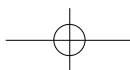
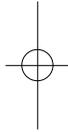
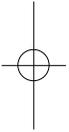
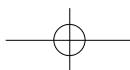
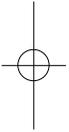
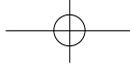


## PART 3

# Looking Forward





# 10

## Taiwan's Democratic Transition: A Model for China?

*Bruce Gilley*

Every democratization has its *annus mirabilis*, and that year in Taiwan was 1986. Eleven years after the death of former Chinese president Chiang Kai-shek, his son, Chiang Ching-kuo, decided that the time was ripe for full democratic change. The decision to lift martial law and tolerate a new opposition party came after a decade of scandals, falling electoral support for the ruling Kuomintang, and growing international pressures. Over the next ten years, leading up to the first free and fair presidential election in a Chinese society in 1996, Taiwan went through a decisive democratic transition. Nonetheless, the transition itself was not a mere continuation of what had come before. The timing and nature of the transition were to some extent autonomous of the past, and the transition in turn had its own autonomous effects on the democracy in Taiwan that followed.

Three years after Taiwan's democratic 1986 breakthrough, the Chinese Communist Party was faced with a similar decision. In the face of nationwide student protests, leaders huddled together in the Zhongnanhai leadership complex, or at the home of senior leader Deng Xiaoping, to decide what to do. Party general-secretary Zhao Ziyang argued for radical political liberalization that, on many accounts, would have ushered in the same sort of democratic transition that occurred in Taiwan. But Deng voted *against* democratic change. As in Taiwan, this outcome in China was not a foregone conclusion and could have easily gone the other way. As in Taiwan, this event also had consequences for the regime that followed. Ironically, one of these consequences was a period that looked remarkably similar to that of Taiwan in the 1960s and 1970s. For this reason, there are wide expectations that in the foreseeable future, China will face another moment of choice when a transition will be attempted.

Given the partially autonomous causes and consequences of transitions, it is worthwhile then to consider how a *successful* transition might come about

in China, looking at the Taiwan example for clues. What would a democratic transition in China look like and how might policies adopted by international actors affect its chances of success? I begin by highlighting two main aspects of democratic transitions theory—long-term structural factors and short-term agency factors—before applying each to the Taiwan and China cases respectively. I then consider the ways that actors in China have viewed the Taiwan transition and conclude with some relevant policy advice.

### Democratic Transitions Theory

The theory of democratic transitions can be roughly divided into two parts: the structural or path-dependent aspects (how the transition is determined by long-term causal factors) and the contingent or autonomous aspects (how the transition is shaped by short-term causal factors). Both parts are necessary in order to understand how a democratic transition comes about and the fate of the democracy that results.

The key structural or path-dependent factor that shapes the nature of a transition is the relative strength of state and society on the eve of transition. That factor is, in turn, shaped by a host of internal and external structural conditions—hence the reason why for many years there was no distinctive theory of democratic transitions at all. Studies of democratic transition were simply extensions of studies of the breakdown of authoritarian rule. However, beginning with the work of O'Donnell and Schmitter,<sup>1</sup> greater specificity emerged in outlining the various types of transition that were possible and how each related to different types of state-society relations under the authoritarian regime.

For simplicity's sake, the *relative* strength of the authoritarian state compared to society can be represented along a spectrum, from weak to strong. This gives us three broad transition scenarios—society-led democratization, state-led democratization, and reformed or resilient authoritarianism—and the risks associated with each. Each of these three categories can in turn be further specified (see Table 10.1).

A first point is that not all regime transitions lead to democracy. Of the 106 regime transitions between 1974 and 1999 studied by Geddes, only 51 (48 percent) led to full or partial democracies. Another 17 led to failed democracies and 38 to new authoritarian regimes.<sup>2</sup> Where social forces are weak relative to the state, as in China in 1989, ruptures may lead to a re-institutionalized authoritarian regime rather than to a democratic transition.

A second key point is that it is the relative, not *absolute*, strength of state and society that matters. The absolute strength of a state will depend upon its various capacities—fiscal, coercive, regulatory, and legitimacy/ideological—as well as its internal integrity—especially the degree to which is it character-

**Table 10.1 Democratic Transition Types**

Relative Strength of Social Forces vs. the State	Transition Scenario	Transition Nature	Risks
Strong  Weak	Replacement	Society-led democratization	* demagogic rule * overmobilized society * violent transition * democratic failure
	Overthrow		
	Pact		
	Extrication	State-led democratization	* hegemonic party * hard-line backlash * democratic failure
	Conversion		
	Gradualism		
	Institutionalization	Reformed authoritarianism	* rising costs of dictatorship * worse democratic prospects * state collapse
	Soft repression		
	Hard repression		

ized by internal pluralism and dissent. The absolute strength of society will depend upon the degree to which social forces are unified, organized, resourced, and effectively led. Yet the *effective* strength of each depends upon the other. A partially factionalized state may remain dominant if social forces are even more factionalized. A highly organized state may be weak in the face of an even better organized opposition.

The other half of democratic transitions theory concerns the contingent or autonomous aspects of the transition that are only indirectly related to the structural conditions that precede transition. Once the winds of change arrive at the doorstep of an authoritarian regime, new factors emerge that are distinct. Experience from the 60-odd democratic transitions in Latin America, Southern Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe, and East and Southeast Asia between Portugal's Revolution of Carnations in 1974 and the Ukraine's Orange Revolution of 2004 allows us to describe democratic transitions in terms of an ideal-type sequence of events, noting the possibilities of failure at each stage (see Table 10.2).

There are important theoretical debates about each stage in this sequence. Are the crises that begin democratic transitions usually economic in nature?<sup>3</sup> What role is played by social mobilization and protest?<sup>4</sup> What determines whether elites will split?<sup>5</sup> What determines whether the inevitable backlash by hard-liners is successful?<sup>6</sup> How do we know if a decision is democratic?<sup>7</sup> What determines institutional choice (in particular to what extent is the

**Table 10.2 Democratic Transition Stages**

Stage	Meaning	Transition Failure If...
Crisis	Particular events that force the regime to consider plans for democratization	The crisis is attributed to nonsystemic factors
Mobilization	Evidence of social mobilization in support of democratization	Mobilization is suppressed
Elite split	Emergence of a reform faction in the regime that favors democratization	Regime unity is maintained
Hard-line backlash	Attempts by regime hard-liners to defeat the reform faction	Hard-liners gain support of swing members
Democratic decision	Announcement of plans to institutionalize democracy	Decision is blocked
Institutional choice	Selection of a democratic institutional design	Survival of "second-tier" actors who subvert democracy
Interim regime	Empowerment of temporary regime prior to first election	Interim period is extended indefinitely
Founding election	Holding of first national election	Incumbent party steals the election

process driven by the rational calculations of actors and to what extent by contingency, fads, and emotion)?<sup>8</sup> What determines the stability and effectiveness of interim regimes?<sup>9</sup> And finally, is a founding election the right marker for a successful transition, or should we include more substantive criteria such as the acceptance of uncertainty by all major actors?<sup>10</sup>

Democratic transitions theory has been developed largely through the study of transitions in Latin America and Southern Europe and to a lesser extent those in post-Communist Europe. The 10 major democratic transitions of Asia—in particular those of Taiwan, South Korea, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand—have received far less attention. The Taiwan and China cases are perfectly suited for the application, and perhaps revision, of democratic transitions theory. Taiwan's 1986 transition succeeded, whereas China's 1989 transition failed. Yet a future transition in China may succeed. In studying these three transitions—one successful, one failed, and one prospective—we should consider not just the conventional wisdom about democratic transitions but also the theory of democratic transition itself. How do the two dimensions of transitions theory, as outlined above, look when applied to the cases of Taiwan and China?

## Transition Types in Taiwan and China

Authors in this book find both similarities and differences in state-society relations between Taiwan prior to its democratic transition and China prior to Tiananmen and today. Dorothy Solinger (in Chapter 5 on business groups) and Merle Goldman and Ashley Esarey (in Chapter 3 on intellectuals) see society in China as much weaker vis-à-vis the state, whereas Richard Madsen (in Chapter 4 on religious groups) and Robert Weller (in Chapter 6 on religious and environmental groups) see more parallels. Yet state-society relations on the eve of transition can also be read backwards from the nature of the transition itself. Doing this suggests that the Taiwanese state was still quite powerful compared to society in 1986, given that the subsequent transition was largely state-led. Looked at in this way, the differences between the relative power of state and society in late authoritarian Taiwan and present-day China narrow, not because society in China is stronger than we thought but because the state in Taiwan was stronger than we thought.

The Taiwan transition is a good example of why it is the relative, not absolute, strength of state and social forces that is determinative. An organized opposition had begun to form and contest local elections in the 1960s in Taiwan. But the KMT-led state, especially with the passing of Chiang Kai-shek, strengthened its own internal character, reemphasizing Leninist democratic centralism, constructing new regulatory institutions, and enjoying the fruits of Taiwan's booming economy. Moreover, the KMT continued to enjoy reasonably strong levels of support from society.<sup>11</sup> Thus when the transition came, the state was the dominant actor.<sup>12</sup> In terms of Table 10.1, the Taiwan transition is probably best described as a conversion, in which the state undertakes a deliberate, planned move to democracy under only moderate pressure from social forces. Chiang Ching-kuo announced the formation of a 12-member panel to consider political reforms in 1986. That unleashed a process that would result in 1992 in the first democratically elected legislature in the Chinese world since the 1911–1912 elections in China and then four years later in the first free and fair presidential election in the Chinese world.

To be sure there were elements of extrication (a more hurried or crisis-driven conversion) or even of pact in the Taiwanese case. Indeed, some accounts have gone so far as to describe the transition as mixed state/society-led.<sup>13</sup> For instance, following student demonstrations in March 1990, KMT chairman and national president Lee Teng-hui held talks with 52 student representatives and then in April 1990, for the first time, with representatives of the Democratic Progressive Party. Most important, 16 DPP members as well as many prominent regime critics and liberal scholars were invited to join the June/July 1990 National Affairs Conference (NAC) of 150 prominent Taiwanese, called by Lee Teng-hui to deliberate on options for political reform. DPP members, including party chairman Huang Hsin-chieh, were even given

220 *Looking Forward*

three of the conference's 15 chairs, responsible for guiding the deliberations. The consensus reached by this pluralistic body and endorsed by Lee was a plan to make the national legislature and the presidency directly elected. Chiou argues that the NAC marked the beginning of Taiwan's transition.<sup>14</sup>

To some extent, these invitations were forced upon the president by demonstrations in March and May 1990 in favor of political reform. But the ability to pick and choose who would join the NAC, plus evidence that Lee was already in favor of a directly elected legislature and president, suggests that the KMT remained in charge. Even though the increasingly organized opposition had a significant impact on internal debates within the KMT, at no point did opposition actors become determinative of the timing and nature of the changes. First Chiang Ching-kuo and then, after his death in 1988, Lee set the tone for the reforms that eventually led to Lee's victory in a free presidential election in 1996. The mere fact that the transition was spread out over a 10-year period—from 1986 to 1996—implies a state-led process. The Taiwan case is a reminder that transitions with pacts are not necessarily pacted transitions.

China's failed transition of 1989 was a mixture of soft and hard repression (Table 10.1). Following the ouster of reformist CCP leader Zhao Ziyang, martial law troops fought their way into Beijing on June 3–4, killing an estimated 2,000 citizens. In the year after the failed transition, 127,000 party members were expelled and another 166,000 punished.<sup>15</sup> Hundreds of dissidents and protesters sought refuge in foreign countries, and hundreds of thousands of students were sent to factories to *duanlian* (self-temper). To the extent that there is anything theoretically interesting about this failed transition, it is how quickly it gave way—after patriarch Deng Xiaoping's tour of southern China in early 1992—to a renewed liberalization of the regime. The long-term causes of regime ruptures endure, even when those ruptures are temporarily repaired. Looked at from today's perspective, Tiananmen appears to be merely a blip in the continued liberalization of the CCP regime that began in the late 1970s.

What sort of outcome should we expect the next time that China faces a similar crisis? From the standpoint of this structural or path-dependent theory of transitions, a successful transition in China next time would be more likely if social forces have become more powerful relative to the state than they were in 1989. Certainly there is ample evidence to this effect. Not only does China have a significant middle class today—probably 25 percent of the population in the year 2008<sup>16</sup>—but the liberalization of the media, private business, the legal system, and nongovernmental organizations since 1989 has created a much stronger society. It is simply not possible to imagine a repeat of the 1989–1991 repression in China. Despite significant and far-ranging reforms and rebuilding, the CCP state has become *relatively* weaker than society since 1989 on most accounts. Although fiscal, regulatory, and coercive capacities have been rebuilt or maintained, the CCP's ideological control over society

has weakened<sup>17</sup> while its own internal pluralism has increased.<sup>18</sup> Just as Chiang Ching-kuo's recommitment to Sun Yat-sen's populist Three Principles of the People after 1978 opened the way for democratic reformers to rise through the ranks of the KMT, so former CCP general secretary Jiang Zemin's espousal of the populist Theory of the Three Represents in 2001 has opened the way for democratic reformers to rise within the CCP.

This suggests that the structural conditions for a democratic transition have improved in China. Yet it is still unlikely that such a transition would be society led. There is no successful opposition movement in China—the last attempt to create one in 1998–1999 in the form of the China Democracy Party was successfully crushed. One of the only political activists who ever seriously articulated and planned for a society-led overthrow of the Communist state in China is Peng Ming; he was arrested by Myanmar authorities while setting up a political base in that country in 2004 and is now serving a life sentence in China. Meanwhile, many of the new social forces have been in various degrees co-opted by the party-state, as Dorothy Solinger and Merle Goldman and Ashley Esarey note in Chapters 5 and 3. Internal CCP pluralism, meanwhile, has limits. Even reformers inside the party argue for the maintenance of CCP rule.<sup>19</sup> Although social forces are stronger, they are by no means so strong as to render the state ineffective.

This means that the most likely scenario for a future democratic transition in China is a successful but state-led transition. Dickson's belief that "China's democratization, if and when it occurs, will likely be a discontinuous transition"<sup>20</sup> ignores the possible, indeed empirically most common, outcome, which is a democratic transition with significant continuities with the past. Such a prediction is hardly novel. It has been the mainstream view of students of China's politics throughout the reform era, and both Chapters 7, by Randall Peerenboom and Weitseng Chen, and Chapter 6, by Robert Weller, suggest that the regime will stay in control of the pace of political change. Indeed, its roots may go beyond structural factors: Guo shows that "top-down political change" represents a confluence of Confucian, Leninist, and neoauthoritarian intellectual threads in the political culture of contemporary China,<sup>21</sup> a point made more generally about Asian democratizations by Chan.<sup>22</sup> As scholar Sun Yan, an advocate of the state-led approach, argues: "[China's people] likely will continue to rely on the state as the engine of change."<sup>23</sup>

That leaves us with three possible scenarios for democratic transition in China—the three state-led variants of extrication, conversion, and gradualism. From a normative standpoint, many scholars have argued for the merits of the gradualism model of state-led transition in China. Since the failure of Tiananmen, a wave of writings has arisen on "constitutionalism"<sup>24</sup> or "the rule of law"<sup>25</sup> as gradualist tactics for democratic transition. At present, there is little evidence that the CCP is engaged in such a transition. The expansion of direct elections from the village to the township and city level, although

endorsed by Jiang Zemin in his speech to the Fifteenth party congress of 1997 and then again by Hu Jintao in his speech to the Seventeenth party congress of 2007, has been blocked. The reasons for this are obvious: the CCP believes that it would rapidly lose control of any such gradual opening. Given the post-1989 strengthening of social forces, it does not believe it could direct a gradual democratization. In the 1980s, the CCP was both willing and able to begin gradual democratization and thus it passed the 1987 village elections law. But after 1989, it rejected this option. The CCP cannot institutionalize political competition even if it can institutionalize other aspects of the state. Indeed, since the mid-1990s there has been a distinct regression of political contestation at the national level in China, an “end of politics” syndrome that reflects the state’s inability to manage political openness without inducing instability.<sup>26</sup>

Peerenboom and Chen’s East Asian Model described in Chapter 7 implies that state actors intentionally move their countries to democracy when social pressures arise. But this seems unlikely in China in the absence of some sort of crisis. That means that a more hurried conversion or extrication is the most likely scenario for China. In the case of conversion, the regime takes the initiative at a time of growing social pressure but *before* change is forced upon it and when its legitimacy is still high. This was the case in Taiwan. Yet, as Dickson argued and as Tun-jen Cheng and Gang Lin argue in Chapter 8, the KMT had *already* committed itself to becoming more responsive to social demands. Although the Three Represents and a rising concern with legitimacy<sup>27</sup> show a similar drift in China, the CCP has not yet made democracy an explicit goal of national development. The result is that the CCP will likely require a more pressing crisis to convince it to launch major reforms.

That leaves extrication as the most likely denouement.<sup>28</sup> At this point, the parallels between Taiwan and China break down. The KMT was able to effect a 10-year conversion to democratic rule because it took the initiative *before* it was forced to do so. The CCP, at least from the current vantage point, looks unlikely to move preemptively. Although it would likely retain control of the process, it would be acting in a more crisis-ridden environment. A democratic transition in China will look more like the Soviet case than the Taiwanese case. This is a reminder that prior institutions may trump developmental pressures in shaping transitions. Being a Communist state with an explicit aversion to electoral democracy is more salient to China’s future than being a rapidly developing Chinese society.

### **Transition Processes in Taiwan and China**

This then takes us to the second part of transitions theory—the short-term process of transition—and the lessons to be learned from the Taiwan case. Although China’s transition is likely to be more rapid than that of Taiwan, the

predicted extrication in China is sufficiently close to Taiwan's conversion model, and the stylized stages of every transition of whatever type are sufficiently similar and autonomous of structural conditions, to push the comparison beyond structural questions to questions of process. By tracing the eight-stage process of transition (see Table 10.2) across the three cases—Taiwan in 1986, China in 1989, and China in the future—we can see how structural differences do not translate necessarily into transition process differences. .

### *Crisis*

Democratic transitions usually result from a particular crisis that occurs against a backdrop of authoritarian delegitimation. The assassination of Franco's successor, Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco, by Basque terrorists in 1973 or the financial collapse of the Bosnian state trading company Agrokomerc in 1987 could not be more different. But they share one essential feature: they were crisis events that raised the question of the legitimacy of authoritarian regimes. In the case of Taiwan, the 1986 breakthrough was preceded by a long-string of crises that, in Tsang's words, "were pushing Chiang [Ching-kuo] to a major review of policy."<sup>29</sup> These included, inter alia: Nixon's 1971 visit to China and Taiwan's subsequent loss of its United Nations seat; the 1977 local elections where the newly formed opposition camp won 35 percent of the seats in the Taiwan provincial assembly (the body charged with running subnational affairs) and 20 percent of the gubernatorial posts at the county level; a mass protest during those same 1977 elections over perceptions that the KMT had stolen the local mayoralty race in Chung-li; the police crackdown on opposition protests held on International Human Rights Day in Kaohsiung in 1979 that led to the injury of 40 civilians and the subsequent jailing on subversion charges of eight of the protest leaders (and 33 other participants); the murder of opposition journalist Henry Liu Iliang (pen name Jiang Nan) in south San Francisco in 1984 by alleged KMT agents; and finally the bankruptcy due to fraudulent loans in 1985 of the Tenth Credit Cooperative, whose chairman was a KMT legislator, that led to the resignation of the KMT ministers of both economy and finance.

This string of crises galvanized a growing opposition to KMT rule through actors such as the wives and lawyers of the Kaohsiung protest leaders or the depositors of the Tenth Credit Cooperative. More important, they realigned power within the KMT, strengthening the hand of reformers such as Lee Teng-hui. A little luck did not hurt as well: Sun Yun-hsuan, the dithering premier, collapsed from a blood clot in the brain in 1984, further strengthening Lee's hand.

The Tiananmen Square movement of 1989 was also preceded by a string of crises, most notably the rise of inflation from 1985 to 1988 due to price decontrols; mounting evidence of official profiteering, including that by Deng

224 *Looking Forward*

Xiaoping's son Deng Pufang; and finally the death in harness of the popular and officially mistreated former party general secretary Hu Yaobang in April 1989. The regime was facing a temporary legitimacy crisis, and reformers in the senior leadership knew it.

What is notable from contemporary China is how many similar crises have *not* started the wheels of democratic transition. One can enumerate any number of stolen elections; health, environmental, or financial scandals; or mass protest incidents that might have constituted a crisis in the regime. The SARS crisis of 2002–2003, the \$550 million in losses made by state trading company China Aviation Oil in 2004, and the chemical factory explosion that threw 100 tons of carcinogens into the Songhua River in 2005 are all examples of the sorts of crises that, mishandled by an unaccountable and secretive regime, have led to panic and protest. The reports on the desk of former party general secretary Jiang Zemin, as described by his wife in an official memoir, offer a neat summary: “Explosions here, rioting there. Murders, corruption, terrorism—little that was nice.”<sup>30</sup> That these crises have *not* led to transition processes shows how ill-defined the theory of crises is: without a theory of what makes a crisis salient, we can identify crises only *ex post*.

The examples of Taiwan in 1986 and China in 1989 show that crises are only crises when the regime is *already* predisposed toward launching major political reforms—as were Chiang Ching-kuo in 1986 and Zhao Ziyang in 1989. That the string of events in contemporary China has not led to crisis is owing to the fact that this crucial element is missing. The reason, of course, is that senior leaders do not perceive that their regime faces a legitimacy crisis, and they are probably right.<sup>31</sup> Short of a major catastrophe, crisis-watching in contemporary China is thus premature. Until there is evidence of a predisposition toward major political reforms within the senior leadership, driven by a perception of dwindling public support, disasters will come and go in China with minimal consequences.

### *Mobilization*

Crises are important because, when coupled with knowledge of support, or at least tolerance, within the regime, they lead to the next stage, social mobilization. Social mobilization represents a mass manifestation of the crisis of the regime—the moment when attention shifts to politics. Mobilization on a sufficiently large or organized scale is important because it is the first *public* indicator that a transition process may be underway. The tolerance of mobilization signals the predisposition toward major political reforms among some elements of the leadership that may hitherto have remained obscured: Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's unexpected tolerance of protesters in Sakhalin province in 1988 or of the memorial movement of Stalin's victims are two oft-cited examples from the Soviet case.

As noted, Taiwan's opposition movement had been gradually mobilizing since at least 1977. The importance of this mobilization cannot be underestimated even if it is in turn dependent upon regime toleration. Without it, the explicit split in the regime on the question of political reform would be less likely. In the summer of 1986, before the ban on opposition parties had been lifted but after Chiang's empowerment of a 12-member committee to consider this move, the DPP announced its creation. The KMT took no action against the illegal party, which eventually won 13 members in the legislative election of December 1986. This "sudden tolerance of organized opposition,"<sup>32</sup> as Dickson called it, was a good example of how mobilization signals, and in turn accelerates, changes at the top. For this reason, some have pointed to mobilization as having critical causal status in Taiwan and other cases. Tsang, for example, argues that "the vitality and, in the circumstances, the responsible manner in which the opposition and the general public pushed for further democratization ought to be recognized as the more important force [compared to internal KMT pluralism] that built up the momentum for democratization."<sup>33</sup>

China's 1989 social mobilization was the largest in the history of the PRC. Protests occurred in 341 of China's then 434 cities, taking in an estimated 100 million people.<sup>34</sup> Protest groups in Beijing included representatives from the *People's Daily*, the People's Liberation Army Navy, and the National People's Congress staff association. Workers were organized under the newly established Beijing Autonomous Workers' Federation, and students dominated the movement's leadership. One could not have asked for a more substantial mobilization. Retrospective critiques of the movement's factionalism or its failure to embrace the peasantry miss the essential point of mobilizations in state-led democratic transitions: their role is to empower reformers, not replace them. The reasons for the failure of China's 1989 transition must lie elsewhere.

A future mobilization in China need not be as large as Tiananmen in 1989. Moreover, technology and information spread make the possibilities even greater. A growing regularization of popular protest, moreover, is creating norms that make it more likely that citizens would take to the streets given signals of toleration from the top at a time of regime crisis. The very fact that the Ministry of Public Security has, since 1993, made annual reports on the number and scale of public protests shows the normalization of this form of political participation in China. When there is a predisposition toward major reforms in the leadership, mobilization will be rapid and effectual.

### *Elite Split*

The division of an authoritarian regime over the question of major political reforms is the crux of any democratic transition.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, Bunce argued in

226 *Looking Forward*

2000 that the *only* real generalization of two decades of research on democratization is that “when elites divide, the probability of democratic outcomes increases substantially.”<sup>36</sup> What is important to note from the cases here is that elite split is a two-stage process. The first stage is part of the long-term factors that form the predisposition to major political reforms among some elites. The second stage involves the explicit shift from a *predisposition* to an *intention* to launch major political reforms in the face of crisis and mobilization. The split involves those reform-minded elites dividing from resisters on the question of political reform by making their intentions clear internally and, soon enough, externally. Elite splits are important because they are the second public indicator that an attempted transition is underway.

The elite split became evident in Taiwan as early as 1983 with the exile of hard-line KMT Department of Political Warfare director Wang Sheng to be ambassador to Paraguay after his attempts to accumulate power during Chiang Ching-kuo’s lengthy illness. His defeat signaled the ascension of the reform faction within the KMT, centered on the Youth Corps of Lee Huan, who became KMT secretary-general in 1987. The emergent split was widened by the fact of growing local electoral competition between KMT and de facto opposition candidates. As Langston argues, and as Tun-jen Cheng and Gang Lin argue in Chapter 8, local elections provided incentives to KMT reformers to break with hard-liners because they believed they could regain power through elections even if they lost power in internecine struggles.<sup>37</sup>

The subsequent democratic breakthrough, according to Dickson, “was dependent primarily on changes in the composition of the party elite, ending a stalemate that had existed for years.”<sup>38</sup> As Cheng and Haggard noted: “Internal political debates within the KMT were the crucial factor shaping the transition.”<sup>39</sup>

The fact that Chiang himself moved to the side of the reformers as his death neared was obviously of central importance. The reasons for this remain clouded in debate—whether he was a genuine democrat or was acting for strategic reasons. The truth is probably both—as is the case in most democratic transitions.<sup>40</sup> He was Soviet-trained and schooled in strengthening the party and in recovering China. But he also took seriously the Three Principles of the People and believed deeply that legitimacy in the eyes of both history and the people was the ultimate aim of government.<sup>41</sup> The two motivations were in fact complementary. After all, it was not the technocrats but the party affairs personnel who were on the side of reforms in the KMT. Although the party affairs personnel were often seen as conservatives, they were conservative only in a romantic sense—they *believed* in the ruling party. But this belief led them to embrace reforms that they predicted would benefit the party itself. As Scalapino noted: “Chiang Ching-kuo was no democrat. ... [His] reforms were designed to protect his power and that of the party to which he was fully committed.”<sup>42</sup>

The elite split in China in 1989 became public in Zhao’s speech to the

Asian Development Bank meeting in Beijing on May 4 in which he sided with the students and said that the party needed to respond to their demands. On his side were such powerful elders as Bo Yibo, who commented in an internal meeting: "We should grab the initiative by launching democratization now, while the leadership role of the Party is relatively strong."<sup>43</sup> The emergence of this split was by no means inevitable: most of the "liberals" taking part in Zhao's political reform study group set up in 1987, including Zhao himself, were opposed to the introduction of multiparty democracy.<sup>44</sup> One factor, obviously, was the role of the Tiananmen protests in encouraging this split—just as protests in Tiananmen in 1976 had encouraged party elders to overthrow the Gang of Four.<sup>45</sup> But, like the Taiwan case, strategic considerations seem insufficient to explain Zhao's bold gambit. At this point, individual leadership and a commitment to popular rule at some normative level seem indispensable. What is obvious from his discussions with a close friend after the incident is that Zhao believed passionately in pluralistic politics, arguing later that a "Western" democratic system was the best one yet developed even if its implementation in China was premature.<sup>46</sup> Although the adage that "democrats do not produce democracy; democracy produces democrats" is certainly true at a general level, it is also true that *some* predisposition or sympathy for democracy is necessary for elites to split. Prudential concerns or rational calculations cannot explain the risks that reformist elites take to initiate democracy.

That is why there is so little optimism about a similar split emerging in China in the future: there is little evidence that any significant elite political actor in China has a commitment to major political reforms, much less democracy.<sup>47</sup> However, as in Taiwan in 1986 and in China in 1989, the revelation of such a commitment may come very late in the game. Mikhail Gorbachev, for example, was promoted to head the Soviet Communist party in 1985 precisely because he was seen as a party stalwart *opposed* to political liberalization. To understand the potential for elites to embrace democratization, then, we must look back one stage to see whether there are elites who are (1) tolerant or pragmatic in their approach to political organization, (2) risk-taking in their individual behavior, and (3) populist in their political inclinations.

Looked at from this perspective, the Chinese leadership seems no less predisposed to splitting on the issue of democratic reforms than it was in 1989 or than Taiwan's was in the 1970s. A process of technocratic transformation of party cadres began in China in the early 1980s, mirroring a similar process in Taiwan in the 1960s.<sup>48</sup> Pragmatism, populism, and opportunism, and with them the buried seeds of democratic commitment, are certainly not in short supply in the current Chinese leadership. Designated future premier Li Keqiang, for example, is a Leninist romantic of the "inland" faction who told fellow students at Beijing University in 1978 that he wanted to "change the party from the inside." Designated future party general secretary Xi Jinping, meanwhile, who is due to assume power in 2012, is a results-oriented and non-

228 *Looking Forward*

ideological leader whose father, party elder Xi Zhongxun, suffered at the hands of Mao.

In the Taiwan case, Chiang Ching-kuo's convening of a National Construction Conference in 1972 in which scholars aired bold plans for political reform might be seen in retrospect as signaling his predisposition to change. Similar conferences held by Hu Jintao at the Central Party School since then can likewise be seen as signaling an emerging interest in "audacious"<sup>49</sup> political reforms within the Chinese leadership.

Meanwhile, the groundwork for populism has been laid in the CCP. The CCP's populist Three Represents parallels the KMT's populist Three Principles of the People (and Khrushchev's "party of all the people" of 1961, a policy that led in the Ukrainian region of Sverdlovsk to a young man named Boris Yeltsin's joining the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Hu Jintao's "harmonious society" parallels Chiang Ching-kuo's policy of seeking "political harmony" in late-authoritarian Taiwan.<sup>50</sup> And the emergence since 2002 of distinctive "coastal" and "inland" factions on policy issues in the CCP,<sup>51</sup> both claiming to represent popular views, parallels the emergence of KMT factions through electoral politics in Taiwan in the 1960s.<sup>52</sup>

The only missing element is a predisposition to major political change. At present, that does not exist, and that alone must explain why transition processes have not begun in China. Put simply, an interest in audacious reforms will not become a predisposition toward them until there is evidence of a legitimacy crisis that gives urgency to such plans.<sup>53</sup> The prospect of legitimacy crisis will sweep the CCP off its feet because the CCP is already oriented to being moved with social demands.

*Hard-line Backlash*

Retrospective accounts of Taiwan's transition tend to downplay, or wholly ignore, the very real attempts by hard-liners to defeat the reformers who had emerged in charge of the KMT. But from the perspective of the 1986 to 1992 period, Taiwan's transition looked very uncertain. Dissidents continued to be thrown in jail for sedition in this period, and the KMT stepped up its control of the national media. Wu describes a "surging tide of conservatism" inside the KMT after Chiang announced his 12-member committee in 1986.<sup>54</sup> The fact that Chiang then fell gravely ill until his death two years later foreboded trouble for the nascent democratic transition.

The conservative backlash in Taiwan was at first aimed at preventing the Taiwan-born Lee Teng-hui from succeeding Chiang. Ironically, it was Chiang's mother, 90-year-old Madame Chiang Kai-shek, who first came forward in January 1988 and then again in July 1988 to prevent the KMT from appointing Lee as party chairman. Having failed, conservatives then attempted in February 1990 to prevent Lee from being nominated as the party's pres-

idential candidate for the following month's National Assembly vote. In this case, the conservatives broke with democratic centralism and nominated a rival presidential candidate, judiciary minister Lin Yang-kang, with Chiang Ching-kuo's younger brother, Chiang Wei-kuo, as his vice president. In all three cases, only careful persuasion and politicking by reformers in the KMT saved the day.<sup>55</sup> KMT reformers such as Jaw Shao-kang, James Soong, and Kuan Chung "were able to convince hardliners of the necessity of reform," notes Hood.<sup>56</sup> Stirred by rising student and DPP protests against the role of National Assembly hardliners—protestors numbered more than 20,000 in the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall Square on March 19–20, 1990—the National Assembly eventually dutifully elected Lee as president on March 21, 1990.

Having failed to unseat Lee, conservative efforts then shifted to thwarting the planned elimination from the three main political bodies—the Legislative Yuan, National Assembly, and Control Yuan—of the "China seats" elected in 1947 and 1948 that accounted for three-quarters of the total membership in those bodies. In its session that opened in February 1990, the National Assembly tried to pass a law extending its term of office and arrogating to itself the right to initiate and veto laws and to meet annually. This was in direct contradiction of Lee Teng-hui's announced plans of February 1989 to reform the body. Rumors circulated in Taipei about an imminent People's Liberation Army (PLA) invasion of Taiwan in collusion with KMT hard-liners, underlining the seriousness of the situation and signifying the beginnings of a long period in which Taiwan's democratization would become the main issue in cross-Straits relations.

The decision to elect Lee was in part a sign that National Assembly resistance was crumbling. But the backlash was finally defeated only in the high court—a reminder that prior institutionalization of the rule of law can have positive impacts on democratization, as Randall Peerenboom and Weitseng Chen (in Chapter 7) as well as Tun-jen Cheng and Gang Lin (in Chapter 8) argue in this book. In June 1990, the court ruled that Lee's law on "China seats" retirements of February 1989 was constitutional, and all mainland-era representatives must retire by the end of 1991.

It is also noteworthy here to stress the critical role played by Lee Teng-hui in sticking to plans for reforms: although Chiang is often cited as the father of democracy in Taiwan, Lee's critical role in preventing the hard-line backlash and then carrying through the full democratization was arguably just as important.

At the same time, the role of social mobilization, much of it motivated by a rising sense of separate Taiwanese identity, cannot be ignored: the massive protests against the Old Thieves (*lao zei*) of the National Assembly and Legislative Yuan, as the pre-1949 era members were derisively called, by tens of thousands of people in Taipei in March 1990, made Lee's conciliatory style seem moderate. The generous payouts for each retiring legislator and assem-

230 *Looking Forward*

blyman—the equivalent of US\$170,000 per person in 2008 prices—may have helped as well.

This point helps to explain the successful hard-line backlash in China in 1989 that ended the attempted democratic transition there. That there were hard-liners in the Chinese case opposed to democratic reforms was not the critical point. Hard-liners attempting to sabotage democratic transitions are always in plentiful supply, especially in Leninist or quasi-Leninist systems such as Taiwan and China where the ruling party is organized precisely to ensure such a backlash. As in Taiwan, those hard-liners had a historical pedigree in China that gave them an elevated status within the party—in both cases they were the veterans of the KMT-CCP civil war of 1946–1950 who had “saved the nation.” In China in 1989, they were represented by the Eight Immortals (*ba lao*), led by Deng Xiaoping, who still held the position of chairman of the Central Military Commission, and Yang Shangkun, who was president.

Why did the Eight Immortals succeed in China while the Old Thieves failed in Taiwan? In light of the Taiwan case, the answer is that there were no internal moderates in the CCP who could remonstrate with the hard-liners, convincing them to side with Zhao and his reform plans. Whereas this pluralism had developed within the KMT as a result of local electoral competition, such pluralism was deeply insufficient within the CCP in 1989. Premier Li Peng was as hard-line as the immortals themselves. The moderate National People’s Congress chairman Wan Li was detained at the Shanghai airport by the local party secretary, Jiang Zemin (who would replace Zhao), as Wan attempted to return to Beijing from an ill-timed overseas trip. The result was that when the Eight Immortals moved against Zhao, there was not a peep from the CCP elite.

What about next time in China? One advantage of the passage of years is that the Eight Immortals are now all dead (the last, Bo Yibo, died in 2007). Meanwhile, Li Peng’s last representative, Luo Gan, stepped down from the Politburo Standing Committee in 2007. The PLA, meanwhile, has been almost entirely removed from the realm of politics and its internal policing duties handed over to the civilian-controlled People’s Armed Police (PAP). The hard-liners in today’s China do not have the pedigree of those of the past. They are peers, not elders, of the current leadership. One can also find a greater degree of moderate opinion within the party today. Nonetheless, there are still serious doubts that these moderates exist in sufficient numbers to overcome a hard-line backlash against an attempted reform-led split. Until the CCP has a longer period of social engagement as a result of the Three Represents, the moderates’ ability to wrest control of the party from conservatives must remain in doubt.

*Democratic Decision*

With the June 1990 high court ruling against the conservatives and the July 1990 NAC consensus on a directly elected presidency, the way was open for

a democratic decision in Taiwan—the point at which the regime made an explicit and clear commitment to democratization. After the NAC, Lee appointed a 13-member KMT panel headed by Vice President Li Yuan-zu to study the conference's proposals for a fully elected legislature and National Assembly. In February 1991, the panel voted in favor of those proposals. At that point, the KMT's decision to implement democracy was clear, even if it was not until 1992 that the proposals were fully enacted. Lee had accepted the NAC consensus and made the decision to move forward. In May 1991, martial law was lifted.

China's failed transition of 1989 never made it such an explicit official commitment to democracy. The hard-line backlash had already overtaken it before then. However, we know for all intents what that initial decision would have looked like. The General Framework for Political Reform produced by Zhao's Working Group on Political Reform in 1987 included plans for expanded local elections, constitutional limits on the CCP's powers, and genuine press freedoms.<sup>57</sup> In the following two years, those proposals were widely debated inside the party. The Tiananmen protests of 1989 brought them to the brink of success, but sent them instead to failure. When Zhao made his dramatic appearance among the protesters in the square in the early hours of May 19, 1989, his plain words were reflective of the fact that the chance for a democratic decision had passed: "We have come too late."<sup>58</sup>

Assuming that a future transition in China makes it past the inevitable hard-line backlash, what might a democratic decision look like? A common finding of democratic decisions in state-led transitions is that they are often couched in the language of continuity, stability, and ruling-party interests. This was the case in Taiwan and would have been the case in 1989 China. In a future transition in China, there will be an even greater variety of ways to couch a democratic decision in the language of continuity, given institutional developments in the post-1989 period. A reformist leadership could, for instance, make good on the 1997 and 2007 party congress promises to expand direct elections to the township and county/city levels. "If the Chinese people can manage a village, I believe in several years they can manage a township," premier Wen Jiabao, who was at Zhao's side as his chief-of-staff in 1989, said in 2005.<sup>59</sup> Or a reform leadership could announce plans to implement the legal requirement that township-level people's congresses be directly elected, just as Gorbachev's initial reforms were centered on making local soviets genuinely elected and genuinely powerful. All this could be more broadly phrased within the context of post-1989 doctrines such as "political civilization" (*zhengzhi wenming*), "the development of the rule of law" (*fazhi jianshe*), or "constitutional government" (*xianzheng*). Outspoken democratic advocate Yu Keping, who is head of the CCP's Central Translation Bureau and, more important, is director of the government's Center for Chinese Government Innovations that rewards "audacious reforms" at the local level, has proposed

232 *Looking Forward*

a phased democratic transition in the name of “incrementalism.” As in Taiwan, a democratic decision in China could result from a little-noticed vote by an obscure CCP committee studying political reform options.

*Institutional Choice*

In general, state-led transitions adopt new democratic institutions that build upon existing ones.<sup>60</sup> In the Taiwan case, the only major revisions required to transform an authoritarian system into a democratic one were to make the legislature and National Assembly fully elected. The DPP’s failure to win the necessary 25 percent of seats in the first popular National Assembly elections in December 1991 (it won 20 percent of the seats up for election, ending with 16 percent of the entire body) ensured that institutional choice remained in the hands of the regime (since the National Assembly had powers to revise the constitution in addition to choosing the president). This was a case where popular mobilization (in this case the National Assembly election) actually legitimated the regime-led nature of the transition: most Taiwanese seemed to prefer that the KMT remain at the helm of the transition. The National Assembly meeting of March 1992 then harmonized legislative and presidential terms at four years each and established a strong-presidency model of executive-legislative relations (again, consistent with state-led transitions). KMT divisions on the question of a direct presidential ballot led the issue to be postponed, but Lee indicated his support of a direct poll in March 1992: “Direct election is the trend of democracy,” Lee said.<sup>61</sup>

The degree of leeway for institutional choice in Taiwan was further constrained by an external factor: Beijing, ironically, was opposed to major constitutional revisions that would undercut the KMT’s claim to rule all of China, since that was seen as a concession to Taiwanese independence. An oblique constitutional revision passed in 1991 limited the area covered by the constitution to Taiwan but did not give up on the claim to rule all of China. Not until its democratic transition was over did consideration begin of further major constitutional reforms such as the abolition of the Taiwan provincial government, the National Assembly, and the National Reunification Council.

The predicted state-led extrication in a future transition in China likewise implies that it will build upon existing foundations. Indeed, the popular “constitutionalist” proposals for political reform in China today call for an implementation of the existing constitution with only minor revisions, most notably the elimination of the CCP’s “leading role” in the political system.<sup>62</sup> The National People’s Congress would live up to its official billing as “the highest organ of state power,” and the consultative Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference would retain an advisory role, perhaps giving greater representation to regional and minority groups. The current weak president and strong premier would be retained. Although such continuist transitions

create later problems for democratic consolidation, as we will discuss below, they are easier to agree upon at the critical moment.

### *Interim Regime*

Interim regimes are those charged with carrying through the democratic decision. In the terminology of Shain, Linz, and Berat, those in state-led transitions benefit from having both “backward legality” (they inherit state power from the outgoing regime) as well as “forward legitimacy” (they are leading the country to democracy).<sup>63</sup> From the lifting of martial law in March 1991 until the first legislative election of December 1992, Lee Teng-hui’s cabinet served as the interim regime, guiding the deliberations of the National Assembly and planning its own first electoral battle. Indeed, so continuist was the Taiwan transition that Lee’s government was never really recognized as having a “caretaker” capacity at all. Taiwan’s transition is seen as having gone directly from authoritarian rule to democratic rule. Yet in those 21 months, it was neither. That the interim regime was so short-lived shows the momentum and support that the transition had developed by early 1991.

If the predicted extrication scenario is a better description of a future transition in China, then the interim regime in that case will be more prominent. Yet it also means that such a regime would be just as short-lived, perhaps even more so given the more pressured nature of the transition. Extrication reduces the likelihood of a permanent interim regime that never makes good on its democratic promises.

### *Founding Election*

Founding elections are good indicators of the completion of a democratic transition where the elections are reasonably free and fair and where the results are widely accepted. In the Taiwan case, legislative elections in 1992 and 1995 and the first direct presidential election in 1996 all met those criteria. This raises the question of *which* election should be taken as indicative. The KMT’s sweep of 60 percent of the legislative seats in 1992 gave it its first democratic mandate, which in turn gave Lee’s presidency a popular basis it had hitherto lacked. Yet Lee himself was not directly elected until 1996, which in formal terms is a better date to end the transition. What is remarkable is that the results of all three elections were widely accepted by all major groups (save perhaps China, which launched belligerent missile tests off Taiwan’s coast in the run-up to the 1996 poll). Just two election outcomes in 1992, in Hualien, were protested, and the 1995 legislative election and 1996 presidential election were free of major controversies.

An election in China would involve some 900 million eligible voters, making it the single biggest event in world history. India’s 2004 national elec-

234 *Looking Forward*

tion (where 368 million people, or 55 percent of the 670 million eligible voters, voted) showed the benefits that China will derive as a latecomer. India employed electronic voting for the election, which passed off virtually without electoral fraud and defects and with minimal violence. There is today also a vast resource of international groups that help with the administering of elections on which China could draw. Given its size and diversity, issues of contested local polls and disgruntled conservative forces would remain more potentially spoiling in China than they were in Taiwan. Indeed, democrats in China are already wisely warning that this will be part of the country's passage to democracy. Former Zhao adviser Yan Jiaqi, for example, predicts:

China will likely have to go through several more nationwide protest, strike, and student movements before it achieves mature democracy. It will have to get through several short-lived military coups, many local-level armed conflicts, many cases of major political scandal, the entry of bribery and violence into elections, and maybe a couple of cases where the national election results in a great dispute that brings constitutional government to the brink of collapse. Even so, China can surely march through the various stages of democratic development.<sup>64</sup>

Even at this final stage, then, democratic transition in China will be immensely more complicated, and risky, than in Taiwan. Still, other large countries, such as India, Indonesia, and Brazil, have successfully completed those stages. China's chance to try again, when it comes, will offer evidence of exactly how much has changed since 1989.

### **Transition Implications in Taiwan and China**

Both aspects of democratic transitions—the structural or path-dependent aspects and the contingent or autonomous aspects—have an impact on the degree and nature of the democracy that follows. Table 10.1 shows the risks associated with different structural types of transitions. A similar list could be drawn up for Table 10.2, showing the implications of the various stages for the democracy that follows.

In terms of the structural aspects, the most common finding is that the greater is the social involvement in the transition, the faster tends to be the progress toward liberal democracy in the years that follow.<sup>65</sup> In a study of 64 democratizations from 1972 to 2005, Freedom House found that society-led or mixed state/society-led transitions had dramatically better outcomes than state-led transitions (see Table 10.3).<sup>66</sup>

Taiwan's democratic progress was unusually good, gaining 3.5 points on the 7-point scale shown in Table 10.3 between 1986 and 2005. Although Freedom House classifies Taiwan as a mixed state/society-led transition, it

**Table 10.3 Democratic Gains by Transition Type**

Transition Type	Cases	Gains (7 point scale)
Society-led	18	2.78
Mixed	32	2.58
State-led	14	1.10
All	64	2.31

*Source:* Karatnycky and Ackerman 2005.

*Note:* Gains indicate the change in combined average rating of political and civil liberties scores from year of transition to 2005.

could just as well be classified as a state-led transition, in which case its performance would be all the more remarkable. Looked at from the perspective of the late 1980s or early 1990s, it is important to remind ourselves that this result was wholly unexpected. Cheng and Haggard, for example, wrote in 1991 that “the electoral performance of the DPP in 1989 may well be a one-time gain. ... The KMT clearly has the capacity and opportunity to transform Taiwan’s one-party authoritarian regime into a one-party dominant democratic system.”<sup>67</sup> Meaney argued similarly in the same year that there was “potential for the emergence of a hybrid regime, neither fully authoritarian nor democratic, that may persist for a protracted period” and that it was uncertain “whether the [KMT] will stick to its plans for electoral reform if it appears that they might actually result in an opposition victory.”<sup>68</sup>

That the Taiwanese transition did *not* give way to a feckless democracy is a testament both to the importance of social pressures and to the normative commitment to democracy that Lee Teng-hui brought with him into office. Once the inevitable pressures arose for a “second revolution” to end KMT rule, the KMT itself had become sufficiently imbued with democratic norms that the rapid march toward a liberal democracy was inevitable. In this sense, Taiwan’s democratization enjoyed the best of both worlds: the stability and continuity of a state-led transition and the rapid gains in democratic quality of a society-led transition.

China will not likely be as fortunate. In the Freedom House study, eight countries classified as “not free” prior to transition experienced state-led democratizations (as we predict for “not free” China). Four of them (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Zimbabwe) remained not free by 2005, and the others (Ethiopia, Gambia, Mozambique, and Paraguay) were classified as only partly free. Dickson argues that the most likely result of a democratic transition in China would be a stalled transition, a new regime “much like the old regime, minus the Leninist elements. ... The CCP would likely dominate its societal partners and ... the outlook for democracy in

China is not good under those circumstances.”<sup>69</sup> The prospect of a new People’s Republic of Chinastan broods over a future democratic transition in China.

China, then, must aspire to achieve a transition consistent with the latter four examples in the Freedom House study and with the Taiwan case. To do this will require greater social pressures and a sharper division within the CCP—process factors that mitigate the structural ones. The “myth of moderation” as Bermeo calls it,<sup>70</sup> is to assume that all that is moderate and gradual is necessarily good for a democratic transition. This may not be the case. A similar “myth of state strength” is that all forms of state strength are good for democracy. Again, this may not be the case, as Way has argued of post-Communist Europe.<sup>71</sup> The Taiwan example shows that social protest, destabilizing elite divisions, and a divided state may be necessary for a successful posttransition consolidation phase. Similarly, Paraguay’s remarkable three-point gain on its Freedom House score beginning with a state-led democratic transition in 1989 resulted from an internal coup against the repressive rule of General Alfredo Stroessner. The transition was state-led, but the state itself had changed colors prior to the transition. Although to succeed, China’s transition must aspire to be socially mixed, internally divisive, and a challenge to some forms of state strength.

### **Empirical, Theoretical, and Policy Conclusions**

The Taiwan-China comparison is both apt and useful in the case of democratic transitions. It shows both the similarities and differences between the two places, pointing to a better understanding of what was special about both Taiwan’s successful transition of 1986 and China’s failed transition of 1989. This leads to a better understanding of the forces that will shape a future transition in China.

Several key lessons emerge about the Taiwan case. One is that there was nothing that made the string of scandals and incidents of the 1970s and early 1980s necessarily crises. Only the predisposition of Chiang Ching-kuo to a liberalization of the regime, coupled with a sudden gambit in 1986, made those events critical in nature. Crisis in Taiwan was subjective, not objective.

Second, although it has rarely been mentioned, there *was* a serious hard-line backlash in Taiwan that might have derailed the transition there. That backlash was fought in the courts and in the National Assembly and so lacked the drama of a military confrontation. But it was no less serious for all that.

Third, given that the defeat of the hard-line backlash was achieved by Lee Teng-hui rather than Chiang, Lee arguably has a better claim to being the father of democracy in Taiwan than Chiang. His gentle persuasion and unwavering democratic commitment saved what might have become a stillborn, or

more violent, transition. Hard-liners complained of “the Lee Teng-hui syndrome” in defeating their plans for sustaining authoritarian rule, perhaps the greatest compliment he could have earned.

Finally, even though social mobilization critically shaped the transition, its main role came *after* 1996, ensuring that Taiwan did not drift toward a feckless electoral democracy dominated by the KMT but instead moved quickly into the ranks of the world’s liberal democracies. In other respects, social mobilization and opposition politics played an adjunct role alone. To repeat, Taiwan’s transition contained a pact, but it was not a pacted transition.

In light of the Taiwan case, the main lesson that emerges about China’s failed transition of 1989 is a simple one: nothing made the 1989 defeat inevitable, or even likely. Virtually all of the preconditions necessary for a successful transition were in place in 1989, save one: sufficient internal pluralism in the CCP to support Zhao Ziyang against the inevitable hard-line backlash of early May 1989. Yet that condition might have been remedied by better luck—a few of the Eight Immortals deceased before 1989 rather than shortly after it, for example, or National People’s Congress chairman Wan Li in Beijing rather than traveling abroad. Just as it is important to avoid retrospective views of Taiwan’s 1986 transition as bound to succeed, so too it is important to avoid retrospective views of China’s 1989 transition as bound to fail. Contingency was critical to the outcomes in both cases.

A second lesson from the China case is that institutions matter. Being Communist is more important to China than being Asian, Confucian, or developing. Internal pluralism was weak in the CCP in 1989 because Leninist institutions conspired to keep it that way. The great question that must be raised in the context of a future transition in China, then, is whether post-1989 reforms have shifted the CCP to a quasi-Leninist party, where Leninist principles are challenged by emergent pluralist ones. Authors in this book are divided on that issue—Ten-jen Cheng and Gang Lin indicate in Chapter 8 that they believe elections have *not* been sufficiently important in China to achieve the same pluralism that they did in Taiwan, but Randall Peerenboom and Weitseng Chen’s work in Chapter 7 suggests the emergence of competing legalistic norms inside the party.

To what extent does this analysis force us to reconsider aspects of democratic transition theory itself? Two points deserve mention. For one, the idea that one can objectively measure the crisis-potential of an authoritarian regime is undermined by these two cases. Taiwan’s 1986 transition and China’s failed 1989 transition both occurred in times of rapid growth, low unemployment, and healthy financial systems. Although we can, and must, study the objective conditions that might be defined as “crisis-type” in nature, ultimately there is only a probabilistic connection between this analysis and what relevant actors will subjectively *perceive* to be a crisis. Purely objective crisis theories in general and objective *economic* crisis theories in particular have only a probabilis-

238 *Looking Forward*

tic relation to democratic transitions. To understand their potential, one must understand the predispositions of would-be regime reformers and their subjective views of what constitutes a crisis.

More generally, “political economy” approaches to democratic transitions fail on both substantive and methodological grounds. Objective economic conditions have little predictive value in explaining transitions for the same reason that “rational choice” theories of elite choice fail as well: what matters is not some objective set of rules and interests that can be studied as an exercise in interest-maximization but rather the ideas, moral commitments, and subjective perceptions of actors that make an everyday event suddenly appear as an objective crisis or that make unnecessary and self-defeating choices appear as “rational.” Like so much of political life, democratic transitions represent a triumph of ideas over interests, or more accurately a redefinition of interests in terms of prevailing ideas. “One person with a belief,” wrote Mill, “is a social power equal to ninety-nine who have only interests.”<sup>72</sup>

A second general finding for democratic transitions theory, following the above, is that some level of normative commitment to democracy by key elites is necessary for a successful democratic transition. Even though no democracy is ever created by a card-carrying liberal democrat, it is also true that without *some* commitment to the ideals of political equality and popular control, the risk taking and staying power needed from reform elites is unimaginable. Chiang Ching-kuo’s rediscovery of the populist Three Principles of the People after his father’s death and Zhao Ziyang’s explicit commitment to popular rule (but not multiparty democracy) in China both show this. Chiang’s successor, Lee Teng-hui, was even more morally committed to democracy. We cannot explain democratic transitions as merely a “fortuitous byproduct”<sup>73</sup> of struggles for domination and clashes of interests, however appealing such formulations are to the cynically inclined. Such clashes could only result in civil war, new authoritarian regimes, or hegemonic electoral regimes. Transitions to democracy must arise from some level of commitment to the normative principles of democracy. Democratic transitions may be contingent, but they are by no means fortuitous. As Gill has written, “If the transitions literature does not recognize this normative aspect of democracy, it cannot explain the appeal of this form of government.”<sup>74</sup>

What does this imply for the making of policy toward China? There are many policies that might help to create the structural conditions for a democratic transition in China. Consistent with that, the implications here are that international and domestic actors should strive to strengthen social forces in China as much as possible prior to the transition. The more “mixed” is China’s transition, the better prospects the new democracy will have. That the CCP recognizes the dangers of growing social pluralism and has taken steps to limit it—such as by vetting the civil society groups that the European Union is trying to cultivate in the country—is an argument for *more*, not *less*, effort in this

regard. Likewise it is important to encourage internal regime pluralism through programs that seek to educate the senior leadership to the widest possible number of democratic societies, both in Asia and abroad.

In this regard, a deeper understanding of the Taiwan experience may aid transition in China. In a 2006 article in the popular journal *Yanhuang Chunqiu*, for example, Wang Yeyang of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences offers a glowing assessment of Chiang Ching-kuo's far-sighted decision to initiate a democratic transition in Taiwan as social conflict and KMT-DPP conflicts began to rise.<sup>75</sup> The article, entitled "Chiang Ching-kuo and the Kuomintang's Democratic Transition," is important because, as this book has emphasized, it is the intersubjective lessons of the Taiwan experience as much as their objective lessons that will matter to political outcomes in China. Chinese Academy of Social Sciences professor Zhang Boshu's stunning 2007 essay on the lessons from Taiwan's transition for China similarly highlighted not only the importance of organized social forces in pushing for transition but also the role of leadership: "The Taiwan experience reminds us that CCP reformers will meet with all sorts of resistance. Thus reformers inside the CCP must be courageous and wise. They must break out of their organizational state of mind in order to fly towards the shores of freedom."<sup>76</sup>

Do key actors in China share these perceptions of reformist scholars that Taiwan is a model transition for their country's future? Certainly, the official line is that a repeat of Taiwan's democratic transition, like all democratic transitions, is to be avoided. Chiang's initiation of democratic reforms, like Gorbachev's, is represented as a serious violation of Leninist organizational principles. However, outside of this official rhetoric, which is not expressed with much conviction by any scholar in China, there has emerged a counter-discourse, of which the works by Wang and Zhang are good examples. On this view, the Taiwan transition shows the benefits of a preemptive political opening. "By exploiting his powerful leadership position, Chiang Ching-kuo pushed reforms to a breakthrough while also maintaining the overall stability of the political situation. ... Inter-party relations became more tolerant and social protest was kept within the bounds of the law," wrote Wang.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, in his 2003 book *China's Economic Development and Democratization*, Wang Yanlai argues that the Taiwan transition has lessons for elites in China.<sup>78</sup> In particular, he argues, it shows that there can be much continuity with past political and economic systems and that the eventual loss of power by the ruling party can be minimally disruptive.

A 2005 article by Lin Zhen of Putian University in Fujian Province argues that the key reason for Taiwan's democratic transition was Chiang Ching-kuo's wish to be the "father of democracy" in Taiwan, coupled with a series of regime crises that disarmed internal opposition.<sup>79</sup> Although mainstream in its interpretations—indeed, it draws upon the scholarship of this book's coeditor Larry Diamond—Lin's article is important for what it does *not* say: that dem-

ocratic transition in Taiwan was, for instance, a result of nefarious “independence” forces in Taiwan or of Cold War strategists in Washington, both official interpretations. Taiwan’s transition is instead portrayed in naturalistic, developmental tones. Meanwhile Zhang—who *does* make clear and strong parallels between Taiwan’s past and China’s future—categorically rejects the notion that losing power in a democratic election would represent a disaster for the CCP. “Losing power would provide a powerful impetus for internal party reforms, allowing the party to seek to return to power within a constitutional framework. Calling this a ‘disaster’ for the party is deceiving the people and deceiving themselves.”<sup>80</sup> Such subjective learning from Taiwan may shape the political future of China.

The revival of KMT electoral fortunes in Taiwan after the second presidential term of DPP president Chen Shui-bian (president from 2000 to 2008) could further emphasize the attractions of the Taiwan transition for actors in China. Although the analysis here has emphasized that a successful transition in China will likely be *more* disruptive to the CCP than the Taiwan transition was to the KMT, that objective lesson does not stand in the way of subjective interpretation that sees the CCP as having all the advantages of the KMT. In this regard, Taiwan has a special policy role to play. To encourage democratic change in China, Taiwan needs to insert itself into the subjective perceptions of society and elites alike in China. In this sense, the establishment of the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (which supported the conference on which this book is based) is an important step. However, more could be done that would reflect the confidence of Taiwan in its own democratic experience. Why not invite Chinese lawmakers and electoral officials to come to Taiwan to observe and even monitor elections in Taiwan? Why not provide extra funding to Chinese scholars of political reform to study in Taiwan? Why not convince the DPP to show more respect and honor for Chiang Ching-kuo and Lee Teng-hui as democratic heroes of Taiwan?

Given the contingency and autonomy of transition processes, it is also worth thinking in advance how the world community might support a second attempted transition in China. Bunce and Wolchik argue that much more attention should be paid to transitional policies, given that longer-term structural policies are difficult to implement.<sup>81</sup> This means that policies should be in place to create “ratchet effects” during a future transition in China—factors that will ensure the attempted transition does not unwind. Greater on-the-ground scrutiny and reporting of social mobilization will reduce the likelihood of repression, for instance, and immediate promises of economic assistance to a newly democratic state (and economic sanctions on a resurgent authoritarian state) will undermine support for hard-liners.

Democratic transitions are stories of social emancipation with particular local histories. But they also share certain forms, and the relatively universal form taken by the Taiwan case makes it a useful template with which to study

China's past and future transitions. What actors in China will do with that template is a critical question for the future of Asia, and the world.

### Notes

1. O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986.
2. Geddes 1999, 115–116. I include the 21 states that resulted from the breakup of larger authoritarian states.
3. Haggard and Kaufman 1995; Hollifield and Jillson 2000; Lee 2002.
4. Collier 1999.
5. Dogan and Higley 1998.
6. Huntington 1991, 137–139.
7. Linz and Stepan 1996a.
8. Benoit and Schiemann 2001; Easter 1997; Horowitz 2002.
9. Shain, Linz, and Berat 1995.
10. Carothers 2002.
11. Chao and Meyers 1998, 124.
12. Cheng and Haggard 1992; Dickson 1997, 1996.
13. Karatnycky and Ackerman 2005; Tsang 1998.
14. Ch'iu 1995, 121.
15. Lam 1995, 156.
16. As estimated for 2008 by Li 2006.
17. Bakken 2004.
18. Li 2005.
19. Nathan 2007, 2006.
20. Dickson 1996, 73.
21. Guo 2003.
22. Chan 2002.
23. Sun 2005, 261.
24. Nathan 1996.
25. Peerenboom 2007a.
26. Gilley 2004b.
27. Holbig 2006.
28. Gilley 2004a, 2006a.
29. Tsang 1998, 12.
30. Kuhn 2004, 266.
31. Gilley 2006b; Shue 2004; Wang 2005.
32. Dickson 1996, 63.
33. Tsang 1998, 14.
34. Nathan 2001, 724.
35. See Arendt 1958 on the 1956 Hungarian uprising.
36. Bunce 2000, 707–708.
37. Langston 2006.
38. Dickson 1996, 65.
39. Cheng and Haggard 1992, 12.
40. Vanhanen 2003.
41. Tsang 1998, 14–15.
42. Scalapino 1996, xi.
43. Zhang, Nathan, and Link 2001, 108.

242 *Looking Forward*

44. Wu 1997.
45. Fan 1990, 132–133.
46. Zong 2005, 2007.
47. Nathan 2007.
48. Li and White 1990.
49. Grindle 2000.
50. Moody 1992, 90.
51. Li 2005.
52. Huang 1996.
53. See Gilley 2008.
54. Wu 1995, 37.
55. Ch'iu 1995, 105–108.
56. Hood 1997, 85.
57. Wu 1997.
58. Zhang, Nathan, and Link 2001, 217.
59. “China’s Wen Says Moving Towards Democracy,” Reuters News, September 5, 2005.
60. See for example Jones Luong 2002.
61. Tammy Peng, “Three-year Delay in Vote on Eelecting President,” *The Free China Journal*, March 27, 1992, p. 1.
62. Cao 2003; Huang 1998; Yan 1996; Yang Jianli 2004; Zhou 2006; Zhuge 1998.
63. Shain, Linz, and Berat 1995, 14.
64. Yan 1996, 228
65. McFaul 2002.
66. Karatnycky and Ackerman 2005.
67. Cheng and Haggard 1992, 23–24.
68. Meaney 1992, 96, 105.
69. Dickson 2006, 42, 44.
70. Bermeo 1999.
71. Way 2006.
72. Mill 1861/1958, 13.
73. Rustow 1970, 351.
74. Gill 2000, 88.
75. Wang 2006.
76. Zhang 2007.
77. Wang 2006, 27.
78. Wang Yanlai 2003, 226–227.
79. Lin 2005.
80. Zhang 2007.
81. Bunce and Wolchik 2005.