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The Democratic Breakthrough

Extrication or Overthrow?

Broadly speaking, there are two exit routes for a CCP faced with popular protests that it can neither repress nor embrace: it can be overthrown by protest leaders riding on the wave of unrest; or it can be "extricated" from office by reformers within its own ranks.

In Asia, there have been examples of both. Thailand's military was extricated from politics through the efforts of the king and prominent politicians as pro-democracy protests mounted in 1983. A mass overthrow was evident in the People Power revolution against the Marcos regime in the Philippines in 1986. While overthrow is most memorable, it is the least common. One Western scholar calculated that only six of 33 democratic transitions in the 1970s and 1980s were popular overthrows, the others being withdrawals (gradual democracy) or extrications. Of the 10 communist regimes that fell in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union in 1989–91, perhaps only one, Romania, can be rightly described as a popular overthrow. Among the best examples of extrication were Russia and Hungary, where party elites engineered a democratic resolution in the face of a weak or disorganized opposition. Of the notable transitions since then, Indonesia and South Africa were both examples of extrications, although supported by mass action. In all, 29 of 41 democratic transitions in the Third Wave were extrications by elites.[1]

Regime-led extrication can be seen as a hasty retreat from the battlefield in the face of sporadic or mass protest or opposition. The regime turns and runs rather than being defeated. It is, I believe, the most likely path from power for the CCP. In this scenario, CCP reformers gain the upper hand and extricate the Party from office by establishing an interim leadership with promises of national elections and a new constitution.

The existence of extrication, indeed its common occurrence, is overlooked by many political reformers in China, who therefore pin their hopes for change on popular overthrow. Since voluntary withdrawal (gradual democ-

ratization) is unlikely, they embrace the other extreme of popular overthrow rather than the middle way of extrication. Peng Ming's China Federation Development Committee, for example, has formulated quite explicit plans to "attack" the CCP. Other democrats hope to see the regime collapse under the burdens of crisis. Few see the very real possibility of an elite-led transformation of the state spurred by modest pressures from below.

The belief in popular overthrow as the only means of political transition draws on the Chinese tradition of "revolution" or *geming*, a word whose Chinese rendering literally means "broken mandate." The implication, as one 1989 participant, Liu Xiaobo, notes, is that regime change is seen as necessarily violent and discontinuous.[2] "Each and every one of us has been a victim and a carrier" of the revolutionary ideal implied by *geming*, he writes.

Fortunately, there is some evidence that this historical curse is lifting as reformers learn from the past. A few democrats who once advocated violent change, like Liu Xiaobo and former Zhao Ziyang political reform advisor Yan Jiaqi, now advocate regime-led extrication.[3] They have absorbed the lessons that overthrows usually produce less stable democratic governments than extrications. They have also come to realize that overthrow is less likely.

The resolution of crisis through extrication reflects the relative strength of the state over society. Revolutions, democratic and otherwise, in which rebels truly "make" the revolution, occur only in countries with a significantly liberalized authoritarian regime and a strong civil society. This has been the leitmotif of democratic revolutions in Latin America, as it was in the Philippines. In cases where the authoritarian regime remains all-powerful and civil society is weak, the revolution is more likely to be "made," inside the state itself—through a crisis of state governance, a defection of elites to the cause of change, and much else. This was typical of Eastern Europe and the USSR.

Historically state-centered revolutions have been the norm in China too. Claims that Mao and his rag-tag armies "made" the revolution of 1949 do not stand up to scrutiny. Rather, he and his Red Army seized opportunities created by the breakdown of KMT governance and the invasion of China by Japan. In 1989, a revolutionary uprising failed for the same reasons: the state managed to right itself and deny rebels the opportunity for change. Rebel leaders—Zhao Ziyang and the students—duly shuffled off the stage when it was apparent that the "opportunity" no longer existed.

What about next time? To be sure, society in China has grown greatly in strength under post-Mao reforms. From our discussion in part 1, it should be clear that a mass protest movement in the early twenty-first-century would be better organized, better funded, and more clear of its purpose than in 1989. The growing sense of a need for political reforms, coupled with a more

wealthy, connected, and organized society, mean that compared to the ragtag tents-and-bedsheets crowd who demonstrated in 1989, a national movement would be formidably strong.

It would also be able to count on more robust international support, not least from the democratic rulers of the former communist countries of Europe and from the democracies of Asia. International civil society could also play a larger role, magnifying by many times the significant impact that material and moral support from Hong Kong and Taiwan had in 1989.

Some activists inside China see in these changes the seeds of CCP overthrow by a robust civil society: "There will be an organization of social unrest as the frequency of protests increases and the protests gain a certain amount of organizational and financial resources. . . . The demands for political freedoms will become more strident . . . But the state will not easily grant these freedoms. As a result, civil society may rise up and break down the obstacles to its development and create a new political structure by itself."[4] Another imagines a three- to five-year period in which "small protests are constant, the economy is stalled, fiscal crisis worsens, goods shortages appear, standards of living fall, social frictions increase, and faith in the political system is shaken." That crisis would prompt a last-ditch attempt by the Party backed by the military to assert control, which having failed, would spark mass protests leading to the overthrow of the regime. "The use of force against protestors will be clearly insufficient to control the situation," he writes.[5]

Yet all evidence suggests that the state remains powerful enough to force the revolutionary change to take place on the inside rather than the outside. While the strength of society has grown manifold, it is not enough to overthrow the state. The lingering effects of the clientelist ties to the state that dogged the early development of private business and civil society in the 1990s will still be felt. The CCP had managed in the late PRC era to successfully neuter or co-opt most potential democratic opposition. This will make it more difficult for protestors to present themselves as a viable alternative to the regime.

To overthrow the regime, they would need a broad agenda with wide appeal, government-like structures including leaders, funding, and an amenable environment in which the regime cannot repress and indeed welcomes its presence. Many pro-democracy groups abroad have worked toward this goal, but with little progress beyond blueprints. In present-day China civil society remains too weak to produce and sustain this kind of alternate regime. The legacy of totalitarian rule is stronger than a few decades of reforms. Without societal leaders who represent well-institutionalized interests, the social move-

ment will tend toward radicalization and a lack of coherence, factors which will mitigate against talks with the regime.

By contrast, the CCP-led state, though in serious decline by the turn of the century, remained strong enough to withstand overthrow. The coercive forces, though unlikely to suppress mass protests, were loyal enough to the state, and to the ideal of public order, to act to protect the state against violent overthrow. The CCP had also kept for itself a monopoly over other areas of the infrastructure such as telecoms, transport, and utilities. Says one scholar: "At least in its early stages, China's transition will be less negotiated than bestowed."[6]

This is not to say that protests will remain locked out of the process. Even in an extrication, mass mobilization is important because it is what prompts elites to begin responding to their problems. In Poland and Czechoslovakia, mass protests strengthened the hands of reformist elites but did not take their place, highlighted most dramatically by the Polish round-table talks of March 1989. That scene was echoed by the Tiananmen students meeting with state leaders in the Great Hall of the People two months later. We can expect that protest leaders would have audiences with the besieged regime again. They will shape and cajole the decisions of state actors. Popular unrest creates the conditions for initiative at the elite level. It will encourage the search for solutions within the Party. But it is there, inside the crimson walls of Zhongnanhai, where the democratic breakthrough will occur. "Radical systemic change will not start at the top," notes one Western scholar, "but it will likely end there."[7]

The Heroes of Retreat

In the face of massive and growing protests but no imminent threat of overthrow, what will happen inside Zhongnanhai? As in 1989, when leaders huddled in long meetings debating the trends of the times and how the Party should respond, CCP elites will be forced to think beyond the immediate issues of crowd control and disruption.

Much will have changed since they were last in this position. There will be no hoary elders declaiming that they fought tooth and nail for the communist revolution and will not see it undermined by a bunch of idealistic students. Many of the younger members of the Politburo will be pragmatists to a fault. China will now be a significantly liberalized and globalized country.

Though the atmosphere will be tense and confused, the outcome of the meetings may still be predictable. Since the mid-1990s, and drawing on the

period of the 1980s, a strong reformist faction has emerged inside the CCP which believes in the inevitability of democratic change. This group is complemented by a significant number of elites in the national parliament, business community, and scholarly community who share their views. Now will be the moment when they can lead China to democracy. Crisis and protest will have emboldened them to action, and impressed its need upon others.

Those who come forward to embrace democratic change were described by one writer as "the heroes of retreat."[8] That is because they have the courage and the wisdom to be the agents of systemic improvements that would otherwise come at greater cost. Chinese democrats have pointed out that their past reformist leaders have been, by world standards, conspicuously unwilling to engage in the heroics of change.[9] Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang both humbly accepted the Party's censure and shuffled off stage, even though their power was surely as great as that of Yeltsin, who took to the streets and stared down a battalion of tanks.

This time around, however, it is the less demanding heroism of retreat that will be called for, and there is every reason to believe that it will be in plentiful supply. The acknowledged extent of the problems of CCP rule and the popular movement for change will make the risks of action less. China's heroes of retreat will be made inside Zhongnanhai.

In formal terms, the combined pressures of metastatic crisis and popular mobilization will lead to an elite split, or more accurately, a redefinition and widening of existing elite splits. As discussed, China's politics has been riven by factionalism, some of it policy-based, under the CCP. Now the policy content of factionalism will grow and come into the open. One scholar in China wrote: "The political crisis will lead to the creation of two competing groups in the leadership, one arguing for an immediate opening of the media and democratic participation in order to solve the crisis, the other arguing that it is exactly because of the crisis that these things cannot be allowed because they would expose more bad things and further damage faith in the government."[10]

Experience shows that a democratic breakthrough can be launched by any actor at any time. Nothing is for certain. As two experts on China note: "Individual personalities and historical contingencies—factors which remain stubbornly immune to the best predictive efforts of social scientists—play a decisive role in translating popular unrest into . . . political transformation."[11] Here we will describe the creation of a "breakthrough elite" drawn from reformers inside the regime and bolstered by semi-official elites in society.

We can divide elites in the central regime in Beijing into three groups: democrats, moderates, and conservatives. The latter certainly includes those

who have long opposed democratic reforms and who were most closely associated with the 1989 crackdown. That means ex-hard-line premier Li Peng and his allies like security chief Luo Gan. Stalwart hard-liners among Party elders would include people like Song Ping and Deng Liqun.

On the democratic side will stand open and avowed liberals like elders Li Ruihuan, Wan Li, Tian Jiyun, and Qiao Shi. The democratic group will also include the jailed Zhao Ziyang. The critical role of purged liberals in democratic transitions has been seen time and again, from Taiwan's Chen Shuibian and South Korea's Kim Dae Jung to South Africa's Nelson Mandela and East Timor's Xanana Gusmau. Zhao's personal aide, Bao Tong, and the personal aide of Hu Yaobang, Lin Mu, have remained active and high-profile voices for democratic change since their mentors were purged. So too has Li Rui, a former deputy head of Party organization and private secretary to another one-time democratic hopeful, Mao.[12]

The democratic group might also include those outside the regime acting in some remonstrative role, among them National People's Congress (NPC) insiders with strong liberal credentials like Wang Jiafu, or outspoken NPC women delegates like Li Baoqun and Wu Qing. Or they may include members of China's "democratic parties" who make their voices heard in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Congress (CPPCC). Party intellectuals are critical too. The Central Party School's Wang Guixiu is among the boldest advocates of democratic reforms. Others making the same arguments on economic grounds include prominent economists like government advisor Liu Guoguang, CASS member and Tiananmen participant Yu Guangyuan, and rural policy critic Du Runsheng.

Standing between these groups will be the moderates—the great swing factor. This group includes noncommittal pragmatists as well as more committed neoconservatives, both of whom share the conservatives' aversion to democracy and the democrats' desire for political reforms. Those gathered around retired elder Jiang Zemin include possible fifth-generation leaders Wang Gang, Xi Jinping, Bo Xilai, and Li Tielin. Most important could be the role of Jiang's protegé Zeng Qinghong, appointed to the Politburo standing committee in 2002, the author of the CCP's late moves to embrace pluralism in the 2000s and a man who in internal speeches made it clear he favors direct elections at all local levels and the introduction of new political parties.[13] Along with him, former premier Zhu Rongji and his successor Wen Jiabao are also moderates who would side with pragmatic reformers.

Party general secretary Hu Jintao may not be the person to lead political change, yet is also not likely to oppose it. The son of a family of tea merchants from central Anhui province, Hu spent his formative years in the unremitting

climate of China's west as a water engineer and then cadre. In his ten years as designated Party heir from 1992 to 2002, he developed a reputation as a capable administrator and moderate reformer, overseeing important changes like the military's divestment of its business empire and new rules to encourage merit in the civil service. After coming into office, Hu took steps to make the Politburo more transparent, raise the profile of the constitution, end pompous send-off ceremonies for officials going abroad, and rebuild Party legitimacy through closer attention to the poor. Like Gorbachev, he appears to be a "Leninist romantic" who believes the CCP could work with better internal management. But his generation has less emotional investment in CCP rule and is less averse to democracy as a result. He too should be classified as a moderate.

This division of personalities is based on their known pre-crisis profiles. Yet these profiles can change once crisis begins. The new conditions mean that the fault lines may appear in new and surprising places. Gorbachev was an unlikely reformer when he came into office, but proved to be a hero of Russian democratization because of his pragmatic decision to embrace change. For other moderates or conservatives, their previous views may simply have changed, unbeknownst to others. Ren Zhongyi is a good example of the "sudden reformer," a longtime Party elder whose earlier-mentioned reformist article in the *Southern Weekend* newspaper in 2000 came as a surprise to many. Peng Zhen, the conservative who pushed for village democracy, is another example.

The key for a successful extrication is for democrats to be stronger than conservatives and for them to gain the complicity, if not outright support, of moderates. While conservatives may remain dead-set against change, moderates may swing to the side of reform because they believe that the costs of continued crisis, short-term and long-term, are higher than the risks of change. For both rational and normative reasons, they may be convinced by the democrats to isolate the conservatives and opt for democracy.

In the days and weeks that the breakthrough elite takes form, it will be critical for the would-be heroes of retreat to engage in secret consultations with several groups: regime moderates; the leaders of the protest movements; and the coercive forces. Communications play a big role in allowing the democrats to allay fears and build support for democratic change. If they are severed—as in 1989 when the Party General Office under Wen Jiabao was cut off from all information flows with the imposition of martial law on Beijing on May 19—it can hamper the movement. Again, technological advances like mobile phones and the Internet provide China as a late-comer with a great advantage.

Talks with regime moderates and protest leaders create the middle ground necessary for a successful transition. Both groups agree to support an elite-led transition as a compromise rather than back extremists in their midst.

Also both need to be able to exclude radicals on their sides, radical hard-liners in the regime and radical democratizers outside the regime. This "middle ground" to be staked out means that dissident pro-democracy groups in China and abroad would also likely not be part of the reformers. Their exclusion would ensure the reformers gain the support of moderates.

Keeping hard-liners isolated will be easier than it was in the USSR. By the early 2000s there had already been a significant clearing out—by death or retirement—of the old-time CCP elders who might oppose change. Veterans of the Long March were all but retired while most leaders had little recollection of the civil war or Japanese invasion. That means there is no overarching "power behind the throne" to step in and prevent democratic transition, a role than Deng Xiaoping and other Party elders played in 1989. Under Hu Jintao, no elder has the prestige to unilaterally intervene in a major political crisis. Chinese liberals are right to see in this great hope for a successful breakthrough.

This shift of calculations and allegiances is almost always imperceptible. Yet in state-centered democratizations it is the critical breach. Suddenly, there is a viable alternative to the regime created from within the regime itself. As the old adage puts it, China already has a formidable democratic opposition ready and waiting to assume office: it is called the CCP.

The heroes of retreat emerge with a goal to compromise, even accept, the demands of society for political change. They recognize the need for such changes and believe they can control and win early elections. They believe that the potential benefits of a decisive shift towards democracy outweigh the risks of trying to uphold a faltering authoritarian regime. They may also be induced to seek reforms to save the economic order or gain international commendation. Their well-timed and wise exercise of a rapidly diminishing ability to control events serves their interests better than inaction.

The strong likelihood that the PLA will remain on the sidelines (and thus not be a key elite in the transition) is a good thing, as mentioned. This is less because civilians are more democratic than the military—something questionable in China—but because they are typically better able to work out pacts and compromises because they operate under a less hierarchical system and have more regular contacts with the public. However, to the extent that the police, PAP, and PLA are allied with the reformist elites, it could well be as a liberal force promoting transition. All the literature on comparative transitions suggests that the military can be a positive force for change because it

seeks to protect its corporate interests and is quick to disassociate itself from a regime that has lost support. The types of pro-reform writings contained in military-backed journals like *Strategy and Management*, or written into books by people like PAP Colonel Jiao Jian, hint at this potential in China.

One intriguing question is the role that local elites might play. As outsiders not sullied by involvement in the central leadership and often with strong track records in local government, such leaders can emerge at the height of crisis. One scholar speculates that a reform-minded regional leader who is associated with China's southern-style liberal and inclusive national identity could emerge to lead the nation toward democracy.[14] Another foresees "an attempt at change from above starting the process, but then stalling and being superseded by action at the local and regional level that goes farther than what was intended."[15]

These political elites at all levels will be joined by social elites. China has a large number of quasi-official elites who, while not likely to join mass protest will also stand outside the political elite. Scholars Pan Wei and Liu Junning and economists Wu Jinglian and Hu Angang hold a semi-official status as elites of a society always closely enmeshed with the state. The movement of such elites to join and support the insiders can add to the momentum for change.

Along with wider elites in business and the military, these groups may share the antidemocratic beliefs of the regime. But they do not share the regime's interest in maintaining power "at all costs." The regime may seek to forestall their defection by last-minute threats and inducements—recalling how the CCP sought to bring entrepreneurs into the Party in the late PRC era. But those attempts may backfire, as they have in other transitions, accelerating the defections.[16]

The importance of these social elites cannot be overstated. Typically, communist regimes have fallen to narrow and often radical reformers without a broad coalition because pluralism in society has been so underdeveloped. China may be an exception to that because its market reforms had, by the turn of the century, created modest pluralism that mirrored that in the advanced Eastern European countries like Hungary and the former Czechoslovakia. Having a broad and moderate coalition is critical to an unruffled passage from crisis through to functioning democracy. "Reformers should thus pursue support-building with special vigor and timeliness," notes one student of communist regime collapse.[17]

The defection of business elites in particular has been a key moment in many authoritarian regime collapses. The corruption, arbitrariness, unfairness, and impositions of the regime are weighed against the likely results of

democracy and the business elite decides to throw its weight behind the cause of change. Business leaders focus on specific policy failures of the regime and recalculate the costs of democracy. In the Philippines, it was the formation in 1984 of the Makati Business Club of business leaders, and to a lesser extent the church-backed Bishops-Businessmen's Conference, supporting the presidential bid of Corazon Aquino in the breakthrough February 1986 election that is seen in retrospect as a critical leg of support for the overthrow of Marcos.[18] Aquino promised to dismantle monopolies and lessen red tape: this reflects the quest for a level playing field when a crony-based system breaks down in the face of new entrants. In China, as we have seen, in the early 2000s, business leaders had become more outspoken about the costs of CCP policy failure.

The creation of this "democratic breakthrough" group obviously depends on many factors. Insiders need to have the resources of incumbency while outsiders the resources of society. Both need to calculate that change is the best option.

There is a strategic game underlying this choice. If you are a member of the regime and believe democratic change is inevitable, the best solution is to be the first to launch it, or certainly not the last to endorse it. As one student of the Russian transition has shown, when the forces urging democratic change are weak, regime reformers who try to launch democracy will be purged (as happened to Yeltsin in 1987 and Zhao Ziyang in 1989). But once those forces are strong, even undemocratic elites will suddenly embrace the democratic course (Gorbachev in 1990) as the payoffs of doing so increase.[19]

To quote a former U.S. national security advisor on China's future: "The process that I envisage will involve political unrest or other circumstances that impose upon the Party the necessity of change; the Party will have to come to an accommodation with these pressures, or else eventually face a revolutionary situation. To some extent, I am betting on the prospect that the Chinese political elite will be intelligent and realistic enough to see that it must make the necessary accommodations."[20]

As mentioned, the elites are empowered by protestors. In that sense, there is a sort of implicit symbiotic relationship between the two. Early elite splits encourage mass action which in turn further empowers reformist elites. At the critical juncture, the leverage of the reformers is critically shaped and determined by the nature and extent of popular mobilization. These stirrings on the ground provide the breakthrough group with the resources needed to pursue its agenda.[21]

We have seen evidence of this pattern in China before. In April 1976, protests erupted in Beijing against the removal of wreaths in Tiananmen

Square commemorating Zhou Enlai, including sporadic violence and fights with police. Society was in no position then, and is in no position today, to march into Zhongnanhai and drag the Politburo Standing Committee into the Avenue of Eternal Peace in shackles. However, the outbreak empowered elite reformers led by Party veteran Ye Jianying to overthrow the Gang of Four shortly after Mao's death. As one insider account put it, describing how popular mobilization spurred elite action:[22]

> [The Tiananmen protests] produced highly favorable circumstances for the arrest of the Gang of Four, acting as a general mobilization and dress rehearsal. Without it, the Gang of Four would not have been arrested. Because of the protests, Ye Jianying and other Party veterans were able to hear the voice of the people and survey the size and strength of China's robust society. The fall of the Gang of Four would not have been as decisive or quick otherwise. The people took things into their own hands and made history.

How the heroes of retreat gain power need not trouble us here. It could be a formal vote of the Politburo, or of the full Central Committee if progress towards "inner Party democracy" had gone forward in the years leading up to the change. It could equally well be a palace coup, a night of the long knives such as ended the reign of terror of the Gang of Four in 1976. Since we are positing an extrication rather than a withdrawal of the CCP, a coup is certainly possible. Typically, it is only in withdrawals where no one gets purged. On the other hand, a coup might prove unnecessary if those purged were promised a graceful exit and a secure retirement. This has been the norm of purges in the post-Mao era. No less than ten Politburo members were purged in the reform era and all allowed to live out their lives in peace. If it could convince incumbents of the inevitability of change—pointing to the "size and strength of China's robust society"—the breakthrough elite might be able to seize power without force.

The Politburo is now under new leadership. The alliances are forged and the consensus readily apparent. A fateful choice awaits. It's time to make history.

The Pact

The core issue that is resolved by any democratic pact is the disposition of political power. Reforming authoritarian regimes like China's may have covered some distance in redressing this problem through liberalization and institutionalization. But the path leading down the "last mile" to democracy,

where competition for and participation in political power are made universal, lies yet ahead. The CCP's pervasive and damaging "leadership" of the political system must be broken for democracy to begin. The breakthrough will not appear magically from the creation of a coalition of well-meaning elites. There is, in the words of one scholar, "no asymptotic approach to freedom."[23] Rather, democracy needs to be explicitly and formally embraced.

We have assumed all along that this is indeed the intention of the reformers who seize power. Here we look more closely at the content of the pact and how it comes into being.

The content of the pact is closely related to the motivations the parties have for embracing it. There are really two separate forces pushing the elites to embrace democracy. One, the weaker of the two, is a normative belief that democracy is the best thing for the country. While a critical mass exists in society that holds this view, it is probably not felt deeply at the top. Even political liberals may have reservations about full-scale democratization. The second force however is the critical one: democracy is the only solution to the political crisis. Any attempt to recentralize power or repress protest would lead to fissures and breakaways because it would be illegitimate. The only legitimate solution is to offer everyone an equal voice. This is why democracy so often results unintentionally from crisis in authoritarian regimes. It is the only way for elites to lead their nations out of a political impasse.

It is important to stress this instrumental rather than normative reasoning since it will likely be paramount in China's case. In the face of popular pressures and a breakdown of an internal consensus, the "selectorate," which has the power to install or remove the head of the regime, confronts alternatives to autocracy.[24] It may consider broadening the franchise to more groups within the regime to make it into an oligarchy. It may consider allowing some elites in society to become members of a new ruling coalition—a new United Front—as a sort of aristocracy. Or it may decide to throw the doors open completely to create a democracy. The more is the diversity and autonomy of constituent parts of the regime, the more likely it is that democracy will result. History shows it does not take much. In Eastern Europe and the USSR, as in so many Third Wave democratizations, "multiple centers of power contended with one another from within the state and no one coalition was able to establish its hegemony." As a result, "projects to maintain authoritarianism or establish new authoritarian constitutions failed."[25]

China will likely follow this path. It takes just a few disgruntled members of the selectorate to spoil attempts to create a new autocracy, or some form of oligarchy or aristocracy. They may all be self-interested. But like a feud inside the mafia, it usually leads to demise. The only system they can all agree

on that will ensure they are not trodden by others is democracy. They all hope to reach into society and use their imagined support there to defeat their rivals.

This was the case of Gorbachev in USSR. It also was Poland against the Solidarity strike wave. It was even Greece in the wake of the Cyprus invasion debacle. Democracy offers the only workable way out of a national crisis. In Taiwan, the KMT wanted to maintain national stability while the opposition wanted to cash in on its growing popularity.[26] As even China's 1989 experience showed, at the time of crisis, while not everyone was agitating *for* democracy, none except a few hard-liners at the top were arguing *against* democracy. It is in that sense a "fortuitous byproduct," in which "circumstances may force, trick, lure, or cajole nondemocrats into democratic behavior."[27]

Next time around in China, democracy will be the only solution to both long-term and short-term crises. The breakthrough elite will argue, backed by a political will and power that it could never have mustered in the pre-crisis period, that democracy will allow the Party to compete and to do well, as remnant communist parties did in Eastern Europe. They will argue that "democratization is the best path for the CCP to take in terms of its own narrow interest."[28]

Those advocating democracy for idealistic reasons will be in the minority. Most people will want a clean and accountable government, rule of law, and more freedoms. The breakthrough elite will likely promise all these things—along with national unity, social stability, economic development, even cultural revival. Undemocratic elites who have proposed various non-democratic or pseudo-democratic solutions will find themselves embracing democracy too as the only means to their own pet projects. As one scholar noted: "What matters at the decision stage is not what values the leaders hold dear in the abstract, but what concrete steps they are willing to take."[29]

The democratic decision can be thought of as an almost perfectly controlled experiment in social decisionmaking such as was used in the theories of the political philosopher John Rawls. Since everyone is living behind a "veil of ignorance" about the future, the only system they can agree on is one based on equal rights. The terms of the transition typically change later as the veil is lifted and various forces realize, and use, their relative strengths. For now, the focus is on face-saving and risk-sharing for everyone.

That said, there is still a deep underlying reason why elites embrace a normatively desirable system. The instrumental script should not obscure the normative stage on which the elites are acting. The reason, after all, that mobilized society does not accept anything short of democracy is that years of debate and reflection have brought enough of them to the conclusion that this is the only fair way of making decisions. In that sense, what appears to be

a pragmatic solution is, at a deeper level, a forced embracing of an ideal solution. Elites may prefer a Magna Carta-like limit on authoritarianism but that kind of "limited democracy" quickly loses support from society, which in China by the early twenty-first century had seen the rest of the world embracing full democracy. While we focus here on the elites, it is these "background" conditions that push them to embrace democracy. On their own, they might choose a rigged system with strong authoritarian features. But the looming presence of mobilized society—whether it's workers on the streets or intellectuals in advisory positions—makes it harder to embrace anything short of full democracy.[30]

How will the breakthrough be announced? Some scholars imagine a "political southern tour" (*zhengzhi nanxun*) in which a reformist leader "breaks out" of the system and makes a speech on the need for democratic reforms, replicating Deng Xiaoping's 1992 southern tour which focused on economic reforms.[31] Others imagine a grand Party meeting where the reform leaders announce the change in policy as the latest "ideological liberation" of the reform era.[32] The leader of the reform faction might address the nation on television. The protests had shown the great patriotism of the people and their concern about the future, he would say. The Party is now ready to embrace changes. Both scenarios would likely involve a sudden eruption of the "democratic discourse" described earlier. A leader would suddenly begin talking in the first person and in the informal language of democracy.

Still others believe that the democratic move might be signaled by a reversal of the official verdict on the Tiananmen Massacre. The movement would be declared as just and patriotic, while many political dissidents jailed under post-Tiananmen laws would be freed. Zhao Ziyang might reappear in public. This issue is bound to come up early, if not immediately, in any democratic transition because it remains so inextricably linked with the whole issue of political reform. No democratic breakthrough could remain coherent without embracing the pro-democracy ideals of Tiananmen, just as economic reforms under Deng required a reversal of the original verdict on the 1976 Tiananmen incident. It would also make strategic sense for a breakthrough elite uncertain of its powers to wrap itself in the good feelings of Tiananmen to bolster its power. As former Party aide Bao Tong wrote: "Those who reverse the June Fourth verdict will inherit the benefits of this great legacy, they will win the hearts and minds of the Chinese people, as well as sincere respect and applause from around the world." Or as he later put it: "Whichever leader reverses the Tiananmen verdict will gain the upper hand in politics."[33]

At some point, this will lead to an explicit commitment to plans for democracy within a reasonably rapid period. That is, the participation that has

long been denied to Chinese people will be expanded to embrace virtually every adult and with the power to choose executive authorities at the top. Immediate freedoms of the press would be unveiled along with a crackdown on judicial and government corruption. Existing governments at all levels would remain in place pending arrangements to expand elections to the top. The NPC would become the "highest organ of state" as promised in the constitution. The Party would relinquish its special powers over the political system.

It is possible for the pact to be more limited, of course. The promised introduction of some form of "minimal democracy" as the first move in which elections are held but still guided in some way may be seen as striking the right balance between new "positive" freedoms to take part in public life and the existing "negative" freedoms from interference and fear already through market reforms. Consideration of introducing full-blown democracy would be deferred to a national conference. Reluctant elites hoping to maintain power may successfully sell such a program as a guarantor of smooth transition. Reformist writer Wang Lixiong's proposal for the direct election of legislators at local levels who would in turn choose legislators to higher levels is conceived precisely as the sort of bounded pact that might be more politically feasible to start.[34]

There may also be some "secret" aspects of the bargain not known to the public. They would concern power-sharing and guaranteeing everyone's interests. The ex-CCP head might want his son's business interests protected, while the Guangdong governor might want promises that rich provinces will not be given a shakedown in post-transition revenue-sharing arrangements. The protest leaders may have promised to endorse the regime democrats with promises of funding for their first electoral party. The regime democrats may have promised an inquiry into the role of Li Peng in Tiananmen. The democratizing elite might even strike a bargain with the outgoing regime, promising some form of "cohabitation," at least for the initial period until elections are held.[35]

Some of those secret bargains may be not so secret, as for example, limits on new political parties or democracy to be introduced only on an "installment plan" over a decade or more, as in Taiwan. There may be a compromise with the antidemocratic forces. Poland's Solidarity is now accused of betraying its followers by striking a power-sharing agreement with the ruling communists in 1989. Yet given contingencies—the realities of the future interim regime's power—that might have been the only way to avoid a more tumultuous transition. The breakthrough elites may have to promise, for example, an upper

house with extensive representation for the defenders of the ancien regime, even if this does not make it into existence later on.

The chance of this, again, depends on the influence of civil society on the elites: the stronger it is the harder it will be for them to limit the pact. The more serious is the economic crisis and the more mobilized is society, the harder it is to limit reforms or participants and to grant special amnesties or protections for the interests of the old elites.

In order to keep the military onside, the reformers may issue some form of immediate amnesty for past human rights abuses to ensure that the coercive forces—military, paramilitary, state security, and police—are less inclined to fight the changes fearing for their own futures. Such amnesties were seen in many countries during the democratic transition—Chile, Argentina, and Spain. In China, those responsible for the Tiananmen Massacre and the Falun Gong crackdown will want to know they will not be brought to book for following CCP orders. Of course, the balance to be struck in this amnesty cannot alienate those who hope for justice. So the amnesty has to be suitably vague. In the same vein, military leaders will want some indication of future budgets for them, promises of their role in the appointment of future military leaders, and a definition of the military role in politics under democracy.

The need to strike some face-saving and interests-saving bargain with the anti-reform elites is a reminder of their important role in this delicate time as potential spoilers.[36] Again, this is one of the "undemocratic" aspects of transitions that can help the transition itself but can pose problems for the new democracy, a battle scar that takes time to heal.

Continuity may be the byword of the democratic breakthrough. It is entirely plausible to imagine that it would be announced in the name of the CCP. The reformist elites could hearken back to the 1911 revolution, the May Fourth Movement, Mao's pre-1949 promises of democracy, the democratic humanism of Hu Yaobang, Deng's promise of democracy by 2035, or Jiang Zemin's theory of a more representative and inclusive polity. One Western scholar, noting the rediscovery of Mao's populist and democratic persona, notes how the reformers could win converts from those who feared a discrediting of Mao—as Lenin's supporters clung to his memory as the Russian communists fell—by pointing to their being his true successors—even if an objective evaluation of Mao would make him anything but democratic. "If Mao is popular, then democrats may win popularity by embracing Mao, reimagined as a democrat," he writes.[37]

Likewise, the radically pragmatic teachings of Deng Xiaoping could be a touchstone for democratic change. "It doesn't matter whether we are a com-

munist dictatorship or a multiparty democracy, as long as the system brings economic growth, social peace, and national strength," the reform elites might say, echoing Deng's use of an old Sichuanese adage that it doesn't matter whether a cat is black or white as long as it catches mice.

A key point here is that it will be possible for a CCP-led reformer to promise competitive elections even in the name of the CCP. Gorbachev and Chiang Ching-kuo both recognized the need for opposition parties as part of democratization plans, along with greater media freedoms, hoping to maintain power as the natural ruling party. Sharing political positions might be seen as consistent with maintaining political power if the latter is defined by the ability of the CCP to set the broad agenda and guide the country.

Thus, a high degree of continuity may be expected with the old state even as the reformers overthrow its fundamental tenet—the CCP's monopoly on political power. This is typical of most democratic transitions where "the overthrow or transformation of the state is not necessarily the primary object or result."[38] The changes will be announced in the name of continuity, or preserving the gains of late PRC era, rather than radical change. Stability, development, and national greatness, the rallying cries of the late CCP, will be the new ones too. The PRC may remain in name. But the democratic moment will have come. As the saying goes: "If things are going to remain the same, some things are going to have to change."

Alongside the political pact, there will need to be a socioeconomic pact, explicit or not, that embodies a new approach to the general welfare. Some aspects of this—like the promise of fair taxation exacted by Guangdong leaders mentioned above—may be tied up in promises of political support, a preview of the new political economy of a democratic China.

But much of it will be a salve to the protest movements that forced the transition on reluctant elites. As we have seen, China differs significantly from the USSR, where welfarism and planning had a lock on state power at the time of transition. In China, those things have long ago fallen away, giving rise to jarring inequalities and a tattered social safety net. "A successful democratic movement will require a social program that addresses the poverty and social divisions in Chinese society," notes one scholar.[39]

The socioeconomic pact will likely include promises of proper welfare and benefits for workers and peasants, a crackdown on tax evasion, possibly even a renegotiation of some high-profile showcase foreign investment projects. Workers might be rewarded with the promulgation of the right to strike and organize independent unions. Peasants might get their long-sought-after farmers association (*nonghui*) and the right to free internal migration.What is important here is not "who gets what" but "how we decide." A country long

thought to be frozen will now be awash with competing interests and competing ideas of the just polity. All will want their just desserts.

In this way, the heroes of retreat will forge and announce a democratic pact that, with all its messiness and complexity, extricates a troubled regime from the burdens of rule. As during the 1989 protests, reports of the change will be confused and often mistaken. The actual outcomes will depend on many contingent factors yet to come. But a historic shift has occurred: China is on the road to democracy.

Ending the PRC

In every transition from authoritarian rule, there is always a "democratic moment" when the people inherit the burden of rule from the regime. The crowds of Lisbon who adorned the rifles of rebellious young officers with carnations in 1974 followed this with feverish spontaneous "assemblies" to make grand plans for the future. It is this sense of victory, the sense of having taken history into their own hands, that is really the democratic moment.

In China, while the CCP may remain in charge of the state, responsibility for the future will now lie with the common man. Despite the elite-led nature of the pact and the strong elements of continuity, this will be a revolution indeed. The sudden end of CCP's unchallenged monopoly on political power, coupled with the broader breakdown of state identity and ideology that will result, will fit any "commonsense" definition of revolution, even if there is no guillotine or Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. That was the retrospective lesson of the "silk revolutions," in some Eastern European nations, and it will likely be the case in China as well.[40]

This may be symbolized by a formal political act that ushers in the demise of the PRC. Constitutional changes require the approval of two-thirds of the NPC, so any new regime that wanted to remove the CCP's monopoly on power and embrace new rights would have to make this an early priority. Again, assuming the state crisis is serious and the democratic response enjoys general support, the NPC, although stuffed with CCP loyalists, could be expected to support the change.

The actual sequence of events—from coup to carnations to assemblies—will be a mixture of necessity and choice. Clearly, the ideal sequence would involve a relatively short period from crisis and mobilization through to breakthrough and pact. Reality may not be as simple. Hard-liners may hold up agreement as they bargain for concessions. Reformers may hesitate if protests escalate. Eventually though, the deed is done. The PRC comes to an end, in fact if not in name.

The removal of Mao's portrait from the rostrum of Tiananmen may not take place immediately, just as Lenin's tomb remained in Moscow. The elements of continuity will be strong and there will be a need to reassure citizens with the reassuring grin of the chairman. But the democratic moment may be symbolized in other ways, by the vacating of the Party's Zhongnanhai (Central and Southern Lakes) leadership complex so that it can be rejoined to Beihai (Northern Lake) public park, for example.

The CCP will have ruled China for 60 years in 2009. The previous records for a party's unbroken tenure in office were just over 70 years by both the Russian Communist Party and Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party. Whatever the exact date of democratic transition, the CCP will go down in history as one of the world's longest lived ruling parties. It will be a reign that ends for the same reason that other dynasties in China ended: the court lost touch with the people, was starved of resources, and finally rotted from the inside. It will also mark the end, for all intents, of the disastrous utopian experiment called communism that once engulfed the world.

Now we have brought China through the tense and historic move toward democracy. It is not the first such move in the country's history. But, compared to 1912 and 1949, the prospects for the creation of a genuine and enduring "people's republic" are now bright.