

PREFACE: RISING CHINA AND ASIAN DEMOCRATIZATION

The promise of the “rise of China” is that economic development based on trade and foreign investment will eventually cause China’s democratization, after which the Realist nightmare of a violent US–China “power transition” can be averted. The two megapowers would work jointly together and with other states and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to steer humanity clear of the great dangers it faces in the areas of resource security, sustainable development, quality of life, and complex technological advance. As Chinese individuals and groups participate more extensively and meaningfully in global civil society, the bountiful heritage of Chinese civilization would enrich the worldwide culture-construction process. Respecting a democratic and advanced China, the United States would learn the wisdom of consulting with foreign partners instead of taking unilateral acts.

This promise has occasioned much speculation on prospects for China’s democratization. Most observers conclude with some variation on the theme that China “may not democratize soon, but certainly it *will* democratize at some point in the future.” The optimism is sometimes based on parallel assessments of democratization in Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan. Perhaps there is an “East Asian path to democratization” on whose trajectory China must inevitably be launched.

In this book, I contend that such is not the case. I explain democratization in Asia as a function of state socialization to a liberal-rational “global culture,” originating in the West some two centuries ago but now transnational in its power to provide compelling constitutive norms for domestic governance. I borrow the global culture concept from the “world polity” school of international relations (IR) theory, sometimes called “the Stanford school” because its founder is Stanford Emeritus Professor of

Sociology John M. Meyer, or “sociological institutionalism,” the term favored by Meyer’s student, and George Washington University professor, Martha Finnemore. World-polity theory is dazzlingly thought-provoking. To travel through Asia doing fieldwork while armed with its insights is an unparalleled intellectual joy. But as I explain in the pages below, I think world-polity theory suffers from one major and one minor flaw. The major flaw is that it implicitly assumes *all* states will be socialized successfully to liberal-rational global culture. The minor flaw is that it assumes global culture is unitary and coherent.

To address the major flaw, I designed my study to contrast two successful cases of Asian democratization, Thailand and Taiwan, with one failed case, the People’s Republic of China (PRC). I wanted to contrast positive cases with a negative one, because I suspected the reason world-polity theorists overestimate the likelihood all states will be socialized successfully is that, with some exceptions, they study only successful cases of state socialization. I discuss this problem of “selection on the dependent variable” in Chapter 1. It strikes me as a methodological mistake compromising studies not only in the world-polity school, but also in many mainstream democratization studies from comparative politics. This may be why a number of democratization specialists also overestimate the likelihood that all states will eventually become democratic.

I do not claim that my own design of contrasting one failed case with two successful ones is exemplary. I seek only to maximize variation on the dependent variable to a reasonable extent, given that my research methodology is qualitative (and therefore time-consuming), combining textual analysis of documents and articles with interviews of intellectuals, government officials, and political activists. Originally, I had a 2×2 design in which I contrasted China and Burma (two failed cases) with Taiwan and Thailand (two successful cases). All entered “transitory moments” in the 1980s but emerged with different outcomes. I could control that way for cultural-historical background variables, since China and Taiwan were similar in important respects, as were Burma and Thailand. But in the end, I had to drop the Burma case simply because its internal political situation and the parlous state of US–Burma relations prevented me, try as I might, from going there to do research.

I deployed my inevitably limited fieldwork resources for research in Thailand and Taiwan. I reasoned that since they were the positive cases, I could most likely elucidate the liberal-rational global culture’s role in democratization by going there instead of China. In both Thailand and Taiwan, I interviewed extensively and read at libraries, especially the Thailand Information Centre at Chulalongkorn University and the Wu San-lien Foundation Library in Taipei. Let me here take this opportunity to thank the staffs of those two libraries for their helpful assistance and

unfailing patience. Let me also thank my host institutions in Bangkok and Taipei. In Bangkok, I was hosted by Chulalongkorn University's Social Research Institute. Under the talented direction of Dr. Amara Pongsapich and Dr. Suwattana Thadaniti, the Institute's staff and affiliated professors were hospitable, spirited in their discussions, and generous in their guidance. The same was true of my host in Taipei, the Institute for National Policy Research, directed by the accomplished Dr. Luo Chih-cheng. I also spent time at Taiwan's National Cheng-chih University library, and I am grateful to Dr. Chien-min Chao for arranging that productive visit.

Almost all of my Taiwan research was conducted in Chinese, a language I have studied since 1985. On four occasions over the years, I have enrolled to take intensive courses at the International Chinese Language Program (ICLP) at National Taiwan University. When I returned to the ICLP from January to August 2004, I brought with me a huge stack of articles and documents from the PRC, most copied at the Universities Service Centre library in Hong Kong—which I have also visited frequently over the years, and where, in fact, I sit now (August 2005) writing this Preface.

In class in Taiwan, with the ICLP's experienced and well-educated teachers—most of Mainlander descent—I discussed the PRC articles and worked through my thoughts. It was a good environment in which to ponder China and democracy because the ICLP's teachers are almost all committed to a Chinese identity but also to democracy. They helped me internalize deeply the notion that possibilities for China's future are not exhausted by the visions of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). They also taught me to think more critically about the Taiwan independence movement.

I researched the Thailand chapters during six months of fieldwork in Bangkok during 2000 and five additional months in 2003. I should confess that my Thai language skills are still not sufficiently advanced for reading and digesting Thai articles and documents. Research assistants helped me to read Thai materials; otherwise, I used materials translated into English. Since Thailand has long been open to the outside world—a key factor in its democratization—most government officials, NGO activists, academics, journalists, and business people speak good and often excellent English. Two of the country's most influential newspapers, *The Nation* and *The Bangkok Post*, are published in English. The Thailand Information Centre has a large collection of stellar English publications. So my inability to read Thai fluently should not, I believe, compromise the arguments in this book. Of course I defer to readers to make the ultimate judgment.

I promised the people I interviewed for this study, in both Thailand and Taiwan, that I would not identify them by name. The reason was simply so that they would feel free to speak openly about controversial issues. I *formally* interviewed thirty-six politicians, activists, government

officials, academics, journalists, and independent observers in Taiwan. I stress “formally” because I also benefited from numerous less-structured conversations, at lunches and dinners, on the sidelines of public lectures, and on other such occasions. I conducted the formal Taiwan interviews and archival work during the summer of 1999, October 2000, and the summer of 2002, with a few supplementary interviews during January–August 2004.

I number the Taiwan interviews 201–236 in the text. Though in some cases allegiances are unclear, generally twenty-two of the Taiwan interview subjects leaned toward the “Green” camp in Taiwan politics, as members or supporters of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) or Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU). Some thirteen interviewees leaned toward the “Blue” camp, as members or supporters of the Kuomintang (KMT), People’s First Party (PFP), or New Party (NP). The thirty-sixth interviewee lived and worked in Taiwan as a foreign diplomat. Among all thirty-six, twenty were activists and politicians (including academic-politicians), six were relatively apolitical officials, four were journalists, three were relatively apolitical academics, one was a Presbyterian minister, one was a lawyer (but not politically active), and one was a foreign official. All of the interviews were conducted in Taipei and Kaohsiung.

In Thailand, I conducted a total of thirty-one formal interviews, all in Bangkok and its immediately adjacent provinces. I number the Thailand interviews 300–330 in the text. Four interviewees were government officials, including two at the ministerial level. About twenty were people I classify as “academic/activists” because they teach and conduct research at universities but also organize NGOs and participate in democratization politics. Some of the activists were (and are) radical, some relatively conservative. Seven Thailand interviewees were pure NGO activists, all, to varying degrees, radical. Many of these people invited me to public meetings and lectures, to lunches and parties, and, in a few cases, to their homes. Their hospitality was extraordinary, and I especially appreciated it because I was, after all, an “outsider” going into the study, a scholar with expertise on China and Taiwan but very little on Thailand. My hosts educated me, with patience and kindness. They taught me, most importantly, to think of Thailand and, more broadly, Southeast Asia, on its own terms, not through the prism of China, which, as a trained China specialist, I was predisposed to do.

I use as my working definition of democratization the Linz-Stepan formulation of 1996:

In a nondemocratic setting, *liberalization* may entail a mix of policy and social changes, such as less censorship of the media, somewhat greater space for the

organization of autonomous working-class activities, the introduction of some legal safeguards for individuals such as *habeas corpus*, the releasing of most political prisoners, the return of exiles, perhaps measures for improving the distribution of income, and most important, the toleration of opposition.

Democratization entails liberalization but is a wider and more specifically political concept. Democratization requires open contestation over the right to win control of the government, and this in turn requires free competitive elections, the results of which determine who governs . . .

A democratic transition is complete when sufficient agreement has been reached about political procedures to produce an elected government, when a government comes to power that is the direct result of a free and popular vote, when this government *de facto* has the authority to generate new policies, and when the executive, legislative, and judicial power generated by the new democracy does not have to share power with other bodies *de jure*.¹

By this definition, Thailand and Taiwan are now democratic, though perhaps the Thai transition is not yet fully complete. Both countries have problems with “democratic quality.” China has barely begun liberalization, and has in fact regressed since Hu Jintao consolidated his power in 2004.

I admit that democracy is my normative preference. I consider it inherently good. Democratic political participation, free public discussion and debate, the right to organize freely, freedom from arbitrary arrest and harassment—all create the social conditions in which people become fully adult human beings. In this book I try to be as analytically objective as possible in sorting out why Thailand and Taiwan have democratized while China has not. But I am unapologetic in expressing my preference for democracy and my belief in its universal validity.

Since I will, therefore, appear critical at various points of the CCP and its elite intellectual supporters, let me make clear from the start my enormous fondness for the Chinese people and Chinese civilization. I have been studying the language, history, culture, and politics of China for twenty years. Each time I visit China or Hong Kong, I am charmed anew by the warmth, hospitality, intelligence, and humor of the people. The country’s economic and scientific accomplishments herald China’s rightful return to world greatness. But until it becomes democratic, China cannot realize its full potential. To criticize the CCP’s dictatorship is, therefore, *not* “anti-China.” It is *pro*-China.

China’s democratization is also critical to the security of democracy in other Asian countries, especially Taiwan but also Thailand (and others).

¹ Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, p. 3.

I do not see how Taiwan can survive as an autonomous democratic entity if China continues to grow stronger, while the CCP insists on pursuing a nationalistic-authoritarian agenda. Even Thailand's democracy could be undercut indirectly should the CCP succeed in its proclaimed goal of establishing an alternative new "political civilization" that would be nondemocratic and form the nucleus of an alternative world Center to the West. Because I am pro-China and pro-democracy, I hope the CCP changes course. But I try to explain this course and the reasons for CCP opposition to democracy objectively.

I have incurred enormous intellectual debts in writing this book. I want first to thank Ed Friedman for, most importantly, our ongoing dialogue, since 2001, about Chinese politics and international relations. Ed shares his insights with me through e-mail on at least a weekly, sometimes daily, sometimes twice- or thrice-daily, basis. He read the entire manuscript in minute detail, making important substantive suggestions and offering tireless editorial advice. His personal and intellectual mentorship is most appreciated. But I must work harder to meet his exacting expectations.

Hayward Alker has played a similar role as my senior colleague and mentor in the University of Southern California School of International Relations (SIR). With Ann Tickner, whom I also wish to thank for her mentorship and support, Hayward helped to establish an extraordinarily rich and open intellectual environment at SIR when he and Ann first arrived in the mid-1990s. Entering this environment to begin life as a tenure-track assistant professor *enabled* me to begin transcending the limitations of hyper-rationalist political science and develop the qualitative, historically grounded sociological approach I employ here.

I want to thank my colleague and friend Stan Rosen of the USC Department of Political Science. As a fellow China specialist and jazz aficionado—an unusual but, we think, exquisite combination—Stan has, day after day, shared his observations and insights, not only on this specific project but also on China studies generally, comparative politics, the ways of academia, and, of course, film.

I want to thank SIR's Abe Lowenthal for his indirect contribution to this study. Ever since my year as a Visiting Scholar at the Pacific Council on International Policy in 1996–97, when I was also a Visiting Scholar at USC's Center for International Studies, Abe has consistently encouraged me to link my interest in history and social science theory with policy concerns. This was a key factor in my originally getting interested in democratization and the related China–Taiwan dispute.

I want to thank Shelley Rigger, the leading Taiwan specialist in the United States, for reading over the entire manuscript and offering exceptionally helpful advice. Shelley made me rethink a number of important

issues in ways consistent with the thinking of my teachers at ICLP and with Ed Friedman. It is a good feeling when the manuscript reviewers agree on what needs to be changed.

Dan Fineman and Apichai Shipper, published Thailand specialists, and deeply knowledgeable about the country, read the Thailand chapters completely through and offered penetrating observations and criticisms. I thank them both. I have also benefited from numerous private conversations with Dan and Apichai in recent months, with Dan at Evergreen and at some of Bangkok's many fine eating establishments, and with Apichai at the less-pleasantly-chaotic but still pleasurable Trojan Grounds coffee shop on the USC campus.

Eric Blanchard, a superb SIR Ph.D. candidate, uniquely combining expertise in IR theory and Chinese foreign policy, read through the entire manuscript, sharing his keen observations. I particularly appreciate Eric's suggestions for Chapter 1. By coincidence, as I write, Eric prepares to make his own move to the ICLP for a year, having already spent a grueling summer there. I hope he benefits as much as I did.

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