Chapter Four

Chiang Ching-kuo

Democracy in the Context of Transition

Under its ideology, Sun Yat-sen’s Three Principles of the People, the KMT did not define its role in terms of the struggle between progressive and reactionary classes. Instead, it justified itself as a moral and technocratic vanguard capable of guiding national construction and gradually introducing full constitutional democracy.

Can we find substantive discussions of democracy in Chiang Ching-kuo’s public pronouncements, or were his references only cosmetic? If he did discuss democracy substantively, did he provide a vocabulary that reformers could use to demand democratic changes of the government? Does he provide materials for democratic learning and socialization? Did his discussion differ from Sun’s and his father’s understandings? Did he provide, and see himself as providing, a Chinese version of democracy?

Chiang Ching-kuo’s Context and Problems

Like Chiang Kai-shek’s, Chiang Ching-kuo’s discussions of democracy must be understood against the background of the context of his situation and the problems he faced. As premier and later president, Chiang faced a political situation that had begun to change in the later years of his father’s life. The PRC and the ROC were still in conflict. The public aspiration of the regime was still to retake the mainland, and Chiang spent a considerable amount of time comparing the sins of the mainland with the virtues of the ROC on Taiwan.1 The ROC still identified itself with the West. But internationally, the position of the ROC was deteriorating. An increasing number of nations were moving formal recognition to the PRC. The most important blows were dealt by the United States, first with the understanding reached by Nixon with the PRC in 1972 and later with Carter’s switch of formal recognition to the PRC and his abrogation of the mutual defense treaty between the United
States and Taiwan. Thus Chiang could not automatically count on the support of the United States in either domestic or international affairs. More particularly, any support the ROC did receive from the mid-1970s onward depended upon demonstration that it fit with the Western powers as a democratic nation and was different from the authoritarian PRC. While support for the ROC always depended to some degree on acceptance of its democratic claims, from the late 1970s the practical value of Taiwan in the Cold War had diminished dramatically, making its claims to democracy increasingly important.

Coupled with these external factors were internal developments. As a leading “Asian Tiger,” Taiwan experienced rapid economic growth from the 1960s through the 1980s, generating a large, educated middle class and rising levels of prosperity and sophistication. An increasing number of young people had also returned from schooling abroad during this period, bringing with them ideas about political and social reforms. These developments culminated in the formation of a series of opposition groups that demanded liberal and democratic reforms, including greater freedom of expression, the right to form new political parties and campaign freely for office, and the repeal of the emergency provisions that served to override or suspend important parts of the constitution. Clashes between the government and reformers occurred throughout the 1970s, culminating in the suppression of Formosa Magazine and the Kaohsiung Incident in 1979. Reformers experienced a period of repression throughout the early 1980s, recovering only later with the technically illegal establishment of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in 1986. These demands for democracy, as the literature on Taiwan’s transition demonstrate, placed pressure on Chiang to make good on the KMT’s democratic promises.

Views of Chiang Ching-kuo

Views are quite mixed with regard to Chiang’s relationship to the democratic transition that began, on the government’s part, with the lifting of the “Emergency Provisions” in 1987 and the move to recognize the legality of the DPP. Scholars such as Ge and Hui emphasize Chiang’s leadership in this process, with Ge identifying him as a key player in the transformation and Hui emphasizing the independence of his eventual decision to liberalize. Huang and Wu attribute democratization to Chiang’s economic development efforts and success in promoting a generation of Taiwanese leaders in the KMT. More succinctly, a recent editorial in the United Daily News memorialized his
one hundredth birthday by praising his leadership abilities and arguing that “every step [Ching-kuo] took advanced democracy.”

Others see Chiang favorably but are less laudatory of his democratic accomplishments. Some on the mainland see him as a Gorbachev-like figure who imposed a democratization process from above rather than allowing it to come from below. Harrison portrays Chiang as a liberalizer but emphasizes that he did not push conservatives hard and died before accomplishing a complete transformation of the political system. Jacobs likewise argued early in the 1970s that the KMT and its leadership pursued a contradictory course: it wanted democracy but was unwilling to share power with non-KMT leaders, resulting in a situation in which the KMT ran Taiwan in the same manner as an American political machine. However, Jacobs also believed it significant that when on one occasion in the late 1970s “K’ang Ning-hsiang made
an outspoken call for political democracy . . . Premier Chiang Ching-kuo’s reply showed considerable sympathy for democracy as did his other statements to the Legislative Branch.”

On the other side of the argument are scholars who downplay Chiang as a factor in the democratic transition. Hsu stresses the role Chiang played in creating an internal intelligence network and his skill in gathering a political clique around himself, arguing that his “tolerance of Taiwan’s democratization was a shrewd recognition of the inevitable rather than a promotion of the cause of democracy as an ideal.” Likewise, Winkler holds that at the beginning of the democratic transition Chiang was probably headed to no more than a change to “soft authoritarianism” and operated mostly as a defuser of tensions between KMT and non-KMT elites. Wachman also argues that Chiang was at best a reluctant reformer; he does not mention the KMT’s previous arguments regarding democracy, and he highlights the importance of opposition to the democratic transition. In general, he holds that “although Chiang must be credited for seizing the opportunity to initiate reform, if he felt he could have continued to suppress the opposition, he probably would have done so.”

Others have specifically portrayed the democratic conceptions of the KMT in general and of Chiang in particular during the 1970s and 1980s as falling significantly short of the democratic practices that were later instituted. Nathan and Ho endorse Lerman’s argument that, while it discussed democracy as a goal, the KMT leadership even in the late 1970s saw democracy in purely mobilizational terms, that is, as “liberating the energies of the people and channeling them into public affairs; disciplining the energies of the people; orderly discussion in search of a unified general will.” Taylor, meanwhile, takes a middling position. He argues that while in the 1950s Chiang was cool to the idea of democracy and rights, he became interested in political reform from the late 1960s and increasingly so in the 1980s. The democratic breakthrough of the late 1980s, in Taylor’s opinion, was a joint product of the opposition’s and Chiang’s deliberate attempts to guide conservative elements in the government and the KMT toward democratic reform.

Despite the harsher views of those associated with the DPP, the general population today tends to see Chiang Ching-kuo as more approachable and more democratic in his manner than his father. I agree that the evidence shows that he was ambivalent toward liberal democracy, particularly in the years immediately following his father’s death in 1975. There is evidence of this coolness
throughout the 1980s. Nathan, Ho, and Lerman, in their critical descriptions of his theoretical statements and political practices, are correct in their portrayal of one conception of democracy that Chiang Ching-kuo put forward publicly. However, I argue that these assessments do not do justice to the totality of the conceptions of democracy he popularized. They miss parts of Chiang Ching-kuo’s discussion that gesture toward the liberal democratic model and buttress Taylor’s more sympathetic understanding of his political views. This makes his democratic conception appear even more mixed than those of Chiang Kai-shek and Sun Yat-sen.

The Democratic Content of Chiang Ching-kuo’s Speeches

The Goodness and Possibility of Democracy

Democracy, the 三民主义, and Sun

Continuing the line of argument Chiang Kai-shek initiated, Chiang Ching-kuo legitimized democracy by associating it with the goals and ideology of the Chinese Revolution and with the thought of Sun. Sun is often mentioned by name, and almost every speech by Chiang mentions the 三民主义 in association with democratic and constitutional government. For Chiang, Sun’s understanding of democracy in the 三民主义 was often sufficient for his needs, and references to the 三民主义 were adequate to establish the necessity of attaining democracy as a goal. However, by establishing a commitment to Sun’s thought and coupling that thought with democracy, Chiang did go further than his father in identifying democracy as the ultimate goal and defining characteristic of the nation. Democracy, in Chiang Ching-kuo’s utterances, is located at the heart of what the ROC is all about. Typical of his discussion is the following, from a speech in 1979:

We know that since the day the Tsungli [Sun] created the Three Principles of the People, the long-range goal of the National Revolution has never been changed and that since the establishment of the Republic of China, the nation has never budged from the long-range goal of “vesting sovereignty in the people.”

This passage touches on important themes that we find in many of Chiang’s justifications of democracy. Three concepts are key: the centrality of “vesting sovereignty with the people” as democracy, the invocation of Sun’s authority, and the placement of democracy among the paramount goals of the state. Popular sovereignty could, to a limited degree, be a substantive concept, as it is not merely the invocation of democracy as a label to be applied to any prac-
tice but one that appears to entail a specific practice and thus a specific standard. Democracy as popular sovereignty means that the state is responsible to and should be guided by the will of its citizenry rather than the will and interests of a ruling group. It implies a notion of responsible government and accountability.

To reference Sun, meanwhile, is to invoke the person the KMT leaders and others had for decades argued was the father of their country. But Chiang’s references to Sun are more deferential and more numerous than those of previous leaders.¹⁶ His invocation of Sun was akin to invoking George Washington in America in the nineteenth century—it was to associate a concept with someone whose judgments, character, and seminal importance have been established over time as unquestioned and unquestionably good.¹⁷ Here, Chiang extends his father’s argument. Sun is a person not just to be admired, not just to be followed, but to be obeyed and imitated politically. To say that he was in favor of democracy is to say that everyone in the ROC should similarly favor that form of government.

Finally, to identify democracy with the state in this way is to say that democracy is the defining feature of the state and the most important measure of the legitimacy of its government. Democracy is central to Chiang’s claim to legitimacy, his claim to leadership, and his claim to act correctly. He implies that to be a good and effective leader, one must be a democrat. The same is also implied of ordinary people. To be a good and loyal citizen, one must embrace democracy.¹⁸ As he put it in 1987, “Constitutional democracy has been the Republic of China’s major national goal since its founding.”¹⁹ No other form of government is legitimate; thus all other forms are illegitimate.

Stepping back from these observations, one can see that there are several things at work, not all of them consistent or compelling with regard to democratic learning. First is the invocation of popular sovereignty. While potentially of some value, it is also rather empty. There is nothing in the reference that specifies how democracy operates. It gestures toward significant concepts, and people who internalize it will probably embrace important democratic expectations. But more is needed if robust democratic learning is to take place. Second is the continuation of the rhetoric that painted Sun as the all-knowing, benevolent founder of the Chinese nation. This was a conscious effort to cloak the ROC and the KMT’s regime on Taiwan with Sun’s legitimacy. Chiang thoroughly identifies Sun with China and the government on Taiwan and in turn uses Sun’s ideology to establish the normative contours of the nation. Sun,
in this sense, is not just a KMT leader. He is the founder of the country, the
one who managed the transition from premodern to modern China. He
therefore establishes the necessity of democracy for everyone who is Chinese.
To be for Sun is to be for democracy; to oppose democracy is to reject Sun
and the modernity of the Chinese nation.

The latter claim is, to a degree, effective and powerful. Such assertions
serve to delegitimize nondemocratic forms of government so long as one accepts
Sun's position as decisive. References to Sun connect democracy with a rhe-
torical strategy common to many discourse communities, in that they often
root both legitimacy and an understanding of the solutions to ongoing prob-
lems in the teachings of a founding figure. This strategy is probably no less
effective than justifying democracy by reference to stories of a state of nature
or accounts of natural law. Yet the problem with this strategy lies in the prop-
osition that people should and would accept Sun. Normatively, the problem is
with the invocation of Sun's authority in terms of a democratic understand-
ing of consent and free and equal citizenship. This problem is shared by the
invocation of any authority figure. There was no poll that established Sun as
the father of the nation. No one elected him the font of all that is right with
Chinese politics. Moreover, automatically deferring to his program and his
principles leaves ordinary citizens outside the circle of fundamental decision
making, thus reinforcing nondemocratic lessons about the accountability and
power of government officials. Such deference calls to mind the obedience
that Chiang Kai-shek, Chiang Ching-kuo, and other government officials rou-
tinely demanded of citizens in determining a whole raft of policies. Why
should the people of Taiwan defer to the wishes and philosophy of a long-
dead mainlander if Taiwan is to be a democracy? Why should they accede to
the normative rules he set down? Why should they be subjected to his under-
standing of democracy rather than another? Even if effective, this justifica-
tion is itself philosophically undemocratic.

There are also problems with the efficacy of such references as material for
legitimizing democracy. This justification depends upon the continued exal-
tation of Sun and his Sān Mín Chū Yì doctrine. But as time passed and the
events of Xinhai Revolution of 1911 became more distant and less relevant as
a “mainland” event and Sun himself passed from people's memories, how many
people continued to revere him as a founder? To tie democracy to Sun in this
fashion is to risk its legitimacy in the long term. By the early 1980s, opposition
groups began to turn to narratives of Taiwan's story as ways of thinking
about politics in general and democracy in particular, dwelling at length on the martyrs of the 2/28 Incident and the participants in the events of the late 1970s rather than on the efforts leading up to the Xinhai Revolution on the mainland. Thus, while this mode of legitimizing democracy continues to this day, there is doubt as to its prior and continuing efficacy.

Democracy Is Natural

If Chiang held that democracy is good because associated with Sun, he also followed in the footsteps of his father in arguing (against Sun) that democracy and the Sān Mín Chǔ Yì participate in some natural set of moral principles. One way he makes this argument is by comparing the effects of the Sān Mín Chǔ Yì on Taiwan with conditions on the Communist mainland. Mainland conditions, he argues, are unnatural, leading inevitably to popular resistance against the government of the PRC. Like all people, those on the mainland want freedom and democracy. They have, in Chiang’s words, “undertaken struggle for freedom, democracy and survival. They want to live as men and not as animals.”

There is, he argues on a later occasion, a “natural inclination of human beings to win their freedom as demonstrated in the natural course of history itself.” Likewise, in denouncing the PRC as “despotic and perverse,” Chiang extolled the Sān Mín Chǔ Yì as humane (rén), particularly in their responsiveness to citizens and their closeness to what humans want. The Sān Mín Chǔ Yì and the constituent goals of freedom and democracy are natural. They “have followed the course of nature and accommodated themselves to the needs of human kind.”

Here we have Chiang Ching-kuo rehearsing some of the arguments Chiang Kai-shek put forward. While he does not speak at length about innate knowledge and makes more references to history, he does locate democracy and Sān Mín Chǔ Yì in human nature and makes the connection with heaven (tiān) in arguing that they are part of the “course of nature” (tào). Prominently displayed in this argument is the assertion that nondemocratic governments are not natural, are not humane, are not close to the people, and do not accommodate human needs. They depart from The Way. People on Taiwan have a moral obligation to strive for democracy because democracy is intimately tied to being human. All other forms of government, being unnatural and out of step with human nature, are therefore illegitimate.

Yet it is telling that Chiang did not refer to the natural character of democracy as frequently as his father did. He was less inclined to philosophize in
public, perhaps believing that the foundation of democracy in human nature had been sufficiently established by his father or that such a congruence was self-evident, necessitating no further elaboration. In any case, he reinforced the type of democratic learning his father promoted but made such arguments appreciably less often.

Democracy Flows from Traditional Chinese Culture

Chiang Ching-kuo is much more consistent than his father in identifying democracy with traditional Chinese and Confucian culture. He rejects the proposition that Asians are culturally incapable of embracing and practicing democracy. The Chinese are not “backward” in relation to the West. The Chinese do not have to undergo a process of cultural modernization in order to embrace democracy. They do not have to discard their traditional heritage or adopt an alien concept. Being compatible with, and indeed even part of, Chinese culture, democracy is congenial to the Chinese experience.\(^27\)

In portraying democracy as something not alien to the Chinese, Chiang explicitly links it with Chinese cultural tradition. Such linkages come in a variety of forms. In one way, the connection between democracy and Chinese culture is elective. They are compatible not only because democracy represents an extension of that culture but also because the Chinese people, being deeply immersed in that culture, have recognized democracy as part of that culture and embraced it. Here the Chinese are not unthinking beings automatically following what is culturally compelling but discerning entities who can recognize and anticipate where culture is leading and help shape their own futures. In living under the doctrine of the Sān Mín Chū Yì, they have given their consent to the ROC’s correct cultural interpretation of government and democracy. Thus Chiang remarks that “the Chinese people have long since chosen to live under the Three Principles of the People, which are the fruits of our heritage of Chinese culture, so that the government of the people, by the people and for the people may become a reality for all China.”\(^28\)

At other times, Chiang emphasizes the direct connection between democracy and Chinese culture. Here he echoes his father in holding that democracy and the Sān Mín Chū Yì constitute an essential element of a living Chinese tradition. It represents a core part of the tradition, and the logic of that tradition automatically leads one to democratic understandings. The emphasis is not on consent but on being authentically Chinese. To reject democracy is to be obtuse regarding one’s cultural heritage.\(^29\) Here, in arguing that the essence
of democracy is familiar and flows from the principles that the Chinese historically have embraced, Chiang accepts the mínbēn argument that democracy was a political concept discovered by Chinese sages in their attempts to define good government. Likewise, Chiang argues that, insofar as democracy is a part of traditional Chinese culture, it is Sun’s and the KMT’s formulation that best exemplifies democracy and makes Chinese culture complete. There is no modern Chinese democracy without the Sān Mín Chǔ Yì doctrine, and Chinese culture is not whole without democracy. But implicit in this argument is also the contention that there is no need for Western acculturation or a Western conceptualization for democracy to flourish in the ROC. Ching-kuo stands with Kai-shek at least partly against Sun here, for the latter seemed to argue that “tutelage” would lean on more than just lashings of traditional Chinese culture.

Related arguments allowed Chiang to link the Sān Mín Chǔ Yì doctrine with the exemplars of Confucianism that form the backbone of what he regarded as traditional Chinese culture. These include the familiar historical figures Sun and his father cited. To be democratic in this sense is to be a good Chinese not only in a broadly traditional sense but also more narrowly in the Confucian tradition. This argument also provided Chiang Ching-kuo with a way of conceptualizing the democratic connection between leaders with ordinary citizens. In Chiang Kai-shek’s formulation, democracy as a traditional Chinese concept informed by Confucian principles creates a set of responsibilities linked with actions that are assessable on the part of the population in ways that policy decisions are not. Chiang Ching-kuo follows this lead by arguing that standards identifying what is good and harmful are embedded in traditional Chinese culture in general and specifically in such well-known artifacts as the Spring and Autumn Annals (春秋). In turn, he argues that those standards have been transferred textually to the Sān Mín Chǔ Yì, spiritually to the revolution, and politically to the ROC. Democracy as understood through the Sān Mín Chǔ Yì thus participates in the “cultural tradition” that the Chinese accept exclusively, which is based on traditional virtues. Again, the implication is that to be faithful to one’s heritage, one must embrace democracy because that heritage includes and informs democratic understandings of public affairs.

Chiang Ching-kuo’s related arguments are consequentialist as well as essentialist. They hold that because democracy and the Sān Mín Chǔ Yì participate in traditional Chinese culture and because the developments on Taiwan since 1949 are grounded in traditional Chinese culture, the former are re-
sponsible for the economic and social progress on Taiwan that occurred since the removal of the Nationalist government to the island. Yet culture is not the only responsible or active agent here. Democracy, he argues on these occasions, was a process that began on Taiwan with his father’s arrival, and its pursuit by the KMT led to the good things that have happened since. This argument seems to form a defense of the KMT’s modernization plans, including its policies on political developments that implemented Chiang Kai-shek’s understanding of tutelage. Where previously he had argued that no change was necessary for the Chinese to embrace democracy because their culture incorporated that form of government, here he argues that the KMT successfully met the challenge of preparing the Chinese society on Taiwan for democracy by both preserving and building upon Chinese tradition. Taiwan’s society had to be modernized for it to be capable of supporting a constitutional government, even if that modernization only entailed pushing Chinese culture forward to its evolutionary ends: “When the Central Government moved to Taiwan 30 years ago, the overall situation was chaotic. But in that first year Taiwan began to implement local self-government,” Chiang argues.

Thanks to the dedication and diligence of all our compatriots, we have followed the blueprint established in the Three Principles of the People and built a solid foundation for constitutional and democratic rule, a prosperous and equalitarian economic system, and a peaceful and happy society. . . . These creations are unquestionably consistent with the thought, culture and way of life of the Chinese people and can meet the needs of future social development in China.32

This argument deepens those above by claiming that the KMT has established democracy, that creating a democratic regime was a conscious decision on the part of the party, that the actions of the KMT were in keeping with the Sān Mín Chū Yì, and that all are deeply compatible with traditional Chinese culture. Because of that compatibility and success, the party is justified in pursuing democracy as a political goal. Such action requires “dedication and diligence,” not merely a perfunctory reference to tradition. The KMT is an active agent in bringing democracy out of Chinese culture and preparing Taiwanese citizens for it, not just a passive receiver and transmitter of tradition.

In general, these attempts to link democracy to Chinese culture are useful in promoting democracy. They provide a necessary amplification of the mínbēn justification for democratic purposes and serve to legitimate democracy for culturally conservative citizens. They also provide possibly compelling justifi-
cations for ordinary citizens to embrace democracy while retaining their self-identification as Chinese in culture and national identification. To be a democrat does not entail embracing an alien ideology. Indeed, to be true to one’s Chinese cultural and political heritage, one ought to embrace democracy. In discussing the KMT’s role in using economic development to prepare the ground for democracy, these remarks also reflect an important scholarly understanding of events.

In examining these pronouncements critically, we also see several potential problems. First is the tension among the different ways in which democracy is associated with Chinese culture. At times, it is merely asserted that it is compatible. At other times, the argument is that democracy is intrinsic to that culture or that it represents the completion of that culture. At still other times, the argument is that democracy is associated with that culture but that some outside agent (the KMT) must necessarily intervene to put the two together on Taiwan through the process of tutelage. Not only is this potentially confusing; it also raises suspicion that this linkage is tactical and its purpose is to cloak the KMT’s activities with the mantle of Chinese culture. Such confusion tends to lessen these arguments’ utility for democratic learning. Second is the rather arid nature of these pronouncements. They achieve their aim more by forceful delivery and repetition than by conceptual power. It is not clear from these assertions what it is about democracy that makes it compatible with traditional Chinese culture other than popular “roots” that hold that the “people” should be sovereign. There is no acknowledgment on Chiang Ching-kuo’s part, as there was on Sun’s, that traditional Chinese government was autocratic, that democracy in its current form had its origins in modern times, or that important aspects of democracy (such as constitutionalism) came from the West. These arguments also do nothing to establish substantively how democratic concepts and forms align with specific parts of traditional culture. This task is left to other descriptions of democracy.

There are also tensions with democratic concepts that accompany the conflation of democracy with cultural identification. If to be Chinese is to be democratic, the corollary may require that to be a democrat on Taiwan one must be “Chinese” (as opposed to “Taiwanese”). To locate the roots of Taiwan’s democracy on the mainland, in mainland culture, could not but alienate many of those who embraced a Taiwanese identity by resurrecting for them the programs of cultural homogenization that had taken place earlier in the KMT’s rule on the island. That project also gestures toward the unitarian concepts
of the demos contained in the republican unitary and Chinese unitary models, concepts that could slide into culturally aggressive, essentialist, and exclusivist policies that reinforce moves to deny people on Taiwan cultural choice and agency.

**What Is Democracy?**

For Chiang, the fact that that the *Sān Mín Chǔ Yì* were based on traditional Chinese and Confucian culture distinguishes them in the understanding of democracy they provide. He argues that the ROC “has been an independent country standing for the traditional Confucian doctrine of humanity and practicing Dr. Sun Yat-sen’s Three Principles of the People, which stresses ethics, democracy and science.” \(^{33}\) Understandings and types of democracy, he implied, are tied to contexts: democracy arises and flourishes differently in different countries and different cultures and possibly at different times. Thus, he insisted, to be successful in understanding and implanting democracy, “democracy must be cultivated and not transplanted and . . . must be adapted to our own national environment so it can strike root in our own soil.” \(^{34}\) This assertion in part recapitulates Sun’s argument that thinking about democracy as a form of government must take context into account, but here the thrust is more substantive. It implies that Chiang adheres to a version of “Chinese democracy” rather than merely democracy instituted in a Chinese context—that is, a version compatible with the aspirations and beliefs of the general Chinese public and its culture that may lead to important differences with Western understandings. “Chinese” democracy in this view cannot be compared with other versions or measured by any universal standard of democratic definition or practice. What this position means in practice, however, is uncertain because Chiang provided several different conceptions.

**A Liberal, Pluralist Conception?**

Chiang’s statements on some occasions suggest he promoted a liberal and pluralist understanding of democracy. One early conception holds that democracy entails the government’s carrying out the people’s wishes. In this conception, government appears responsive to the populace, and the views of ordinary citizens are given prominence in ways that appear to modify Sun’s stricture that administration be separated from sovereignty. The directions that the government takes from the people are portrayed as extending to the
setting of policy and to the administrative realm. Chiang also went further in this direction in other declarations. In a set of pronouncements from the late 1970s, democracy is said to equal elections and the exercise of “democratic civil rights,” protection of rights in a constitution, and an independent judiciary. Similarly, he elsewhere associates democracy with constitutionalism, freedom, and individual rights, benefits that those on the mainland lacked. Thus, like Chiang Kai-shek, Chiang Ching-kuo argues that if the Nationalists were successful in reunifying China, they would create a full-fledged democratic state that would follow the practices pioneered on Taiwan, including “the institution of constitutional democracy, elimination of totalitarianism and class struggles, the responsiveness of government policy and programs to the will of the people, and equality of political power for all Chinese citizens, and assurances of equal rights for all before the law.” These statements refer to many features of the liberal democratic model. Responsiveness to the public, political equality, an independent judiciary, constitutionalism, and equal rights are all vital to such an understanding of democracy. This position stands in contrast to some of Chiang Kai-shek’s arguments that nothing in addition to the Sān Mín Chǔ Yì is necessary for democracy. It also lacks the mobilizational elements that are often noted as characterizing Chiang Ching-kuo’s predecessors’ understandings of democracy.

But we need to know more specifically what stands behind these pronouncements and whether the enumeration of such features of democracy is consistent with the broader understandings of democracy Chiang referenced elsewhere, particularly given the fact that, even in the above description, he continues to talk of democracy in terms of government implementing the “people’s will,” a concept associated with unitary models. Did he ever follow up on these liberal references?

Chiang did fill in some of these details later in the 1980s. Important to these pronouncements is Chiang’s recognition of the centrality of rights and of the existence of plural views and interests. In 1987, after the formation of the DPP, he made a point of holding that democracy entails “political freedom,” the enjoyment of a “free life,” and “rights guaranteed . . . under the Constitution.” Other details are found in Chiang’s speeches delivered in 1984. In his inaugural address of that year, he characterizes democracy as a matter of making policies in a particular fashion—by open discussion among plural views. He reiterates this position a few months later in his Constitution
Day address, where he argues that democracy entails constitutionalism, repeating that “there are no major issues of our country . . . that cannot be openly discussed for the purposes of reaching general consensus.” The necessity of open process, close government attention to popular opinion, and finding rather than assuming consensus, he argues, is not attributable to a problematic condition that requires the addition of an external disciplinary body. Rather, it is due to inevitable, natural, and benign differences of understanding:

We must all understand that in a pluralistic, open society, developments in each and every activity phenomenon are naturally complex. Because of differences among individuals’ interests, always, views will differ on national and social affairs. In the same way, people will have different opinions concerning the various advocacies of government administration, themselves derived from different viewpoints. These are but normal aspects of modern societies based on freedom and democracy, and all are open to debate.  

This view describes democracy in a way that coincides largely with the liberal democratic model. First, it holds that decision making is an open rather than hidden and closed process. This could include all types of decisions and all possible options and, ostensibly, the participation of various types of people rather than only members of a single party. Second, it holds specifically that views are legitimately plural. This position excludes the argument that there is a single, objective understanding of correct policies that already exists, thus differentiating it from Sun’s and Chiang Kai-shek’s understandings that appear to brand dissent as dangerous and unpatriotic because they detract from or confuse a general will or the detection of a common good. It could also imply an acknowledgment of plural views on what constitutes the common good. It recognizes that plural views stem from different interests. There is therefore no predetermined or objective common good that it is the duty of the government to discover. In this understanding, to establish that a policy furthers the national interest entails a process in which everyone participates and all interests are included. The general interest is the amalgamation of particular interests, not something apart from and higher than those interests that is discoverable only by guardian-like elites.

This description, while underdeveloped and falling short of a full conception of democracy, provide evidence that Chiang did sometimes promote a relatively liberal conception of democracy. Government is portrayed as operating in a delegative rather than trusteeship mode and recognizing that the
common interest is synthetic and constructed from below through compromise among different interests and understandings rather than unitary and natural or orchestrated from above by the application of rules and laws. This description also acknowledges the natural and benign character of pluralism and a diversity of political views and does not assign to government any role in molding public opinion, reducing the scope of political diversity, or imposing any particular conception of the common good on citizens. The people here are active rather than passive. This portrayal departs fundamentally from Sun’s story of the car as the paradigm through which to understand democracy and is different from the latter’s arguments for an elite that is based on a natural hierarchy of intelligence and steers the machinery of state by reference to its own superior understanding of politics and policy.

These materials are useful for democratic learning, and liberal democratic learning in particular. They outline a conception of democracy that leads to expectations of participation, political freedom, and the acceptance of a diversity of views and interests. In this respect they point to important aspects of what will be Taiwan’s democratic future, though they are sporadic and indeterminate.

**Democracy as a Unitary Conception**

In contrast, we find in other pronouncements by Chiang Ching-kuo a more consciously elitist and unitary understanding of democracy that is at odds with such concepts as pluralism, equal citizenship, and downward accountability. It is not just his tendency to identify a particular brand of democracy with a monolithic Chinese culture that is the problem here. He sometimes conceptualizes “public interest,” for example, as something apart from and probably beyond the reach of general public understanding. This position echoes the views held by his father, by Sun, and by the unitary models, all of which paint the general will and common good as entities that are objectively identifiable, more than the sum of particular opinions and interests, and understood only by elites. Leaders and the ruling party are key in this understanding of democracy. They are more than first among equals and act as trustees rather than delegates, for while they are said to embody and reflect popular aspirations, these aspirations and the understandings from which they flow are actually molded by the state or by a party that controls the state in this conception.

This understanding of democracy contrasts with the conception described above and is reflected in the ambivalent views on political pluralism Chiang
articulated in response to political unrest in the late 1970s. In contrast to his other comments on differences, he sometimes argued at this time that while pluralism is natural, it is at best regrettable and at worst the result of the failure of the population to discipline itself. It arises because “individuals cannot always harmonize themselves with the whole picture, and conflict between public and private interests cannot always be avoided.” The government’s task is to navigate among these views, while simultaneously limiting them to types that are compatible “with assuring the public good and maintaining social order.” Here differences of views, while again seen as natural, are conceptualized as the products of popular incapacities and the perniciousness of private interests. This understanding condemns any refusal to align oneself with an official policy as dangerous and disorderly and emphasizes the role of government in forcefully dealing with such recalcitrance on the part of innately troublesome citizens. The inability of ordinary citizens spontaneously to reach agreement on policies (particularly those the government thinks best) does not, in this account, spur recognition of the need for an open decision-making process in which the political system provides a way for ordinary actors to compete for the free allegiance of a majority but empowers governmental and party elites to overcome that deficiency in the interest of good governance both by identifying independently the nature of the “public interest” to be furthered and by passing judgments on the legitimacy of the views that citizens hold. In other words, one does not change the goal of acting on a consensus in the face of demonstrated pluralism; one changes the agent that pursues the goal. Pluralism is not the bedrock of or motivation for adopting democratic procedures; it is an obstacle to democracy for the same reason Sun bemoaned the lack of nationalistic solidarity among the Chinese. Democracy is understood in the same way Sun conceptualized it: as political elites implementing (and perhaps molding) the wishes of a potentially united, undifferentiated, and unperceptive demos. Absent a natural unity, it must be constructed from above with a predetermined understanding of what the consensus will entail.

These assertions are preceded in this particular discussion by an elaboration of democracy that underscores the proposition that, in the ROC’s democratic system, the government and the KMT should be much more than active; they should be dominant in their relationship with ordinary citizens given the latter’s shortcomings. Chiang here argues that democracy is a way of creating an understanding of the general will and accommodating political
conflicts within a predetermined structure of what is on the table for discussion and what is not, with the government playing the deciding role. He argues that this version of democracy is how government attempts to “harmoniously rectify extreme tendencies and accommodate conflicting views.” Thus democracy is not so much about competition among competing visions and the determination of majority opinion but the attempt to create a consensus from above in the face of citizens’ inability to do so for themselves.\(^{44}\) This requires that differences be narrow and their expression muted and that the government be active and powerful. What is primary is not individual rights but the government’s “establishment of the rule of law” as the framework in which “harmonization” is achieved.\(^{45}\) This discussion, unlike those referenced previously, is compatible with the Chinese unitary model of democracy.

We shall return to the concept of the rule of law when we discuss constitutionalism. For now, it is sufficient to note that Chiang’s concept of law involves the establishment of rules for dealing with diverse political understandings. For Chiang Ching-kuo in this iteration of the concept, democracy is a rule-based regime type. For him, as for Chiang Kai-shek, such rules are not limited to the external. Both argue that democracy requires discipline on the part of the people and on the part of government officials that places limits on both and internalizes the rules that flow from political and ethical conceptions. This allows the state to identify and promote a unified will that provides directions to the state and creates officials who are able, selflessly and faithfully, to identify and mold that will and to steer the state well. Here again, pluralism is not benign. It is a manifestation of a lack of discipline and an inability to follow rules. In this view, as in that discussed above, pluralism must be eliminated. But in the course of eliminating pluralism with the intention of making clear a general will, the government actually defines the nature of that will. As we saw in similar provisions in Sun’s conception, the driver of the car of state imposes conditions on the passenger citizens and thus dictates their destination as well as the route taken.\(^{46}\)

Because Chiang claims to put forward a Chinese understanding of democracy, he naturally argues that discipline is created by the leadership and the people exercising virtues associated with Confucian ethics and the good things those virtues bring. The association of culture with democracy points not to the importance of democracy but to the necessity of culturally generated values and discipline that mark democratic society with uniformity and orthodoxy.\(^{47}\)
References to the party practicing virtue while exercising power on behalf of demos inform other parts of Chiang’s discussion as well, such as his understanding of the ways in which governmental structures remain in contact with the populace in terms of accountability, responsiveness, and “honesty and efficiency.” If these are to be attained primarily through the cultivation of virtues, then the expression of contrary views and the rotation of people in office are not necessary because the most important characteristics of government officials are not those that are generally considered when elections are the means by which people are placed in office. Such attributes are the products of training rather than attendance to popular views. Where Chiang understood virtues to be insufficient or officialdom in need of renewal, he supplemented political elites in this conception with the recruitment of citizens into the government and into the ruling party. Participation and contact between government and citizens takes the form of co-optation rather than independent activity on the part of citizens. Citizens are dominated by the state because they are not viewed as gaining access to political power through their own efforts and the support of their fellow citizens who agree with their policy views but rather by being “cultivated and promoted” into political affairs after first being subject to the “social education” everyone is to undergo “so as to improve social customs and make sure of political renovation to assure a high level of constructive political morale.”

Note the difference between this conception and, for example, the liberal understanding Madison put forward in *Federalist* 10. Madison also argues that the existence of factions (in the form of political parties and interest groups) and their association with political officials was unfortunate, but he rejected the notion that governments should control them or attempt to unify diverse interests. Free governments must put up with factions because to get rid of them is to deprive citizens of important freedoms and their natural diversity. Because it entails the removal of liberty and the attempt to mold people artificially, the cure for factions is worse than the problems they bring. In contrast, Chiang appears to invoke the concept that people can be active and united at the same time only if they adopt the appropriate, government-approved set of ethics and policies and are recruited for political activity by the state. This view does not leave room for organized political parties or interest groups; indeed, it views such organizations and their independent political platforms as dangerous to the web of relationships that form the foundation of social
order and solidarity. In the absence of such solidarity, governments should not give way to the desire for such groups; rather, they must actively seek their elimination.

Here, in failing to provide defenses of rights and pluralism and undermining arguments favoring limitations on government power, Chiang favors the Chinese unitary model. His conception of democracy in these remarks is incompatible with the liberal democratic model because of its hostility to pluralism. It is also problematic in terms of the republican unitary model because it gives too much power to the state and elites to form opinion. The power structure Chiang outlines does not meet the criteria of Rousseau’s definition of democracy. In all, his discussion provides only weak stuff for democratic learning in general. He largely limits accountability to consultation and co-optation, while setting up the government as arbitrator as to what is and what is not an acceptable political view. More broadly, rather than emphasizing the importance of citizens’ control over the government, their active role in government, and their participation in choosing leaders and providing independent opinions regarding issues and policies, he instead promotes expectations of passivity, obedience, and uniformity on the part of citizens.

**Views on an Enlarged Party System**

Given both the more liberal and pluralist understanding of democracy described previously and this alternative conception with its emphasis on creating consensus from above through rules, virtues, and discipline, it is no surprise that Chiang displayed considerable ambivalence regarding the utility of an enlarged party system as a means of putting officials into policy-making positions and generating downward accountability. Before 1987, he often appeared not just practically but philosophically opposed to such a system. While he noted in 1984 that “a politically pluralistic society already exists on Taiwan,” he did not see this as reason to allow the formation of new political parties. Indeed, he pointed to that pluralism as proof that the KMT’s predominant position and the existence of the “emergency chieh-yen” laws “have in no way restrained the normal free activities and welfare of the people.”49 This statement echoed the position he had taken earlier, in a similar setting, in which he held that the correct conception of democracy was fully compatible with one or only a few parties. This is because democracy is not about the representation of particular interests in government but about the general control
of government by the people as a whole and the government’s responsiveness to the general public:

The essence of democracy is to make, through the people’s participation in politics, the government responsible for the well-being of the people and responsive to their aspirations. Democracy has no absolute connection with the number of political parties. . . . The absence of new political parties has not impeded the functioning of parliamentary politics.  

This position is likewise a reformulation of an earlier position Chiang held that defended the capacity of a single party—the KMT—to embody the general will and common interests of citizens without competition. To argue otherwise, he held, is to attempt to drive a wedge between the government and citizens. Such attempts are misguided and misleading because there is an inherent unity between the government and citizens. Significantly, Chiang assumes on this occasion the identification of the government with not only the people but the KMT. He rejects the notion that the government or the KMT could have interests particular to themselves and separate from the population as a whole. He also implicitly rejects the notion that the common will could be in dispute or is constituted by the sum of particular interests that must be expressed to be taken into account. 

In this understanding, there is no need for multiple parties to provide choice, to furnish a check on the government and the KMT, to hold the government accountable on a day-to-day basis, to allow for the expression of diverse views or interests, or to allow majorities to institute their understandings of the common will that may differ from the understandings held by the KMT. Neither did Chiang concede that the government or the KMT might systematically abuse power, because he viewed both as nothing more than extensions of the people. In such circumstances, multiple parties are not needed and only serve to break the population into self-interested factions. In this view, the existence of dissent should not be treated as a reason for creating new parties but as evidence of the difficulties the government faces in creating a consensus from above. All that is needed, in Chiang’s view, is virtue and goodwill on the part of the government and the people. 

Even in 1986, just months before conceding the necessity of expanding the party system, Chiang did not publicly discard his philosophical objections to adding more political parties. Instead, he again downplayed the importance of political choice, preferring a conception of democracy that privileges gov-
ernmental sincerity in its attempts to remain close to the population, the need to forge consensus from above, and the centrality of the rule of law. Indeed, it was this conception that allowed him to argue at that time that the creation of multiple parties and the demand for constitutional democracy itself must be balanced against the requirements of national security.53

Chiang did, on occasion, publicly back away from an absolutist adherence to this conception and return to a more liberal understanding of democracy. In these interludes, he sometimes argued that it was not philosophical reasons that prevented the government from agreeing to the formation of new parties but that the time was not ripe, because of security concerns, to allow more parties. He implied that political choice is acceptable, even good, but stressed that what was most important at the time was “our freedom and stability, which are the keys to our political, economic and social progress.”54 At other times, Chiang also appeared to acknowledge publicly the need for multiple avenues of political participation and, therefore, the need for multiple parties. But he held in these statements that the existence of the Young China Party and the China Socialist Democratic Party (small parties whose leadership had accompanied Chiang Kai-shek to Taiwan after the civil war) in addition to the KMT, along with the opportunity for a citizen to run for office as an unaffiliated candidate, provides sufficient choice. As he put it in 1982, “Kuomintang members and non-Kuomintang personages enjoy equal opportunities for political participation,” and, therefore, “the channel of political participation is not clogged” by the absence of additional parties and the dominance of the KMT.55

The position Chiang ultimately took in 1987 in discussing the government’s decision to allow formation of new political parties is consistent with the more liberal understanding of democracy and was therefore quite different from what we might expect from someone who also advocated “consensus from above.” He argued that it was the government’s goal all along to institute an expansive party system, thus implying that he had always embraced a conception of democracy that viewed political choice and multiple political parties as intrinsically important. He held that it was not philosophical opposition but security issues, the lack of sufficient economic and social development, educational shortcomings, and the problems of political stability that had delayed implementation of this democratic vision. There is no mention here of his earlier opposition to the concept of multiple parties and the philosophical shift that accompanied this move on the part of the KMT and Chiang
himself. Instead, he paints the KMT as having followed with ultimately liberal intentions Sun’s developmental path to democracy, with the preceding few years representing the culmination of the tutelary effort.56

These materials again contribute unevenly to democratic learning. While Chiang reinforces the conception that government should be responsive to and take general direction from citizens rather than the interests of officials, his description of how such a democratic system should work fails sufficiently to differentiate a democratic electoral system from the manipulated elections that serve to legitimize pseudodemocratic regimes. There is little support for downward accountability here even when Chiang speaks in the language of the republican unitary and Chinese unitary models, and he sometimes runs afoul of the former. When he does reinforce expectations that citizens may organize themselves in political organizations free from government interference that would legitimize political pluralism, he sometimes undercuts democratic learning by elevating the importance of security. Free and plural political participation must take a backseat to government judgments regarding the suitability of the political environment in his view. People do not have the general right to participate freely; they only enjoy that privilege if and when government decides to grant it to them. This is, at best, a weak democratic lesson.

**The Role of Leaders**

_A unitary and elitist understanding._ We also see signs of Chiang’s inconsistent views on the nature of democracy in his discussions of the role of political leaders. The less liberal and elitist conception comes across in defenses of the KMT and the government against criticisms of their policies, particularly allegations that the government violated democratic principles and individual rights. In response, Chiang often argues that it is the responsibility of leaders to use their power to “instill” beliefs in people. In doing so, he again often conflates the KMT with national government and with the popular will and attributes opposition and criticism of leaders to the KMT’s “failures to exercise its influence and power of conviction in cultural and press activities.”57 Here leaders are not portrayed as constrained by public opinion, much less expected to respect and take into account understandings that differ from those the government favors. There is one general will; it is what the government says it is, and if people do not accept the government’s definition, the government must try harder to make them accept it, and citizens must pay
closer attention to what the government says. This understanding runs afoul of both the republican unitary model (in its elitism) and the competitive elitist model (in its disregard for pluralism) as well as the liberal democratic model.

Even stronger terms are found in other remarks. Nations make decisions, Chiang once held, and while people have the right to speak, the assumption is that citizens will follow the government and the government is authoritative in its direction of the nation based on its interpretation of the interests of the nation. Expressions of opposition to the government's choice of strategies and goals, particularly its goal of retaking the mainland, are not tolerated. While he argues that identification between the government and the people is necessary, it is incumbent upon the government to make this connection through communication and other means, not by way of downward accountability. The government and leaders are the only real actors in this conception of a democratic political system. Thus, “The government considers the people's interests its interests and secures its rights from the people's rights” (emphasis added). Its strategy is to communicate its actions and policies to the people “so they will understand the position of the country and the actions of the government.” This position goes beyond the usual understanding that the state must act authoritatively and laws must be obeyed if order and stability are to be maintained. It implies that all opposition to the government's actions, including policy differences, stems from either citizens' failure to understand (revealing a deficit of intelligence or inadequate government communication strategies) or from a failure of critics to acknowledge the interests of the people as correctly identified by the government (revealing a lack of good faith). Thus Chiang concludes, “If the government always keeps the people in mind and conducts itself in accord with their interests, the people will not withhold their support.” There is no room here for the possibility that a majority of citizens may completely understand the government's position and still not support the government's policies or administrative tactics or that they may be divided among themselves in their interests or may hold that the government, no matter what its policies, is incompetent. In a simple if-then proposition, Chiang assumes that citizens will agree with the government's policies if the government tries hard enough to communicate or, at best, consult with them.

Inherent in this last statement, however, is an intriguing strand. It gestures toward a deeper understanding of democratic accountability that is difficult to operationalize given the way Chiang formulates the general powers of leaders. What he implies in this conditional proposition is that a demonstrated loss of
support for the government may signal that leaders are not “keeping the people in mind” or “conducting themselves in accord with the people’s interests.” Differences between citizens’ and leaders’ understandings of correct policies and strategies may in fact indicate a democratic deficiency, the failure of leadership, and an illegitimate government. This is masked, however, by Chiang’s insistence that leaders should help mold the people’s understanding of their interests and that separation between leaders and people usually indicates failure of communication or, worse, treachery on the part of unfaithful citizens, rather than failure on the part of leaders to craft truly popular and effective policies. To put some muscle into this implicit leadership standard, Chiang would have to supply an understanding of the right of citizens to formulate an understanding of the general will and favored policy approaches for themselves. In other discussions addressing the role of leaders and the people, Chiang exhibits a profound ambivalence regarding the capacity of people by themselves to develop acceptable opinions, understand the common will, or hold views that the government should take seriously. Often he employs the tutelary conception he inherited from his predecessors that stresses leaders’ responsibility to pay attention to the opinions of ordinary citizens but also to instruct people in how they should understand their interests and discipline those who would agitate against the government’s understanding of what the people want and need, despite the fact that he argued that the state was now a constitutional democracy. He argues in one speech that it is the government’s responsibility

to uphold democracy and the constitutional government that enables the people to enjoy a life of liberty and equality, and to teach the people to perceive and experience the true meaning of democratic government so we can march along the right political road and ensure the opinions of the people are truly respected. I am convinced that in these times no one should undermine our constitutional foundations by spurning public opinion and giving false accounts of the facts.59

In these remarks, Chiang does not concede that ordinary citizens have the right to espouse understandings critical of the government, including advocacy of alternative policy approaches, without the threat of political leaders using state structures to punish them. Alternative readings of policies, motivations, and facts are subject to an official construction that could label them “false” and “contrary to the facts” and, therefore, fundamentally dangerous
to the public weal. Backing this reading is his emphasis on the government’s duty to teach people the correct way of thinking and acting. He argues that it is incumbent on the government to team up with media in teaching people frugality, hard work, and national consciousness as well as “correcting decadent social morality.” Earlier, as premier, he had been even more specific in discussing what constituted the orthodoxy the government would promote.

On the other side of this relationship, Chiang often refers to the need for leaders to exercise self-discipline based on ethical virtues and a devotion to some understanding of the common good. Chiang resorted to alternative methods of disciplining government officials in the absence of the checks provided by a completely free press and open political system. Inherent in such an approach is the danger that discipline and virtue will be directed toward ensuring that lower-level government officials keep the most powerful leaders happy rather than forcing them to be responsive to the populace and the common good. In other words, this is a recipe for upward rather than downward accountability.

One important virtue that Chiang extols is “benevolence.” In one reading, the centrality of this virtue is troubling. It assumes not only an inherent and probably unbridgeable difference of power but also that the treatment of citizens in such fundamental matters as rights depends upon the indulgence of leaders to follow the wishes of the population rather than an inescapable requirement set by laws, the constitution, and institutionalized elections. A benevolent leader, in this understanding, is one who rules benignly and tolerantly of his own account and without compulsion rather than one who is held to strict account by a populace that ultimately controls government. Benevolence implies a free gift of patience and charity given by the rulers to the ruled. A different reading, however, which sets benevolence more firmly in the context of mínběn democracy and traditional Confucianism as generally human qualities (rén, 仁), construes the centrality of this virtue as less disturbing. In this understanding, officials are expected to be benevolent because such an attitude is part of what it means to live a moral life, to participate in The Way. In this view, the government’s treatment of citizens is not a matter of whim or indulgence but a natural expression of an ethical attitude that takes the interests of all into account. It is part of a fundamental and natural ethic, comprising those things that any decent human is expected to do no matter the source of his or her power or authority. To be benevolent is to do what is expected of anyone. Yet even in this reading, there is no role for structures,
laws, or instruments of political responsibility to discipline or change officials’ behavior. As in all systems of moral accountability, it is up to the individual herself to develop the requisite virtues, and if leaders do not develop the virtues that constitute rén, citizens have no recourse to laws or politics to force them to act differently. Accountability is sideways to a moral ethic rather than downward to citizens.

In both these readings, initiative and action are imputed to the government and passivity to ordinary citizens. Citizens are not expected to understand government policies on their own, to make independent political decisions, or, more generally, to hold government and government officials accountable. The government and officials act benevulously. Thus, Chiang argues that it is the responsibility of leaders to keep people informed of its decisions and to govern selflessly while it seeks to regenerate itself from internal resources:

> The government should improve itself from time to time and keep our people informed so that they can always understand what is going on. I hope that in the end each of us will cast out our private interests and prejudices while keeping in mind the interests of the nation and the people as a whole.\(^{63}\)

Connection here with the populace, as we shall also see later in some of the official PRC versions of democracy, is mainly through the mechanism of consultation. The government consults with the populace regarding its wishes and understandings, but there is nothing binding in that process. Consultation does not equal the acceptance of any popular program of policies and priorities. The government, not the populace, sets the agenda. Note also the linkage here between an active government, a condemnation of different interests, and the attempt to identify a singular public good and general will. There is no need for people to inform government of their interests because the public good and general will are things apart from and beyond those particular interests. Rather than being defended, particular interests should be cast aside and suppressed as unworthy of citizens in order for leaders, through the lens of their benevolence, to understand and act on the unitary common good.

At best, these pronouncements support democratic learning in terms of the Chinese unitary model, but even that judgment is questionable. One could argue that these lessons fall short of any truly democratic conception, lacking as they do any robust depiction of downward accountability. These views are too unitary for the competitive elitist model, too elitist for the republican
unitary model, and too unitary and elitist for the liberal democratic model. They appear, in all, to be pseudodemocratic.

A more liberal understanding. In contrast to these public assertions, Chiang on other occasions expanded on this understanding of selfless leaders governing in accordance with the common good in ways that go beyond the Chinese unitary model and pseudodemocracy. In these comments, he provides criteria by which leaders are to be measured in terms of the concrete, democratic accomplishments they are expected to attain. These include creating “the foundation of a democratic and constitutional government” as well as encouraging the creation of “a sound, prosperous and equalitarian economic system.” He further holds that leaders are to abide by norms that accord well with liberal democracy. These include “respect for the people’s judgment in ascertaining right and wrong in keeping with normality and rationality.” This criterion, despite its qualification by the final clause, shifts the burden of judgment from leaders back to ordinary citizens, who are actively to use their judgment to hold officials to account.64

The norms that are to form the basis of that judgment include those of “legality.” Chiang alludes to two norms important to democracy in this respect. First, he holds that “everyone should strictly abide by the laws and respect the rule of law.” Because he is speaking here of government officials and leaders, he is arguing that those groups are under the rule of law, not above it. This position echoes earlier assertions on the part of Chiang Kai-shek that also indicated a liberalization of the latter’s views and a basic recognition that laws and constitutional norms, not officials, are supreme. Thus he embraces here the rule of law, not merely rule through law. Second, Chiang Ching-kuo asserts that “our goal is to see that everyone is equal before the law and to respect his legal rights and interests.”65 This statement not only conceptually levels the field in terms of power between leaders and ordinary citizens but would provide citizens a vocabulary for demanding the construction of a legal foundation legitimizing challenges to the government over its strategic goals and policy decisions, a foundation that would allow citizens to control government rather than being subject to attempts to formulate a consensus from above. This formulation also recognizes the centrality of equal citizenship as the basis for democratic government.

In sum, we are again presented with materials that are mixed in their potential to contribute to democratic learning. Most of these materials privilege
leaders and government powers too emphatically to impart to citizens important lessons regarding requirements for strong systems of accountability and the need for citizens actively to participate in accountability processes. It is not accountability but consultation and communication that are called for. Many comments that do provide for accountability point upward or sideways rather than downward to citizens. Given that Chiang orchestrated a crackdown on dissent and began articulating the position that discussions must take place within the confines of a government-sanctioned agenda in the years following some of his more liberal remarks, these comments take on added weight. At best they serve to train citizens in the strictures of a Chinese unitary democracy. However, it is also important to note that by alluding to additional features, particularly by discussing the importance of public officials being under the rule of law and referring to equal citizenship, Chiang did provide a vocabulary useful to some aspects of more liberal democratic learning.

Constitutional and Administrative Machinery

Like Chiang Kai-shek, Chiang Ching-kuo emphasized the importance of the ROC’s constitution. Like Kai-shek, Ching-kuo did not dwell at length on the importance of procedures. But he did put more emphasis on rights, the rule of law, and equality before the law than did his predecessors.

In his public discussions, Chiang depicted the constitution as an important, if not the key legitimator of the ROC. He emphasized on these occasions his understanding that the people of the ROC had accepted the constitution, as it “is the consensus of all the people,” and he held that the government had been faithful to that document’s democratic “principles” and “spirit.” This position implies that if the constitution did not represent such a consensus, it would be inapplicable, and that should the government stray from it (if we assume the constitution does represent such a consensus), then the government would be illegitimate. Chiang at least gestures to the concept of consent here.

Chiang was careful to portray the constitution as both democratic and Chinese, praising it as the correct blend of political principles and respect for tradition. In mixing his description of the constitution as democratic in form with references to Chinese culture, he continued with the assertions he made elsewhere that democracy was good, that the type of democracy practiced in the ROC was congruent with Chinese culture, and that the realization of a Chinese brand of democracy was therefore desirable. He once described the constitution as “the treasured book of nation-ruling through which Dr. Sun
Yat-sen’s teaching is implemented, Chinese culture is carried on and national virtues are enhanced.” It is also, he argues, “the symbol of democracy, freedom and justice.”

As the expression of Chinese democracy, what does the constitution do politically? In Chiang’s argument, a constitution is a plan or rulebook necessary for democracy. Democracy is not merely the untrammeled expression of the people’s will in policies and practices. It is the expression of the people’s will as filtered through that permanent plan for distributing power and responsibility within government and between the government and ordinary citizens. Thus for Chiang the constitution provides several goods necessary for stability and democracy that the ROC by the late 1970s had not yet fully obtained. These included provisions that “enlarge political participation, safeguard freedom and human rights and assure that democracy and freedom are based on the will of all the people and can be advanced in accordance with moral rationality, dignity of the law, common harmony and sincere solidarity.”

He further held that the constitution is “the fundamental law consolidating the nation, protecting the rights of the people, ensuring social stability, and promoting the people’s welfare,” as well the framework for a government whose main task was “strictly enforcing the rule of law.”

Chiang references several features of a substantive democratic regime here. The constitution provides the state with a fundamental law that must be obeyed. Rule by decree is not legitimate, nor are any actions or laws that do not accord with that law. The constitution as fundamental law also contains an authoritative description of citizens’ rights that cannot legitimately be abrogated. The constitution provides stability. Democracy is not an unregulated market of ideas, policies, and preferences. It is a stable regime that works on the basis of consensus on rules rather than ad hoc arrangements. Finally, the constitution institutionalizes particular goals, namely, those that are outlined in the Sān Mín Chū Yì. This marks Taiwan’s democracy as a Chinese product.

Chiang expands on the topic of constitutional rights both to contrast the ROC with the PRC and to expound his understanding of the limits on the rights the constitution confers. In so doing, he legitimizes a vocabulary of rights as both rooted in the constitution and definitive of the ROC itself. But he also weakens that vocabulary by interpreting flexibly the powers of the government over the rights people may exercise in pursuit of political goals. The constitution may secure political rights of all kinds and particularly a right of expression in that vocabulary, but the government may also, in his view,
rightfully exclude particular beliefs and activities. Constitutional guarantees of particular rights in these pronouncements are not only conditional rather than absolute or expansive; they are, from the viewpoint of a liberal respect for individual freedoms, excessively limited. Thus for Chiang if “respect for human rights is a moral principle this government fully supports, and an important aspect of our anti-Communist struggle,” that respect is not applicable to those who are “working for the Communists against our anti-Communist policy of safeguarding human rights and people's freedom.” As he emphasized in 1980, while the constitution provides for individual rights, “the exercise of civil rights cannot deviate from the course prescribed by law and cannot step outside the bounds of the rule of law” as interpreted by the government in its understanding of the needs and interests of the nation. Again, as in Chiang Kai-shek’s discussion of constitutional rights, there is no reference to specific principles or decision rules that would allow for the neutral enforcement of these strictures. The concept of rights as completely subordinate to any laws the government passes is both illiberal and highly formalistic.

This ambivalent attitude toward the security of rights within the constitution extends more generally to the changes in the constitution wrought by the “Temporary Provisions Effective during the Period of Communist Rebellion.” Even though these measures gave the government sweeping powers over citizens and did much to consolidate the power of the presidency, Chiang argues that they were not as harsh as outsiders perceive. He apologizes for them but does not paint them as inimical to democracy, or even to a democracy that promotes individual freedom. “In the face of the Chinese Communist threat,” he argues,

this measure is unavoidable. But its application is very limited in scope. Instead of impeding the people’s freedoms and well-being, and disrupting social stability and prosperity, the “state of serious alert” has actually safeguarded all these. Therefore, the “state of serious alert” is a far cry from the military control envisioned by Westerners in a martial law situation.

While Chiang is at pains to argue that the effects of the “Temporary Provisions” are much milder than portrayed, he is also arguing that the abrogation of constitutional rights is a defensible action. He is by no means advocating constitutional absolutism or posing as a strong civil libertarian in arguing that such infringements on rights, structures, and procedures do not threaten freedom. His argument on this topic slides close to a manipulation of a con-
stitutional and democratic vocabulary and therefore to a weakening of that vocabulary as material for democratic learning.

In contrast, at other times Chiang’s emphasis on the rule of law and equality before the law contributes positively to the vocabulary of democracy he provided. Beginning when he was premier in the late 1960s, his references to the rule of law are often couched in terms of the necessity of ordinary citizens obeying the law, but they also point to the need for government officials to operate within the boundaries of law. He argues that “to abide by the rule of law means that our fundamental principles, system and specific policies must be consistent with the provisions of the Constitution. This is what we mean by constitutional rule.” This implies that commitments to abide by those provisions must be permanent rather than contingent and that government officials can be held to account at any time for their failure to abide by laws or to grant equality before the law. Crucial as well to these discussions is Chiang’s accompanying acknowledgment that equality before the law is likewise important.

For Chiang, the rule of law importantly means that “everyone is free within the bounds of the law.” In these arguments, the rule of law, the concept of equality before the law, and negative freedoms are linked with democracy and with the constitution. This linkage expands Chiang’s language of democracy in ways important for liberal democratic learning. First, it moves his discussion away from the notion that democracy is the attempt to harmonize public policy with the government’s understanding of the state’s interests and thus away from the “consensus from above” description that draws, at best, on the republican unitary and Chinese unitary models. Second, it provides a sense of permanence and necessity to privileging the rule of law, equality before the law, and negative freedoms. If all of these are intrinsic to a democratic constitution, they are not merely ephemeral policies. Third, in speaking of people as being free “within the bounds of the law” and thus enjoying negative liberties, he points to citizens living without the possibility of government dictating their movements and actions through mobilizational techniques.

Like much of the material discussed above, Chiang’s discussions of constitutionalism contribute unevenly to democratic learning. His insistence on defining rights by government fiat and excluding from protection particular
subjects of speech and expression are destructive to lessons in liberal democracy and come close to teaching nondemocratic lessons. If the government can control the ways in which the demos considers political affairs, then the lesson is that it is the government, not the demos, that is ultimately in charge. These problems are balanced by Chiang’s support for the important concepts of the rule of law and equality before the law, as well as his other discussions of the central place of rights and freedoms in a democratic constitution. These discussions do reinforce important aspects of democratic learning.

**Elections**

As we have seen, Chiang contributed a number of ideas to a democratic vocabulary that envisions the constitution as serving to check government. There seems to be a role for the demos in this conception. Add to those references the powers of initiative, recall, and referendum embedded in the ROC’s constitution that he supported, and one would expect that Chiang would provide a rich source of democratic and liberal democratic material in this area. His contributions, however, are limited. While they follow the same bifurcation between elements that are found in the republican unitary and Chinese unitary models as well as the liberal democratic model, Chiang Ching-kuo’s contributions here tend not to be liberal. Though he argues consistently that elections are an important part of democracy, he describes elections and participants in elections inconsistently.

Chiang was most vocal about the goodness of elections during the 1970s and early 1980s. As premier, he argued forcefully that elections are an essential aspect of democracy and self-government. Therefore, the number and types of elections must be expanded. In 1980, after the turmoil of 1979 and the postponement of scheduled elections, Chiang further reinforced the view that elections are important. In these remarks he argues that “elections provide a yardstick for democracy” and that “voting is a civil right and also an obligation.”

Yet his description of the role of elections within a democracy is sometimes at odds with a democratic conception. In both the aforementioned discussion and in an earlier address to the National Assembly, he describes the purpose of elections as the identification of “wise and able people to serve the country.” While perhaps unexceptional by themselves, these pronouncements take on importance when considered in the context of other remarks. First, in emphasizing wisdom and service rather than representation, this description fits
with the understanding of a single, objectively identifiable common good, a single general will identified by the government, and the republican unitary and Chinese unitary models of democracy. Second, Chiang often portrayed elections as exercises not of accountability and choice but of mobilization. Elections, he argues in 1979, are held “to assure solidarity and harmony.” They are not vehicles for particular groups or for the expression of particular interests. Third, other remarks make clear that Chiang almost exclusively identified wisdom and ability with the existing government and with membership in the KMT. He argues that an important reason for holding elections is to legitimize government by “lay[ing] the foundation for the government’s permanent success and enduring stability.” In other words, elections are held for the convenience of, and to increase the utility of, the government, not to give people a say in political affairs, hold officials accountable, or test and submit alternative governing parties and their platforms to citizens. He fully expects the KMT to win and depicts elections as tools for legitimizing its inevitable rule. This is not a democratic argument, as it undercuts elections as tools for downward accountability.

Given this understanding of the role and nature of elections, Chiang felt able in 1986, before his decision to acknowledge the existence of the DPP, to argue that there was no problem in the ROC with elections. They have already been held and they are free:

Politically, we have remained a firm member of the democratic community, and regularly held fair, open, and impartial elections at different levels to facilitate the smooth operation of a constitutional democracy and assure our great goal of “the people with sovereignty, the government with ability.” This is surely the foundation of our country’s unity and stability.

Here he argues that the ROC’s elections are completely open, free, and democratic despite limitations on speech and on the organization of parties and that elections serve a functional role that benefits the government rather than providing representation to citizens. Indeed, he here replicates Sun’s understanding of democracy as incorporating popular sovereignty with officeholding by experts.

Even given this argument that the ROC had held free elections and was therefore a democracy, Chiang earlier had no trouble in providing reasons for postponing elections or avoiding an expansion of the scope of elections to the Legislative Yuan. In the first instance, he argued that in the wake of the nor-
malization agreement between the United States and the PRC in 1979, elections would create a situation in which “many differences of opinion aired.” This would create instability that the government “could not control.”83 Here elections are deemed less important than a perceived threat to stability. Indeed, elections themselves are seen as inherently destabilizing because they potentially bring to the surface different understandings of interest, the common good, and the general will. In the second instance, Chiang argued in 1983 that the ongoing state of tension with the PRC created special circumstances that, along with the need to protect the constitution, served as his excuse not to expand the scope of elections. Yet even given this decision, he argues that the “legitimacy” of the country possessing a “multi-party, democratic constitution for all the people” was not at all in question.84

Here we see profound ambivalence in Chiang’s contributions to Taiwan’s understanding of elections. His generally approving attitude toward them and his linkage of them to democracy as an abstract concept are useful materials for democratic learning. Democracy implies the existence of elections. Yet the way he describes elections, the functions he assigns to them, his concern with the fact that they would reveal pluralism, and his willingness to cancel or postpone them is not helpful to building a democratic heritage. He does not portray them as the means by which the government is held accountable. Nor does he concede that open and free elections serve as the means by which people may be rotated into and out of office or rival policy options be put before the electorate. Collectively, these descriptions paint elections as tools of state officials, to be held or not held according to their schedule and judgments. These descriptions, at best, provide training in republican unitary and Chinese unitary democracy; at worst, they again gesture toward pseudodemocracy.

**Chiang Ching-kuo’s Contributions to Democratic Learning**

Chiang Ching-kuo continued and expanded upon Chiang Kai-shek’s justification for democracy based on reverence for founding figures. In his dependence on such justifications, he spent less time rooting democracy in human nature and natural law. This approach creates rhetorically and culturally powerful justifications that are, nonetheless, philosophically weak and temporally confined. So long as the populace continues to accept the proposition that Sun and Chiang Kai-shek are important figures to be emulated, this proposition works. But it works through problematic invocations of authority and tradition.
Chiang is ambivalent with regard to the type of democracy he advocates. At times he recapitulates many elements of the republican and Chinese unitary models. At other times, he emphasizes many facets of the liberal democratic model. At still others, he falls short of democratic concepts in his discussions of democracy. This ambivalence is expressed not in attempts to meld or otherwise join those models but in conflicting comments made at different times. This characteristic is probably the result of tactical needs of the moment and the influence of various aides on this thought. His lack of consistency can lead to confusion, particularly with regard to his conception of pluralism. While he generally holds that pluralism is natural, he provides varying assessments of its desirability. At times it is the result of indiscipline. At other times it is an unfortunate but remediable condition. At still others it is a result of differing understandings and interests that should be accepted instead of treated as a disease of the body politic. Which is the case? What is the government’s attitude toward policy differences? May they be legally expressed? Does the government take them seriously? Is democracy compatible with different understandings and views or must they be subordinated and eliminated, as Sun and Chiang Kai-shek would hold? Are differences one reason for holding elections, or do differences make elections too dangerous? Citizens never know what is allowable and what is not. Ultimately, therefore, this problem weakens the emphasis on constitutionalism and the rule of law that Chiang Ching-kuo also champions.

On the whole, Chiang Ching-kuo’s discussions of democracy focus less on unity and general will and more on recognition of the reality and legitimacy of pluralism than did his predecessors. His discussions of pluralism, uneven and only hesitantly related to multiple parties and competitive elections in his rhetoric as they may be, are his most important contribution to the discussion of Chinese democracy. As we shall see, his attempt to meld pluralism with a unitary understanding through a “consensus from above” approach may have anticipated parallel conceptions on the mainland. Otherwise, though he did less to justify democracy philosophically than did his father, he did do more to introduce particular liberal democratic conceptions into the ROC’s political dialogue even if those contributions were sometimes weakened or offset by contradictory statements.

This invocation of different conceptions also carries implications for understanding these conversations in the context of the Chinese community. In one sense, Chiang expands the breadth of that discussion, moving as he does
from rather empty gestures toward democracy through traditional and unitary conceptions and on to liberal conceptions. Even as he moved, however unevenly and hesitantly, to incorporate more aspects of the liberal democratic model into his discussions of democracy and ultimately embraced that model before his death, Chiang Ching-kuo furthered and deepened his father’s attempt to root democracy in Chinese culture and traditions. This association of more liberal aspects with a greater identification of democracy with China and assertions that the Sân Mín Chǔ Yi outline a Chinese understanding of democracy is surprising, given that in other hands an emphasis on Chinese and Asian characteristics generally leads the discussion away from the liberal model on the grounds that the latter is an essentially Western understanding of democracy. One could argue that Chiang’s different approach to this question was important to the liberal democratic transition on Taiwan and perhaps something similar must happen on the mainland for a parallel transition to occur there.