Dr. Sun Yat-sen’s dream for a constitutional democracy was not realized on the Chinese mainland, but today it has taken root, blossomed and borne fruit in Taiwan.

As we have seen, Sun and the two Chiangs discussed democracy extensively, if unevenly and not necessarily always in a liberal fashion. To think about the broader impact and place of these discussions, we look to current understandings of democracy in the larger Chinese community. To do so, we first explore how they relate to political elites’ understanding of democracy in Taiwan today. Second, we situate them in the larger history of Chinese discussions of democracy, including discussions currently ongoing on the Chinese mainland.

Conceptions of Democracy in Contemporary Taiwan
What impact did these discussions have on Taiwan’s current understandings of democracy? While the question is complex and any analysis incomplete, we approach it in three ways. First, we examine the conceptualizations of democracy held by members of the two major parties. Second, we explore the contemporary privileging of consensus in Taiwan’s political community as evidence of influence of the unitary models of democracy Sun and the two Chiangs employed. Third, we look for the influence of these discussions on justifications for some recent electoral changes in Taiwan.

Current Understandings of Democracy in Taiwan
I had the opportunity during a trip to Taipei in the spring of 2008 to interview a variety of elites regarding their views of Taiwan’s democracy and to
attend several events at which democracy was discussed. I also gathered campaign and other literature from the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections to create contemporary benchmarks against which to compare the previous conceptions of democracy under study here.

I found a number of interesting parallels and continuities as well as differences with those conceptions in the course of this investigation. This finding could very well represent the continued influence of those previous conceptions and discussions. Prior conceptions, unsurprisingly, are most credible in the eyes of KMT elites, though there are echoes in the discussions of people affiliated with the DPP. These similarities point to the role of those discussions in reinforcing particular attitudes toward democracy that have developed from a variety of sources in the thinking of Taiwanese political elites.

**Views of the Origins and Nature of Taiwan’s Democracy**

Contemporary justifications of democracy on Taiwan sometimes follow the content of prior discussions. In general, people take for granted democracy as the modern form of government and the means by which modernity is attained,
thereby replicating Sun’s contextual and pragmatic jiùwáng justifications. Occasionally, democracy is linked with human nature. In one recent speech, for example, DPP chairperson Su Tseng-chang (蘇貞昌) reiterated Chiang Kai-shek’s connection between the incompatibility of human nature with the characteristics of the PRC’s government and further gestured towards the compatibility of that nature with democracy. In addition, some KMT elites accept the mínbēn rooting of democracy in Chinese history. For example, in conversations with me several KMT members referred both to historical examples of dynasties toppled by popular unrest and to the teachings of Confucius and Mencius as illustrations of the existence of democratic concepts in Chinese culture, illustrations that are strongly reminiscent of the understandings of Sun and Chinese mínbēn democracy theorists in general. These KMT members discarded the proposition that democracy is essentially Western or that its presence on Taiwan is due mainly to Western influences and accepted democracy on the grounds that it is a concept located in traditional Chinese culture.

DPP leaders, in contrast, tend to argue that Taiwan’s democracy is not rooted in Chinese culture. Many reject the mínbēn argument that democracy is something familiar to the Chinese and argue that democracy is predominantly a Western concept. They trace Taiwan’s understanding of democracy to Western influences, either directly from the United States and Europe or indirectly through Japan, and are optimistic that Taiwan can deepen its democracy by drawing upon the practices of established democracies. These leaders, however, do not necessarily point to Chinese culture as fundamentally problematic for Taiwan’s democratic future. Some I spoke with did reference the authoritarianism that was the hallmark of classical Chinese government and the fact that ordinary citizens in China did not historically participate meaningfully in politics at the national level as obstacles to be overcome. But they also generally rejected the proposition that a lack of strong democratic roots in Chinese culture represents an insuperable problem. The assumption is that although democracy is a political concept that has been imported into Taiwan, it is a universally desired form of government that can flourish anywhere given time, patience, and the commitment of democratic activists to see democratization through.

Despite these differences, many (though not all) KMT and DPP partisans tend to agree on the main outlines of a definition of democracy, at least in the current circumstances. Both hold that Taiwan’s democracy is of the indirect
and possibly elitist variety, entailing the election of leaders who then make policy decisions. Leaders are held accountable for their failures—voted out of office by the public if voters are not satisfied, reelected if the populace is satisfied. Ordinary citizens in this conception are generally viewed as exercising choice based on the selection of leaders rather than of policies and in general are not expected to understand policies or the policy-making process in depth.

KMT elites tend to adopt this position not out of any pragmatic understanding of the impossibility of engaging in direct democracy given the large size of contemporary nations but rather out of a lingering belief, traceable to Sun’s emphasis on the division of sovereignty from administration, that ordinary people are not intellectually ready to engage deeply in the nuts and bolts of policy making. One in particular argued that a truly grassroots democracy was still hundreds of years away because such democratic practice requires a much higher level of education on the part of ordinary people than now exists. But in the meantime, the existing model of electing people who then make key policy decisions is a workable and adequate model of democracy in his view.

There is an analogous conception of democracy in the DPP camp, but it appears less indebted to traditional political philosophy than to modern sociology. This view holds that ordinary people, while capable of political understanding, do not think very deeply about policies because they have other things that occupy their time and energies. The DPP officially argues that ordinary people should be involved in some decision making through the referenda process (a legacy of Sun, though other influences may also be in play), and its leaders generally have argued when in power that “the government’s administrative measures and policies are formulated based on public opinion.” But the DPP position interprets that dictum loosely and accepts the notion that ordinary people are by themselves not always inclined to engage in the political process and must therefore be mobilized by parties and their leadership.

Thus both the KMT and DPP elites I spoke with agree in descriptions of contemporary practice that locate Taiwan’s democracy as a combination of unitary, competitive elitist, and liberal democratic models. That is, the outline they provide combines Sun’s understanding of democracy with a recognition of pluralism, multiparty elections, a raft of individual rights and freedoms, and procedural justice. Citizens vote for leaders who run as heads of different parties; elected officials are then expected to formulate policies that will protect and further the interests of Taiwan taken as a whole, follow a general consen-
In this view, leaders generally agree that Taiwan now meets the criteria for being a democracy, though its democratic practice still has room to deepen. Regarding this latter point, the KMT supporters I spoke with agreed with the DPP that not much has been done in terms of developing a sense of democratic responsibility since the transition in the early 1990s. While they tend to see Taiwan’s democracy as institutionally and procedurally mature, they share a sense of frustration in their perception that Taiwanese politics on both the elite and popular levels has not risen above the exploration of scandals, the elevation of minor events into major issues, the use of cynical political tactics, and a superficial politics of celebrity. In this assessment both sides share, to a degree, views consistent with the republican unitary and Chinese unitary democracy models, as well as some critiques of liberal democracy that we shall later encounter in discussions of democracy on the Chinese mainland.

Understandings of Elections and Accountability

An important difference between the two parties’ practical understanding of politics is their expectations of citizens when choosing leaders. This difference feeds their differing criticisms of contemporary politics in Taiwan. While both accept the current liberal and pluralist structure of the state, including a multiparty system, the KMT and DPP see the purpose of elections and the way in which people should hold leaders accountable in somewhat different ways. The DPP members I spoke with believe that issues should play the predominant role in elections. Voters should choose leaders on the basis of their positions or records on issues, even if ordinary citizens should not always participate in choosing policies. In this view, citizens must hold leaders accountable for what they do in office through a clear understanding of what is happening on and to Taiwan. Many in the DPP believe that leaders are not being held to account in part because of media’s irresponsible attitude toward politics and the population’s parallel quest for entertainment. Reflecting a deep belief that ordinary people ought to have the opportunity to participate meaningfully in the policy realm, one person identified with the DPP with whom I spoke even deplored the fact that, in his perception, his own party tended to avoid policy debates and discussions of issues. Such debates and discussions, it appears, are important to his conception of the process by which ordinary people should judge and select the leaders who formulate
This position probably reflects a more deliberative form of democratic participation than Sun or Chiang Kai-shek advocated.

Others in the DPP more generally blame the KMT for the current reluctance to discuss issues and the preference for focusing superficially on candidates’ personalities and biographies. These developments, they argue, are a legacy of the KMT’s previous authoritarian rule. Under that rule, the argument goes, the only safe way of evaluating candidates was through a focus on personal details, because criticism of government policy could bring harsh government sanctions. This history of denying political freedoms, particularly freedom to engage in policy discussions, has had a lingering effect, making the population hesitant to talk about issues for fear that a KMT government would even now punish them for taking the wrong position.

Many DPP elites also identify as problematic a lack of popular mobilization in political affairs. These elites, in a perhaps unwitting echo of Sun, see popular participation channeled solely through representative democracy as inadequate. What they want is a continuation of the political mobilization that marked the democratization process. For example, the DPP’s international press conference before the 2008 election featured the video “March against the Wind,” which consisted of scenes of mobilization (particularly young people marching and walking) as well as invocations of particular events and entities important to the DPP—the 2/28 Memorial, Formosa Magazine, and protests that took place after the founding of the DPP. In doing so, the video conceptualized democracy as importantly implicating direct citizen involvement in politics, usually by working informally outside of institutions. While the DPP may have found this conception elsewhere than in KMT doctrine (in the American civil rights movement, the New Left, or the People Power movement in the Philippines, for example), it is also plausible to conjecture that the predisposition to adopt those views stems from exposure to Sun’s writings, which were ubiquitous in both the political and educational arenas. The parallels between the positions are too close to be coincidental, even given the presence of alternative sources of influence.

In contrast, the KMT elites with whom I spoke appeared more comfortable with encouraging voters to focus on candidates’ character and life history and expressed unease with mobilization. To evaluate candidates based on their ethics and morals, they argue, is an acceptable way for people to choose and hold public officials accountable. This outlook was evident during the 2012 presidential campaign when Ma Ying-jeou continually questioned the
ethical conduct of his DPP opponent and the DPP’s overall commitment to ethics. His general stance emphasized ethical scrutiny as an important way of determining a candidate’s fitness for office. Like the DPP camp, KMT elites attribute some of the shortcomings of Taiwan’s political system, including the fact that people are not engaging seriously in the ethical scrutiny of candidates, in part to the sensationalist press and the quest for entertainment. But they also blame the DPP’s mobilizational focus, or what they term its “street mentality.” They argue that the DPP prefers to take politics out of normal channels and institutions, stir up the population, and place popular pressure on political leaders to adopt the positions the DPP elites favor. The DPP does this, KMT elites argue, not through reasoned argument, but by lurid appeals to emotion, such as linking policy positions to the threat from the mainland or by recasting current events in the context of the past. Such practices, they argue, serve to debase politics and divert citizens from serious consideration of candidates’ qualifications and character, and thus they see the DPP’s focus on policies and issues as divisive, destabilizing, and an obstacle to good governance. Here we see a continuation of one conception of accountability that was central to Chiang Kai-shek’s discussion of democracy coupled, ironically, with a repudiation of Sun’s mobilizational emphasis.

To summarize, where the DPP tends to see the shallowness of popular engagement with politics largely in terms of an illiberal and antidemocratic KMT history, KMT elites see it as a product of elite manipulation of divisive issues that fractures the public and leads it to focus on superficial qualities and emotional response. Both groups of elites deplore what they consider the failure of citizens to discharge their responsibility to hold government to account, but the KMT appears to follow in part Chiang Kai-shek’s conception of a system of democratic accountability based on ethical evaluations of leaders rather than policy positions. The DPP, in contrast, expects the populace to focus solely on how leaders deal with issues of interest, a position that appears both to repudiate the elitist division of people and to encroach upon the strict division between sovereignty and administration that Sun championed.

Consensus and Majoritarianism in Taiwan’s Democratic Landscape

Emphases on Consensus

As we have seen, Sun and the two Chiangs each emphasized, to varying degrees, the importance of a united demos. Sun argued that democracy is the
form by which a united people solves large problems. Chiang Kai-shek spoke of the need for a united polity disciplined through the use of traditional Chinese ethics. Chiang Ching-kuo often alluded to a consensus that owes its existence to political orchestration. Such positions appear to align with the Chinese unitary model of democracy and, at times, the broader republican unitary model, both of which understand government as implementing a general will and furthering a general good with regard to public goals and issue positions.

We find a continuation of related discussions in contemporary Taiwanese politics, the difference being that these conversations often assume more pluralism than Sun or Chiang Kai-shek recognized and a consensus or general will that is more prescriptive in terms of policy than Sun’s discussion of sovereignty assumes. Any survey of political argument in Taiwan would find that an important part of the conception of democracy that is continually referenced is the premise that political activity entails the attempt to find or forge consensus. While political figures, members of the media, and ordinary citizens now explicitly embrace the legitimacy of multiple parties and different policy positions, they appear uncomfortable with conflict. Therefore, the acceptance of multiple parties is tempered by a demand, honored more in the breach than in practice, that leaders cooperate, that agreement be the aim of all politicians despite the existence of differences and pluralism, and that the best situation is when agreement extends throughout society.

This orientation was recapitulated in the spring of 2008 in Ma Ying-jeou’s inauguration speech alongside references to pluralism and competition: “We will endeavor to create an environment that is humane, rational and pluralistic—one that fosters political reconciliation and coexistence. We will promote harmony among sub-ethnic groups and between the old and new immigrants.” Both major parties engage in this type of rhetoric. Invocations of this type have in common not only the tropes of consensus, reconciliation, and harmony but also the “harder” analogs of the people’s will (國民意志). The latter can be found in this defense of the Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) administration’s 2004 referendum condemning China’s missiles:

A referendum allows for the proper expression of the will of the people. . . . The referendum will also serve to galvanize the will of the people. . . . Through the referendum, we may reconcile divergent views and forge a consensus in order to demonstrate the will and resolve of the people of Taiwan to strengthen national defense and pursue peace.
This defense is based on an earlier press conference in which Chen argued that it was his constitutional duty to hold the referendum in order to “establish a consensus” (建立...共識), “consolidate the will of the people” (凝聚國民意志), and “voice the collective will” of the people of Taiwan (能展現出台灣人民的集體意志).\(^{11}\) Note that while the first quotation speaks of the need to “reconcile” views, there really is no room in either discussion for dissent. There is either a preexisting will that is expressed or a consensus to be created by means of the referendum. Consensus is not an accommodation to opponents or critics. It is a show of strength and unity, a mobilization of the population that in ostensibly reaching agreement marginalizes opponents of the government’s policies.\(^{12}\) This stance, aside from its focus on particular policy positions, echoes arguments that both Chiangs used and is in accordance with the understanding Sun espoused.

These examples are not isolated; they are continually and broadly replicated in media reports, editorials, and the speeches of political elites. We find variants of the themes of consensus (共識), reconciliation (和解), and harmony (和諧) invoked in a wide variety of political contexts, from arguments over casinos and considerations of economic policy to discussions of the placement of constitutional amendments on the ballot and issues regarding cross-strait relations.\(^{13}\) One would expect that with the growing appreciation of pluralism, much more would be made of the need to recognize differences, respect minorities, and abide by the preferences of majorities that fall short of broad agreement. Yet that is not generally the case. Consensus and unity continue to be part of a generally accepted, politically correct vocabulary.\(^{14}\) So while for the most part elites from both parties with whom I spoke conceded that there is considerable pluralism in Taiwan’s politics, their appreciation of the durability and variance of such differences is often not strong. They do note that there are large differences in terms of attitudes toward economic policies, mainland China, Taiwan’s relationship with mainland China, and constitutional issues. They also acknowledge that such differences are often rooted in characteristics that make Taiwan’s population diverse. They recognize the existence and importance of different economic and other interests, variations in educational levels, and the multiethnic makeup of the population. Yet almost every political figure speaks of the need to find or construct, respect, and act on consensus. Some do so because they take differences as either artificial in origin or as having been given an artificial importance.\(^{15}\) Such understandings may in part account for the intolerance others have
noted among the population for differing political positions. But even when political leaders do not see differences as artificially created, they still seek out consensus as the right approach to democratic political activity. So, for example, for party spokesperson Hsiao Bi-khim (蕭美琴), whose DPP emphasizes the importance of pluralism in Taiwan’s electorate, elections are still the means by which consensus is translated into policy.

Given this simultaneous recognition of pluralism and insistence on consensus, democracy is not conceived of as merely the rule of majorities, with elections giving a political party the power to put its own carefully differentiated policy proposals into practice in the face of disagreement by others, but is seen as being more about discovering the basis for or orchestrating broad agreement on the direction the nation should take and the policies that should be implemented. As another example, during the 2012 presidential campaign both the DPP candidate Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) and the People First Party candidate James Soong promised if elected to seek consensus on important foreign policy questions, such as those implicated in relations with the PRC. Tsai even went further to argue that she would form a “grand coalition” of all parties based on the “mainstream” policy views they all share. This coalition would work to refine shared views and jointly exercise power in putting those views into concrete policies. Indeed, her campaign repeatedly criticized Ma’s administration for not reaching out to other parties to find or construct a consensus on cross-strait relations.

There is no agreement, however, on the mechanism by which consensus is to be reached. Tsai’s and Soong’s consensuses would be forged by a meeting of minds among party leaders. But consensus is also sometimes described as the invocation of a general will involving the entire population, as Chen Ming-tang of the Mainland Affairs Council once asserted regarding Taiwan’s desire for a seat in the United Nations, as Chen Shui-bian argued in conceiving of democracy as the government following the people’s will, as Ma held in putting forward his understanding of possible KMT control of the executive and legislature as expressing the outcome of the popular will, and as Ma again stated in arguing that Taiwan’s sovereignty “transcends political affiliations and is something that everyone should work together to defend and protect.” Yet another understanding is the conception of the general will as a combination of common interests and common identity, both of which must be constructed. For example, Frank Hsieh’s (謝長廷) 2008 campaign literature called for an end to the “politicization of culture and identity issues” that he
laid at the feet of the KMT. What is needed, he argued, is a project to “develop a national identity that celebrates the rich multicultural diversity of Taiwan.”

During that process, it appears, consensus must be orchestrated, which is a point quite congenial to Chiang Ching-kuo’s views.

Thus consensus as an understanding of general agreement or a general will continues to play an important role in the way political leaders think about democracy in Taiwan. Discussions go beyond the familiar calls for bipartisanship in the United States, which usually are confined to particular and narrow issues having to do with national security or with pressing emergencies. In Taiwan, the preferred mode of operation for addressing all policy issues is consensus. This emphasis points to the continued influence on Taiwan’s democratic practice of the unitary models of democracy that Sun and the Chiangs previously invoked. But understandings of unity, now conceived mostly in the form of consensus, have changed and continue to diverge over time, possibly in response to the attempt to square unitary desires with the recognition of pluralism. Understandings of the basis of consensus can be wide or narrow and its character viewed as natural or constructed, confined to elites or encompassing all citizens, and acted on by one party or the result of power sharing.

**Electoral Law Reforms and Majoritarianism in Taiwan**

These contemporary Taiwanese views on consensus suggest that portions of the conceptions of democracy Sun and the Chiangs referenced have become a source for arguments that assume the derivation of consensus out of an initial condition of pluralism. Such conceptions might also be linked to important changes to Taiwan’s electoral system that have moved its democracy in a majoritarian direction.

Prior to 2005, elections for seats in Taiwan’s national legislature, the Legislative Yuan, predominantly used the single nontransferable vote (SNTV) system in the context of multimember constituencies, supplemented by a small number of seats filled by a party-list proportional representation method. This type of system encourages the creation of small parasitic parties and the weakening of major parties because members of the same parties can run against one another in multimember constituencies. Elections to the Legislative Yuan, therefore, predictably produced ill-disciplined representatives from a variety of parties who focused more on publicity, procedural battles, and delay than on passing important legislation. These problems exacerbated
existing constitutional ambiguities in the relationships among the Legislative Yuan, the premier, and the president.

In 2005, article 4 of the constitution (which governs the Legislative Yuan) was amended with the support of both major parties. The changes reduced the number of seats in the Legislative Yuan from 225 to 113. They further mandated that 73 of these seats would be filled by elections from single-member constituencies and 34 would be filled through a party-list proportional representation method (the other 6 seats would be filled by elected representatives of aboriginal groups). The result of this electoral change in the 2008 legislative election was a dramatic transformation in the composition of the Legislative Yuan. Rather than the distribution of significant number of seats among a plethora of parties and a situation in which the DPP and KMT were roughly even in strength, the elections resulted in the KMT winning 81 seats to the DPP’s 27, with minor parties gaining only 5. This result, in tandem with Ma’s victory in the presidential election, gave the KMT an overwhelming position in the national government.

Reilly argues that such electoral changes and outcomes, having been instituted not only in Taiwan but also in Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand, are symptomatic of a broader Asian model of democracy that emphasizes electoral majoritarianism. There are two aspects of Reilly’s contention that are important for us to explore. The first is whether the majoritarianism that Reilly identifies is part of the conceptions of democracy that Sun, Chiang Kai-shek, and Chiang Ching-kuo put forward. The second is whether Taiwan’s electoral reforms were justified by concepts put forward by Sun and the Chiangs, those put forward by Reilly, or in other terms.

Reilly holds that these types of majoritarian systems are “motivated by common aims of promoting government stability, reducing political fragmentation, and limiting the potential for new entrants to the party system.” This motivation stands in contrast with alternative attempts (found in some European parliamentary systems) to engineer electoral outcomes so that the body of the national legislature broadly and comprehensively mirrors the different views and interests that exist in the demos. Those efforts result in a multiplicity of parties that fragment those legislatures. In contrast, the Asian effort at electoral reform (through discarding the SNTV and eliminating multimember constituency systems in favor of single-member constituencies) results in movement toward two-party systems and election results that give decided legislative majorities to one party. In their emphasis on majoritarianism, Reilly
argues, these electoral reforms not only make this group of Asian democracies different from many of their European counterparts; their existence may signal a return to authoritarian attitudes.\textsuperscript{25}

The first question we must ask is whether Sun’s and the Chiangs’ conceptions of democracy are reflected in the philosophical background implied by Reilly’s hypothesis. The answer is a qualified yes. The impatience with pluralism and fragmentation that we find in all three and their focus on stability and unity are consistent with the motivations Reilly identifies. The implied elitism of the desire to restrict access to positions of power that Reilly also references likewise accords in general with their views. However, that elitist tendency does not go as far as Sun’s differentiation between administration and sovereignty. Likewise, the majoritarianism Reilly identifies does not fully replicate Sun’s and Chiang Kai-shek’s unitary preferences. While electoral majoritarianism in Reilly’s description implies a desire for undivided government and clear outcomes for elections, such majoritarianism falls short of the indifference toward or impatience with pluralism per se and emphasis on the general will that we find in many of the democratic discussions under study here. Electoral majoritarianism still implies multiparty electoral systems and true party competition, elements that are not stressed in Sun’s and Chiang Kai-shek’s discussions. It may, however, be related to Chiang Ching-kuo’s discussion of consensus orchestrated from above.

The second question is whether Taiwan’s electoral reforms were justified by arguments that conform to Reilly’s concept of majoritarianism or Sun’s and the Chiangs’ conceptions of democracy or by other rationales. There are a number of reasons a nation might wish to move away from the SNTV system that Taiwan had previously utilized to a system in which most seats are filled by votes in single-member constituencies. Hsieh provides a useful list: a desire to reduce the number of parties, a desire to reduce the number of candidates running in a district, a desire to increase the internal discipline of parties, a desire to address problems of corruption, and a desire to make parties moderate their positions so that they appeal to the median voter rather than to outliers.\textsuperscript{26} These reasons may coincide with the push for stability, defragmentation, and restriction of participants in the political arena that Reilly observes or with other motivations. The first two reasons may have to do with the desire to make electoral choices easier or to reduce the number of frivolous candidates. Party discipline can be associated with a desire to reform the workings of the legislative chamber as well as with majoritarianism. It is really only
the desire to have parties appeal to the median voter rather than to more radical elements that fits without question the goals Reilly has in mind; it also fits with conceptions of consensus that we find particularly in Chiang Ching-kuo’s discussions of democracy.

What were the reasons put forward for election reform in Taiwan? Impressionistic evidence suggests that some elites did put forward reasons that coincide with the goals Reilly discusses. We also find other reasons, some of which implicate the views of Sun and the Chiangs. One example is this passage from an article in the *Taipei Times* that advocated adoption of the reform proposals:

Legislators . . . have shown a lack of interest in actually reviewing legislative bills. This state of affairs must be improved. Another example is the many legislators with a preference for participating in call-in TV shows . . . [who] promote ethnic division and trample on democracy and reason. These legislators should improve their self-discipline. Furthermore, legislators reveling in press conferences to reveal misconduct are simply pandering to the masses under the protection of legislative immunity.27

Here we find a variety of justifications. Some have to do with legislative discipline in following procedure and accomplishing standard legislative tasks. These are general justifications. Other arguments speak of discipline more broadly and in ways reminiscent of the Chiangs. Legislators are dividing the populace and pandering to certain groups rather than providing guidance and wisdom.

A second article speaks approvingly of the changes’ likely creation of a two-party system.28 This position appears to fall into the political and electoral conception that Reilly describes, as do references in the same article to popular perceptions of instability. The piece also speaks of the reforms’ salutary effects on corruption and legislative discipline, complaining of “clowns” in the legislature. These are standard arguments not necessarily connected with the concepts of democracy discussed here. But the author does go on to speak of the current system’s encouragement of the media’s involvement in politics, particularly its role in playing up conflicts between the major parties. This looks much more like the understandings of Sun and the Chiangs.

A final article also provides a mixture of justifications.29 This article argues that the reforms will bring a host of improvements: better politicians, better legislatures, a two-party system rather than the current multiparty system, and increased momentum toward transformation into a presidential system.
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with a strong referendum mechanism. This list of benefits looks very similar to Reilly’s conception of majoritarianism, particularly in the expressed desire for a two-party system and a general consolidation of power signaled by the desire to move to a presidential system. However, the piece also goes further toward the understanding Sun and the Chiangs promote, advocating a referendum mechanism by which a unified demos can register the general will. Not only does the author of the piece see the aim of the reform as making sure political figures “keep faith with the people”; the process itself is one in which success has been predicated on “the will of the people to overcome powerful political interest groups through the mobilization of public opinion and making use of democratic procedures.” The echoes of Sun and the Chiangs are unmistakable.

Thus we see a variety of arguments for the recent electoral reform. Language associated with Sun and the Chiangs is present even if it is not dominant. It appears that people reflexively use such justifications but do not feel compelled to make only such arguments. If we trust these arguments, political motivations for these electoral changes appear to be a mixture of general desires to clean up the legislature, the political motivations that Reilly describes, and the belief that such understandings will build a political system that would share features of the unitary democracies that Sun, Chiang Kai-shek, and Chiang Ching-kuo drew upon.

Recent developments, however, have also revealed a complication in any easy equation of majoritarianism with consensus in Taiwan’s context. As noted above, DPP candidate Tsai Ing-wen called for the creation of a “grand coalition” during the 2012 presidential campaign. Such a coalition would entail the creation of a consensus-building and power-sharing mechanism involving all political parties. We noted that Tsai’s position represents another piece of evidence supporting the continued persistence of the trope of consensus in discussions of democracy on Taiwan; thus one might expect Tsai to voice support for the 2005 amendments. But the reason for Tsai’s call for a grand coalition, according to Tsai’s campaign, was dissatisfaction with the majoritarian outcome of the 2008 election, which put in power one party (the KMT) that, in turn, refused to share any policy-making power with other parties despite the presence of substantive agreement on particular policies and issues. Tsai’s camp is therefore not satisfied with the 2005 constitutional changes and during the 2012 presidential campaign hinted at the possibility of future reform proposals. Consensus does not equal majoritarianism in their view; consequently,
they see the 2005 majoritarian reforms as mistakenly encouraging the party that wins an election to claim that its policies are supported by a general will and that it is empowered to act alone on the basis of that will. In other words, the Tsai camp now views the 2005 reforms as supporting the practice of unitary democracy, a development that it did not foresee and that it rejects. In contrast, Tsai’s group grounds its preferred understanding of consensus on a Rawlsian conception of political liberalism, in which democratic consensus is defined as a situation in which pluralist groups find agreement on some but not all issues through an overlapping of views and proceed to share policymaking power on those issues. This definition of an “overlapping consensus” in Rawls’s terms at once assumes an additional facet of cooperation (power sharing) and a less extensive scope of agreement than do other conceptions we have seen. This understanding, therefore, pulls in a different direction from the impulses Reilly assigns the supporters of majoritarian regimes and diverges significantly from the more strongly unitary understandings of democracy Sun, Chiang Kai-shek, and Chiang Ching-kuo held.

Democratic Conceptions and the Chinese Conversation on Democracy

We have seen that the democratic discussions of Sun and the Chiangs have at times been echoed in Taiwan’s contemporary democratic landscape and that there has in some cases been a merger of unitary democratic elements with the liberal democratic model in discussions of democracy even if such language is not dominant. Of equal interest is the relationship of these discussions to democratic understandings in the broader Chinese community. Where do the contributions of these three leaders fit in the Chinese encounter with democracy and current attempts by various people on the Chinese mainland to grapple with the concept of democracy? I first discuss broadly how these leaders’ conceptions fit into the Chinese conversation by examining justifications of democracy. I then examine invocations of the Chinese unitary and liberal democratic models.

Justifications of Democracy

We concentrate here mostly on jiùwáng justifications, given their number and interesting characteristics. From the evidence we have at hand, it seems that Sun was typical of his time in putting forward jiùwáng and contextual arguments in favor of democracy. He was not alone in desiring democracy
because it would support a strong state that would provide good governance in the form of a heightened capacity for policy performance. Where he, perhaps, goes farther than his contemporaries is in linking jiùwáng to a larger discussion of history in which humans, when facing particular kinds of challenges, generate particular forms of government. This understanding situates China’s encounter with democracy within a larger context that transforms China’s predicament from a purely parochial matter into an episode in an interconnected human narrative.

While we have noted that Sun’s use of a jiùwáng justification helped push his democratic conception in a nonliberal direction, Fung has differentiated the use of that justification historically from an automatic rejection of liberal democracy in the Chinese community. We also find this to be the case in later discussions. Late twentieth- and twenty-first-century jiùwáng justifications of liberal democracy on the Chinese mainland have arisen among critics of the government who see in democracy a tool for attaining modernization, social justice, and social cohesion as well as a method for holding government agencies and officials accountable for corruption and abuses of authority.

Guang argues that the democracy activists of both the Democracy Wall and the Tiananmen Square eras promoted democracy as a more effective way of engaging in modernization and economic development, holding that these processes are inextricably linked with political democracy. But an examination of documents from that period and later reveal that in doing so, these activists often have linked liberal democracy with solutions to mundane problems, such as corruption, incompetence, waste, failure to deal with natural and man-made disasters, and the need to restrain officials, problems that contrast with Sun’s linkages of democracy with much larger processes and tasks.

Jiùwáng justifications of liberal democracy have also arisen more recently in response to officials who refuse to countenance further political reforms and argue that liberal democracy will weaken the state, thus inviting disorder and national fragmentation. So, for example, the authors of Charter 08 (a document calling for the institution of liberal democracy in the PRC) argue that democracy is needed on the mainland in part because the current authoritarian government has created a rift between the state and ordinary people that has led to popular unrest and an increase in disorderliness that display the population’s dissatisfaction with policies, economic inequality, and the government’s lack of respect for private citizens. Here, democracy is presented as the answer to the problems of disorder and instability because it addresses
two root problems—disenfranchisement and popular resistance to government policies. Democratic procedures and human rights allow ordinary people to hold government accountable, thus creating in them satisfaction and removing these causes of disorder.

Like earlier jiūwáng justifications, these later justifications invoke democracy as the answer to the failings of the state. Their main difference from Sun’s justification is the complaint that the state is too strong rather than too weak and that the problems being experienced are the direct result of the state’s actions rather than those presented by modern contexts alone. While Sun hints that democracy is necessary because a mature people will demand control of a strong state, his ultimate pragmatic argument for democracy is that it makes the state strong and capable of tackling monumental tasks by harnessing popular energy and will; for many contemporary activists, the processes of a liberal democratic state make it sensitive to and accepting of the pluralism of popular interests, accountability by ordinary citizens, the sanctity of individuals, and the importance of grassroots views. Democracy is good because properly functioning liberal democratic features (process performance) provide the popular voice, accountability, rights, and transparency that make government suited to tackle to the tasks (the achievement of orderliness, social justice, and economic development) associated with good governance. Not only is sensitivity to pluralism and individuals important here in ways Sun did not embrace; the assumption also is that ordinary people are in closer touch with the problems that are the object of policy-making processes than are officials and political elites, and thus accountability to citizens in general is paramount to good governance. In this updated version of the jiūwáng justification, the features of liberal democracy remedy the intrinsic inability of current authoritarian structures to obtain the information necessary for providing for the common good and for modulating policies to fit particular contexts and the needs of ordinary people. This version, therefore, has a strongly anti-elitist character that contrasts with Sun’s views.

Chiang Kai-shek and Chiang Ching-kuo are mostly outside this pragmatic conversation. They are in closer company with those on the mainland who refer to democracy as the form of government most deeply compatible with human nature. We see scattered references to the relationship of democracy to human nature in the contributions by some of the early liberals that Fung described and the Tiananmen Square activists that Guang and Nathan document. We also find in the text of Charter 08 passages that resemble Chiang
Kai-shek’s justification of democracy, particularly the argument that the absence of democracy “rots away [people’s] humanity” (腐蝕人性).  

Less relevant and powerful are Chiang Kai-shek’s and Chiang Ching-kuo’s justifications of democracy by reference to authority figures. Sun is still lionized on the mainland, and while Nathan documents approving references to Sun on the subject of democracy among the Democracy Wall activists, Sun’s image has been importantly linked with the CCP’s appropriation of his legacy. For the Communists, his political understanding of democracy is typical of a necessary but inevitably outmoded era of bourgeois understanding. However, some commentators on the mainland (and on Taiwan) do take Sun seriously as a democratic theorist. Attention is paid to his understanding of the democratization process, as well as to his five-power constitution. For those who see democracy as a process that must be engaged in slowly, or who take tutelage seriously, Sun is an important visionary. Others have also referred to the Sun Mín Chǔ Yì as containing important democratic principles that contemporary China would do well to follow. But such references appear rarely on the mainland.

While Chiang Kai-shek is not seen as a democratic theorist, he is appreciated as a figure central to China’s reunification after the warlord period and as an opponent of Japanese aggression. When he is officially mentioned with regard to democracy, it is often as someone who spoke of democracy but did not understand it. Chiang Ching-kuo, on the other hand, is seen by some as a pioneer of modernization, as well as a Chinese version of Gorbachev who helped initiate democracy from above. However, these depictions are not employed as justifications of democracy but (in the case of the latter) as a model of democratization to be rejected in favor of a bottom-up process.

The Chinese Unitary Model

Sun, Chiang Kai-shek, Chiang Ching-kuo, and the Chinese Unitary Model

Throughout our discussion, we have referenced a Chinese unitary model that appears to have been embraced, to varying degrees, by Chinese theorists of democracy throughout the twentieth century. Many of those whom Nathan and Chao identify as following a minběn understanding of democracy adhere to most aspects of this model. In particular, Liang Chichao (梁啟超), in Nathan’s description, anticipates many of the features of democracy that Sun put forward, as did Hua Guofeng. Many of the democratic discourses Peng documents on the Chinese mainland also partake of this model.
Table 1 provides an overview of the relationship of Sun and the Chiangs to this model. We see from this table that Sun generally embraces all the elements of the Chinese unitary model. He is less emphatic in emphasizing traditional Chinese values for purposes of unity than Chiang Kai-shek and is somewhat closer to the republican unitary model in his belief that participation in democratic politics will unite the nation. Sun transparently assumes the unity of the demos and relies upon the generation and expression of a subjective general will that can be objectively identified. His elitism is both central and robust. Though he is sometimes credited with a strict regard for individual rights, his discussions of democracy in the Sān Mín Chǔ Yì lectures display impatience with the Western obsession with those rights, preferring instead the four political powers he allocates citizens as the more useful safeguards of the popular interest.

Chiang Kai-shek is also at home with this model, but in somewhat different ways than Sun. In contrast to Sun, he does not rely heavily on its favored justifications. Instead, he locates democracy in human attributes and transcendent values. He emphasizes the substance of traditional cultural values to provide unity and discipline to the demos. His elitism is as strong as Sun’s, but who constitutes this elite is somewhat different. Chiang Kai-shek prefers that his intellectual elite possess not only technical ability but also the virtues of traditional Chinese scholar-administrators. He speaks somewhat less of a general will, opting instead to identify a common interest that is more visible to government officials than to ordinary citizens. Finally, he is more vocal and more insistent on social and political discipline than Sun and somewhat

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more willing to make at least rhetorical room for individual rights. In sum, Chiang Kai-shek is substantively more in tune with some aspects of this model than Sun but also hints at departures from the model that Chiang Ching-kuo would take up more fully.

Chiang Ching-kuo is much more ambivalent regarding this model. He barely mentions its justifications of democracy. His strongest endorsement comes in the form of his continued emphasis on elitism and his discussion of elections. Even when speaking of elections as matters of choice, he is often careful to argue that the point of such exercises is not representation but the recruitment of talent into the government. Otherwise, his discussions of the core elements of the model are generally offset by allusions elsewhere to more liberal tenets. He often portrays differences of opinion over policies and goals as natural and sees the unifying concept of consensus as artificially orchestrated from above rather than flowing from democratic practice or the substance of traditional values. While he sets up Sun and Chiang Kai-shek as authority figures whose preference for democracy should guide the ROC in its political aspirations, his public discussions deviate significantly from the closer attachment of both his predecessors to this model.

The Chinese Unitary Model in the Chinese Community

Democracy has been conceptualized in various ways in the Chinese community. As a political and cultural construct, the Chinese unitary model and its constituent minběn arguments importantly put forward as standards of good government the view that those who exercise policy-making power are elites who must govern for the good of all and the understanding that the demos is united and in possession of a specific will. I explore here some conceptions of democracy in general as they are found in the Chinese discussion in relation to these two important elements.

The people as a unitary entity. We have seen that Sun and Chiang Kai-shek consistently invoked the conception of “the people” as a cohesive organism that holds sovereignty, while Chiang Ching-kuo often suggested that diversity is, nonetheless, natural. In this, all three deliberately and starkly differentiated “the people” from experts and other knowledgeable officials who hold public office. However, if we look closely, we see that they understood the grounds for the unity of “the people” in somewhat different terms. We alluded earlier to the differences between Sun and Chiang Kai-shek on this topic. Sun, seeing that a common culture, race, and history were unable alone to unify China,
wanted additional fundamental materials in the form of the common political experience of living under a democratic government to provide the unifying impetus. “The people” for him is not just a cultural but also a political construct. That is one reason he would exclude from the polity those who did not accept the republican and democratic revolution. Chiang Kai-shek, in contrast, did not see democracy as the primary factor generating the united entity of a democratic “people.” Rather, “the people” was formed importantly by exposure to the substance of traditional Chinese values. “The people” for him is, therefore, fundamentally a cultural entity, shaped by the particular content of China's history of philosophical and cultural ethics. That is why he is unsatisfied with the bare attainment of democratic political structures. They were not sufficient to provide the unity that was needed to make a democracy work.

Some portions of Chiang Ching-kuo’s understanding present a third type of construction. He alludes at various times to the proposition that “the people” should be united but are not, mostly because of natural factors. These factors must be overcome by the working of political institutions, either by imposing a view on the demos or by elites orchestrating a consensus from above by weaving together the various views and interests present in the population. However, even this process must have a political bedrock of belief, as was the case with important parts of Sun’s conception. But for Chiang Ching-kuo, that common understanding was not just belief in the republic but also acceptance of particular core policies, including anti-Communism and the necessity of taking back the mainland. Views that do not accord with such policies and the people who hold such views are not tolerated and are to be excluded from “the people.”

These understandings of “the people” are, in their unitary contours, typical of discussions of mǐnběn concepts in the Chinese community throughout the past century. For example, Nathan illustrates the adoption of the assumption of unity by democracy theorists from Liang Chichao to the Democracy Wall activists of 1979.42 Guang also documents continuities between the Democracy Wall and Tiananmen Square activists in their assumptions of a unitary conception of the demos.43 Understandings on the mainland of what provides unity to “the people” have varied over time. Sometimes, as Peng has documented, conceptions are confined to particular groups (those who accept a particular ideology or viewpoint) or classes (the toilers, the working classes, etc.) that are defined by their economic circumstances and interests. At other
times, the designation is based on a broader distinction between bureaucrats or government officials and ordinary people. Here, the assumption is that either common understandings (ideology) or common interests and experiences (of a class or of ordinary citizens) will serve to unite the demos into “a people.” This conception appears to be the source of various current arguments, including appeals for citizens to vote. Government officials also sometimes make a distinction by marking ordinary citizens (who enjoy freedoms and a variety of political rights) as “the people” and differentiating them from “antagonistic forces” who do not support the present regime. These conceptions are probably comparable to those that Sun and Chiang Kai-shek discussed.

Yang Hengjun sums up what he believes is the dominant contemporary attitude on the Chinese mainland regarding the place of a unitary demos by referring to a skeptical stance toward elections. In this conception, the government represents everyone because of its monopolistic position that confines competition within a single party (the CCP). This position accepts the proposition that in a competitive party system, those who vote for losing candidates are not represented, and their resentment must disturb peace and stability:

In China, where people have never experienced democratic elections, it’s impossible to imagine how social harmony can result when close to half of the voters in any election back candidates who “lose.” How much better it is, many Chinese imagine, to have instead of an elected government one that represents the interests of all people—where there is no need for elections, and everyone wins, even if decisions are made in secret.

In this analysis, the government provides unity by somehow discovering and embracing a common interest while avoiding the use of political mechanisms (in the form of competitive elections) that would create divisions. In its anti-pluralistic stance and reference to a common interest or common good, this understanding of consensus is reminiscent of that which Chiang Kai-shek accepted but is a step beyond the attitude found currently in Taiwan, which embraces the importance of multiparty, competitive elections.

*Officials as elites.* In Sun’s understanding, officials stand as highly educated technical experts who run the machinery of the state in the name of the ordinary people who possess various inferior levels of intelligence. These experts are expected to execute the will of the people in their collective, subjective, autonomous choice as to the goals the state should follow, though there are hints that perhaps officials should do more than passively carry out the wishes
of the demos. Official autonomy is curbed by the popular powers of voting, recall, initiative, and referendum. But even in the most restricted reading of their autonomy, there is considerable scope for officials to exercise their own understandings in the formulation and execution of policies. The same holds for Chiang Kai-shek and Chiang Ching-kuo, though with some differences. For Chiang Kai-shek, officials are characterized not only by their intelligence, but also by their high moral and ethical standards. This characteristic strengthens their relationship with the demos, allowing them to push more firmly to inculcate the traditional teachings that will serve to unify and discipline the people. For Chiang Ching-kuo, at least in some of his utterances, officials are administrative experts trained in Confucian ethics, but perhaps more important than their ethics are their political talents in helping harmonize conflicting interests within the demos. Where Chiang Kai-shek’s officials promote unity through teaching, with officials helping guide “the people” in terms of goals, Chiang Ching-kuo’s officials promote harmony through their astute understanding of different political positions and help establish national goals through their harmonization of different subjective understandings of national aspirations.

Contemporary discussions on the mainland that address conceptions of government officials and the nature of the government services that benefit “the people” are complex. For those who hold to a general mínbēn understanding rather than a Western conception, the definition of who decides what is best for the people has strong continuities that encompass the elitist position that Sun and Chiang Kai-shek held. Many tend to hold that “the people” do not have sufficient wisdom, technical expertise, or sometimes the requisite objective spirit to decide what is best for the demos as a whole. It is better that the stratum of highly educated people holds administrative and policy-making powers and uses its innate talents to discover what is best for the nation. Nathan documents this tendency in his discussion of Chinese democracy, as does Peng’s discussion of the history of twentieth-century mínbēn thinking.48

Differences on this topic also exist among those who have discussed democracy on the mainland during the past few decades. Guang, in particular, holds that the Democracy Wall and Tiananmen Square activists embraced different views. While the Democracy Wall activists were more traditional in conceiving of the demos as a united entity, they also tended to adopt a more populist conception, contrasting the uprightness of ordinary citizens with the corruption of officials. They sought much greater substantive input on the part
of ordinary citizens into policy making and administrative processes. This populist attitude anticipates some of the justifications of liberal democracy we find in contemporary activists. In contrast, the otherwise more liberal and Western-influenced Tiananmen Square activists, while acknowledging the importance and naturalness of pluralism, tended to adopt an elitist stance, questioning whether important segments of the population understand and can act intelligently upon their interests. They were content with broadening the scope of officials to include more than the narrow cadres then in power but did not rush to include populist mechanisms of input or the tools of liberal or deliberative democracy in their demands.49 Ironically, these more liberal activists anticipate the positions of such contemporary theorists as Liu, who is reluctant to move beyond intraparty democracy despite other liberal tendencies.

Hu Wei, Guang, and Nathan also note the presence of strains of participatory and deliberative democracy in contemporary discussions on the mainland. These include calls for mass participation in the style of the Paris Commune, more modern attempts to involve ordinary citizens in administrative systems at the local level, and public hearings and cyberdemocracy at higher levels of government. Wei also notes that references to deliberative democracy have been merged with understandings of more traditional forms of consultation between government bodies and ordinary citizens.50

Recent discussions on the mainland regarding the nature of officials and what policies they implement tend to reference substantive and concrete outcomes closely connected to everyday policy goals, while conceptions of officials vary. For leftists and CCP officials who speak of democracy, democratic outcomes are conceptualized in the form of welfarist and social democratic policies that are put forward by officials characterized by their understandings of economics and their status as occupiers of positions in the system of democratic centralism. These policy outcomes are said to emanate from the people only in the objective sense identified by orthodox Marxism.51 For traditionalists, it is a paternalist regard for the general welfare that officials, chosen for their knowledge and morality, provide.52 Newer conceptions include thinking of government officials as constituting a neutral, meritocratic governing group promoting harmony in general and as sophisticated employers of social scientific principles chosen for their talents who operate powerful institutions to promote modernization, economic development, and social harmony while also protecting individual freedoms.53 Of these, those
who connect democracy with harmonization are perhaps closest to Chiang Ching-kuo, in that they tend to see officials actively integrating pluralist positions rather than acting on an already unified general will or primarily pursuing other types of goals.

A final conception sees officials as standing apart from the demos because of their education and selection into the CCP but not necessarily representing a unitary group in themselves. Some party reformers argue that the dominance of the CCP is necessary but can be refined and reshaped. In this conception, the tools of oversight, competition, balance of power, and checks can be incorporated into the current system by introducing key elements of intra-party democracy. Here, the argument is that elections for higher-level positions could be spread to the entire party and open to multiple candidates, and different groups within the party could provide different policy proposals, compete for support, and provide checks on and oversight of members who wield policy-making powers.54 This conception harkens back to Sun’s idea of groups of officials either being confirmed in office by a national legislative body or swept away and replaced by an alternative group.

The CCP white paper on democracy. One partial contemporary expression of the Chinese unitary model is contained in the white paper on democracy the CCP issued in 2005, entitled “Building of Political Democracy in China.”55 Besides elaborating on an understanding of democracy, this paper serves several purposes. It surveys the history of the CCP’s democratic efforts, justifies the party’s understanding of democracy, and lays out avenues for what the party regards as the furthering and deepening of democracy.

It is useful initially to mark the points of departure between the understanding of democracy contained in this paper and those put forward by Sun and the two Chiangs. First, while the document explicitly notes that Sun and others took up democracy as a way of strengthening China, it does not deploy a jiùwáng justification of democracy. It instead associates modernization, unification, and other achievements with the CCP itself. It is not democracy per se but the leadership of the party that is essential. Second, unlike Sun or the two Chiangs, the paper does not locate democracy in Chinese history and culture through the mínběn conception, nor does it associate democracy with human nature, as did Chiang Kai-shek and Chiang Ching-kuo. Third, it embraces a consciously Marxist-Leninist orientation, continuing to identify China as a socialist country and labeling any democratic concept that does not include socialism as a bourgeois conception that is not suited to China.
There are, however, important parallels at work. Like Sun, the white paper justifies democracy by reference to the spirit of the times, referring to the “outcome of historical development and political civilization.” While it puts the conception in terms of “people’s democratic dictatorship,” the paper attempts to distinguish a disciplined democracy from democracy in general. The type of democracy China requires, the authors hold, does not tolerate the attempt by persons to put their “will above that of the collective,” thus transparently locating the unity of the demos in the coercive instruments of the state. Related to this point is an emphasis on harmony, unity, and stability that we also find in Sun, the two Chiangs, and contemporary Taiwan. There is some limited acknowledgment of pluralism in this conception, particularly with regard to the recognition of the special status of ethnic minorities and historically disadvantaged groups, but there is more stress placed on the demos as “the people” when it comes to accountability and the steering of the state. It is “the people” in an undifferentiated sense whose wishes and views are consulted, and it is “correct opinions” that are harvested from consultation.

Likewise, while the paper emphasizes that there are multiple parties in the PRC, the system in which they operate is characterized as a “multi-party cooperative and consultative” system in which non-CCP parties are viewed as “friends” by the CCP, are consulted, and their members given government roles rather than being institutionally placed as oppositional parties that act as checks on officeholders and sources of policy alternatives. Of more importance to the authors of the paper is the participation of these parties in cooperation with the CCP and the introduction of reforms within the CCP that promote intraparty democracy. One suspects that the unitary conception implied by the central role the CCP plays and by the emphasis on cooperation among parties would be more to Sun’s (as well as Chiang Kai-shek’s and at times Chiang Ching-kuo’s) liking than the “multi-party competitive” system that the paper rejects.

Like other variations on the Chinese unitary model, this paper conceives of democracy as importantly centered on a connection between the demos as a whole and the government in the sense that the government and leaders are accountable to “the people” and carry out its wishes. It is not constitutionalism or rights or other parts of liberal or other conceptions of democracy that are important, but rather this claim to ultimately populist identification. Finally, like Chiang Kai-shek and Chiang Ching-kuo, the paper rejects the notion that democratic systems must conform to a universal and particularly Western set of standards. Democracy must be fit to the Chinese context,
and while the authors hold that China can and does borrow freely from the
West by incorporating such features as the embedding of human rights into a
constitution and the notion of a constitution itself, they nevertheless affirm
that “there is no one single and absolute democratic model in the world that
is universally applicable.”

**The Liberal Democratic Model**

Sun, Chiang Kai-shek, Chiang Ching-kuo,
and the Liberal Democratic Model

Adherence to portions of the Chinese unitary model does not preclude inclu-
sion of elements from the liberal democratic model. As shown in table 2, Sun
and the Chiungs all incorporate at least some elements that fit into the latter.

Sun is the least liberal of the three, at least in the Sān Mín Chǔ Yi lectures. This is due in part to his refusal to adopt any Western model and possibly also, as Chang and Gordon note, to his impatience with younger, less disci-
plined revolutionaries. He is at his most liberal in speaking of the importance
of constitutionalism and equality before the law. However, his insistence on
constitutionalism is never pushed in a substantive direction other than his
devising of the five branches of government. His insistence that everyone is
equal in terms of their relationship to the state is hedged considerably by his
elitist division of administration from sovereignty and his even more vehe-
ment argument that people are radically unequal in their abilities. There is
some controversy regarding support for individual rights and freedoms and
the liberal character of his proposals for initiative, referendum, and recall,

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but overall he says little in the *Sān Mín Chǔ Yì* lectures about the protection of individuals but instead argues that such protection is neither needed nor popularly appreciated in the China of his day. He also says little about pluralism and does not emphasize the importance of competitive multiparty elections or an independent civil society. His suspicion of uneducated citizens that drove his proposal for tutelage is also at odds with a liberal orientation, but it is important to note that it was shared by others at the time.57

Chiang Kai-shek mirrors Sun’s position on most elements but improves on Sun with regard to the presence of multiple parties (even if these were minor) and the importance of individual rights and freedoms. His argument that the desire for freedom is innate can also be interpreted as a liberal tenet. He does, however, continue Sun’s intolerance for plural views and is explicit in stating that particular policy positions are not to be allowed in the political arena. He also perpetuates Sun’s general view of elections as plebiscites and his formalistic understanding of constitutionalism, though he speaks of constitutions more often than did Sun and speaks of officials falling under the law. He does little to improve on Sun’s position with regard to political equality, continuing to distinguish between the abilities of government officials and the lack of understanding on the part of the majority of ordinary citizens. Where in taking his positions Sun was probably in step with his peers in China and even in the West (where fascination with elitist conceptions and eventually fascism would take hold among some), Chiang Kai-shek in his later years was out of step with his contemporaries in the West, particularly in his insistence on the government’s imposition of a perfectionist set of Confucian life plans on citizens.

In his bifurcated discussions of democracy, Chiang Ching-kuo displays by far the most liberal characteristics of the three. He recognizes the pluralistic character of the citizenry and speaks more often about individual rights and freedoms. He is also somewhat less likely to speak about great distances between officials and ordinary citizens. He still speaks of consensus but often sees it more as a political creation than something natural or cultural. The increased presence of liberal elements in his conception makes him different from his predecessors, but as noted above, he does little to combine the various liberal and nonliberal aspects of that conception.

**Discussions of Liberal Democracy in the Chinese Community**

Fung notes the long history of references to liberal democracy in twentieth-century China, even if that conception was not the dominant understanding
early in the conversation. In particular, he and others document early attempts by participants in the May Fourth Movement to understand democracy through the constructs of human rights, constitutionalism, and the rule of law. On Taiwan, some factions of the democratic opposition before the transition were known for promoting liberal democracy alongside others who drew upon more traditional concepts, Taiwanese nationalism, and social democracy. Now, the predominant image of that opposition, particularly with regard to the oppositional *Formosa Magazine*, is generally that of Western-educated young people who both theoretically and practically opposed the government by putting forward liberal democratic demands regarding the protection of rights, procedural justice, and competitive multiparty elections.\(^{58}\)

While on the mainland liberal positions generally yielded during the mid-twentieth century to *mǐnběn* and Marxist conceptions of democracy, since the late 1970s both traditional and newer Western understandings of democracy (such as those associated with the direct democracy of the Paris Commune of 1848) have gained currency. References to individual rights and freedoms in the form of human rights (人權) have been especially numerous. As Goldman and Nathan note, these conceptions of democracy often contain references to rights, the need for accountability through competitive multiparty elections, an independent judiciary, and checks and balances.\(^{59}\) Examples are scattered throughout the documents associated with Tiananmen Square protests.\(^{60}\) Hu Wei also documents the numerous references to liberal democracy in contemporary China.\(^{61}\) Indeed, some contemporary writers have gone so far as to argue that cultural *mǐnběn* contains not just democratic but liberal democratic concepts said to be found in the writings of China’s most famous philosophical figures.\(^{62}\)

In the most recent discussions of democracy on the mainland, many participants have rejected the elitism and faith in an educated set of officials that marked earlier democracy activists, the CCP’s approach, and the positions of Sun and the Chiangs in favor of more liberal understandings. Mao Yushi (茅于轼), for example, argues in his blog that governments that do not respect human rights are bound to fall (蔑視人權的政府最後是長不了的) and labels China’s ongoing economic backwardness a symptom of its refusal to adopt liberal democratic concepts and values and instead rely upon an authoritarian elite.\(^{63}\) Others also use elements of the liberal democratic model to critique both current official claims that China is practicing democracy and traditional *mǐnběn* arguments that so long as the government favors policies that benefit
“the people,” it is democratic. For example, Qian Gang (錢鋼) has put forward liberal, pluralist understandings of democracy as a means of critiquing a history of failed attempts by China to create a constitutional and democratic form of government. It is only by introducing political, cultural, ideational, and other forms of competition into the political system, Qian argues, that China will realize its potential for democracy. Likewise, Yang Hengjun (楊恆均) objects to the CCP’s rejection of Western democracy, arguing that there need not be a complete bifurcation between “Western democracy” and a “Chinese democracy.” Yang contends that any true understanding of democracy must contain important elements of the Western liberal model, even if it need not adopt that conception as a whole. He explicitly criticizes what he decries as the manipulative mínběn understandings of “the people” in whose name the CCP claims to govern.

Yang Jisheng (楊繼繩) also endorses the liberal model by dismissing Western praise for the “China model” of governance. Emphasizing the tendency of authoritarian rulers in China to turn to tradition and exceptionalism to validate their antidemocratic practices, he takes to task both domestic and foreign admirers of the current system who wish to paint it as a new and unique form of democracy. In doing so, he references important elements of the liberal democratic model as normative for any understanding of democracy:

> China presently stands a great distance from democratic politics. The level of public participation in national affairs is low; channels for expression are far from open; forces checking political power are weak; government power is overstretched; the party and government are not separate, and the party is still substituted for the government; the court system cannot gain independence [from the party]; there is no freedom of speech. China is still an authoritarian political system.

Charter 08 pushes these positions further, and in so doing epitomizes the liberal faction on the Chinese mainland and stands as the culmination of several decades of invocations of liberal democratic elements there. In its specifics, its tone, its references, and its overall vision, it is a liberal document that depicts democracy as the antidote to the failures generated by the CCP’s monopoly on power. It assumes individuals rather than “the people”. It posits a nation of pluralist interests and views and demands toleration for them. It designates multiparty elections as the main instrument of accountability and advocates other liberal tenets such as the subordination of the military to ci-
vilians and the constitution and the sanctity of private property. It argues for majority rule and the protection of political minorities. It invokes the need for a comprehensive range of individual rights along with an independent judiciary to enforce them. And it promotes the adoption of such liberal structural features as separation of powers and checks and balances.\textsuperscript{68} This scheme extends much further in a liberal direction than any programmatic statement by Sun or either of the Chiangs.

\textit{Other contemporary uses of the liberal democratic model on the Chinese mainland.} One high-profile person who has incorporated parts of the liberal democratic model (as well as traditional justifications) into his discussions of democracy is PRC premier Wen Jiabao (温家宝). Wen has garnered much attention over the past few years with speeches praising democracy and promising further and immediate political reforms.\textsuperscript{69} He has become a polarizing figure. Some have likened him to a Chinese Gorbachev struggling against more conservative members of the CCP leadership to liberalize the political system. Others argue that he is merely a token of reform who is powerless in the face of more unscrupulous and authoritarian party leaders.\textsuperscript{70}

In his speech to the Royal Society in London in 2011, Wen justifies democracy in several ways.\textsuperscript{71} One is by painting democracy as a reaction against feudalism that serves to emancipate people politically and intellectually from an oppressive system. This appears to be a form of the \textit{jiùwáng} justification, perhaps with a Marxian flavor. The second justification is his argument that an open political process contributes to the state’s ability to accomplish important policy goals. These goals include the equalization of incomes and the attainment of justice. While this additional \textit{jiùwáng} justification links democracy to state capacity, it points more to the state’s operational efficiency and efficacy than the strength and power to which Sun alluded. It does appear on the basis of these justifications that Wen, as did Sun, thinks of democracy as unconnected with human nature. It is a concept or idea that has arisen and been embraced because of its impact on humans materially and intellectually. Therefore, democracy appears to be a useful political tool, but no more than a tool, for Wen as well as for Sun.

Wen lists various features of democracy without providing a comprehensive description. This list includes important liberal features along with other characteristics. Democracy, Wen holds, involves the rule of law, transparency, the guarantee of economic and political rights, the attainment of justice, oversight of officials and systems for the checking of officials’ power, and
equal opportunity for participation. Wen’s understanding of democracy focuses more on the ways by which the power officials wield is checked, supervised, and informed than on the means by which citizens exercise control of policy-making or electoral power. Indeed, one might argue that this understanding is more liberal than it is democratic. His emphasis on the freedom to conduct scientific research and pursue other academic interests (probably influenced by the venue of this particular speech) is especially conducive to such attribution.

Absent from this description, however, are other liberal features. There is no discussion of multiple parties or competitive elections. There is little discussion of pluralism aside from references to multiculturalism. Rather than voting, Wen refers to consultation between officials and citizens. Wen also does not mention a constitution. Yet it is also significant that Wen avoids any discussion of problems with democracy in the Chinese context. He does not caution against too rapid political reforms or express worries over the looming dangers of anarchy, lawlessness, or political splintering if democracy were introduced. This is one of the reasons some reformers look to him with some degree of hope.

Like the official CCP white paper, Wen sees democracy as a concept with plural operational forms. He holds that China will learn lessons about political reform from other countries, though he is not specific about what lessons China will embrace in that learning process. He more emphatically holds that while democracy is a standard reaction to the experience of feudalism, it “may be achieved in different ways and forms in different societies and countries.” Democracy may be a universal idea, but there is no standard model, and no country has a monopoly on its operational definition.

Another CCP official who has included liberal elements in his discussion of democracy is Yu Keping (俞可平). Yu has emerged as a prominent democracy theorist who, while acting as deputy director of the Compilation and Translation Committee of the CCP, nonetheless does not always echo the party line on political matters.

Yu’s provocative 2006 essay “Democracy Is a Good Thing” (民主是個好東西) and the subsequent book of the same title offer a version of democracy that contains several parallels with as well as differences from the conceptions under discussion here. Yu’s essay provides a list of caveats regarding democracy. His treatment takes the form of a back-and-forth discussion in which the phrase “democracy is a good thing” and a list of democracy’s virtues is offset by the
problems democracy is said to create (instability and disorder, trivialization of important issues, empowerment of dictators, government delays and inefficiencies) and the problems democracy is unable to solve. The purpose of this rhetorical tactic is to acknowledge democracy as a normatively good, useful, and probably necessary but by no means an unproblematic way of organizing the state and to demonstrate that democracy is a worthwhile goal for which the country must be willing to pay a reasonable but not excessive price.

On one level, this ambivalence as a whole is not in keeping with Sun's understanding of democracy. For the latter, democracy rightly understood would pose no problem in terms of unity, discipline, corruption, or dictatorship. Democracy provides the solution to all these problems by putting the people themselves ultimately in control of the state. Yu's conception is perhaps closer to Chiang Kai-shek's understanding of the problems of individualism and potential chaos in Western democracies, though Yu does not copy Chiang's insistence that traditional moral and ethical values are the answer to such problems. However, on another level this view is in keeping with Sun's understanding, in that Yu tends to see democracy as a political tool that has its uses and drawbacks. While Yu provides a justification of democracy based on human nature, as we shall see below, it does not appear he thinks democracy is the only form of government compatible with human thriving.

Yu provides several justifications for democracy. One is the familiar affirmation of democracy on jiùwáng grounds. Democracy can push forward the modernization process and assist in solving the problems of the people's livelihood. Here he is on familiar turf with Sun and many others in the broader Chinese conversation on democracy, but he is closer to his contemporary democracy activists than to Sun in pointing toward democratic processes and the importance of good governance rather than to state power as the useful products of democratization. Yu also follows Sun in arguing that democracy is congruent with a particular stage of development. For Yu as well as Sun, democracy is part of the trend of the times. However, Yu refers to cultural, social, and economic development as well as political development and like many Western scholars sees China's recent economic growth as a precondition for democracy rather than an outcome of democracy. While Yu explicitly argues that democracy is justifiable because it is temporally topical, he also holds that the premature or too rapid introduction of democracy and the potential for populist misuse of democracy by leaders can lead to internal and external violence, anarchy, or dictatorship. Such a position was implicit in Sun's argument
for political tutelage, though one might argue that in contrast with Yu’s sober-minded assessment of China’s readiness for democracy (on the part of both the populace and officials), Sun was more vehement in his argument that the process of democratization must proceed immediately.

Another of his justifications for democracy puts Yu in the company of Chiang Kai-shek and Chiang Ching-kuo but not Sun. That is his judgment, alluded to above, that democracy is “in accord with human nature” (標的工具, 更契合人類自身固有的本性) in that, even with their material necessities provided for, humans would still be incomplete without the rights that are inextricably linked with democracy (即使有最好的衣食住行, 如果沒有民主的權利, 人類的人格就是不完整的). Note several features of this justification. First, it is the association of rights with democracy that is in turn linked with human nature, not democracy as a political form. Thus, if democracy is correct and proper because of its connection with rights despite the problems it creates, other forms of the state theoretically might be accorded this status if they, too, embraced similar types of rights. Second, note that this justification is not quite the same as Chiang Kai-shek’s. It does not point to human nature as innate knowledge, nor does Yu invoke traditional philosophical references to The Way or the “mandate of heaven.” This is not a justification rooted in traditional Chinese philosophy and ethics. Rather, Yu employs a substantive understanding of human nature that establishes the compatibility of democracy and associated political rights with the potentialities and characteristics of humans, not their innate incorporation of particular ethical values.

What is democracy for Yu? Like Wen, Yu never provides a comprehensive discussion that would allow us to reconstruct his conception fully. We do know it consists of an incremental process in which the first steps are those associated with good governance: the development of intraparty democracy within the CCP, implementation of local and grassroots democracy, and further development of oversight and consultation mechanisms. However, beyond discussing these elements, Yu is vague. He alludes to the importance of political choice on the part of the populace, the rule of law, downward accountability, equal opportunity, a set of basic rights, checks and balances, and constitutionalism, but he does not provide much in the way of how these features are to be institutionalized.\textsuperscript{74} Much of this list, of course, draws upon the liberal democratic model.

Of related interest is the fact that Yu’s understanding is more pluralist than those of Sun and the Chiungs in its emphasis on civil society. The bulk of the
essays that make up Democracy Is a Good Thing is taken up by discussions of the problems, accomplishments, and promise of civil society on the mainland. Yu believes private organizations form an important part of the current functioning of democracy on the mainland and will play even more important roles in future democratic developments. Here, of course, he moves against the unitary impulses of Sun and the Chiangs. However, his analysis suggests that cooperation between civil society organizations and the government is a high priority and that at least some of the problems such organizations experience are the result of an oppositional stance on their part against the government, a stance that is “harmful to unity and stability.”

Finally, Yu sees himself as a syncretic theorist of democracy. For Yu, democracy as a form of government is a universal concept, both part of a contemporary process of globalization and associated with human nature. But democratic practice is also contextually conditioned. China need not and should not import all features of its democratic conception from the outside. Yu is most comfortable in thinking about universal standards associated with transparency and the rule of law, particularly as they pertain to civil society. He is more reluctant to embrace a multiparty system, in part because it appears he believes such a system would adversely affect the attempt to build and promote a “harmonious society” in China. So while he agrees that pluralism in the form of a lively arena of nongovernmental organizations that work at the grassroots level to supply services and help with oversight activities is good, his endorsement of pluralism and competition at the national level and in the policy realm is much weaker. The same is true of his treatment of federalism. As a feature in the distribution of power, he argues, federalism is not essential to the concept of democracy, nor is it compatible with mainstream Chinese political traditions, which emphasize a unitary state. This last point is of particular interest because Sun, by means of strikingly similar arguments, also dismissed the idea of introducing federalism into China.

The final figure we discuss here is Liu Xiaobo (劉曉波). Liu has been a prominent dissident, critic, and democracy activist for more than two decades. A participant in the Tiananmen Square movement, he has been jailed several times for antistate activities and in 2010 won the Nobel Peace Prize. He was a key player in the group that created Charter 08 and, as such, is associated through that document with the concept of a liberal democracy.

We see Liu’s liberal analysis at work in several venues. One is in his attack on the CCP’s white paper on democracy. Here, Liu discards faith in an
enlightened elite as a throwback to the figure of the good and benevolent emperor and puts in its place the concepts of human rights, procedural justice, and multiparty elections as the correct ways of safeguarding citizens’ well-being. In these contentions, he is typical of others who see in liberal democracy important pragmatic tools for fixing the political, social and economic problems of modern China that political elites have failed to solve. Thus, like many of his fellow democracy activists, Liu depends upon a modern version of the jiùwàng justification that emphasizes the shortcomings of the current regime and the connection between good governance and liberal democratic processes. Democracy for him has external utility rather than being expressive of innate human tendencies or in accordance with moral criteria.

In the collection of essays published in the West entitled No Enemies, No Hatred, Liu expands on this justification by further cataloging the abuses and general problems the power-seeking officials of the ruling CCP have generated, which he looks to democracy to solve. He points to unregulated sweatshops, land grabs, the privatization of public wealth, slavery, the denial of civil rights to citizens, social injustices, and the vastly unequal distribution of wealth. These ills, he argues, are directly attributable to the fact that the higher CCP leaders’ primary aim is to retain power and the fact that the state is constructed so that lower-level officials are only accountable to higher officials and not to ordinary people. Ultimately, he argues, the prosperity, stability, and social solidarity between government and the people that CCP officials trumpet are illusory, as they are not available under authoritarianism, given the social, political, and economic inequalities and abuses and dysfunction such government creates. Only a “free government,” with openness to criticism, freedom of information, and popular accountability can supply those goods. In making this argument, Liu (like other contemporary democracy activists) associates liberal democracy with the very attributes (stability, solidarity, unity) that Chinese critics of liberal democracy accuse it of undermining, thus following Sun in linking democracy generally with those attributes. However, it is the process performance he associates with liberal democracy that generates these goods in Liu’s understanding, not the solidarity of the demos or Sun’s strong state.

Liu’s second justification of democracy in No Enemies is the rights and freedoms he links with that form of government. For Liu, the key to China’s (and the world’s) advancement is the continued evolution of culture and morality.
Once obsessed by the possibility that Western culture could transform China, Liu now sees a truly human culture as transcending both East and West. Here he resembles Sun in the latter’s search for an advanced theory of democracy that is neither Eastern nor Western and Chiang Kai-shek in his emphasis on culture and morality (though not the traditional Chinese versions). A key to the development of a new culture and morality in Liu’s mind is the capacity for the deployment of reason, aesthetic appreciation, and critical self-reflection on the part of China’s population. It is only under a democracy, he urges, that these tools can be used fruitfully, given that only a democracy takes constitutional rights seriously, and only a democracy allows its citizens to hold officials accountable for respecting those rights. In the absence of democracy, culture becomes a manipulated commodity in the hands of authoritarian rulers, and freedom of thought shrinks and becomes fugitive. Liu points to erotic literature and patriotism in particular as cultural resources that officials currently manipulate to mobilize citizens behind the government and to divert them from thinking about the character and nature of the country. Once the foundations for subverting smug and unrepresentative orthodoxy, discussions of sex and nationalism have been vulgarized, commercialized, and attached to the state as forms of propaganda and fantasy.

Like Yu, Liu sometimes emphasizes the liberal part of liberal democracy more than the nuts and bolts of democratic structure. He also hints at a universalist definition, eschewing a purely Chinese position while rejecting the concept that “universal” equals “Western.” He esteems Russian and eastern European opponents of authoritarianism, referencing in particular the Czech authors of the anticommmunist Charter 77 as inspirational in their democratic ambitions and willingness to take on state authorities. While admiring Taiwan and its democratic system, seeing it as a demonstration of the capacity of the Chinese to build and practice democracy and viewing Chiang Ching-kuo as a key player in Taiwan’s democratization, he likewise understands the latter as a Gorbachev figure who initiated a “top-down” process of democratization and on several occasions notes that this avenue of change is not available on the Chinese mainland. If China is to become like Taiwan, it must undergo a different, bottom-up process of democratization, he argues.

The place of the liberal model in Chinese discussions of democracy. We see that contemporary liberal discussions of democracy in the Chinese community generally leave behind the assumptions and goals that animated Sun and his successors when they spoke of democracy. Modern Chinese proponents of
liberal democracy on the mainland either are less likely to be afraid of fragmentation and social indiscipline on the part of ordinary citizens than were Sun and the Chiangs or they attribute those problems to current authoritarianism rather than to liberal freedoms and democratic political activities. They see an effective government as one that is responsive to the nuances of and differences within public opinion, as well as to the interests of each citizen, holding that only this type of government will discern and address the social and economic problems that afflict China. Liberal democratic activists invoke the individually expressed and diverse manifestations of wisdom on the part of ordinary citizens operating in a pluralistic world, not the technical skills of an elite identifying objectively good policies in a monolithic universe. In doing so, they sometimes emphasize liberal tenets more than democratic values.

There is understandably greater suspicion of, even cynicism regarding, the benevolence and disinterestedness of government officials among these contemporary commentators than we find in Sun, Chiang Kai-shek, and Chiang Ching-kuo. Accusations of official corruption and the use of state power to protect political ambitions signal that many modern democratic enthusiasts on the mainland reject Sun’s assumption that the state is a mechanical tool with no interests of its own and of no use to officials seeking to further their individual interests. While some references to recall and referendum are reminiscent of Sun’s thinking, the more routine and exacting means of holding officials accountable through competitive multiparty elections, checks and balances, and judicial enforcement of rights are the favored form of popular control of government and protectors of citizens’ interests. Unlike Sun and the Chiangs, these democratic activists are just as interested in how power is structured as they are in the goals the state pursues and the policies it crafts, and they are more interested in the fate and freedoms of individuals.

Criticisms of Western liberal democracy, particularly from official sources, have also not been in short supply recently on the mainland. These often follow in the footsteps of Deng Xiaoping’s speech in January 1980, in which he argued, “A multiparty system which some democrats had suggested, would sap the nation’s unity” and prevent the government from undertaking a successful program of modernization. The nationalist editor Hu Xijin has recently argued that a Western-style democracy would lead to widespread social disorder, civil war, and the breakup of the country. Others who support democratic reforms link a defense of their proposed
changes (which include more citizen input in the form of consultation and citizen supervision of officials) with a rejection of calls for importing a Westernized, liberal, multiparty democracy. While reforms are said to be needed to fight corruption and focus policy more closely on popular needs, the wholesale implementation of a Western “process” democracy is undesirable because of its looseness, its divisiveness, the probability of reintroducing large gaps between the rich and poor, and the power that elites wield in controlling Western-style elections and shutting out the voices of common people. Zheng Ruolin (鄭若麟) has also recently attacked both the pragmatic justifications for introducing Western liberal democracy and rejected Western definitions of democracy. Elections, he holds, do not necessarily lead to empowerment of good leaders, nor do they automatically lead to good governance. Elections also do not contain the essence of democracy, but rather only one facet of a Western conception. Rather than elections, he argues, it is the delinking of political power from the right to inherit and hold it indefinitely that encompasses the true understanding of democracy. “Once a country’s leaders do not come to power by hereditary right, and once they must [as in the case of China] leave office after a set term, then this country is not only already a republic, it has entered the orbit of democratic systems.” In this understanding, China’s method of having a single party select leaders from a pool of technocrats and subject them to term limits is a superior form of democratic practice to the liberal, multiparty competitive model.

Closing Thoughts

Their massive statutes seated within their respective monuments in Taipei, Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek are officially designated by KMT governments as the fathers of Taiwan’s democracy. Chiang Ching-kuo, though bereft of monumental commemoration, is likewise credited in many circles with initiating the actual democratic transition. To sum up what we have learned about their discussions of democracy, what can we say about their contributions? We have seen that all three made strong statements justifying democracy as a desirable form of government. While Sun did not make statements that strongly delegitimized authoritarian governments, Chiang Kai-shek did. All three also argued that democracy is compatible with Chinese culture. All three sometimes discussed democracy in problematic and illiberal ways, generally combining the elitist, unitary, and liberal models. We find elements of these in Taiwan’s current democratic ethos, though its democratic institutions fol-
low the liberal model. On balance, this analysis lends support to conten-
tions, such as those of Rigger, Gold, and Nathan and Ho, that these leaders’
discussions of democracy played a role in Taiwan’s democratic transition. This
judgment is fortified by the fact that Lee Teng-hui (李登輝), who followed
Chiang Ching-kuo as president, echoed Sun’s and the Chiangs’ justifications
and conceptualizations of democracy during the actual democratic transi-
tion.83 This points to the conclusion that any explanation of Taiwan’s transi-
tion to democracy should consider its connection with these leaders’ pronoun-
ments and the opportunities for democratic learning they provided. However,
it also points to the danger of relying heavily on those discussions to account
for Taiwan’s transition given the problems we found with regard to demo-
cratic learning and the predominantly liberal democratic characteristics of
Taiwan’s current political system.

What of the place of these conceptions in the discussion of democracy
within the larger Chinese community? In the course of this analysis, we have
seen an important intellectual trend played out—the gradual acceptance of
liberal democratic concepts within the vocabularies of the leaders under study,
as well as in the discourse of mainstream politicians on Taiwan and demo-
cratic dissidents on the mainland. Important figures no longer cleave as closely
to the Chinese unitary model as did Sun. The attachment to a conception of
a united demos has loosened, as has plebiscitary understandings of elections.
What has been added is additional recognition of pluralism, multiparty elec-
tions, individual rights, and the rule of law. Also of particular interest is the
fact that many mainland activists have adopted liberal democratic process val-
ues as important for good governance and justify democracy by reference to a
list of pragmatic benefits that liberal democracy would bring. Justifications of
democracy no longer generally link it with a powerful state or a monolithic
demos; instead, supporters of democracy often associate it with important
limitations on state power that serve to protect a pluralist citizenry.

However, we have also seen that elements of the Chinese unitary model
that were important to the conceptions of Sun and the two Chiangs have not
disappeared from the way political figures on Taiwan conceptualize democ-

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mainland who argue that Chinese democracy need not and should not be Western because the West overemphasizes individual interests and volitons. This position puts these elites in something of a quandary. They continue to argue that Taiwan’s democracy is about choosing elites who make policy and, therefore, hold that ordinary people do not know much about issues or policies. They use Western techniques as ways of working out that conception through the instrument of elections. But they also see the adoption of contemporary Western political practices as contributing to a trivialization of politics. They want both candidates and the general population to be more serious in their political activities. In some ways, they yearn for the united demos and the disciplined leaders that Sun and the Chiangs depicted so frequently and are frustrated that these cannot exist as long as Taiwan’s elections look like those in the West. Having experienced Western-style democracy, they are perhaps more sympathetic to arguments that liberal democracy creates political problems than are many of the mainland’s democracy activists.

The same is also true of some on the mainland. Some advocates of democracy there go even farther to reject multiparty democracy in favor of intra-party democracy and increased consultation and popular oversight of the CCP on the grounds that too much competition and encouragement of diverse views will lead to China's physical breakup. Where supporters of liberal democracy point to the success of Taiwan and other Asian democracies, these commentators sometimes gesture more fearfully to the fate of the Soviet Union after democratization.  

The result, as the justifications we found in arguments supporting the majoritarian electoral law changes in Taiwan suggest, may be further intellectual developments in Taiwan and on the mainland in which a new conception of democracy combining the liberal and Chinese unitary models is hammered out. This model, as Reilly suggests, would accept pluralism and a multiparty system, along with rights and constitutionalism, but seek to limit the expression of pluralism in the interests of unity and stability. Thus, for example, the emphasis on consensus could be retained and further theorized to accord with understandings of an initial and natural pluralism. Chiang Ching-kuo’s understanding of consensus orchestrated from above may be part of such a new theory, which might also include emphases on new practices and norms that discipline elites so that they reach policy agreement and engage voters on serious political issues.
Another possibility is that democracy on the mainland will remain at the stage that Yu thinks of as transitional and that the CCP believes constitutes true democracy. That is, the mainland could, despite the arguments of many of democracy activists, embrace a conception that looks much like the Chinese unitary model, constituted by elements of intraparty democracy in the CCP, a more substantive emphasis on rights, and stronger mechanisms for popular oversight and consultation. Such a situation may incorporate the type of responsive and informal institutional behavior that Tsai argues China’s businessmen have successfully wrested from the government. This model, Tsai suggests, has led China’s entrepreneurs to remain supportive of the status quo rather than risk destabilization by demanding formal and routine institutional accountability to citizens as a whole. One of the dangers of China moving to such a model, some argue, is that it could lead to an aggressive rather than peaceful democratic mainland because of its emphasis on unity and democracy for purposes of nationalistic jiùwáng rather than for accountability and democratic process performance. Whether such developments would also represent a step backward toward authoritarianism, as Reilly suggests, would depend on the character of the new model. It would definitely be a move away from a full embrace of liberal democracy. As such, it would represent yet another chapter in the ongoing Chinese conversation about democracy that could return to important parts of the understandings that Sun and the Chiangs embraced.
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