

Elite Politics in the Process of Taiwan's Regime Change (1984-1987)

You Ying-Lung¹

In this article, I analyze elite interaction and decisions in the critical period of Taiwan's regime change, 1984 to 1987. During this short span of time, the ruling KMT, contrary to its usual practices, sought to accommodate the expanding native opposition forces. Scrutinizing three critical episodes, I come up with three major arguments. First, political liberalization in Taiwan was not a regime-led or state-initiated reform. The decision to consider moving toward liberalization was forced on the state by elements from below and from above. Second, the leadership of the Tang-Wai opposition forces deserves some credit for the course of liberalization. Some intelligent moves of the opposition leaders considerably helped to reduce the KMT leaders; anxiety over the issues of national identity and political violence. Finally, the late president Chiang Ching-kuo played a critical role in the narrative of liberalization in Taiwan. Although it is an overstatement to say that Chiang was "the real architect of Taiwan's democratic engineering." Several measures which Chiang implemented before his death did have a significant impact on the path of political development.

A common feature of all dictatorships, whatever mix of inducement and constraints they utilize, is that they cannot and do not tolerate independent organizations. The reason is the following. As long as no collective alternatives are available, individual attitudes toward the regime matter little for its stability.

— Przeworski, 1990: 87.

Civil society can only transform its relation to the state through the organization of new and autonomous structures, the creation of a new cultural fabric and the elaboration of a conceptual challenge to power monopolies.

— Bayart, 1986: 120.

¹ Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Soochow University.

As Przeworski notes, authoritarian rulers would ban any types of autonomous organizations if they could. This is because authoritarian rulers know the truth: as long as no independent organization emerges, their ruling position will be safe. On the other hand, as Bayart's argument implies, if civil society wishes to free itself from the state's domination, "the organization of new and autonomous structure" is required. Thus, there exists an inherent contradiction between authoritarianism and societal autonomy. The inherent contradiction would deepen and become explosive as civil society breeds a stronger collective consciousness against the state and accumulates more resources to claim its autonomy.

In Taiwan, this inherent contradiction between authoritarianism and societal autonomy had been sharp. Moreover, because the ruling bloc has been essentially non-indigenous, the intensity of the contradiction appeared even stronger. Unmistakably, the ruling KMT has banned independent political organizations for almost four decades since its arrival to Taiwan. It was not until the fall of 1986 that the taboo of independent political associations were thoroughly broken by the establishment of Democratic Progress Party (DPP), the first real opposition party in four decades. And, it was as late as July 1987 that the strict restrictions on political and social associations were formally removed because of the lifting of martial law.

In short, Taiwan's political liberalization came about in the second half of 1980s, and it not come easily. The ruling KMT initially did not plan to make concession to liberalization. Liberalization became more possible only in the middle of 1980s when the Tang-Wai opposition groups decided to tackle the political taboo of developing independent political organization. To be sure, liberalization is by no means a favor from authoritarian rulers; it can only be fought out by the oppressed social groups.

The quality of political leadership of both ruling and opposition elites appears particularly important with respect to the final result of political liberalization. Many cross-country evidence suggests that the wisdom, judgment, and choice of rival political elites is an important short-term factor of smooth regime transformation. Under identical structural and cultural conditions, different political leaders might have produced different results.²

In the following sections, I will analyze elite interaction and decision and in the critical period of Taiwan's regime transition, 1984 to 1987.³ The four years from 1984 to 1987 were critical in the evolution of authoritarian rule under the KMT.

² Thus, Cheng Tun-jen (1989: 32) has suggested that "the democratic breakthrough in Taiwan should be construed as the result of a series of calculated moves by both the regime situation can one understand the logic of these moves that shaped the course of democratic transition in Taiwan."

³ The existing scholarly literature has argued that political variables are especially crucial to the establishment of democracy (Rustow, 1970; Almond et al., 1973; Linz, 1978; O'Donnell, Schmitter et al., 1986 Higler & Gunther, 1992; Di Palma, 1990; Przeworski, 1990)

During this short span of time, contrary to its usual practices, the ruling party explicitly sought to accommodate the expanding native opposition forces.⁴

From the beginning of the Kou-t'ung (literally “communication”, “dialogue”, or “opinion exchange”), KMT authorities attempted to control the course of the democratic movement. However, the Tang-Wai's quick establishment of a new party broke the KMT's plan. To control the fledgling democracy movement, the late president Chiang Ching-kuo, the top leader of the ruling KMT, took a deliberate liberalization measure: he lifted martial law in the July of 1987. This dramatic move by the KMT represented a critical landmark of political liberalization in Taiwan. A closer look at the interplay between the ruling KMT and the Tang-Wai opposition forces is now called for.

From Repression to Kuo-t'ung

May 10, 1986 was a memorable day in the political history of Taiwan. On this date, a serious if informal Kuo-t'ung between the ruling KMT and the Tang-Wai unfolded through the intermediation of four well-known liberal intellectuals.⁵ This meeting represented an extraordinary move by both sides, especially the ruling KMT.

From a long-term perspective, ever since its retreat to Taiwan in 1949, the KMT had inclined to deem political dissidents as enemies, either as Tai-Du (people who advocates Taiwan Independence) or as the “fellow travelers” of the Chinese communists. Cooptation or coercion had been used most frequently to liquidate the opposition. The KMT would only consider dialogue with the opposition only if cooptation and coercion failed. Viewed from the angle, the 1986 Kuo-t'ung indicates that the KMT leaders realized that cooptation and coercion alone were insufficient to meet the challenge of the new opposition groups.

From a short-term perspective, Kuo-t'ung also meant a new power realignment within the party. Represented by the military and security apparatus, KMT's hard-liners had enjoyed their heyday for half a decade after the crackdown of Kuo-shing demonstrations in 1979. Throughout the first half of the 1980s, the whole island was still clouded by the fear of terror.⁶ Repression rather than negotiation was

⁴ In Winckler's (1984) words, this period represented change from a hard authoritarian regime to a soft authoritarian regime.

⁵ The ruling party was represented by the three Deputy Secretary-Generals of the Central Policy Commission: Liang Su-jung, Hsiao T'ien-tsan and Huang Kuang-ping. On the opposition side, eight leaders of different factions were invited to attend, including You Ching, Hsieh Chang-ting, Kan Ning-shiang, Huang Tien-fu, Fei His-ping, Chang Chung-shiung, Chiang Pang-chien and You His-kung. The four peacemakers were Ta'O Bai-ch'ung, Hu Fu, Li Hung-his and Yang Kuo-she.

⁶ Two unsolved murder cases typify this appalling period. The first case involved the ghastly killing of the aged mother and two teen aged daughters of Lin Yi-hsuing on February 28, 1980. Lin Yi-hsuing, a determined opposition leader, was one of eight chief victims of the Kao-hsiung Incident.

the mainstream idea of the ruling bloc at that time. The KMT's decision on Kuo-t'ung thus represented a bloc at that time. The KMT's decision on Kuo-t'ung thus represented a major change within the ruling bloc. The voice of the soft-liners prevailed.

The development of political dialogue between the KMT and the Tang-Wai resulted from a variety of reasons. The neutral mediators, the Tang-Wai, and the KMT took part in the meetings with diverse motivations and interests. The role of the neutral mediators was particularly important. In fact, if the four liberal intellectuals had not taken the initiative, face-to-face communication between the ruling party and the Tang-Wai would probably have been impossible.

As Hu Fu recalled, the motivation of the neutral mediators to arrange a talk between the KMT and Tang-Wei was simple.⁷ They took the initiative because of a strong sense of duty to the nation and belief in democracy and freedom. They did not assume the responsibility of mediation at the request of either the ruling party or the Tang-Wai. Their position was completely independent and neutral. Also, they had no concrete agenda or proposal for the sides to consider. Their primary function was to create an environment where both sides could sit down and talk freely.

The work of mediation actually began in 1984 because of threats to Tang-Wai from the ruling Nationalist party. On May 11, 1984 a group of Tang-Wai politicians established a formal organization, the Tang-Wai Public Policy Research Association (TWPPRA). Although the declared purpose of the TWPPRA was merely to conduct policy studies and to assist the Tang-Wai law-makers, it was perceived by the ruling party as a step towards the establishment of an opposition party.

Because KMT leaders did not wish to see the emergence of any independent political organization, they developed a strategy to prevent the TWPPRA from becoming a legal association. They convinced a group of pro-KMT academicians to organize the ROC Public Policy Research Association (ROCPPRA) which immediately registered with the Ministry of Interior Affairs. According to the Civic Association Law of the Emergency Period, only one civic association engaged in a particular activity would be allowed to register. Since the ROCPPRA registered first, according to the Law the TWPPRA could not legally be registered with the Ministry

It was widely believed that security agents committed the crime as a retaliation because Lin dared disclose the fact that he was tortured in custody. The second case involved the mysterious death of Chen Wen-chen during the summer of 1981 on the campus of the National Taiwan University. Chen was a young Professor of Statistics at the Carnegie Mellon University of the U.S. when he returned to Taiwan to visit his parents. He was killed after he was summoned to meet with officials of the Taiwan Garrison Command Headquarter. Many people believe that Professor Chen's death had something to do with his sympathetic views on the issue of Taiwan's Independence.

⁷ The following report about the motive of the four mediators is based on my personal interview with Professor Hu Fu during the summer of 1989. Lee Hung-his (1986), one of the four peacemakers, also provided an excellent analysis on this matter.

of Interior Affairs.

KMT authorities then insisted that since the TWPPRA was an illegal organization, it had to disband. It was widely believed that as long as Chiang Ching-kuo approved, the security forces would be anxious to close the TWPPRA or arrest opposition leaders who dared disobey the law. An intense confrontation appeared to be imminent.

Nonetheless, the timely intervention of four prestigious professors changed a potential disastrous scenario (Lee, 1986). On behalf of the mediators, Hu Fu actively lobbied both sides. He argued that Kou-t'ung as a means of conflict resolution was in the best interest of both parties and the entire society. Tang-Wei welcomed the four professors' proposal; the KMT rejected it. Nevertheless, Professor Hu continued to entreat both parties.

According to Huang (1990: 8), “ [b] y January 1985, a tentative agreement was reached: the association [TWPPRA] would change its name to ‘Political Construction Research Association’ and register with the authorities.” This pact immediately provoked a hot feud within the opposition group, however.

Tang-Wai's leaders were deeply divided on the matter of registration (Lee, 1987). Moderates felt there was nothing wrong with registration, as long as by that way TWPPRA would be legalized. The radicals opposed registration. For them, registration meant the abandonment of the traditional protest spirit of the Tang-Wai opposition movement; in other words, registration equaled surrender. The disagreement within the Tang-Wai leadership led to inaction on the issues of registration and name change. Deadlock resulted between the KMT and the Tang-Wai, but the government never formally dismantled the TWPPRA.

A new crisis was triggered in the first part of 1986. Without regard for the KMT's explicit warnings, the TWPPRA launched its efforts to erect its island-wide local branches. Local opposition leaders earnestly responded to this organizational endeavors. At least nine branch offices applied for and secured TWPPRA's recognition (Lee, 1987). These branch offices spread throughout most of major cities and counties of the island. Apparently, these efforts were aimed at the development of a strong oppositional organization. By this juncture a severe political crisis seemed inevitable.

Sensing the possibility of a major disaster, the four neutral mediators again plunged themselves into the action to avert the crisis.⁸ Their petition for a formal

⁸ The composition of the second team of mediators was significantly different from that of the first one. The second team, minus Professor Chang Chun-tung, included a critical figure, Tao Bai-ch'uan. Tao, aged 83, was a close advisor to the late President Chiang Ching-kuo. He was also a former member of the Control Yuan. With a reputation of being impartial, Tao was highly respected by both the KMT and the Tang-Wai leaders.

communication between two parties was well-received by the mass media. The mass media was also anxious and preferred talk rather than a clash between the KMT and the Tang-Wai. Moreover, perhaps partly because of Tao's influence, this time the KMT agreed to designate higher ranking officials to meet with the Tang-Wai leaders publicly (Huang, 1990).

However, there were at least three other factors that made the KMT's decision makers feel that the Tang-Wai deserved to be heard at the negotiating table. First, the strength of the Tang-Wai kept expanding even after the heavy crackdown of the Kao-hsiung demonstration. For instance, in the 1985 local elections, overall the Tang-Wai garnered about 30 percent of the popular votes. In Taipei, the capital city, the Tang-Wai obtained forty percent of the popular vote, and all of its eleven nominated candidates for City Council were elected. It appeared that even the crackdown of the Kao-hsiung demonstration and the subsequent massive arrests could not intimidate the veteran opposition leaders. On the contrary, the Kao-hsiung Incident led many qualified people to participate actively with the opposition movement. The KMT's traditional policy of repression was no longer an effective deterrent.

Second, the international image of the nationalist government was gravely damaged by the murder of Henry Liu.⁹ Badly scanned by the negative publicity attached to this assassination, the military and security unit could ill-afford any more damaging media attention.

Finally, the legitimacy of the Nationalist government was undermined by a financial scandal of Taipei's Tenth Credit Cooperative. This fiasco exposed the improper collaboration between high ranking party-governmental officials and heads of certain big businesses. To compensate for this loss of legitimacy, the KMT leaders felt a need to talk to the opposition forces, since public opinion had shifted to Kou-t'ung.

For the opposition, three considerations made it appealing to conduct face-to-face meetings with the ruling party. First, considering the rapidly escalating tension with the KMT, talks could possibly facilitate a cooling off period. This would at least temporarily protect the budding opposition force from repression at the hands of belligerent KMT's hard-liners.

Second, a talk with the ruling party could affirm and justify the status of the Tang-Wai as a major opposition force. Despite already being a significant

⁹ Liu was a Chinese writer who lived in the U.S. He was noted for his biography of Chiang Ching-kuo. He was gunned down at his residence in California in 1984. It was soon disclosed that Wang His-lien, the chief of the Intelligence Bureau of Defense Ministry of the ROC directed the operation of the assassination. Wang was subsequently imprisoned in Taipei. It was widely rumored that Chiang's second son, Chiang Hsiao-wu, had a hand in this perplexing murder.

opposition force, the Tang-Wai had never been shown respect by the ruling party. For many members of the KMT, a talk with the Tang-Wai leaders, even if informal, would be foolish. These individuals believed that a dialogue with the Tang-Wai would send a strong signal to the general public that the ruling party now recognized the Tang-Wai as a significant opposition force, which the KMT had denigrated badly in the past.

Third, the Tang-Wai could take advantage of the opportunities made available as a result of Kuo-t'ung to establish its island-wide organizational network, which otherwise would have been extremely difficult if not impossible to achieve under martial law restrictions.

As all relevant social and political factors turned out to favor Kuo-t'ung, the mainstream of both sides did not wish to be absent at the dinner of the prestigious neutral mediators on May 10, 1986. As the hosts skillfully moderated, the eleven guests began to talk to each other. It was a long night. In five or six hours, both sides extensively debated and often disputed a wide variety of issues.¹⁰

The delegates of the ruling party repeatedly stressed the following points. First, in order to facilitate political harmony and the people's well-being, the ruling party was absolutely willing to communicate with various social groups. Second, the Tang-Wai must accept the ROC constitution. Third, the TWPPRA must erase the word of Tang-Wai from its name, and obey the law to request the permission of the government. Fourth, the Tang-Wai must not measure the present state of national political development by the standard of Western democracies, or ask to enjoy the same level of liberties and human rights as in those democratic countries. Finally, the Tang-Wai must empathize with the difficult situation which the country is facing, and understand the basic difference between normal circumstances and unusual ones.

The Tang-Wai delegates, on the other hand, stressed the following points. First, the ruling party must first comply with the ROC constitution to nullifying the Temporal Provisions and lifting martial law. Second, the TWPPRA was a political association which did not need governmental permission to act legally. They insisted that if the TWPPRA had to register, then the ruling KMT should also register. Third, the government must respect people's freedoms of speech, press, assembly, and association. Fourth, the ruling party should work out a plan to establish multi-party politics before August or the upcoming nomination of the candidates of three central elective bodies. Finally, the ruling party and opposition forces must continue the effort of communication on a rational and sincere basis.

In the end, a tentative three point plan, drafted by Hu Fu, was agreed upon.

¹⁰ My analysis about the detail of the process of Kou-t'ung between the KMT and the Tang-Wai relies chiefly on a memoir of Lee Hung-his (1986), one of the four neutral mediators. In that testimonial essay, Li supplies a detailed report of the process of Kou-t'ung.

First, the two sides pledged the implementation of the Constitution of the Republic of China; as to concrete measures of constitutional rule further consultation would be held. Second, the two sides agreed to the establishment of the Tang-Wai Public Association and its local branches; however, as there was dispute on the question of registration and the name, further consultation on these matters would be held. Finally, the two sides agreed that during the period of consultation, they would continue to make efforts to contribute to political stability and harmony.

Despite the generality and vagueness of these points, the agreement showed that the ruling party made a rare concession on the matter of the organization of opposition forces. The KMT's decision makers appeared to realize that in the foreseeable future it would be impossible to prevent the Tang-Wai from organizing without high-levels of repression. So, they seemed willing to tolerate the establishment of the TWPPRA and its local branches as long as the TWPPRA registered and changed its name. The KMT leaders apparently were trying to induce the fledgling opposition forces to act within the established institutional structure.

Another important achievement of the Kou-t'ung dinner was the opening of a channel for dialogue and for negotiation between the two sides. By this informal channel, both sides could argue interminably with each other, but the chance of physical confrontations on the street would be diminished. Once both sides become accustomed to conversation and negotiation as a way to resolve conflicts, the incentives of appealing to violence would decrease correspondingly. This was what the mediators desired and anticipated.

However, what ensued after the first meeting was not the continuation of a spirited dialogue but rather a series of potentially explosive confrontations between the KMT and the Tang-Wai, as a result of actions by hard-liners in each camp. The encounters began with a move by the radical element of the Tang-Wai. On the same day of the first Kou-t'ung, a group of radical Tang-Wai activists announced the birth of a TWPPRA's branch at Taipei. Meanwhile, the Taiwan Garrison Command Headquarters (TGCH) banned *The Eighties* magazine for one year. *The Eighties* was a leading magazine of the opposition movement. These actions may be interpreted as a boycott by the radicals and the hard-liners to the ongoing dialogue between the ruling party and the opposition force.

On May 17, 1986, Kang Ning-hsiung, an influential moderate leader, announced the establishment of a capital branch of the TWPPRA at Taipei. This move surprised the KMT leadership. Furthermore, the fact that many well-known politicians, scholars, and social celebrities showed up to support Kang Ning-hsiung disturbed the KMT authorities. On May 19, the 38th anniversary of the declaration of martial law in Taiwan, several hundred Tang-Wai activists joined a rally to protest

martial rule. The protesters demanded the Nationalist government revoke martial law immediately. The government responded by moving a sizable police force to contain the demonstration. No violence ensued.

Both the radicals and the right-wing extremists continued to oppose the Kou-t'ung. The right-wing extremists not only slandered the Kou-t'ung but also dared to challenge the authority of Chiang Ching-kuo, the strong man of the KMT. They asked the ruling party not to appease but remain tough in the face of their enemy - the Tang-Wai. They insisted that the KMT should never abandon its "revolutionary" tradition. During this period, the state security apparatus busied itself for possible action. "A few of the opposition leaders apparently were put under surveillance on a 24 hours a day basis" (Huang, 1990: 12).

Under these circumstance, the second meeting of Kou-t' was held on May 24, 1986 as originally planned. The ruling party served as the host this time. As the meeting proceeded, both sides attempted to manipulate the political agenda so as to maximize their gains. The ruling party sought to lower the level of discussion, while the Tang-Wai took the opposite approach, and attempted to raise the level of dialogue to address fundamental problems of political structure.

The KMT delegates, in effect, maneuvered to narrow the discussion to the problem of the registration and name of the TWPPRA and its local branches. The Tang-Wai delegates, on the other hand, tried to shift the focus to other more fundamental issues of political structure, such as the problem of the aging central elective bodies, the lifting of martial law, the termination of the ban of new parties and newspapers, the protection of political liberties, and the legalization of autonomous local government. Consequently, though both sides conducted a deeper and broader conversation than before, the second Kou-t'ung ended with very little concrete change. The only visible achievement of the second meeting was that the date of the last round of Kou-t'ung was set. It was scheduled for June 7, 1986, and the Tang-Wai would assume the role of host.

The third round of Kou-t'ung was indefinitely postponed, however, due to the trial and sentencing of three well-known Tang-Wai figures.¹¹ For the radicals, this event entailed selective persecution by the ruling party of prominent Tang-Wai leaders. In other words, for the radicals, the KMT was manipulating the judicial branch to punish the uncompromising part of the Tang-Wai.

After their sentencing, the three victims decided to appear at mass rallies to protest the action against them. Consecutive outdoor demonstrations which were held from the north end to the south tip of the island and easily attracted several thousands of people,

¹¹ This refers to the libel case of Pong-Lai-Tao magazine. The three persons in this highly controversial case were Huang Tien-fu, Chen Juai-pein, and Li Yi-yang. Huang and Chen were important leaders of the radical element of the opposition force at that time.

embarrassed the ruling party. During these large gatherings, the speakers not only censured the injustice of the ruling party but also ridiculed the Kou-t'ung banquets. The once congenial atmosphere of dialogue between the ruling party and the opposition forces, at this point, had completely dissipated.

The Establishment of the DPP

The discontinuity of Kou-t'ung did not lead to a pause in the activities of the opposition forces. In a sense, it enhanced the Tang-Wai's determination to create a strong organization of opposition forces. Over the summer of 1986, diverse factions in the opposition groups explicitly or implicitly embarked on plans to organize a new party (Lee, 1987).

As early as May 1986, Hsu Hsin-liang, an exiled leader of the Tang-Wai, announced the creation of a preparatory committee of the Taiwan Democratic Party in the U.S. He also broadcast his plan to celebrate the birth of the Taiwan Democratic Party and outlined his strategy to move the party back to Taiwan in the fall of 1986.

On June 13, the moderate bloc of the opposition groups presented "a time table of Taiwanese democratization" to the general public. This outline suggested that it would be appropriate to create a new political party by 1987 assuming the TWPPRA could successfully set up its branches throughout the island. On August 9, the capital city branch of the TWPPRA, the incarnation of the moderate bloc of the Tang-Wai, arranged an outdoor meeting before the masses to explain the need for the establishment of a new opposition party.

In early July, a secret panel of the TWPPRA was organized. The mission of this panel was to design a new party. According to Fu Cheng, a veteran of the opposition movement and a core member of that panel, the secret panel was composed of experienced and influential leaders of the various opposition groups. It subsequently became the prime mover of the effort to organize a new political party.

By early September, another highly controversial libel case was concluded by a local court of Taipei city. Lin Cheng-jieh, a Taipei city councilman and a prominent young opposition leader, was indicted for libeling a KMT councilman colleague. He was sentenced to an eighteen month term in prison. As a result, this indictment provoked intense discontent among the opposition groups.

From September 3 on to the mid-September, intense street protests occurred in Taipei. These protests focused on the alleged inequities of the judicial power. These activities attracted the support of a large number of people, including the public support of eleven noted scholars. These massive gatherings took place in the face of

martial law prohibition against such rallies and demonstrations.

The efforts of opposition leaders culminated in the establishment of the Democratic Progressive Party On September 28, 1986, in Taipei.¹² This announcement was abrupt and potentially explosive. It surprised the ruling party, the neutral mediators, and the entire society. The Tang-Wai leaders believed that their quick move would provoke a strong suppression from the Nationalist government. Nonetheless, they appeared fearless in the face of potential imminent arrest.¹³

However, the response of the KMT authorities to the Tang-Wai's challenge was unexpectedly slow and indecisive.¹⁴ It seemed as if the KMT leadership faced a dilemma. A decision on the immediate suppression or continuation of the Kou-t'ung perplexed the KMT authorities. Indeed, before and after the Tang-Wai's formal announcement of the establishment of the DPP, the governmental position on the ban of new political parties was allegedly firm.¹⁵ The security apparatus was also ready to make massive arrests after the Tang-Wai's explosive announcement, yet it did not actually engage in any repressive actions.¹⁶

Instead, the KMT authority decided to talk to the four peacemakers. On September 30, as the KMT delegates met with the neutral mediators, Hu Fu proposed a way to solve the crisis. He suggested to the ruling party that they make the following announcement: "since the opposition party was still being formed, the government would not take any action but would continue with consultation" (Huang, 1990: 17). The KMT authority accepted this motion.

A formal announcement of the ruling party was issued subsequently by the KMT's three-person panel of Kou-t'ung. It stressed that if Tang-Wai's action of organizing a party remained in the preparatory stage, the KMT delegates would pass over the advice of the neutral mediators to the related branches of the governing party and government. Meanwhile, the DPP responded by praising the KMT's decision to

¹² The action of announcing the birth of the Democratic Progress Party (DPP) on September 28, 1986 was expedited. Indeed it occurred so hastily and suddenly. The initial plan of the core opposition leaders was a bit more prudent and piecemeal. Their primary goal at that time was no more than to organize a formal preparatory committee for the establishment of a new political party.

¹³ In my interview with Fu Cheng, he emphasized that the core opposition leaders had made arrangements to handle the impending massive arrests of the KMT.

¹⁴ According to Hu Fu, four urgent meetings within the ruling party were convened on September 29. In these meetings, the late president Chiang Ching-kuo met with the party, government, military and security leaders to hear their opinions. No news about the process or outcome of those meetings has ever been release.

¹⁵ On September 26, 1986, Shih Chie-yang, the head of the Ministry of Judicial Affairs, warned that it was not appropriate to establish new parties at this particular time and place; should a small group recklessly organize a new party the government would prohibit it according to the law. On September 30, two days after the Tang-Wai's explosive announcement, Shih still publicly insisted on this position when the members of the Legislative Yuan asked him how the government would handle this case.

¹⁶ Some core opposition leaders were put under close surveillance, which meant that the arrest action could happen at any time. It was also reported that the security apparatus submitted a list of 140 of individuals who were to be wounded up (Huang, 1990).

continue the Kou-t'ung, and reiterated its constitutional right of political association.¹⁷ A major crisis thus deflected.

Furthermore, a very dramatic move by the ruling KMT ensued. On October 8, the late president Chiang Ching-kuo delivered a crucial message when he met with Mrs. Katherine Graham, the president of the Washington Post. Chiang declared that his government planned to lift martial law soon. He also emphasized that any new parties must obey the constitution, support the basic governmental policy of anti-communism, and break off any relationship with the overseas Taiwanese Independence Movement.¹⁸ This statement delineated what constituted the KMT's vital interests. It also represented the bottom line of the ruling block in tolerating political participation.

In addition, on October 8, Chiang gave a serious and thoughtful talk before the Central Standing Committee of the party, the highest decision-making organ of the party. In this talk, he advised his comrades to be patient and tolerant. He stated:

The circumstances which our country encounters have been unusual. Things have changed, environments have changed, and currents have changed too. ...Over the years, our party has suffered constant defamation and insult from the enemies. The purpose of the enemies is to irritate and strike us. But we must not act rashly and blindly; we must use our mind rather than emotion to handle things. This is because emotion or impulse would easily make us lose our reason and therefore make us suffer failure. There are many examples of this type in history. Lack of forbearance in small things tangles great plans. We must be cautious.¹⁹

Chiang Ching-kuo was apparently referring both to international and domestic changes. In saying "lack of forbearance in small matters tangles great plans," he was suggesting to the KMT that the new historical situation was unfavorable to harsh repression. As for his "great plan", perhaps no one except him knew to what this referred.

It can be argued that the establishment of the opposition party alone was hardly sufficient reason for the ruling KMT to take harsh repressive measure. Despite being a violation of martial law, the announcement of the establishment of a new party did not endanger the political and social order. As for the charge of violating martial law, the action of organizing a political party was not the first violation of the law in forty years, and conceivably it would not be the last violation assuming martial rule would continue. In fact, the authority of the martial law had already been

¹⁷ See China Times Daily, October 1, 1986.

¹⁸ 17 See China Times Daily, October 9, 1986.

¹⁹ 18 See China Times Daily, October 8, 1986.

damaged by the September street movements. Thus, as a major legal weapon to prevent new party formations, martial law was already weakened.

Chiang Ching-kuo decided that it was time to make major policy adjustments to move toward political liberalization, if his party was to remain in power. But to accomplish this, he knew that he first had to pacify the hard-liners. In Chiang's words:

Maybe someone presumes the government appeared ineffectual in handling certain problems. Yet, to achieve the greater objectives of the country, we must learn not to put the cart before the horse and not to lose a large gain because of a trifle consideration.²⁰

The KMT authority decided to avoid a serious confrontation with the opposition force.

On October 11, three days after Chiang ching-kuo delivered the landmark proclamation stating he would lift martial law, the DPP responded with an amicable and positive announcement. The announcement stated that the DPP would continue the Tang-Wai's tradition of seeking a strict adherence to constitutional rule, insisting on peaceful reform and opposing political violence.

This announcement represented a formal reply to Chiang's proclamation. Nonetheless, the DPP deliberately avoided the issue of Taiwanese Independence. The DPP leaders understood that they should not further upset the ruling party by publicly rebutting the KMT's charge of secessionism. On the other hand, the DPP leaders also knew that the assertion of Taiwanese Independence would be their ultimate goal. They were conscious that they would have to assert Independence someday, but they did not want to push the point prematurely. The best choice at the moment was to leave aside the problem of Taiwanese self-determination.

If the announcements of both sides can be considered as a pact, it was not a solid pact at all. However, the "pact" at least saved the face of the ruling party. It therefore averted a likely showdown between the KMT and the DPP.

The Lifting of Martial Law

On July 15, 1987, the Nationalist government formally ended the longest martial rule in history. This represented a major step toward political liberalization. The military no longer had the legal power to restrict people's freedoms of expression, assembly, association, etc. From then on, civilians would play a much important

²⁰ See China Times Daily, October 8, 1986.

role in domestic affairs.

The lifting of martial law did not, however, signify the arrival of political democracy or the return to normal constitutional rule because the Temporary Provisions and many other emergency-state-related law remained in operation. But, it was a critical landmark in the course of political liberalization in Taiwan: presumably civil and political liberties would receive more legal and constitutional protection; the ban of new political parties and newspapers would be annulled, and, as a result, the type of public contestation would essentially differ from before; most significantly, the hegemonic status of the ruling KMT would soon become history. If the lifting of martial law meant so much damage to the ruling party, the question arises: why was the ruling party willing to make such a major concession?

A typical official explanation is evident in the remarks of the late president Chiang Ching-kuo with Mrs. Graham of the Washington post. Chiang expressed that it was the longstanding wish of the Nationalist government to seek the establishment of democracy and the improvement of the economic environment in Taiwan that caused the lifting of martial law.²¹ In addition, a prevalent official perspective emphasized that democracy had long been a primary goal of the Nationalist party; the lifting of martial law was just a part of the party's continuous effort in pursuing democracy (Wei, 1987).

One piece of evidence often cited to support the official interpretation was the appointment of a twelve-man task force in the Central Standing Committee of the ruling KMT in the spring of 1986. Specifically, at the Thrid Plenum of the KMT's 12th Central Committee held in March 1986, Chiang Ching-Kuo appointed twelve senior members of the Central Standing Committee to examine six crucial problems of political and social reform.²² Thus, Wei Yung (1987), among many others, argued that the lifting of martial law and other reform measures had been on the agenda of the ruling party's reform package. The reforms, the argument goes, were generated by the ruling party; they were absolutely not induced by the opposition forces.

However, T'ao Bai-Ch'uan, an important political consultant of the late president Chiang Ching-kuo, had a different assessment on the so-called twelve-man task force. According to T'ao, the Thrid Plenum of the KMT's 12th Central Committee did not contribute to the lifting of martial law and the removal of the ban on new political parties because no motion or resolution related to that issue was articulated in that meeting. As for the twelve-men task force, T'so pointed out that the actions of the

²¹ See China Times Daily, October 8, 1986.

²² These six problems included the establishment of national security institutions, the modification of the ongoing Civic Association Law of Emergency Period, the revision of the Public Officials Election and Recall Law Effective During the Period of Communist Rebellion, the legalization of local self-government, the improvement of social customs, and the review of the party's central task at the present stage.

twelve members of the Central Standing Committee might be relevant, but it could have been done earlier.²³

The observation of Huang Mab (1990) is consistent with that of T'ao. "The task force submitted its recommendation in June. They were broad in scope and without any specificity, referring to some of the structural problems confronting Taiwan" (Huang, 1990: 6). It was not until October 15, 1986 that the twelve-member task force unanimously approved the two political reform measures, i.e., the lifting of martial law and the removal of the prohibition of new political parties. Thus, in effect the panel that was supposed to suggest reform endorsed a major reform move enunciated previously by Chiang Ching-kuo.

Examining this issue more thoroughly, it is possible to discern that many factors actually came into play in the KMT's decision to terminate martial rule. Among these, three considerations were central. To begin with, the cost for the ruling party of defending the authority of the martial law had become extremely high. The lifting of martial law would not generate a fundamental change in the established power structure. Finally, three pieces of new legislation would substitute or even better serve the original function of martial law.

First, as the political environment drastically changed, it became more and more difficult for the ruling KMT to preserve martial rule. Certainly, the original purpose of martial rule was to consolidate the ruling position of the exiled Nationalist government in Taiwan. By depriving civil and political liberties, martial law had been an effective instrument for the KMT to preclude the emergence of indigenous opposition forces.

However, as social and political circumstance evolved, the effectiveness of martial law declined. The September street protest movement was a striking example. More importantly, the establishment of the DPP had become a reality. Since the major function of the martial law, prevention of opposition, had been circumvented, its existence merely served to embarrass the authoritarian rules themselves.

Second, it was believed by the KMT that the lifting of martial law would not immediately produce a fundamental change in the established power structure. Many other restrictive laws and statutes remained effective. As a perceptive observer commented, "the government has over the years erected a full panoply of legislation which duplicates many provisions of martial law."²⁴

A list of some of these measures would include: the Temporary Provisions during the Period of Mobilization and Suppressing Rebellion (or simply called the

²³ See China Times Weekly, October 28, 1986.

²⁴ See Carl Goldstein, "The Winds of Change," Far-Eastern Economic Review October 30, 1986: 28-29

Temporary Provisions) passed in 1948 in order to grant unlimited power and tenure of the presidency to the late president Chiang Kai-shek; a General Mobilizational Law limiting freedom of assembly; a Publication Law giving the government the power to censor the press; and a Labor Law which banned strikes.

Finally, three pieces of new legislation would substitute or even serve better the original purpose of the martial law. These included the National Security Law, the Civic Association Law, and the Assembly and Parade Law. The National Security Law, put into effect since July 1, 1987, was actually an exchange condition for the lifting of martial law. In addition, the Assembly and Parade Law, passed by the Legislative Yuan in the January of 1988, was to reinforce the regulation of the increasing street movements. Finally, the Civic Association Law, passed by the Legislative Yuan in the January of 1989, provided a legal basis for the emerging aberrant political parties and groups such as the DPP.

The main thrust of these three laws was to set the boundaries of political participation: no violation of the ROC constitution, no advocacy of communism, and no promotion of the division of national territory.²⁵ Thus, by these “legal” devices, the KMT leadership tried to induce the opposition force into the institutional track over which the government had tight control.

In addition to these factors, three secondary considerations deserve mention. First, as noted before, the long existence of martial rule had, to a degree, hurt the international image of the Nationalist government (Chiu, 1986; Wei, 1987; Chou and Nathan, 1987). Second, the rule of the martial law had been defective legally (Hu, 1987). Finally, the KMT leadership attempted to strive for democratic reform.

The legality of martial rule in Taiwan had been a controversial issue for many years. Although a hostile relationship between both sides of the Taiwan Strait persists, no open conflict has happened in this area since 1958.

Therefore, since there was no war or likelihood of war the premise behind the need for martial rule was nonexistent. In other words, the continuation of martial rule had been based upon highly questionable legal ground. When the KMT had absolute power, it was able to use its might to mask the defective martial rule. However, once the hegemony of the ruling party began to deteriorate because of international and domestic changes, it became more difficult to justify the continuation of martial rule.

Finally, attempting to regulate more effectively the tempo of democratic movement was another reason the KMT leadership decided to suspend martial law. As noted earlier, the ruling KMT has been extremely reluctant to proceed towards full

²⁵ Article two of the National Security Law says that public assemblies and groups may not violate the constitution of 1947, advocate communism or the division of national territory. An identical clause can be seen in Article two of the Civic Association Law and Article four of the Assembly and Parade Law.

fledged democratization. Over the decades, the democratic measures introduced by the KMT had been minor. In this sense, it was a major decision for the KMT to terminate martial rule. Huang Mab(1990: 11) has asserted that “the basic strategy of the ruling party could be best described as to co-opt the opposition leaders in a fairly gradual process of political reforms governed by laws”. In so doing, not only could the KMT improve its anti-democratic image, but also control the pace of democratization.

As much as the KMT leadership maneuvered to maximize its gains during the suspension of martial rule, one positive effect of this critical episode must be noted: the military formally withdrew from the domain of domestic affairs. If Chiang Ching-kuo had not made this arrangement, after his death no successor would have been powerful enough to end martial rule. Furthermore, the path of political development after the demise of Chiang Ching-kuo in the January of 1988 would have become even more difficult and uncertain. From this perspective, the lifting of martial law had a profound impact on the political system.²⁶

Concluding Remarks

This article has discussed how the interactive process between the ruling KMT and the Tang-Wai opposition over the period 1984 to 1987 ultimately lead to the lifting of martial law, a significant step of political liberalization. Several conclusions emerge from this analysis.

First, political liberalization in Taiwan was not simply a state-initiated reform as some analysts would argue. In fact, the decision to consider moving toward liberalization was forced on the state by elements from below and from above. As noted earlier, autonomous political organizations had been strictly banned during martial law. Before the establishment of the DPP, the ruling KMT tried to maintain martial rule. After the announcement of the birth of the DPP, some KMT authorities were prepared to take systematic repressive measures against DPP leaders.

However, if the simple thesis of liberalization from above is indefensible, so is the opposite thesis of liberalization from below. For, it is true that the ruling bloc did eventually make the decision to suspend martial rule. In other words, the KMT

²⁶ Although the military lost certain power when martial law ended, it acquired some protection from the KMT's top leader. Article nine of the National Security Law is an example. It says that after the lifting of martial law civilians who had been convicted of martial law offenses may not appeal to the courts for their cases to be overturned. As a result, the military and security apparatus can avoid further embarrassment or revenge in the post-martial law era.

authoritarian rulers conditionally approved political liberalization which has been pushed by the Tang-Wai opposition forces.²⁷ In sum, only by considering the interaction of these various factors, can the final outcome be understood.

Second, the leadership of the Tang-Wai opposition forces deserves some credit for the course of Taiwan's political liberalization.²⁸ During the process of dialogue with the ruling party, the mainstream opposition forces intentionally avoided the issue of Taiwan Independence. At the same time, they decided not to criticize Chiang Ching-kuo, the political strongman of the ruling party. In so doing, they may have lowered somewhat probability of triggering counter-actions by KMT hard-liners.

Moreover, the Tang-Wai leaders' affirmative attitude toward the ROC constitution enhanced the KMT's incentive to relax authoritarian rule, because that action symbolized a tacit consensus on national identity. Without intense anxiety over the issue of Independence, the immigrant authoritarian rulers were obviously more willing to consider the option of political liberalization on the island.

For democratic transition, Rustow (1970) and Di Palma (1990) have highlighted the importance of the willingness of rival political elites to coexist in diversity. Thus, the Tang-Wai leaders explicitly signaled their willingness to co-exist with the ruling KMT under the framework of the ROC Constitution. In addition, they clarified their adamant position against any form of political violence. These intelligent moves helped to cultivate what Dahl (1971) has called "mutual security" between rival political elites.

Finally, the late president Chiang Ching-kuo played a critical role in the narrative of liberalization in Taiwan (Chou and Nathan, 1987; King, 1988; Tien, 1989; Cheng, 1990). Although it is an overstatement to say that Chiang Ching-kuo was "the real architect of Taiwan's democratic engineering,"²⁹ several measures which Chiang implemented in the 1980s did have a significant impact on the political system.

For instance, in the summer of 1984, Chiang Ching-kuo removed General Wang Sheng from the director's office of the General Political Warfare Department of the Defense Ministry. This represented a major purge within the ruling bloc. General Wang was publicly recognized as a leading figure among extreme right-wing forces. His removal from this powerful post was a serious blow to the military and security

²⁷ Thus, Huntington (1989) argues that the process of transition to democracy in Taiwan has been largely one of reforma which involves the alteration of a non-democratic regime by its leaders.

²⁸ Cheng Tun-jen (1989: 18) agrees. He states that "the success of democratic transition in Taiwan was largely attributed to political entrepreneurship of the new opposition, as reflected in its ability to set the agenda, to use extra-legal methods to finesse the repressive legal framework, to shift the bargaining arenas and eventually to force the ruling elite to institute a new set of rules of the game."

²⁹ King (1988: 18) wrote: "He [Chiang Ching-kuo] was not only pragmatic and confident enough to accommodate and respond to opposition views and demands in a conciliatory way, but was also realistic and powerful enough to overcome the resistance of the conservative forces within the party-state."

apparatus.

After the exposure caused by the murder of Henry Liu, Chiang publicly announced several times that no member of his own family would succeed him in power, and that military rule would not be allowed to occur. These vital declarations supported the liberalization effort. Moreover, as noted earlier, Chiang decided to talk to the opposition leaders, he conditionally allowed the formation of autonomous political organizations, and he eventually suspended martial law. All of these measures, in various degrees and at different time intervals, induced Taiwan's political system toward the direction of liberalization.

On the other hand, except for his father, Chiang Ching-kuo had been ... powerful figure of the KMT authoritarian regime in the past forty.... In this sense, he had played a critical role in the process of the reconstruction and consolidation of the KMT party-state in Taiwan. It would not be an exaggeration to call him the real architect of Taiwan's authoritarian structure. But, why did Chiang Ching-kuo do so many positive things for democracy in the last few years of his life? This is perhaps a puzzle without any lucid solution.

Nevertheless, some psychological cues may enable us to posit some possible reasons. In the late spring of 1986 when the Tang-Wai leaders started to institute the local branches of the TWPPRA, Chiang Ching-kuo expressed his personal feeling in the Central Standing Committee of the ruling party. He pondered: "I believe that my father and I have also done many good things for people during the past forty years' of our stay at Taiwan. But, why there still exists so much criticism and complaint?"³⁰

Moreover, during an informal occasion soon after the lifting of martial law, Chiang Ching-kuo publicly claimed that he had been Taiwanese. This was the first time in four decades that the top leader of the mainlander ruling bloc expressed such a sentiment of Taiwanese identity,

This sentimental expression was possibly not accidental. It represented a deep reflection from the supreme leader of the immigrant authoritarian regime. Chiang Ching-kuo apparently came to view the root of political conflicts in Taiwan as resulting from the fact that the entire mainlander ruling bloc had never viewed themselves as Taiwanese. They had never tried to become a part of Taiwanese society; in fact, they had discriminated against native Formosan language, customs, and culture ever since their arrival to Taiwan. He seemed to be afraid that if his mainlander ruling bloc continued to alienate itself from Taiwanese society, sooner or later they would use up the reservoir of Formosan native's good will. This would be a grave crisis for the KMT ruling class since Taiwan was their last hope and it was improbable that they could ever regain a ruling status on mainland China.

³⁰ See *The Journalist*, No. 21: 4.

For Chiang, thus, some critical remedial measures needed to be taken. Political liberalization was a step in that direction, which explains why he sided with the KMT moderates of this move and ultimately lifted martial law.

References

- Almond, Gabriel A. Scott C. Flanagan, and Robert J. Mundt. (eds) 1973. Crisis, Choice, and Change: Historical Studies of Political Development. Boston: Little Brown.
- Bayart, Jean-Francois. 1986. "Civil Society in Africa," in Patrick Chabal (ed) Political Domination in Africa: Reflections on the Limits of Power. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 109-125.
- Cheng, Tun-jen. 1989. "Democratizing the KMT Regime in Taiwan," paper Prepared for the Conference on Democratization in the Republic of China, Taipei, Taiwan, January 9-11.
- Chiu, Hungdah. (ed) 1979. China and the Taiwan Issue. New York: praeger.
- Chou, Yangsun and Andrew J. Nathan. 1987. "Democratizing Transition in Taiwan," Asian Survey, 27 (3): 277-299.
- Dahl, Robert A. 1971. Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Diamond, Larry. 1989. "crisis, Choice, and Structure: Reconciling Alternative Models for Explaining Democratic Success and Failure in the Third World," paper presented to the 1989 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Atlanta, August 31-September 3, 1989.
- Di Palma, Giuseppe. 1990. To Craft Democracies. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gold, Thomas and Gwo-shyong Shieh. 1989 "Transitions from Authoritarianism in East Asia: Empirical Observations," paper prepared for the Conference on Democratization in the Republic of China. Taipei, Taiwan, January 9-11.
- Hu Fu. 1987. "the Evolution and Reconstruction of Constitutional Structure of the ROC," in Fa Shieh Lun Chung. Vol. 16 No. 2: 1-32.
- Higley, John. And Michael G. Burton. 1989. "The Elite Variable in Democratic Transitions and Breakdowns," American Sociological Review. Vol. 54: 17-32.
- Higley, John and Richard Gunther (eds) 1992. Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Huang, Mab. 1990. Political Kou-t'ung and the Rise of the Democratic Progressive Party in Taiwan: 1984-1986. Manuscript.
- Huntington, Samuel P. 1989. "The Context of Democratization in Taiwan," paper prepared for the Conference on Democratization in the Republic of China, Taipei, Taiwan, R.O.C. January 9-11.
- King, Ambrose Y.C. 1988. "A Non-Paradigmatic Search for Democracy in a

- Post-Confucian Culture: The case of Taiwan,” paper prepared for Presentation at the Conference on “Political Culture and Democracy in Developing Countries,” Hoover Institution, September 17-17, 1988.
- Lee Hung-his. 1986. “kuo-ming-tang Huo Tang-Wai Kou-t’ung te Lai Lung Chieh Mai,” in Pa Shih Nien Dai Ping Lun. July, 16, 1986.
- Linz, Juan. 1978. The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Crisis, Breakdown, & Reequilibration. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- _____. 1990. “Transitions to Democracy,” The Wahington Quarterly. Summer 1990: 143-164.
- O’Donnell, Guillermo, Philippe C. Schmitter. (eds) 1986. Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Prospect for Democracy. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Przeworski, Adams. 1986. “Some Problems in the Study of the Transition to Democracy,” in Guillermo O’Donnell, Phillippe C. Schmitter, and Lauence Whitehead (eds) Transition form Authoritarian Rule: Comparative Perspectives. Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins University Press.
- _____. 1990. Transitions to Democracy. Manuscript.
- Rustow, Dankwart A. 1970. “Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model,” Comparative Politics 2, 3: 337-63.
- Stepan, Alfred. 1988. Rethinking Military Politics: Brazil and the Southern Cone. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Tien, Hung-Mao. 1989. ‘Liberalization and Democratization: Taiwan’s Developmental Experiences,” paper prepared for the Conference on Democratization in the Republic of China. Taipei, Taiwan, January 9-11.
- _____. 1989. The Great Transition: Political and Social Change in the Republic of China. Hoover Institution.
- Winckler, E.A. 1984. “Institutionalization and Participation on Taiwan: From Hard to Soft Authoritarianism?” The China Quarterly 99: 481-99.

精英政治與台灣政治自由化 (1984-1987)

游盈隆

本文的主要目標在剖析統治精英與反對精英在台灣政治自由化過程中扮演的角色、互動過程及其影響。誠如許多研究民主轉型的學者所同意，政治自由化過程確切的起點終點為何，乃是一不易回答的問題。但是要指出政治自由化的關鍵時刻或時段，則遠較容易。台灣戒嚴統治的解凍，或者說政治自由化的關鍵期大約是在一九八四到一九八七之間。在這段期間，三個重大事件(critical episodes)即黨內外溝通、民進黨組黨和國民黨解嚴，構成了政治自由化的主軸。本文即針對這段期間所發生的三大事件加以分析；文章重點不在於單存歷史事件的紀錄與描述，而在統治精英與反對精英為實現各自的目標，如何深思熟慮、精打細算地決定採取各種策略與選擇。

本文的主要結論有三。首先，台灣政治自由化是反對勢力長期努力推動，而國民黨統治集團在最後緊要關頭讓步的結果。這就是說，台灣政治自由化絕非是執政當局主導(Regime-led)的結果。第二，在一九八四到一九八七台灣政治自由化的關鍵時期，黨外反對勢力在集體領導下的表現可圈可點，是終結台灣戒嚴體制的一個要因素。在那一段時間中，反對陣營的主要領導者有意避談台灣獨立的問題，且避免直接挑戰蔣經國個人的權威，以及公開表態支持回歸憲政，有助於化解立即的政治危機。第三，蔣經國總統確實在台灣威權體制解凍過程中扮演了一個重要的角色。然而，在評估蔣經國的歷史功過，及詮釋他晚年所採取的種種和自由化有關的政策措施時，學界迄無定論。蔣經國晚年不少重要談話皆環繞在國家認同與省籍情結上。他顯然對台灣底層的政治社會矛盾有相當深刻的體認。政治自由化，對他而言，似乎是從根解決台灣基本政治社會矛盾，但不可欲(necessary but undesirable)的措施。