Studies were excluded if they focused solely on microeconomic issues (e.g., household finance) without linking to broader economic transformation, were commentaries, editorials, or opinion pieces, lacked empirical or theoretical grounding, duplicated findings already included in other

selected sources, or were not accessible in full text. This process ensured adherence to PRISMA standards, minimized bias, and strengthened the review's replicability.

Moreover, for the data Cleaning, the initial search yielded a large set of publications. To ensure accuracy and relevance, duplicate records across databases were removed using reference management software. Titles and abstracts were then screened against the inclusion/exclusion criteria. Eligible studies were read in full to confirm relevance. Finally, each study was coded according to publication year, methodology, thematic focus, and key findings.

Data Analysis

A qualitative synthesis was undertaken to identify recurring themes, research gaps, and emerging trends within the reviewed literature. Through thematic analysis, the studies were systematically grouped into key categories, including industrial policy, labor market transformation, the impacts of globalization, and institutional reforms, allowing for a structured interpretation of dominant research directions. A comparative analysis was then employed to examine findings across different time periods and economic sectors, highlighting shifts and patterns in the processes of economic transformation. Trend mapping was conducted by tabulating quantitative data reported in the literature to illustrate structural changes and long-term developments. Finally, gap identification focused on underexplored areas, such as regional disparities and informal-sector dynamics, thereby providing clear directions for future research.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. *Data and Methodology*

Authors and Studies	Type of Data	Source of Data	Statistical Treatment
Ramos, C. G., Estudillo, J., Sawada, Y., & Otsuka, K. (2012). Transformation of the Rural Economy in the Philippines, 1988–2006.	Quantitative (Panel Data)	Household-level surveys	Econometric analysis, Descriptive statistics
Custodio, K. Q., & Sombilla, M. A. (2025). Rural Transformation in the Philippines and the Role of Institutions, Policies, and Investments.	Quantitative (Macro)	National accounts data (e.g., PSA, World Bank), ADB statistics	Econometric analysis, Descriptive statistics
Usui, N. (2011). Transforming the Philippine Economy: "Walking on Two Legs."	Quantitative (Macro)	National accounts data (e.g., PSA, World Bank), ADB statistics	Economic analysis, Statistical description
Martinico-Perez, M. F. G., Schandl, H., Fishman, T., & Tanikawa, H. (2018). The Socio-Economic Metabolism of an Emerging Economy: Monitoring Progress of Decoupling of Economic Growth and Environmental Pressures in the Philippines.	Quantitative (Macro)	National statistics (Material flow accounts, PSA, government databases)	Material Flow Analysis (MFA), Econometric modeling
Briones, R. (2017). Transformation and Diversification of the Rural Economy in Asia.	Quantitative (Secondary)	National statistics (e.g., PSA, LFS, FIES), World Development Indicators	Descriptive statistics, Econometric analysis
Lanzona, L. (2022). Philippine structural transformation in the context of technological change.	Quantitative (Macro/Sectoral)	National accounts data, Labor force surveys (LFS)	Econometric modeling (e.g., Shift-share analysis)
Magtibay-Ramos, N., Esther Estrada, G., & Felipe, J. (2011). Exploring the Philippine economic landscape and structural change using the input-output framework.	Quantitative (Macro)	Philippine Input-Output (I-O) tables from national statistical offices	Input-Output (I-O) framework analysis
Pradesha, A., Robinson, S., Rosegrant, M. W., Perez, N., & Thomas, T. S. (2022). Exploring transformational adaptation strategy through agricultural policy reform in the Philippines.	Quantitative (Modeling)	Data from IFPRI, FAOSTAT, World Bank, and national sources	Computable General Equilibrium (CGE) modeling
Mohammed, A. J., Inoue, M., Peras, R. J., Nath, T. K., Jashimuddin, M., & Pulhin, J. M. (2015). Transformation Strategy for Managing Coupled Socio-Ecological Systems: Case Studies from Bangladesh and the Philippines.	Mixed (Qual/Quant)	Household surveys, field vegetation surveys, document reviews	Descriptive statistics, Qualitative analysis
Ramos, C. G. (2020). Change without Transformation: Social Policy Reforms in the Philippines under Duterte.	Qualitative	Policy documents, government reports, academic literature	Critical/Discourse analysis, Historico-institutional analysis
Treceñe, J. K. D. (2021). The Digital Transformation Strategies of the Philippines from 1992 to 2022: A Review	Qualitative (Review)	Policy documents, government reports, academic papers	Thematic/Content analysis
Rey, W. P., Villaluz, A. C., & Wilhelm, K. (2024). The Impact of Digital Transformation in the Philippines: A Study of the Key Drivers and Barriers.	Quantitative (Macro)	Policy documents, government reports, academic papers	Thematic/Content analysis
Laurente, M. (2022). The Effect of Structural	Quantitative	National accounts (PSA), Labor Force	Econometric analysis,

Change on Labor Productivity Growth and Employment in the Philippines.	(Secondary)	Surveys (LFS)	Decomposition analysis
Chen, Q., Huang, J., Sombilla, M. A., & Truong, T. (2025). Structural and Rural Transformations and Poverty Reduction in Developing Asian Economies: An International Comparison Among China, the Philippines, and Vietnam.	Quantitative (Macro)	Policy documents, government reports, academic papers	Econometric analysis, Descriptive statistics
Clausen, A. (2010). Economic globalization and regional disparities in the Philippines.	Quantitative (Macro)	National and regional statistics (e.g., census data, economic indicators)	Econometric analysis, Descriptive statistics
Gibson, K., Cahill, A., & McKay, D. (2010). Rethinking the dynamics of rural transformation: performing different development pathways in a Philippine municipality.	Qualitative (Conceptual)	Insights from an action research project	Theoretical/Conceptual analysis
Briones, R. M. (2025). Is the Philippines in an Agricultural Trap? Structural Change, Agricultural Productivity and Drivers of Transformation.	Quantitative (Secondary)	Cross-country panel data, micro-level data (e.g., farm-level data)	Econometric analysis, Quantitative modeling
Teng-Calleja, M., Hechanova, Ma. R. M., Alampay, R. B. A., Canoy, N. A., Franco, E. P., & Alampay, E. A. (2016). Transformation in Philippine local government.	Qualitative (Case Study)	Narratives/Interviews from leaders	Thematic/Content analysis (Backward mapping)
Dumayas, A. D. R. (2018). The Evolution of Economic Zones in the Philippines.	Quantitative (Secondary)	National statistics (PEZA, PSA) on investments, exports, employment	Descriptive statistics, Impact analysis
Lapuz, M. C. M. (2023). The role of local community empowerment in the digital transformation of rural tourism development in the Philippines.	Qualitative	Case studies, interviews with community members	Qualitative analysis

Type of Data

The majority of these studies are quantitative in nature, running from panel household surveys to macro and sectoral time series (Ramos et al., 2012; Custodio & Sombilla, 2025; Usui, 2011; Lanzona, 2022; Laurente, 2022) with several model-based quantitative pieces (Pradesha et al., 2020; Martinico-Perez et al., 2018), as well as a more limited though equally important set of mixed-method and qualitative contributions (Mohammed et al., 2015; Gibson et al., 2010; Ramos, 2020; Treceñe, 2021; Lapuz, 2023) that explore institutional, community, and policy processes.

This numerical dominance generates a strong empirical pattern of structural change and productivity dynamics throughout the Philippines. Meanwhile, the qualitative and mixed studies give us the contextual mechanisms and stakeholder perspectives to make sense of those patterns (e.g., why rural diversification works in some places but not others) for it is when numeric trends (Ramos et al., 2012; Briones, 2017) are read side-by-side with grounded case evidence (Gibson et al., 2010; Lapuz, 2023) that we get fertile cross-fertilization going on.

Source of Data

Sources range from national statistical time series and surveys (PSA national accounts, LFS, FIES) to international databases (World Bank, ADB, FAOSTAT; IFPRI) for macro and cross-country analyses (Briones, 2017; Magtibay-Ramos et al., 2011; Chen et al., 2025), as well as household surveys, fieldwork and interviews for micro-level evidence supporting livelihood and socio-ecological studies (Ramos et al., 2012; Mohammed et al., 2015; Teng-Calleja et al., 2016); policy documents provide key sources for qualitative reviews of digital and institutional transformation (Treceñe, 2021; Rey et al., 2024; Ramos, 2020).

Reliance on official and international datasets ensures comparability of findings and ability to make long-run, sectoral and cross-country comparisons (Lanzona, 2022; Laurente, 2022) but may ironically miss informality and subnational heterogeneity which household panels or field studies document; hence forthright triangulation, linking national time series with repeated micro-surveys and targeted qualitative work as in Mohammed et al. (2015) and Ramos et al. (2012) will yield policy-relevant and equitable insights in this regard to who are gainers or losers in economic transformation.

Statistical Treatment

The literature extensively employs descriptive statistics and econometric analysis (Ramos et al., 2012; Briones, 2017). Although specific methods are also employed on appropriate occasions: panel econometrics and shift-share/decomposition for labor and productivity studies (Lanzona, 2022; Laurente, 2022), input–output and material flow analysis for sectoral and environmental linkages (Magtibay-Ramos et al., 2011; Martinico-Perez et al., 2018), CGE or system models for policy scenario and macro-level counterfactuals (Pradesha et al., 2022). Qualitative pieces employ thematic and discourse analyses to chart institutions (Treceñe, 2021) and policy

narratives (Ramos, 2020).

Such diversity in methodology allows for the use of different lenses, encourages causal inference, aids in dissecting sources of growth, and further supports system-level simulation. However, each also has its limits (model calibration in CGE, identification issues in econometrics), so transparency over what assumptions underlie and how robust are results can be helpful as an approach along with blending quantitative rigor with qualitative validation to provide confidence in conclusions about the drivers of and distributive outcomes from Philippine economic transformation (Pradesha et al., 2022; Mohammed et al., 2015).

Ethical Considerations

This study is a systematic literature review and did not involve direct interaction with human participants, collection of primary data, or experimentation; however, ethical principles guided the research process throughout. Transparency and replicability were ensured by following the PRISMA framework, with clear documentation of the search protocol, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and data extraction procedures. Respect for intellectual property was maintained by properly citing all sources and acknowledging prior scholarship. Bias was minimized by using two independent reviewers for screening and full-text assessment, with conflicts resolved through discussion and, when necessary, consultation with a third reviewer. Data integrity was upheld by including only peer-reviewed articles, books, and credible institutional reports, and by explicitly noting methodological limitations of the reviewed studies. Since the review relied solely on published and publicly available data, no personal or sensitive information was accessed. Household survey data and national statistics cited were used in accordance with the ethical standards of the original authors and institutions. Finally, the synthesis emphasized themes of regional disparities, informality, and vulnerable groups, reflecting a commitment to highlight equity concerns in economic transformation research and aligning with the broader ethical responsibility of scholarship to inform policies that promote inclusive and sustainable development.

Table 2. *Economic Transformation Measurement and Variables Related*

Authors and Studies	Parameters used in measuring Economic Transformation	Variables being related to Economic Transformation
Ramos, C. G., Estudillo, J., Sawada, Y., & Otsuka, K. (2012). Transformation of the Rural Economy in the Philippines, 1988–2006.	Share of non-agricultural GDP; Share of rural off-farm employment	Infrastructure (electricity, roads); Education (secondary, tertiary); Irrigation coverage
Custodio, K. Q., & Sombilla, M. A. (2025). Rural Transformation in the Philippines and the Role of Institutions, Policies, and Investments.	Total Factor Productivity (TFP) growth; GDP growth; Inflation	Investment, Policies, and Investments
Usui, N. (2011). Transforming the Philippine Economy: "Walking on Two Legs."	Potential output growth; Total Factor Productivity (TFP) growth; GDP growth; Inflation	Structural reforms; Capital accumulation
Martinico-Perez, M. F. G., Schandl, H., Fishman, T., & Tanikawa, H. (2018). The Socio-Economic Metabolism of an Emerging Economy: Monitoring Progress of Decoupling of Economic Growth and Environmental Pressures in the Philippines.	Material intensity; Domestic material consumption (DMC); GDP; Resource efficiency	Share of services sector activities; Trade of materials; Environmental pressures
Briones, R. (2017). Transformation and Diversification of the Rural Economy in Asia.	Agricultural TFP growth; Share of agriculture in GDP; Agricultural employment share	Human capital; Level of urbanization; Development flow to agriculture; Technical progress
Lanzona, L. (2022). Philippine structural transformation in the context of technological change.	Structural transformation (shift from low to high productivity sectors)	Policy failure; Lack of investments; Technological change
Magtibay-Ramos, N., Esther Estrada, G., & Felipe, J. (2011). Exploring the Philippine economic landscape and structural change using the input-output framework.	Degree of structural change; Inter-sectoral linkages	N/A
Pradesha, A., Robinson, S., Rosegrant, M. W., Perez, N., & Thomas, T. S. (2022). Exploring transformational adaptation strategy through agricultural policy reform in the Philippines.	GDP; Aggregate welfare; Macro-economic balances	Agricultural policy reform; Factor market adjustments
Mohammed, A. J., Inoue, M., Peras, R. J., Nath, T. K., Jashimuddin, M., & Pulhin, J. M. (2015). Transformation Strategy for Managing Coupled Socio-Ecological Systems: Case Studies from Bangladesh and the Philippines.	Land use change; Forest cover; Household income	Social system (local people); Ecological system (forest); Energy sources
Ramos, C. G. (2020). Change without Transformation: Social Policy Reforms in the Philippines under Duterte.	Social policy reforms (e.g., land reform, universal social welfare)	Neoliberal economic expansion; Populist politics; "Strongman rule"
Treceñe, J. K. D. (2021). The Digital Transformation Strategies of the Philippines from 1992 to 2022: A Review	Digital transformation (as a catalyst); Economic change (by sector)	Digital technologies (AI, blockchain); Innovation; Productivity; Policy support
Rey, W. P., Villaluz, A. C., & Wilhelm, K. (2024). The Impact of Digital Transformation in the Philippines: A Study of the	Government policies, technological advancements,	N/A

Key Drivers and Barriers.	changing consumer behavior, and the role of businesses and industries	
Laurente, M. (2022). The Effect of Structural Change on Labor Productivity Growth and Employment in the Philippines.	Labor productivity growth; Employment	Structural change
Chen, Q., Huang, J., Sombilla, M. A., & Truong, T. (2025). Structural and Rural Transformations and Poverty Reduction in Developing Asian Economies: An International Comparison Among China, the Philippines, and Vietnam.	Non-agricultural GDP and Rural Farm Employment	Rural Poverty Reduction
Clausen, A. (2010). Economic globalization and regional disparities in the Philippines.	Regional growth; Socioeconomic inequality	Globalization; Spatially biased policy; International migration; Remittances
Gibson, K., Cahill, A., & McKay, D. (2010). Rethinking the dynamics of rural transformation: performing different development pathways in a Philippine municipality.	Rural resilience; Habitat maintenance; Diversity	Population density; Employment structure; Land use
Briones, R. M. (2025). Is the Philippines in an Agricultural Trap? Structural Change, Agricultural Productivity and Drivers of Transformation.	Agricultural transformation level; Structural change (labor reallocation)	Total factor productivity; Capital formation; Farm holding fragmentation; Producer support
Teng-Calleja, M., Hechanova, Ma. R. M., Alampay, R. B. A., Canoy, N. A., Franco, E. P., & Alampay, E. A. (2016). Transformation in Philippine local government.	LGU efficiency (e.g., business registration time, # of procedures)	Internal capacity (IT, revenue); Rewards (economic growth); Compliance with national govt.
Dumayas, A. D. R. (2018). The Evolution of Economic Zones in the Philippines.	Investments; Exports; (Direct) Employment	Evolution/Phases of economic zones; Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows
Lapuz, M. C. M. (2023). The role of local community empowerment in the digital transformation of rural tourism development in the Philippines.	Livelihood strategies; Household income; Socio-cultural development	Digital competencies; social, financial, human, and physical capital

Parameters used in measuring Economic Transformation

Researchers measure economic transformation with a set of concrete, comparable parameters that capture structural shifts, productivity, welfare and environmental intensity: sectoral shares and employment shifts (share of non-agricultural GDP; share of rural off-farm employment) and productivity metrics such as total factor productivity (TFP) and labor productivity growth (Ramos et al., 2012; Briones, 2017; Laurente, 2022), macro aggregates like GDP growth and potential output (Usui, 2011; Custodio & Sombilla, 2025), welfare and balance indicators used in policy simulation (GDP, aggregate welfare; Pradesha et al., 2022), and environmental-economy measures such as material intensity and domestic material consumption to capture resource efficiency and decoupling (Martinico-Perez et al., 2018). Case and land-use studies add domain-specific parameters (land-use change, forest cover, household income) when socio-ecological transformation is the focus (Mohammed et al. 2015), while local governance and zone development work use operational indicators (LGU efficiency metrics; investments, exports, employment) to signal institutional and place-based transformation (Teng-Calleja et al., 2016; Dumayas, 2018).

These parameter choices shape what "transformation" looks like in each study: sectoral shares and employment capture the classic structural change narrative (move from agriculture to higher-productivity sectors) and allow cross-study comparability (Ramos et al., 2012; Briones, 2017), productivity and GDP indicators link change to growth and welfare outcomes (Usui, 2011; Custodio & Sombilla, 2025), while system and environmental parameters (MFA, DMC) broaden the concept to include sustainability and resource decoupling (Martinico-Perez et al., 2018). Policy simulations and welfare aggregates (Pradesha et al., 2022) make the research directly actionable for reform design; however, reliance on aggregate parameters can mask distributional and local ecological impacts that land-use or household parameters reveal (Mohammed et al., 2015). For a fuller picture of Philippine transformation, studies should combine these parameter types —sectoral and productivity indicators for general trends, welfare and model outcomes for policy implications, and place-based environmental and livelihood parameters — to assess inclusiveness and sustainability (Laurente, 2022; Briones, 2025).

Variables related to Economic Transformation

Across the sample, researchers test a set of structural, institutional, human-capital, and technological variables as determinants or correlates of transformation: infrastructure (roads, electricity), education levels, and irrigation as enablers of rural non-farm shift and productivity (Ramos et al., 2012); investment, capital accumulation, and policy reform as drivers of TFP and output growth (Custodio & Sombilla, 2025; Usui, 2011); human capital, urbanization and technical progress as determinants of agricultural decline or diversification (Briones, 2017); technological change, policy failure and lack of investment as explanatory variables for stalled structural change (Lanzona, 2022); and digital technologies, innovation and policy support as catalysts or barriers in contemporary sectoral change (Treceñe, 2021; Rey et al., 2024). Studies focused on the environment and resources relate transformation to trade in materials, service sector shares, and environmental pressures (Martinico-Perez et al., 2018), while governance, institutional capacity, and LGU efficiency appear in local and place-based studies (Teng-Calleja et al., 2016; Dumayas, 2018).

The variable set reflects a broad, policy-relevant theory of change: physical capital, human capital, institutions and technology jointly shape whether economies move toward higher-productivity activities and who benefits; empirical work confirms this multi-factor causality but also shows variation in which variables matter by scale and outcome (national TFP responds strongly to investment and reforms in macro studies, while rural livelihood transitions hinge more on local infrastructure and education in household panels) (Ramos et al., 2012; Custodio & Sombilla, 2025). Including technology and digital adoption variables in recent work (Treceñe, 2021; Rey et al., 2024) updates the explanatory framework for the 21st century, but the literature still needs more rigorous interaction tests (for example: how digital adoption moderates the returns to human capital or the effectiveness of policy reforms) and stronger subnational analysis to uncover spatially heterogeneous effects (Clausen, 2010; Gibson et al., 2010).

Table 3. *Summary of Selected Studies*

Authors and Studies	Objectives	Findings	Suggestions for Future Work
Ramos, C. G., Estudillo, J., Sawada, Y., & Otsuka, K. (2012). Transformation of the Rural Economy in the Philippines, 1988–2006.	To analyze the economic transformation of the rural economy from 1988-2006.	The rural economy transformed, driven by infrastructure (electricity, roads) and secondary/tertiary education. The rural nonfarm sector provided jobs for unskilled labor, reducing poverty.	Future research should compare regional transformations to understand why some areas transform faster than others and clarify the multiple mechanisms at work.
Custodio, K. Q., & Sombilla, M. A. (2025). Rural Transformation in the Philippines and the Role of Institutions, Policies, and Investments.	To analyze the levels of rural transformation across 16 regions (1988-2023) and determine how institutions, policies, and investments (IPIs) influenced it.	Rural transformation in the Philippines has been slow and highly uneven. Only 3 of 16 regions reached a high level. The effect of IPIs was critical but varied significantly based on the region's stage of transformation.	Underscores the need to properly identify, logically sequence, and efficiently integrate IPI interventions that are context-specific to each region's challenges.
Usui, N. (2011). Transforming the Philippine Economy: "Walking on Two Legs."	To investigate why the Philippines' long-term growth has been disappointing despite favorable conditions.	The poor performance is attributed to low productivity growth due to slow industrialization. The economy needs to "walk on two legs," developing both industry and services, not leapfrogging to services.	The Philippines must strengthen the business and investment climate and address infrastructure under provision to incentivize diversification in manufacturing.
Martinico-Perez, M. F. G., Schandl, H., Fishman, T., & Tanikawa, H. (2018). The Socio-Economic Metabolism of an Emerging Economy: Monitoring Progress of Decoupling of Economic Growth and Environmental Pressures in the Philippines.	To monitor the relationship between economic growth and environmental pressures in the Philippines using a material flow accounting approach.	The economy achieved relative decoupling (GDP grew faster than material requirements) due to the rising services sector. However, the country also became a net resource exporter of metal ores.	Recommends focusing on strengthening the workforce via quality education, infrastructure investment, and good governance.
Briones, R. (2017). Transformation and Diversification of the Rural Economy in Asia.	To explore the transformation and diversification of the rural economy, focusing on small-scale farmers and food systems.	Diversification of household income remains a key livelihood strategy. Only the upper tier of small farmers can access modern commercial food channels, creating a growing divide.	Recommends investment in productivity growth, infrastructure, finance, and higher education to increase non-farm employment.
Lanzona, L. (2022). Philippine structural transformation in the context of technological change.	To examine why the structural transformation envisioned by the Agricultural Fisheries Modernization Act (AFMA) was not accomplished.	The transition from low-productivity agriculture to high-productivity industry failed due to policy failure and a lack of investments.	Future strategy must focus on adopting appropriate technology that utilizes local resources and providing incentives for the private sector to invest in technology.
Magtibay-Ramos, N., Esther Estrada, G., & Felipe, J. (2011). Exploring the Philippine economic landscape and structural change using the input-output framework.	To evaluate the degree of structural change and sectoral linkages in the Philippine economy from 1979-2000 using an input-output framework.	The Philippines experienced slower structural transformation than its neighbors. Manufacturing remains the key sector with the highest linkages; the economy cannot afford to "leapfrog" industrialization.	Future work must analyze why manufacturing's capacity to boost other sectors has diminished over time, recommending new policies to strengthen these linkages.
Pradesha, A., Robinson, S., Rosegrant, M. W., Perez, N., & Thomas, T. S. (2022). Exploring transformational adaptation strategy	To explore agricultural policy reform (specifically the abolishment of the rice quota) as a transformative	The reform could transform the agricultural system by moving resources to higher-productivity sectors, increasing adaptive capacity.	Suggests that government intervention (e.g., support) could be a "second-best policy" to ease the transition

through agricultural policy reform in the Philippines.	adaptation strategy for climate change.	However, it causes welfare loss for some agents.	for those negatively affected.
Mohammed, A. J., Inoue, M., Peras, R. J., Nath, T. K., Jashimuddin, M., & Pulhin, J. M. (2015). Transformation Strategy for Managing Coupled Socio-Ecological Systems: Case Studies from Bangladesh and the Philippines.	To demonstrate the potential of a "transformation strategy" (linking social and ecological systems) to rehabilitate degraded land, using a case study in the Philippines.	The strategy improved both local well-being and forest cover. In the Philippine case, locals successfully rehabilitated land while also deriving a high proportion of their income from it.	Future work should focus on the long-term sustainability of these coupled social-ecological systems after the initial rehabilitation success.
Ramos, C. G. (2020). Change without Transformation: Social Policy Reforms in the Philippines under Duterte.	To explore the social policy reforms under the Duterte administration (2016-2019) and assess their transformative potential.	The reforms (e.g., CCT expansion) represented "change without transformation." They did not alter the fundamental political-economic structure and were used to legitimize a conservative, authoritarian order.	Calls for a "wider reading of the Philippine case" in in conversation with other historical episodes of social provisioning under illiberal reformers.
Treceñe, J. K. D. (2021). The Digital Transformation Strategies of the Philippines from 1992 to 2022: A Review	To review the digital transformation strategies of the Philippines from 1992 to 2022, using public documents.	Strategic plans focused on ICT infrastructure, transforming government operations (e-gov), and bridging digital gaps.	Recommends that the government enact laws to recognize e-Documents and e-Signatures to boost e-Commerce and e-Government.
Rey, W. P., Villaluz, A. C., & Wilhelm, K. (2024). The Impact of Digital Transformation in the Philippines: A Study of the Key Drivers and Barriers.	To study the key drivers and barriers of digital transformation in the Philippines.	Digital development and AI adoption have a strong, positive long-term effect on economic growth and reducing corruption. Key barriers are infrastructure gaps, digital literacy issues, and weak cybersecurity.	Recommends coordinated efforts from government, business, and education to invest in digital infrastructure, promote digital skills, and foster ethical governance.
Laurente, M. (2022). The Effect of Structural Change on Labor Productivity Growth and Employment in the Philippines.	To analyze the effect of structural change on labor productivity growth and employment in the Philippines.	Structural change (labor moving to high-productivity sectors) has a positive relationship with labor productivity but a negative relationship with employment (due to skill mismatches).	Implies policy must focus on "increasing the value of human capital" (e.g., education, training) to aid the structural change process.
Chen, Q., Huang, J., Sombilla, M. A., & Truong, T. (2025). Structural and Rural Transformations and Poverty Reduction in Developing Asian Economies: An International Comparison Among China, the Philippines, and Vietnam.	To explore the relationship between structural/rural transformation and rural poverty reduction in China, the Philippines, and Vietnam.	Structural and rural transformations (share of non-agri GDP, rural off-farm jobs) significantly reduce rural poverty. However, this correlation is much weaker in the Philippines compared to China and Vietnam.	Provides insights for policies to facilitate and speed up rural and structural transformation with appropriate institutions, policies, and investments (IPIs).
Clausen, A. (2010). Economic globalization and regional disparities in the Philippines.	To empirically track the Philippine policy path of economic globalization and its effect on regional growth and inequality.	Globalization simultaneously caused growth and a deterioration of socioeconomic inequalities (regional disparities). This threatens national cohesion and the state's ability to achieve inclusive growth.	Underscores the importance of examining inequality at localized, subnational levels, not just the national average.
Gibson, K., Cahill, A., & McKay, D. (2010). Rethinking the dynamics of rural transformation: performing different development pathways in a Philippine municipality.	(A conceptual paper) To critique the standard view of rural transformation and propose a new way of "performing" different development pathways.	Argues that representing rural change as a single, capitalist-driven process limits options. The paper theorizes "ethical dynamics" that build on economic diversity and resilience.	Not applicable (conceptual paper).
Briones, R. M. (2025). Is the Philippines in an Agricultural Trap? Structural Change, Agricultural Productivity and Drivers of Transformation.	To argue that the Philippines' slow development is due to an "Agricultural Trap."	The trap is characterized by low agricultural transformation and slow structural change, driven by low TFP growth, farm fragmentation, and an inability to diversify agricultural output.	Concludes that "Escaping the agricultural trap requires the pursuit of a modern agro-industrial policy."
Teng-Calleja, M., Hechanova, Ma. R. M., Alampay, R. B. A., Canoy, N. A., Franco, E. P., & Alampay, E. A. (2016). Transformation in Philippine local government.	To examine the challenges, enablers, and outcomes of organizational transformation in successful Philippine local government	LGU transformation was catalyzed by three elements: vision, leadership, and citizen engagement. This led to a holistic reform of systems, culture, and programs.	Implications of the proposed model for transforming other LGUs and developing LGU leaders for good governance are discussed.

			units (LGUs).
Dumayas, A. D. R. (2018). The Evolution of Economic Zones in the Philippines.	To analyze the impact of the evolution of economic zones (from government-led to private-led) on investments, exports, and employment.	The shift to private-sector-driven and IT-centered zones resulted in a boom in firms, investments, and exports. The effect on direct employment was relatively insignificant.	Future research should measure the indirect employment effects and explore policies to better link SEZs to the domestic economy to improve job creation.
Lapuz, M. C. M. (2023). The role of local community empowerment in the digital transformation of rural tourism development in the Philippines.	To examine the role of local community empowerment in the digital transformation (DT) of rural tourism (RT) in the Philippines.	Empowering local communities is key to the DT process in RT. Digital skills (especially online business skills) increase income and lead to factor reallocation (e.g., more off-farm employment).	Recommends strengthening digital skill development and optimizing the digital environment to boost rural income.

Objectives

The studies share clear, policy-oriented objectives that cluster around three themes: (1) diagnosing structural and rural transformation over time and space (Ramos et al., 2012; Custodio & Sombilla, 2025; Magtibay-Ramos et al., 2011; Chen et al., 2025), (2) testing causal levers and adaptation strategies, productivity, investment, policy, and technological change (Usui, 2011; Pradesha et al., 2022; Lanzona, 2022; Briones, 2025), and (3) documenting institutional, socio-ecological, and digital pathways of change at local and sectoral levels (Mohammed et al., 2015; Teng-Calleja et al., 2016; Treceñe, 2021; Rey et al., 2024). Each paper aligns its objective with its method and scale: macro- and cross-country comparisons emphasize growth, TFP, and sectoral shares, while case and review papers center on policy mapping, governance, and community agency.

This objective mix shapes what the literature can say about transformation: long-run, comparable indicators and model experiments produce generalizable policy lessons about growth and sectoral shifts (Usui, 2011; Custodio & Sombilla, 2025), while local, ecological, and governance studies reveal feasible pathways and constraints on the ground (Mohammed et al., 2015; Teng-Calleja et al., 2016). Future syntheses and research designs should therefore align objectives intentionally across scales—pairing broad diagnostic aims with embedded, action-oriented objectives that test context-specific interventions and institutional reforms (Ramos, 2012; Pradesha et al., 2022).

Findings

Key findings converge on a few robust messages: structural change in the Philippines has been uneven and slower than regional peers, with services growth outpacing productive industrialization and mixed welfare gains (Magtibay-Ramos et al., 2011; Usui, 2011; Custodio & Sombilla, 2025; Briones, 2025); rural nonfarm expansion and infrastructure, education, and local investments reduced poverty in some areas (Ramos et al., 2012; Briones, 2017; Chen et al., 2025); policy reforms and digital adoption show potential to reallocate resources and raise productivity but also create transitional losers absent targeted support (Pradesha et al., 2022; Rey et al., 2024; Treceñe, 2021); and socio-ecological interventions can rehabilitate landscapes while improving livelihoods when local agency and long-term support exist (Mohammed et al., 2015).

Taken together, these findings imply that Philippine transformation is conditional: infrastructure, human capital, supportive institutions, and appropriate technology are necessary but not sufficient; their sequencing, scale, and subnational fit matter (Custodio & Sombilla, 2025; Lanzona, 2022). The literature therefore points to differentiated policy mixes: national reforms to strengthen industrial linkages and TFP (Usui, 2011; Magtibay-Ramos et al., 2011), regional and community investments to capture local nonfarm opportunities and ecological resilience (Ramos et al., 2012; Mohammed et al., 2015), and safety nets or transitional supports to manage distributional costs from market-led or policy-driven shifts (Pradesha et al., 2022).

Suggestions for future work

Authors consistently call for research that deepens scale sensitivity, causal clarity, and policy relevance: comparative regional studies to explain spatial heterogeneity (Ramos et al., 2012; Custodio & Sombilla, 2025; Clausen, 2010), mixed-method work linking econometric results to qualitative mechanisms (Mohammed et al., 2015; Gibson et al., 2010), stronger subnational and informality measures (Briones, 2017; Chen et al., 2025), and more rigorous evaluation of technological and digital interventions including interaction tests with human capital and institutions (Treceñe, 2021; Rey et al., 2024; Lanzona, 2022). Methodological recommendations include more transparent reporting of model assumptions, replication materials, and sensitivity analyses for CGE, I–, and econometric studies (Pradesha et al., 2022; Magtibay-Ramos et al., 2011).

Implementing these suggestions would yield more actionable evidence: regionally disaggregated and mixed-methods studies can identify tailored IPI (institutions, policy, investment) packages that fit local constraints (Custodio & Sombilla, 2025), while transparency and replication in quantitative models would strengthen policymakers' confidence in considering tradeoffs (Pradesha et al., 2022). Prioritizing longitudinal microdata collection, experimental or quasi-experimental evaluations of digital and training interventions, and integrated socio-ecological monitoring will help reconcile productivity, equity, and sustainability goals in the

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Philippines' ongoing transformation (Laurente, 2022; Martinico-Perez et al., 2018).

Conclusions

This paper synthesizes over two decades of scholarship on economic transformation in the Philippines, emphasizing the uneven and incomplete transition from a services-dominated economy toward more diversified and higher-productivity activities. Its principal contribution lies in applying a systematic, integrated review approach that brings together fragmented strands of literature from economics, political science, and development studies into a coherent analytical narrative. By combining quantitative macro- and micro-level evidence with qualitative institutional analyses and case-based insights, the study deepens understanding of how digitalization, institutional reforms, and industrial upgrading interact to shape transformation trajectories, while also revealing persistent gaps in subnational analysis, informality, and methodological transparency.

The findings indicate that although digital transformation and institutional reforms are increasingly acting as catalysts for productivity growth and economic resilience, their benefits remain unevenly distributed. Limited adoption of digital technologies, weak manufacturing linkages, and structural constraints continue to hinder inclusive and sustainable growth. These patterns highlight the need for place-sensitive development strategies that balance productivity gains with equity and long-term sustainability.

Based on these findings, several policy recommendations are advanced. These include strengthening digital infrastructure and implementing nationwide skills development programs to promote broad-based digital adoption; designing place-sensitive institutions, policy, and investment (IPI) packages that address regional disparities; establishing safety nets and transition support mechanisms for groups adversely affected by structural change; and enhancing the transparency and accessibility of economic and labor market data to support evidence-based policymaking and effective monitoring. The study also outlines a future research agenda to strengthen the evidence base on economic transformation in the Philippines. Priority areas include conducting deeper subnational analyses to capture regional heterogeneity in transformation outcomes, integrating measures of informality into models of structural change, and examining interactions between digital technologies and human capital development. In addition, promoting replication studies and greater methodological transparency is essential for improving the robustness and credibility of future research. By re-emphasizing its novelty and offering clear, actionable recommendations, this review provides policymakers and researchers with a practical roadmap for advancing inclusive and sustainable economic transformation in the Philippines.

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