It is a great pleasure and privilege to be here today. San Francisco has been one of my favorite cities. I have been to the prestigious Stanford University for several times. Last time when I was here, I had the chance to visit the Hoover Institution and see a good collection about the modern history of Taiwan and China, including the brightly colored election banners for our President Chen Shui-bian in his presidential campaigns, and also for Premier Su when he ran for Taipei County Governor.

I feel there is a unique link between your prestigious university and Taiwan, which makes it particularly fitting that I come to share my thoughts here today on the topic of democratization in both Taiwan and China.

The progress of democratization in China has long been an issue of global concern. As US President Bush pointed out in a speech delivered last November (2005) in Kyoto, the leaders of China are finding that “Once the door to freedom is opened even a crack, it cannot be closed.” President Bush therefore urged Beijing not to fear a free domestic society, but rather allow its people to enjoy complete freedom of speech and religion.

We in Taiwan hold the same expectations of Beijing, as both Taiwan and China are predominantly ethnic Chinese societies. Taiwan believes that democracy and freedom are universal values, and that the fulfillment of these values ensures the rights and dignity of the people. When people are empowered with the right to choose and to oversee the government through the ballot, a stabilizing force will naturally develop within the country.

Should China choose the path to full democracy, it would help its society keep moving forward
steadily. It would also contribute to peace and prosperity across the Taiwan Strait and in the rest of the Asia-Pacific region. Furthermore, democracy would act as a positive driving force for China to become a responsible stakeholder in the international society.

Before we start discussing the impacts of a democratic Taiwan on China, it would be worthwhile to review Taiwan’s own democratic development.

Riding on the waves of modern history, Taiwan has transformed itself from an authoritarian regime to a democratic polity. Now, Taiwan is recognized as a model of democracy in Asia. As one can expect, along the course, the people of Taiwan did encounter certain obstacles, twists and turns. Let me begin by briefing you on the milestones in Taiwan’s democratization.

Milestones in Taiwan’s Democratization

For the people of Taiwan, democracy, be it in principle or practice, had been an alien concept until recent decades. The first elections in the history of Taiwan took place at the local level some 70 years ago, when Taiwan was under Japanese rule. At that time, only male property holders, or less than 1% of the population, had full voting rights.

After World War II, Japan ended its rule and withdrew from Taiwan. The Nationalist government of the Republic of China assumed control over the island’s administration, and later relocated to Taiwan. Under the Nationalists, local elections continued to develop in terms of level and scope, but the national legislature lacked sufficient representation of the Taiwanese people.

The late 1980s marked a critical period for Taiwan’s democratization. It witnessed important political reforms, in particular the lifting of martial law in 1987. This marked the end of the semi-military rule lasting for four decades.

In 1988, the government lifted bans on the creation of new newspaper publications and political parties, and commenced enforcing “The Parade and Assembly Law” and “the Civic Organizations Law”. All these actions ushered in a new era of political liberalization.

In the following decade, first we saw a complete re-election of the national legislature in 1992, allowing for a drastic change of its power structure. Four years later in 1996, Taiwan held its first direct presidential election—the first of its kind in the history of all ethnic Chinese societies worldwide.
This election remains a key milestone in Taiwan’s democratization process, especially when one recalls that it was held despite direct threats from China in the form of missiles being test-fired near the major ports of Taiwan.

Rather than cower in fear, the people of Taiwan chose freedom and democracy. They safeguarded the success of Taiwan’s first ever direct presidential election. And they also had solid support from the US government, which dispatched 2 fleets of aircraft carriers to the vicinity of the Taiwan Strait in support of Taiwan’s cause.

The year 2000 presidential election was epochal in that it marked the first peaceful transfer of power between political parties in Taiwan. The opposition, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), won the election, putting to rest the half-century of one-party rule by the Kuomintang (KMT). The third-wave of democratization that began in the mid-1970s finally reached Taiwan in the last year of the 20th century.

The process of democratization has been defined by Professor Samuel Huntington as taking place in two phases: power transition characterized by democratic revolution, and the consolidation of democratic achievement.

From his observations on the development of third-wave democracies, Professor Huntington has concluded that, implementing democratic reforms in the consolidation phase is often more challenging than in the transition phase.

The countries embarking on democratization during the third wave have not always reached full democracy successfully. Taiwan, as one of the third-wave democracies, has indeed encountered several democratic crises and challenges over the years. Such hiccups in Taiwan’s democratization have caused some concern internationally.

Challenges to Democratization in Taiwan

From where do the challenges to Taiwan’s democratization arise? For the most part, they derive from the fact that, institutional reforms are unable to keep up with the changing environment. As an emerging democracy, many of our existing systems and operations remain weak and insufficient.

Moreover, the people have yet to learn to follow the rule of law. For a new democracy, it is all the more challenging to resolve controversies by democratic and judicial means when highly political matters
are involved.

For instance, after the 2004 presidential election, disappointments and speculations brewing within the losing side stirred up political turmoil. The opposition camp filed lawsuits demanding the invalidation of the election and the election results. The issue was brought to court.

The court justified the election results through a nationwide recount, and concluded that political disturbances were an insufficient cause to annul the election.

The decisions were ultimately reconfirmed in August 2005 by Taiwan’s Supreme Court. It dismissed the cases and demanded all parties to respect the electoral system. Such a judicial case was unprecedented in Taiwan, and the rulings were eventually accepted by the opposition.

In this case, we see how the people mustered a respect for the rule of law. This proves that, through experience and education, the people of Taiwan have gradually acquired the capacity for mutual tolerance, which is an important element of democracy.

On the other hand, while the people enjoy extensive rights and freedom endowed by democracy, one can easily spot the lack of a corresponding sense of responsibility.

Specifically, in the fierce battle for the public’s attention, certain news media have been chasing after sensational stories, to the extent that they sometimes ignore the difference between fact and fiction in the process. This type of disregard for professional standards has caused much misunderstanding and confusion in Taiwan.

Another thorny issue found throughout the island lies in the rooted differences over national identity. Much to our regret, this has resulted in stern confrontation among political parties.

With a strong opposition in the legislature, a stalemate in the lawmaking process has emerged. Many bills and policy proposals have been boycotted or deferred, leading only to meaningless attrition. The aims of these obstructed plans have ranged from invigorating the economy, to approving military procurements essential to Taiwan’s self-defense capabilities against China’s military threat.

All these seemingly frustrating situations remind me of a story:

In the deep jungles of Africa, a traveler was making a long trek. Coolies (苦力) had been hired from a tribe to carry the loads. The first day they marched rapidly and made good progress. The
traveler had high hopes of a speedy journey.

But on the second morning, these jungle tribesmen refused to move. For some strange reason they just sat and rested. On inquiry as to the reason for this strange behavior, the traveler was informed that they had gone too fast the first day, and that they were now waiting for their souls to catch up with their bodies. (by Lettie Cowman, *Springs in the Valley*)

Our democracy has been moving in leaps and bounds, so much so that its soul has yet to catch up.

The challenges we've met on the way are tests and trials to our fledging democracy. The Taiwanese people must learn to face up to these problems through reason and with an open mind, and they must seek judicial recourse for resolutions.

How they actually accomplish this will set an example for all ethnic Chinese societies and even emerging democracies worldwide. In particular, the solution can serve as a working model for China’s political evolution in the future.

**Taiwan as the best partner for China on her way to democracy**

The American historian Henry Steele Commager once said, “If our democracy is to flourish, it must have criticism; if our government is to function, it must have dissent.”

This sentiment precisely represents the stance of our government in responding to the diverse perspectives and opinions within our society. It has been best reflected in the Freedom House's annual surveys on the state of political rights and civil liberties. In both indicators, Taiwan has received the best ratings possible, putting us in the ranks with the United States, Canada and Switzerland—the freest countries in the world.

Our belief is that, without discontent, progress cannot be achieved. In any society pursuing democracy, it is natural to hear different voices in the process. Likewise, it is understandable that, not all the people can be 100% satisfied with their own democratic system.

Yet, as long as the people remain free to articulate their views and aspirations, the foundation of a sound democratic system can be ensured. This is what we believe constitutes liberty and democracy.

The people of Taiwan remain highly attuned to politics, and they uphold the freedom of speech. As a result, we've seen a very high level of civil participation in Taiwan’s society. This could not have
occurred without the government’s respect for freedom of the press and the expression of diverse views.

One cannot deny the fact that we have experienced some tension, friction or conflicts during Taiwan’s democratization. Examples can be seen in the gunshot incident on the eve of the 2004 presidential election, and the ensuing demonstration in protest of the election results in front of the Office of the President. In the end, the discontented people managed to cope with their disappointments through reason and tolerance, and a peaceful settlement through judicial means was finally reached.

To expect a country to transform itself into a mature democracy overnight would be unrealistic. Democracy neither promises to resolve all problems, nor guarantees a quick fix to them. However, it does provide the best platform for settling differences. Taiwan can face its problems with confidence, learn its lesson along the way, and move on the right track to deepen its democratic development.

Democracy — it is Taiwan’s most valuable asset in its political development. From a mid-long-term perspective, democracy remains the key to improving the bilateral relations across the Taiwan Strait. Moreover, it can serve as a working model for China.

In predominantly Chinese societies, respect for individuals and liberty, the cornerstone of democracy, has traditionally been ignored. The Taiwan experience proves that democracy can grow through peaceful means and operate in these societies.

In this light, the uniqueness of a country’s circumstances or culture makes for a poor excuse to reject democracy. Only through the free expression of ideas by the people can a government truly understand where the shortcomings of a society are.

Taiwan’s experience in democratization shows that the power relationship between the people and the government is of a dynamic and relative nature. As the economy prospers and society becomes more affluent, the people long for a greater degree of civil rights and political liberty. Their escalating expectations in the end will have an impact on the authoritarian regime, thereby forcing it to democratize.

In a similar fashion, China has accumulated vast quantities of wealth over the last decade due to the liberalization of its economy. This has led to greater demands for political reform by the people of China. However, the leaders in Beijing choose to disregard the interests and aspirations of the people; they deny democracy, the trend of history, and they think only of the continuity of Communist rule.
In China, tension has grown due to the widening gap between the rich and the poor and the complex ethnic composition. Beijing must face these issues one day. It has to relieve the discontent brewing within specific communities and ethnic groups, by giving its people more freedom with regard to speech, assembly and religion. Only through free and open debate can China find the right path to development.

Conclusion

If we look at the issue of democratization in China from the grand perspective of history, we’ll see that there is no lack of discourses or arguments promoting the idea of democracy. However, in the history of China, we haven’t seen any regime committed to a social-political system that is of the people, by the people, and for the people. China hasn’t been given too many opportunities to enjoy democracy.

For over two thousand years, China has been under authoritarian rule, and the approach to managing discontent and dissent has always been by repressive means. When the pressure of internal conflicts escalates to the verge of eruption, the oppressor as well as the oppressed always resorts to violent solutions, such as the case of Tiananmen Square Incident in 1989. In the end, the old regime may be taken over by a new dictatorship, but the vicious circle always persists.

Now China is in her best shape in history; the country enjoys booming economy, the people are better off, and the society is in a relatively stable state. It is the best time in history for China to pursue democratic reforms. The leaders in Beijing should seize this chance at the fork in the road, to break off the vicious circle that has been haunting the Chinese people for two thousand years. They should do so by choosing democracy and laying down cornerstone for perpetual prosperity.

At the present stage, the Chinese leaders place higher priority on the continuity of Communist rule, social stability, economic development and national pride, on top of democracy, freedom, the rule of law, and human rights.

In fact, these two sets of goals are not necessarily incompatible with each other. A democratic system provides the bedrock for the stability of society, the prosperity of economy and the glorification of national pride.

Against the backdrop of globalization and democratization, we examine the issue of cross-strait relations, and we propose that the two sides leave aside the controversy over sovereignty and proceed to democratic dialogs. If in the beginning, there is difficulty to initiate government-to-government dialogs, we are willing to start with talks at the non-governmental level.
We firmly believe that the ultimate cure to the cross-strait issue is a democratic China. Taiwan has the experience of being the first successful democracy in predominantly Chinese societies; it will and is willing to be the best partner to China on her way to democracy.

As regards the form of relations between Taiwan and China, as long as the democratic process is followed, and the consent of the majority of the Taiwanese people is obtained, we remain open to any kind of possibilities.

Here we call on the international society, which has been looking at China in terms of business opportunities and strategic importance, to engage in democratic dialogs with China, and to assist her to become a member of the world’s democratic community. The democratization of China will be the most critical global issue in the 21st century.

Once again I call on the leaders in Beijing to seize the window of opportunity the history opens for China, and to get rid of the vicious circle of two thousand years by establishing a free and democratic China. A free and democratic China would benefit not only its people, but also the people of the rest of the world. In the end, democratization would transform China into a responsible stakeholder in the region and beyond.

President Hu Jingtao, if you wish to lead China to peaceful rise and sustainable development, there is no other alternative, except for democratization.

Thank you.