Technocrats and Democratic Transition:
the Cases of China and Mexico

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The rise of technocrats is one of the most salient changes that China and Mexico have experienced in the last two decades. This paper explores the following questions: Who are the technocrats? How do we explain the rise of the technocrats? What is the nature of these technocratic elites? How does expertise influence the distribution of power over policy and decision-making? What happens when experts have power? Does tactics of political control change radically with the change of the new elites? What are the roles played by the elite in the process of democratization that is transforming political institutions in Mexico and China? This paper concludes that in both Mexico and China the technocrats played an important role in economic transformations and a supporting role in the course of slow and incremental political change, but they are not the determining factor in democratic transition.

The most important change in the leadership in post-Mao China is the dramatic rise of the political elites with higher education, especially those majoring in science and engineering. Beijing is now dominated by technocrats whose main concern is to solve China's problems. Of the top seven party leaders, five have degrees from prestigious Chinese universities. In 2001, of the seven members of the Politburo's Standing Committee, China's supreme decision-making body, six are engineers and one is architect. This pattern repeats itself throughout the State Council and the ministerial and provincial government (Li 2001b: 25-26). Below them, younger technocrats – some western-trained – hold high posts in the banks, regulatory bodies, and think tanks.

Meanwhile, technocrats have occupied a large share of top posts in the Mexican regime. Traditional politicians with electoral/partisan backgrounds have become less powerful. This process was especially notable during the de la Madrid (1982–88), Salinas (1988–94), and Zedillo (1994–2000) administrations, whose senior positions were staffed largely by individuals fitting the technocratic stereotype.[1] Much of the dissension in the Mexican political leadership in the 1990s can be attributed to a division between the technocratic leadership and traditional political figures, popularly called *los dinos*, or dinosaurs. As Roderic Camp (1999: 122) points out that the *técnocos* have replaced the traditional politicians; have devaluated their skills and experiences, primarily their electoral and party experiences, and have opposed their unprogressive authoritarian practices with modernizing political and economic alternatives."

On the surface, it would appear that Mexico and China do not have a lot in common. Mexico's 97 million people dull in comparison to China's 1.26 billion. Mexico is a member of the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, a group of wealthy nations), with per capita real GNP (measured at PPP$) of $8,000 compared with $3,000 in China (World Bank 2001). China is a major power, while Mexico role in the global economy and power structure rooted in European colonialism, remains marginal. Despite such

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[1] In Mexico, technocrats are called by a variety of names ranging from *técnicos, tecnócratas,* techno-politicians, political technocrats, to technopols.

differences, similarities between the two are surprisingly strong. Neither Mexico nor China has any historical legacy of democracy, in spite of fact that both underwent revolutions around the year 1910. Over the past two decades, Mexico and China have undergone substantial economic and political changes. Elites in those societies have engaged in a remarkable and often puzzling process of change – a simultaneous industrial, social, and economic revolution.

Both Mexico and China have instituted far-reaching economic reforms – trade liberalization, deregulation, and the privatization of state owned companies. These economic reforms have represented, in both cases, fundamental departures from earlier practices. In the first stage of the reforms, the two countries moved in very similar directions, and for quite similar reasons. Elites in two countries share a common goal: fostering rapid economic growth without changing current political system. In definition, Mexico's political system is a far cry from Communist regime. But the practicality of the corporatist structure of the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) has indeed been labeled the "possible future of the Communist Party of China (CCP)." The PRI is always far more than a political party. It was a system of government and of social organizations that had its roots in every corner of Mexican life. Moreover, Mexico under Salinas and the post-Mao Chinese leadership choose to promote economic development before tackling political reform.

Despite the fact that recent works of political science put more emphases on cross-national comparison, comparative analysis of technocrats has been generally neglected. It is interesting to note in the wake of the technocratic revolution, 71 years of one-party rule in Mexico was ended.[2] Could this happen in China and other developing countries? The study of the phenomenon, however, is insufficient and controversial since the conventional wisdoms seem to suggest that technocrats are less likely to promote democracy.[3]

What is the nature of these technocratic elites? How does expertise influence the distribution of power over policy and decision-making? What happens when experts have power? Does tactics of political control change radically with the change of the new elites? What are the roles played by the elite in the process of democratization that is transforming political institutions in Mexico and China? What are the implications of technocratic policy-making in the transition to democracy? These are the questions to be examined in this paper.

It should be noted that there are many factors behind the political changes in China and Mexico in the past two decades, yet the focal point of this paper is on the rise of the technocrats and their impacts on the two societies. Although the focus of this study is on China and Mexico, the conclusion of this paper will have broader implications for other developing countries, where the technocrats are playing an increasingly important role in the socio-economic transformation.

1. DEFINING THE TECHNOCRATS

Max Weber (1946) tended to think of powerholders in contemporary states as either bureaucrats or politicians. The bureaucrats take pride in skilled service and the responsible

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[2] For detailed discussion on the technocratic revolution in Mexico, see Miguel Centeno, *Democracy Within Reason: Technocratic Revolution in Mexico* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

[3] Jean Meynaud, *Technocracy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968).

politicians take pride in successful defense of group interests. With the dramatic social and economic transformation in China and Mexico, there has been a speedy growth of technocrats. Like so many other concepts used in the social science, the term "technocrat" is far from having a universally accepted definition. In this study, the technocrats are defined as engineer or economist-turned-politicians. The technocrats have three traits: technical educations, professional experience, and high posts. In a more inclusive degree, the category of technocrats also includes experts in economics and finance.

Research on technocrats in Latin America tends to focus on contemporary examples. Yet, the technocratic phenomenon has roots that go back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Baud 1997: 13). The *cientfficos* came to dominant political leadership in the 1890s and 1900s. This group shares many features with the contemporary *técnicos*. For example, they were highly educated, they were upper-middle-class in social origins, and they were prominent professionals. This group of elites came to dominate the "technical" agencies of their era: treasury, industry, and commerce (Camp 1997: 199).

Technocrats also have historical roots in China. Traditional China was a meritocratic society. To become a scholar-official (*shidafu*) was the highest goal for almost everyone. Even under Mao, there were many technical cadres (*jishu ganbus*) in *danweis* (work units), whose job responsibilities include producing the scientific data, analyzing results, and providing policy recommendations to the decision-makers.[4] Yet, those *jishu ganbus* were more likely to be non-party members and had little role in decision-making.

A likely Mexican technocrat will have grown up in an upper-middle-class family in Mexico City, attended the Instituto Politécnico Nacional, gone to National Autonomous University of Mexico (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México or UNAM for short), done graduate study at a prestigious university abroad (Harvard, Stanford, Cambridge, etc.), then immediately found a medium-to-high level in the national bureaucracy, either in a ministry or in the semi-public sector (Smith 1986: 103). As the result of specialized education and experiences abroad, their attitude suggests that western technology can solve most human and social problems. Their view is further enhanced by a belief that what Mexico needs most is good administration, a concept synonymous with efficiency (Camp 1985: 111).

Compared to traditional politicians, today's Mexican technocrats have little direct experience with the masses, or for that matter, comparatively little experience with making political decisions and bargaining with other politicians. The technocrats do not emerge as a roughly homogeneous class. Although they differ in outlooks and opinions among themselves, they share one thing in common: a standard ticket for admission into decision-making circles (Smith 1986: 103).

2. EMERGENCE OF TECHNOCRATS

Mexico represents perhaps the most extreme case of rule by a technocratic elite, in which persons have managed increasingly to control both bureaucratic and political institutions

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[4] For more discussion of *danwei*, see Lowell Dittmer, "Personal Politics in the Chinese 'Danwei' under Reform," *Asian Survey*, 36, no. 3 (March 1996): 246–267 and Xiaobo Lu and Elizabeth Perry eds., *Danwei: the Changing Chinese Workplace in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1997).

(Centeno 1993: 315). The Chinese technocrats were formed by relatively heterogeneous groups of individuals recruited from a variety of professional, regional, and educational sources. The line between technocrats and politicians has been blurred, but clearly expertise plays a major role in determining access to key posts.

The changing character of elites in China and Mexico is part and parcel of reformed political systems in those two countries. Massive elite transformation has been prominent in China. In China, the technocrats came to power in the 1980s, while in Mexico they emerged at the beginning of the 1970s, and increased their number significantly in the 1980s and 1990s (See Table 1).

Table 1. Rise and Decline of Technocrats in Mexico and China

Ruling Elites Mexico	Ruling Elites China
Políticos Prior to 1980	Revolutionary cadres Prior to 1980
Technocrats From 1980 to 2000	Technocrats Since 1980
Transition from technocrats to popularly elected politicians Since 2000	

They have played a key role in policy formation; old elites – revolutionary cadres in China and party bureaucrats or *políticos* in Mexico – have been replaced by technocrats (Centeno 1994; Lee 1991).

Analysts of Mexican and Chinese public bureaucracies (Camp 1999; Centeno 1994; Lee 1991; Li and White 1998) are in agreement that power of technocrats in decision and policy making is increasing. The economists' role as ideological "vanguardists" has been favored by the fact that the popularity of governments is increasingly linked to the outcomes of economic policies. Those with political ambitions now search professional credentials in economics. It has become almost unthinkable that a person without advanced degree in economics could head government economic/planning agencies. It would be equally unlikely for a prominent government economist to remain politically independent. Therefore, the technocrats are also called political technocrats by a number of scholars (Camp 1999; Centeno 1994). It is important to question, however, what explains the rise of their power?

The origins of technocratic revolution lie in the economic and political crises. Like its counterparts in the Southern Cone, the Mexican regime in 1970 faced both an accumulation crisis stemming from the exhaustion of Import-Substitution-Industrialization (ISI) and a legitimacy crisis brought to a head by the government's shooting of several hundred student demonstrators in 1968 (Centeno 1994: 46).

Similarly, China was facing severe social and economic crisis in the wake of the Cultural

Revolution. The Cultural Revolution also made a shambles of the Chinese legal system, one that left a broken framework for law and its enforcement in China. The Maoist cadre recruitment policy was reversed soon after Deng Xiaoping moved to the top of the power structure in the late 1970s. As the CCP abandoned class struggle as its core task and shifted to economic modernization, it first weeded out those whose radical tendencies made them unlikely supporters of reform and also rehabilitated the victims of past political campaigns, especially the anti-rightist movement of 1956–1957 and the Cultural Revolution of 1966–1976. These victims were generally too old and poorly educated to guarantee the success of reform, so the CCP also recruited those who were "more revolutionary, younger, better educated, and more professionally competent." An important part of this elite transformation has been played by top political elites, which have sought to manage the process of transformation with a view to establishing their positions and limiting the disruption.

Table 2. Technocrats' Representation in High Level Chinese Leadership (1982–1997)

	Ministers		Provincial Secretaries		Provincial Governors		Central Committee Full Members	
Year	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1982	1	2	0	0	0	0	4	2
1987	17	45	7	25	8	33	34	26
1997	28	70	23	74	24	77	98	51

Source: Cheng Li, 2001, *China's Leaders: The New Generation,* Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers: 41.

Hong Yung Lee, who has exhaustively studied the transformation of the Chinese cadre structure, states that by the time of the Thirteenth Party Congress in 1987 the "process of elite transformation was nearly completed" and that "almost all leading positions, from the highest level to the basic level, were filled by the bureaucratic technocrats."[5] By the time of the Fifteenth Party Congress in 1997, the percentage of party members with a senior high school or better education was 43.4 percent, up from 12.8 percent in 1978, and 92 percent of central committee members now have at least some college education (Dickson 2001: 523). The meteoric rise of technocrats among top leaders is presented in Table 2. In the Twelfth Party Congress in 1982, technocrats accounted for just 2 percent, but by 1987 they were 25 percent, and over half by 1997. That percentage is expected to increase further in the 16th

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[5] Hong Yung Lee, *From Revolutionary Cadres to Party Technocrats in Socialist China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). See also Hong Yung Lee, "China's New Bureaucracy," In Arthur Lewis Rosenbaum ed., *State and Society in China: The Consequences of Reform* (Boulder, CO: Westview 1992), p. 56.

CCP Congress to be held in 2002.

Second, as the economy grew in size and complexity, the need for expert bureaucrats expanded accordingly. The professional discipline most strongly identified with technocrats is economics. This is not accidental. Economics is associated with the state's growth and its responsibility for macro-economic policy. The success of the economic reforms in these two countries rests largely upon the ability of the governing elite (most of them are technocrats) to control events and to keep the economic motor running at a high rate. According to Hong Yung Lee, the presence of technocrats in the party and government bureaucracies better balances "the political needs of the Leninist party and the structural prerequisites of economic development."[6]

Third, the rise of technocrats would have been impossible without the maintenance of a complex system of interlocking networks of patron-client relationships popularly known as *camarilla* in Mexico.[7] These *camarillas* provided the channels through which the new elite came to power, and they have been central to the stability and cronyism, ideological and otherwise, of Mexican politics for decades (Ratliff 1999: 103). Equally significant, Mexico's political leadership became the primary mentors to successive generations of politicians, perpetuating the importance of educational credentials, of intellectual points of view, and of the institution itself (Camp 1997: 200). President Echeverría (1970–76) effectively skipped an entire generation of Mexican leaders by giving positions of responsibility to many young, well-educated specialists who had almost no political experience (Camp 1985: 111–112). López Portillo set in motion the entrenchment of a younger, distinct national politician by naming his former student Miguel de la Madrid his successor. De la Madrid (1982–1988) was a professional public servant, product of a capital city, national executive branch career confined to economic agencies, and a recipient of graduate, Ivy League abroad. In choosing a cabinet with similar credentials, de la Madrid effectively determined the most influential nodes of recruitment among subordinate figures, those emerging as the contemporary technocratic generation, those born in the period of 1950–69 (Camp 1997: 203). The technocrats in Mexico reached their apex under Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988–1994). Table 3 supplies an overview of the technocrats during the Zedillo administration (1994–2000), which shows the Zedillo's cabinet shared technocratic characteristics.

As in the case of Mexico, the Chinese technocrats came to power not only through administrative channels and educational credential but also through personal networks or connections (*guanxi*). Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin have played a critical role in promoting technocrats to the top state and party positions. It is widely known that a large portion of top leadership posts in both the Party and state, in both central and provincial government, are occupied by graduates of the Qinghua University, China's leading engineering school.[8] In addition to school ties, *taizi* (children of high-ranking official) background, *mishu* (personal secretary) experience, business affiliation, and birthplace ties (such as the Shanghai gang), are also important factors in the recruitment of the Chinese new elites.

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[6] Hong Yung Lee, "China's New Bureaucracy," In Arthur Lewis Rosenbaum ed. *State and Society in China: The Consequences of Reform* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview 1992), p. 2.

[7] A *camarilla* is a group of people who have political interests in common and rely on one another to improve their chances within the political leadership.

[8] For detailed discussion on the Qinghua graduates in China's leadership, see Cheng Li, "University Networks and the Rise of Qinghua Graduates in China's Leadership," *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no. 32 (July 1994): 1–32.

Table 3. General Characteristics of the Zedillo Cabinet (1994–2000)

Place of Origin		
Federal District		Province
68%		32%
University Attended		
Private		Public
18%		82%
Undergraduate Degree		
Economics	Law	others
36%	32%	32%
Graduate Work Abroad		
United States		England/Europe
50%		32%
Executive Experience Under Salinas		
Cabinet		Subcabinet
9%		36%
Electoral Experience		
Elective Office		None
23%		77%

Source: Roderic A. Camp, 1999, *Politics in Mexico: The Decline of Authoritarianism,* New York: Oxford University Press: 123.

Finally, the growth of technocrats is also the result of change of power base of the ruling parties in China and Mexico. In the 1990s, the PRI moved its power base toward capitalists and professional-managerial class, while opening Mexico to the world economy. For a long time, peasants and labor unions were essential to the power base of the PRI. This was altered under the technocratic revolution. In a speech in 1989, Governor José Francisco Ruiz Massieu, a close friend of Salinas, described the redefinition of the PRI as involving understanding with business, the Church, and intellectuals, and he never once mentioned the urban poor or the peasants.[9]

In contrast to the Marxist notion that the communist party should be the vanguard of the working class, in early 2000, Jiang Zemin argued that the CCP should distinguish itself by representing the developmental need of advanced forces of production, the forward direction of advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the majority of the Chinese people – a plan called the "three representations" (*sange daibiao*) for short. With its emphasis on

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[9] "El partido," in Diego Valadés and Mario Ruiz Massieu, *La transformción del estado mexicano*, 1989, quoted in Centedo, *Democracy Within Reason*, p. 223.

technological revolution and economic globalization, the three representations concept broadened the CCP's power base to include intellectuals, entrepreneurs, and technocrats.

On July 1, 2001, Mr. Jiang announced that newly prominent groups such as private-company owners, high-tech innovators, and managers in foreign businesses were helping to build Chinese socialism, and so should be welcomed into the party. This ideological change is not only consistent with the elite transformation during the reform era but also heralds a more urgent effort to recruit young and well-educated technical and economic specialists into the CCP leadership at the 16th Party Congress scheduled for 2002. If the goal of "the three representations" is to produce a new vision and a new legitimacy for the CCP – and if this policy is adopted at the 16th Party Congress in 2002 – a new wave of elite transformation will take place (Li 2001: 88). In short, the technocrats have been increasing numerically in the Chinese political system. This trend is unlikely to be reversed in the foreseeable future.

3. TECHNOCRATS AND NATIONALISM

Technocrats, because of their foreign training, are frequently accused of being less nationalistic than politicians. These assertions are based on the belief that recent economic changes – particularly privatization and reduced protectionism, which culminated in the implementation of the North American Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 – are not only technocratic but also clearly antinationalistic. It is common for scholars and journalists in Mexico to attribute these economic changes to the rise to power of technocrats (Lindau 1996: 310–311)

Salinas advocated economic liberalization, which he defined as increased control of the economy by the private sector, more extensive foreign investment, and internationalization of the Mexican economy through expanded trade and formal commercial relationship with the United States and Canada. Salinas and his successor Zedillo are considered strong advocates of globalization (Salinas 1991; Zedillo 2001). Zedillo's critics charge that his economic cabinet lack political skills, which led to disastrous devaluation in 1994–1995. Similarly, Zhu Rongji, Chinese premier, was accused of being a "traitor" for giving too many concessions in the WTO (World Trade Organization) negotiation with Washington.[10]

In the past two decades, China and Mexico have experienced an unprecedented degree of integration with the global economy. They have been endeavoring to upgrade their national technological policies at exactly the time when technology and production have become more global in nature. In spite of that, the technocrats in these two countries have not been less nationalistic. Technocrats tend to ascribe to what U.S. economist Robert B. Reich calls "techno-nationalism."[11] Techno-nationalism emphasizes competitiveness among nation-states as the result of scientific and technological development. Technological strength is seen as one of the most important determinants of the rise and fall of major powers (Li 2001b: 195).

There are three main reasons that the elites choose to embrace techno-nationalism. First,

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[10] "Ready for the Competition," *Economist*, September 15, 2001, p. 35.

[11] Robert B. Reich, "The Rise of Techno-Nationalism," *Atlantic Monthly,* 259, no. 5 (May 1987): 63–69.   For more extensive discussion on the topic see Sylvia Ostry and Richard Nelson, *Technonationalism and Techno-Globalism: Conflict and Cooperation* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1995) and Eric Heginbotham and Richard Samuels, "Mercantile Realism and Japanese Foreign Policy," *International Security*, (Spring 1998), 22, no. 4, pp. 171-202.

they believe that it is in their countries' best interest to be a strong contender in the international economy and technological competition. Therefore, they will embrace globalization, but not at the expense of national interests. In fact, economic nationalism showed itself in a number of ways in these two countries.

The second reason is historical. Mexican history has been marked by repeated foreign military interventions and a long exposure to predatory foreign economic interests. Nationalism has been one of the major themes of the Mexican Revolution. Therefore, anti-foreign sentiments have run deep. Much of this nationalistic feeling has been directed toward the United States due to the two countries' geographical proximity and bilateral history. For all these reasons, policies that emphasized Mexican sovereignty and its independence from the United States have been widely supported.

Chinese nationalism is also deep rooted in its long unhappy encounter with the West since 1840. Chinese history in the past 150 years is full of extensive foreign invasion, unequal treaties imposed by the western powers, and loss of territories – all of which are considered the most shameful period in the Chinese history. From the Opium War of the early 1840s to the Sino-Japanese War and the Boxer Rebellion at the century's end, China suffered a host of defeats and indignities that fueled the protracted nationalist revolution that the CCP ultimately rode to power. The historical experience of the two countries with the Western powers has taught the elites that they need to maintain their autonomy and sovereignty. Hence, it would be a political suicide for either Beijing or Mexico City to show any sign of weakness in dealing with the West.

Third, nationalism has served the governments well. It supported tough actions such as the nationalization of private banks in Mexico in 1982. In China, nationalism has become a substitute for communism as an ideology providing legitimacy for the regime. China's five thousand years of "glorious history" are now celebrated. Confucius has been revived, Sun Yet-sen is accorded full honor. Even socialism must have "Chinese characteristic." In 1974, when Michel Oksenberg and Steven Goldstein surveyed the political spectrum of the Party leadership, they could find no one supportive of traditional Chinese culture.[12] Today, however, the Party has come to terms with Chinese tradition and Confucianism, and even views them as bastions of support against those who criticize Chinese culture from perspective of "wholesale Westernization (Fewsmith 2001: 28). The CCP is likely to continue to use nationalism as the most effective means of stimulating loyalty and support.[13]

In sum, the technocrats in these two societies have a cosmopolitan nationalist approach to interactions with the outside world. They are not "protectionist" nationalists but nationalists with the ambition to compete successfully in a relentlessly demanding, rapidly changing, and ever more intrusive global economy.

4. TECHNOCRATS AND DECLINE OF AUTHORITARIANISM

A major development in comparative politics relevant to the study of elite has been the analysis of authoritarianism and bureaucratic authoritarianism (O'Donnell 1979). The theory

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[12] Michel Oksenberg and Steven Goldstein, "The Chinese Political Spectrum," *Problems of Communism*, 23 (March-April 1974): 1-13.

[13] For instance, after the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade in May 1999, student demonstrations were both encouraged and controlled.

of bureaucratic authoritarianism (also known as the B-A model) raised the hypothesis that "in late-developing nations, more advanced level of industrialization may coincide with the collapse of democracy and an increase in inequality."[14] According to this argument, a certain stage of industrialization in late-developing countries, popular democracy that breeds strikes, demonstrations, and disorder may become intolerable to the industrial elite (technocrats and the military). These elites will then restore authoritarian rule in order to continue industrialization.

Conventionally, technocrats are associated with authoritarianism and a dislike for the messiness of politics reflected in a desire to simplify the political arena, often through the exclusion and repression of different political actors. They are also described as less flexible, pragmatic, and willing to compromise than politicians and more prone to commit political mistakes and miscalculations (Meynaud 1968: 59, 211). Moreover, technocrats supposedly place more of an emphasis on planning; elevate economic over political criteria; and use sober, detailed, and technical language in their public pronouncements.[15]

Until the presidential victory of Vicente Fox, the Mexican political system had been characterized as a stable one-party system or state-party regime with a certain degree of legitimacy derived from its revolutionary legacy and from the economic growth since the 1940s. Political power is less available to aspiring members of the laboring and lower-middle classes, while it is more tightly controlled by the upper and upper-middle classes (Smith 1986: 111). The process of "disorganization" of civil society was not one of exclusion but incorporation of substantial major groups – working class, peasantry, popular sectors – into corporate party-state structure. Through this structure and a combination of cooptation and repression, the Mexican state incorporated, weakened, or eliminated many groups and organizations of civil society.

However, in Mexico, the last two decades have not witnessed a clear increase in authoritarianism. Flexibility, pragmatism, and the willingness to compromise have not decreased. While political mistakes and miscalculations have arguably increased, it would be erroneous to link these problems to technocrats qua technocrats (Lindau 1996: 296). There is no indication that the recent Mexican administrations (de la Madrid, Salinas, and Zedillo) responded with more repression to civil unrest than their predecessors. None of these administrations, came close to approaching the levels of violence and repression against labor that were reached when the government savagely suppressed the railway workers union in 1958; or against the student movement in 1968 when the army massacred hundreds of students during a demonstration at the Plaza of Tlatelolco in Mexico City.

In China, the technocrats are more pragmatic than revolutionary cadres, and most of them have been following Deng Xiaoping's oft-quoted advice to concentrate on the quality, not the color of the cat. Despite severe defects in the Chinese political system, the past two decades have witnessed the transition from totalitarianism to soft authoritarianism. Civil liberties have improved. The CCP has sponsored the creation of numerous civil and professional associations to both liberalize social life and promote economic development.

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[14] David Collier ed., *The New Authoritarianism in Latin America* (Princeton: N.J: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 1-31.

[15] Fred A. Kramer, "Policy Analysis as Ideology," *Public Administration Review,* 35 (September/October 1975): 509; Guy Benveniste, *Bureaucracy and National Planning: A Sociological Case Study of Mexico* (New York: Praeger, 1970), p. 20; Roderic A. Camp, "The Political Technocrat in Mexico and the Survival of the Political System," *Latin American Research Review,* 20, no. 1 (1985): 110; "El dulce encanto de la tecnocracia," *Proceso*, (September 10, 1984): 36.

The growth of these organizations in China has created a great deal of excitement among outside observers. Many see these organizations as forming the foundation of civil society, a key component of liberal democratic government.[16]

One may observe scores of positive developments in China. Between the late 1980s and the mid 1990s the number of lawyers nearly tripled (Pei 1998). Private law firms came into existence. It has even happened that official decisions have been challenged in court. Generally speaking, the Chinese society is far freer from ideological and political controls than at any time since 1949. Meanwhile, corporatist structures are emerging in China as a substitute for coercion, propaganda, and central planning to maintain party hegemony (Dickson 2001: 532). In short, along with the technocratic revolution, Mexico and China are no more than they were two decades ago.

5. TECHNOCRATS AND THE TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

One school of scholars contends that technocratic elites do not necessarily pose a danger to democracy. This tradition, exemplified by the work of James Burham sees the development of technocratic ideology based on instrumental reason as means to end social conflict, thereby facilitating democratic practices.[17] Other analysts including Daniel Bell, Don Price, and John Kenneth Galbraith contend that the technocratic elite would either prove unable to challenge political leadership or would be transformed by its participation in governance.[18] Jean Meynaud (1968: 58) holds that technocracy seems opposed or hostile to the idea of democracy, as it is understood in industrial, pluralist societies.[19] The present moment – of third wave of democracy and of a new ascent to power by technocrats – provides an opportunity to examine the above-mentioned ideas in practice.

Salinas advocated political liberalization, which he defined as including more citizen participation in elections, greater electoral competition, and integrity in the voting process – all features associated with the United States and European liberal political traditions. After his 1988 election Salinas enacted numerous "reforms" in an attempt to establish a fair electoral process. Nonetheless, until 2000 the PRI retained an inordinate advantage over its rival parties.

In the wake of the Chiapas uprising in 1994 (one of the rebels' core demands was democracy), the Salinas administration granted autonomy to the Federal Electoral Institute, the institution charged with overseeing national elections. This change dramatically reduced the capacity of the PRI to manipulate the vote count on election day, one of the party's traditional tactics and the one which saved the presidency in 1988. The popular vote was all but meaningless until 1999, because the PRI candidate always won, and he was chosen as

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[16] Martin Whyte, "Urban China: A Civil Society in the Making?" and Dorethy Solinger, "Urban Entrepreneurs and the State: The Merger of State and Society," both in Arthur Lewis Rosenbaum ed., *State and Society in China: The Consequences of Reform* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1992).

[17] James Burhnam, *The Managerial Society* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1960).

[18] Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post Industrial Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1976); John Galbraith, *The New Industrial State*, 4th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985); Don Price, *The Scientific Estate* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1965).

[19] Meynaud, *Technocracy*, p. 58.

candidate not through a democratic primary process, but through a secret selection election process within the PRI known as *dedazo* or "big finger".[20]

Under the pressure from opposition parties and interest groups, Ernesto Zedillo, who took office on December 1, 1994, increased the pace of political reforms. The primary goal of Zedillo's political reform platform was to democratize the electoral system. To that end, all four major national parties were signatories of the Agreement on Fundamental Democratic Advances in Electoral Issues and in the Federal District signed on July 25, 1996. The agreement includes provisions for greater fairness in access to public financing, improved controls over campaign expenditures, full constitutional autonomy for the Federal Electoral Institute, and incorporation of the Federal Electoral Court into the judicial branch. It also creates judicial mechanisms that will protect the political rights of citizens and the constitutionality of federal and local electoral laws. Finally, it extends the right to vote to Mexicans who live abroad, and provides for direct election of the Executive of the Federal District.

The results of these reforms have been astonishing. Until 1989, the PRI had never lost a state election. Since 1999, it has won only one state (Tabasco in August 2001), and its lingering hold on Mexico's states is slipping away. On the night of July 2, 2000 as Vicente Fox Quesada declared victory in Mexico's presidential election – becoming the first opposition candidate to defeat the ruling PRI in 71 years. Reactions to Fox's victory conveyed a sense of the dramatic overthrow of the old order. Senator-elect Carlos Medina Placencia of the National Action Party (PAN) compared the PRI's loss to the "fall of the Berlin Wall" (Grayson 2001: 3-4).

President Ernesto Zedillo (1994–2000) played an important role in democratic transition. He was the first "nine-fingered" president – he would forgo the *dedazo* and allow the PRI presidential contender to be chosen in a primary open to all voters (Grayson 2001: 16). He was prepared to turn over the reins of government to an opposition leader. Not only did he create an independent electoral authority, which ensured that recent presidential vote was the cleanest ever in Mexico. His swift acknowledgment of election night of the Mr. Fox's victory also avoided any possibility that lingering uncertainty might lead to violence. Immediately after election, Zedillo directed his cabinet and the 21 PRI governors to work closely with Fox's transition staff to ensure a smooth changing of the guard.

It is widely known that the Chinese political reform lags behind the economic changes. Compared with Mexico, the Chinese reforms have been executed more cautiously and more slowly. Yet, there have some been dramatic changes in the political realm as well. China today is far more open, far more stable, and far more prosperous than at any time in her recent history. Some have argued that the technocrats are more likely to favor democratization than the revolutionary cadres they replaced; others have argued that technocracy will only lead to a more efficient form of authoritarianism.[21]

Dickson observed that technocrats and entrepreneurs could play a supporting role in the course of political change (Dickson 2001: 530). At the grassroots level where the majority of the Chinese (peasants) live, Beijing has focused on restructuring rural governance by introducing rural democracy. At the village level, but not yet in big cities, provinces or at the national level, elections of officials have become more frequent in the 1990s (Rowen 1996;

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[20] President Ernesto Zedillo is the first post-revolutionary president to renounce the privilege of designating his own successor.

[21] Personal interviews in Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen, China in the summer of 2000.

Shi 1999; Zweig 1999). Of course, there is a significant variation in the freedom and fairness of these elections from place to place. But one may regard them as first, tentative steps toward democratization. Indeed, rapid development of rural elections has caught worldwide attention and produced enormous enthusiasm about Chinese democratization. For many observers, the birth of the rural election system can serve as a starting point of the Chinese style of democratization, that is, democracy from below (Zheng 1999: 1170). During the past decade, genuine elections (with some limits) have been adopted at various levels of Party Congresses and people's congresses, from the grassroots to the top. Deputies of these congresses have used their voting power to effectively block the election of *taizi* and other kinds of beneficiaries of nepotism and favoritism (Li 2001b: 170).

Over the years, the leadership has quietly allowed grassroots democracy in the rural areas to grow and spread through direct election. With continuous adjustment, the Chinese political system tends to show its flexibility by being more accommodating towards social changes and democratic developments (Zheng 1999: 1174). As happened in Taiwan earlier, grassroots democracy will be expanded to higher levels, and elections at the national level will eventually occur.

In his speech marking the 80th anniversary of the CCP's founding (July 1, 2001), Jiang Zemin states the CCP should welcome capitalist entrepreneurs as its members. Communist Party hard-liners have lashed out at Jiang, warning that his recent comments opening the door for capitalists to join the party could lead to its collapse. They compared Jiang to the last leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail S. Gorbachev, whom China's leftists consider a traitor to the Communist cause (Kuhn 2001). Many in China said quietly when a communist party starts seeking capitalist entrepreneurs as its members, you can safely say that it is dead even if its beneficiaries won't let it die. [22]

Technocrats, in general, are more likely to promote market-oriented reform. A quick glance at Table 4 shows the major market reforms under the technocratic revolutions in China and Mexico. As Centeno (1994: 75) observed the reforms of these years "would have been impossible without a small nucleus inside the bureaucracy able to establish internal ideological homogeneity and to impose that vision on the rest of the regime."

The new political elites (most of them are technocrats) are more cosmopolitan (they are especially knowledgeable about the West), competent, and flexible. The pace of political liberalization and institutionalization is expected to quicken once this new generation achieves political dominance (Pei 1994: 101). The future of democratization in China seems bright, as its market-driven economic reforms and integration with global market seem likely to continue. China's soft authoritarianism will become softer, and more democratic elements are expected to be introduced.

As Jorge Domínques (1997: 36) notes that for most part, the technocrats have sought to deepen democracy because obtaining the consent of the governed, especially the actual or potential partisan or sectoral opposition, is the most effective way in the long run to consolidate their preferred economic policies. In his study on Mexican technocrats, Camp (1997) argues that under certain circumstance technocracy may serve as an antecedent to democracy.

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[22] Interviews in Beijing, China in December 2001.

Table 4. Market Reform under Technocratic Revolution in China and Mexico

	Foreign Trade	Industry	Agriculture	Income Distribution
Mexico	From ISI to trade liberalization	Privatization	From communal *ejidos* to commercialization of agriculture	From "shared-development model" to "growth-oriented model"
China	From self-reliance to open door policy	Introduction of stock holding system	From People's Commune to household responsibility system	From equalitarian model to "To get rich is glory"

6. LIMITS OF TECHNOCRATS

Mexico is a centralized political system with power historically concentrated in the hands of president. But the president did not make decisions in a vacuum but reacted to pressures for democratization. As Chand rightly observes that the primary source of democratization stemmed from pressures by the citizenry, opposition political parties, the Church, and civic associations. These pressures in turn explain why the regime chose to follow a course of political opening (Chand 2001: 285).

Some scholars have seen the inclusion of technocrats into the political system as a positive development (Li 2001; Dickson 2001). Are traditional politicians doomed to extinction after being "selected out," replaced by skilled and ambitious technocrats? Let us look at the case of Mexico first. Since the presidential election in 2000, Mexico has witnessed the decline of political power of technocrats. Current president Fox does not fall into the technocratic category. By appointing mostly members of the business community, the president radically departed from the traditional cabinet-making process, whereby most ministers were chosen from the technocratic civil service formed by the PRI. The technocrats only control the top economic positions, including Luis Ernesto Derbez, economic secretary, and Francisco Gil Diaz, secretary of finance and public credit. If the PRI does not rescind its requirement for prior elective experience, even if the PRI retakes the power in Mexico City, there won't be predominance of technocrats in the Mexican government. [23]

Generally speaking, technocrats are more interested in implementation of market reform rather than political reforms. Centeno (1994: 228) holds that their economics were capitalist, but their politics were Leninist. Instead of using democratic opening as means of consolidating economic reform, Mexico's technocrats were confident that they could justify delaying political opening by playing up the results – real and expected – of economic

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[23] The PRI 17th party convention decided candidates of cabinets now have to be party members for at least ten years and have held elective office.

reforms as the public's reward for its patience (Golob 1997: 101).

Salinas could have opened up Mexico's politics. Salinas decided, an adviser says in the true language of technocrats, to wait for "economic reform to create a deeper-rooted tendency for the evolution to democracy."[24] China has pursued a similar policy that emphasizes economic reform and stimulus before political reform.[25] Deng and the party elders in the late 1970s believed they could import Western science, technology, and some economic practices while still maintaining the Leninist political system. Politically, the stability of China rests largely upon the ability of the governing elite to control events and to keep the economic motor running at a high rate.

As Alfred Stepan points out, technocratic elites often have chameleon-like qualities that allow them to serve various political masters.[26] This may be the result of either pragmatic adaptation to the ruling ideology or the fact that, within a technocratic pool, adherents of various political beliefs maybe found, leading over time to a circulation of technical elites (Centeno 1993: 312).

Mexico is now touted as an example for regimes in the Third World to emulate.[27] The Mexican experience shows that the rise of civil technocrats has a positive impact on the market reform and the transition to democracy. The trend of technocracy gives hope to some that economic reform will eventually lead to gradual political change, allowing China's transition from communism to be more like Mexico and thereby avoid the turmoil that accompanied political change in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.[28] Could similar transition from technocracy to democracy happen in China? There are several factors we need to consider.

First, in the foreseeable future, the CCP will retain dominance, with other parties and political forces shaped and controlled by this fact. The old Leninist system dies slowly. Both the party and government will be strongly elitist, but the nature of the elite will continue to be altered, as noted earlier, with specialists and technocrats playing ever more important roles (Scalapino 1998: 39).

Second, the Chinese bureaucratic technocrats are not enthusiastic about political democratization (Lee 1992: 71). Moreover, most Chinese technocrats were trained at home, the former Soviet Union, or Eastern Europe.[29] Unlike their counterparts in Mexico, many of whom received college or graduate degrees in the United States and other Western countries, the Chinese technocrats lack exposure to alternative political values and institutional arrangements. In a recent interview with *the New York Times*, Jiang Zemin said "should China apply the parliamentary democracy of the Western world, the only result will be that 1.2 billion Chinese people will not have enough food to eat. The result will be great chaos,

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[24] Michael Elliott, "Mexico's Fatal Error," *Newsweek,* 123, no. 12 (April 4, 1992): 34.

[25] Interestingly, one of the major slogans of the Chinese Communist Party under Deng was "yao liang shuo ying": deepening economic reform on the one hand and consolidating political control on the other. Central to the former is autonomy and decentralization and central to the latter is control and coordination.

[26] Alfred Stepan, *State and Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 57.

[27] Mexico is perhaps one of the best examples of a "markets-first-and-then-democracy" transformation.

[28] Personal interview with Chinese scholars at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in December 2001.

[29] Seven out of twenty-two current full Politburo members (32 percent) studied in the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries, including standing members of the Politburo: Jiang Zemin, Li Peng, Wei Jianxing, and Li Lanqing.

and should that happen, it will not be conducive to world peace and stability."[30] Nevertheless, younger technocrats have been acquiring more exposure to the West and in the future may be more open to adaptation.

The marginalization of the PRI is one of the most distinctive developments since the 1970s. Although public debate has focused on internal party democracy (above all on the manner of presidential selection) and electoral fraud, Centeno notes that the party's corporatist structure, so fundamental to Mexico's twentieth-century political stability, has become largely an empty shell. One-fourth of the technological elites who dominate the bureaucracy are not even card-carrying party members, and those who are party activists are involved only in the party's "think tank." By the 1980s most cabinet members had no formal party ties. Instead, they had a technocratic background: postgraduate degrees, especially in economics, from foreign universities (Centeno 1994: 125-126). This represents a major difference between the Mexican political technocrats and their counterparts in China. While the former build their power bases in the state bureaucracy, the Chinese technocrats construct their political careers within the CCP and they are almost all simultaneously party officials.

The CCP exercises extensive political control mainly by keeping a firm hand on the selection, promotion, and removal of local officials. Notwithstanding the economic and political decentralization programs, the central government appoints top provincial leaders and monitors the selection of departmental officials. Its appointment and monitoring powers are continually being increased. Central power is also maintained by rotating local officials among different provinces, selectively integrating them into central political apparatus, and other strategic techniques (Huang 1996: 309).

For many years, Mexico has allowed, even encourage, opposition parties (Handleman, 1999: 220). So far the CCP refuses to open that "Pandora's box." Despite its policies of inclusion, the central fact of the China's political system remains that it is ruled by a Leninist party. The party enjoys and protects its monopoly of political organization (Dickson 2001: 535). For instance, the CCP has allowed the All-China Federation of Trade Unions in recent years to advocate strongly the interest of labor in the policy and legislative process, but it has also imprisoned those who advocate the formation of independent trade unions. Corporatist features are clearly emerging in China as a substitute for the CCP's more totalitarian impulse to control state and society in the Maoist years. In spite the fact that the technocrats have played a considerable role in opening up the Chinese society and they may also be essential allies of reformers, China is still far from establishing democratic system. The CCP is determined to crush any attempts to form an organized opposition. The recent severe and swift punishment of adherents of the *Falun Gong* (Buddhist Law Society) is a glaring example.

It has become apparent that the CCP is facing similar situation that leads to the downfall of the PRI, including corruption, income inequality, and civil unrest. Unlike the case of Mexico, Beijing shows considerable reluctance to move from economic to thorough political reforms. Jiang Zemin and his team consider that they have to avoid the steps KMT took in the mid-1980s, especially lifting the ban on political parties and on unofficial newspapers.[31] In other words, the challenge of reform is more daunting in China, which still has a long way to construct virtually the entire institutional apparatus to build a democracy.

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[30] Erik Eckholm, "Chinese President Expresses Optimism on Relations with U.S." *The New York Times*, (August 10, 2001): A8.
[31] *South China Morning Post*, April 22, 2000.

7. CONCLUSION

The technocrats are primarily concerned with promoting economic growth and to that end limiting the influence of ideology in policy making.[32] Overwhelming majority of technocrats have benefited from the neo-liberal reforms. Consequently, they have been the strong supporters of the economic reforms. A major hurdle to the political reform is the potential losers of the economic reforms, many of them are traditional bureaucrats (i.e. revolutionary cadres in China and *políticos* in Mexico). I share the view of Roderic Camp that the technocrats, per se, are neither democrats nor authoritarians. But individuals exist who can rightly described as members of a new generation of technocrats among those groups favoring rapid political democratization, regardless of their economic view (Camp 1997: 211).

Mark Williams (2001: 12-13) points out that whether it is the "Chicago Boys" of Pinochet's Chile, Mexico's "Ivy League" group, or the foreign trained "two -passport Turks" of Turkey, governments that implemented reforms most successfully did so through the work of skilled, competent technocrats who enjoyed strong executive support. The Mexican and Chinese political systems have undergone a quiet revolution in terms of both who rules and usage of state power. In these countries, the technocrats have been incorporated into the political system, they have been deliberately delaying the radical political reform, but democracy does not appear threatened by the role played by the technocrats. The fact that the achievement of democracy in China is still a distant prospect implies other contributing factors are also at work. Numerous studies (Diamond, Linz, and Lipset 1989; Huntington 1991; Lindau and Cheek 1998) have shown that transition to democracy depends on several critical factors. They include: the political will of top leadership, sufficient economic growth, an emerging middle class, civil society, strong pressure for democracy from below, as well as favorable international environment.

The influence of the technocrats is evident: Mexico and China have been the sites of radical economic liberalization processes in the world over the last two decades. Their political systems have also been subject to pressures for change, some of which have occurred. Yet, once economies have begun to flourish, and democracy begins to take root, it is questionable whether technocrats will exercise the same influence. In sum, the technocrats in China and Mexico played an important role in economic transformations and a supporting role in the course of slow and incremental political change, but they are not the determining factor in democratic transition.

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[32] Before the reform started in 1978, ideology had been the linchpin around which economic policy revolved.

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