Seven Laws, One First Day

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A political transition is not tested by its first proclamation. It is tested by its first morning after: who gives orders, who can be arrested and by what authority, which offices keep running, which records survive, and who decides when an emergency power ends. A single dramatic law can answer one of those questions and leave the rest to improvisation. Improvisation, in a moment when old authority has collapsed and new authority has not yet been elected, is where abuses take root and where ordinary life breaks down. That is the argument for treating transition as a system rather than a series of separate gestures, and it is the idea at the heart of the package published on September 27, 2026.

The package is an integrated set of model laws designed for public review and for future lawful democratic consideration in the event of a political transition in mainland China. It covers seven connected areas: transitional governance; democratic transformation of the national security sector and military nationalization; transitional justice and reparations; archives and institutional vetting; economic and social continuity; local democracy and self-government; and constitutional integration with national elections. The list matters less as a catalogue than as a map of dependencies. Governance without security reform leaves armed power outside civilian control. Security reform without justice and vetting leaves the same personnel and the same files in place under new letterheads. Justice without archives leaves victims without evidence and officials without a fair record. Economic continuity without local democracy leaves daily life administered from above while citizens are told they are free. Elections without constitutional integration leave a new government with a mandate but no settled rules for exercising it. Each law, on its own, would be incomplete. Together, they are meant to be read as one framework.

That coordination is deliberate. The package was developed as a coordinated legal system rather than a collection of stand-alone proposals, and it carries common rules across its parts: civilian control, judicial review, individual responsibility, due process, emergency-power limits, anti-evasion safeguards, institutional sunsets, and continuity of essential public functions. Consider what each of those common rules does in practice. Civilian control means that soldiers and security officers answer to civilian authority, not to their own chains of command alone, and that the chain of command itself is subject to law. Judicial review means that transitional decisions can be challenged before a court, so that a body created to manage a transition cannot become unchallengeable simply because it calls itself transitional. Individual responsibility means that guilt is judged person by person, on evidence, rather than assigned to whole categories of people by association. Due process means notice, a hearing, and a chance to answer — the ordinary protections that are easiest to suspend precisely when they are most needed. Emergency-power limits mean that extraordinary authority is bounded in scope and time, and cannot quietly become the normal way of governing. Anti-evasion safeguards anticipate the familiar tricks: renaming an institution while keeping its powers, moving a function to a new body to escape oversight, or using an old regulation to do what a new law forbids. Institutional sunsets require temporary bodies to expire unless a democratically authorized body deliberately extends them. Continuity of essential public functions means that hospitals, water, power, food distribution, and basic administration do not stop while

constitutions are debated. None of these rules is glamorous. All of them are the difference between a transition that protects people and one that merely replaces one unchecked power with another.

The treatment of the existing legal order is equally important, and it is stated with care. Where applicable, the package treats the constitutional and legal order of the Republic of China as the domestic legal starting point. That is a starting point, not a final answer. Permanent constitutional questions are expressly reserved for future democratically authorized procedures rather than decided by temporary institutions. The distinction is the whole discipline of a transitional framework: a temporary body can keep the lights on, run fair procedures, and prepare the ground for democratic choice, but it cannot settle permanently, on its own authority, questions that belong to the people acting through democratic procedures. A package that forgot that distinction would betray its own purpose. A package that respects it accepts a humbling limit: the most important decisions are not the ones it makes, but the ones it preserves for others to make lawfully.

The texts have undergone multiple review stages, including cross-law conflict review, package-wide authority analysis, bad-faith-government abuse testing, and Day-0-to-Year-1 implementation testing. Each stage deserves a plain explanation, because each answers a different fear. Cross-law conflict review asks whether one law contradicts another — whether, for example, a vetting rule undermines a due-process guarantee, or a security provision overrides a judicial-review clause. Package-wide authority analysis asks whether any body is given more power than the framework as a whole intends, and whether every power has a source and a limit. Bad-faith-government abuse testing is the most sobering stage of all: it asks how a government that wanted to abuse the framework could try to do so, and whether the text would stop it, slow it, or merely record its protest. A transition law that only works in the hands of good people is not a law at all; it is a hope. Implementation testing from the first day through the first year asks the practical questions: what happens on day zero, in the first week, in the first month, when a file is missing, when a salary cannot be paid, when two bodies both claim the same office. A framework that cannot survive contact with that calendar will not survive contact with reality.

It is equally important to say what the package is not. The current texts are adoption-candidate model legislation only and have no present legal force. They do not govern anyone today. They do not create offices, impose penalties, or authorize action. They are published for public review, so that citizens, scholars, lawyers, and officials can examine them, criticize them, and improve them before any moment when they might be considered. That status is sometimes mistaken for weakness, as though a proposal that is not yet law were not serious. The opposite is true. Publishing model laws in advance, while there is still time to argue about them, is what allows a transition, if it ever comes, to begin with texts that have already been tested against abuse and contradiction, rather than with drafts written overnight in a crisis. The seriousness lies precisely in refusing to pretend that publication is enactment.

That refusal also protects the people who would live under a transition. Transitional justice and reparations, for example, raise questions that cannot be answered by slogans: who qualifies, on what evidence, through what procedure, with what remedy, and with what protection against revenge dressed up as justice. Archives and institutional vetting raise parallel questions: which records are preserved, who may see them, how a person challenged by a file can answer it, and how a society distinguishes between a file that proves wrongdoing and a file that merely records employment under a regime a person did not choose. Economic and social continuity raises questions of a different kind but no less urgent: how pensions, contracts, property, and public services continue when the political authority that administered them has changed, and how that continuity can be secured without simply ratifying every past injustice. Local

democracy and self-government ask how citizens regain a voice in the places where they actually live, rather than waiting for a distant capital to hand freedom down. Constitutional integration with national elections asks how all of this is brought together under rules that the people themselves can recognize as theirs. Each of these areas could fill a library. The package does not claim to finish those arguments. It claims to give them a common legal language, so that arguments in one area do not silently undo settlements in another.

Public review is therefore not a formality. It is the stage at which the package either earns the confidence it will need or reveals the flaws that must be fixed. Readers should test it against their own worst cases: a security chief who refuses civilian orders, a local official who uses vetting to settle scores, a court asked to approve an emergency that never ends, a community whose water and wages depend on an institution no one has yet reformed. They should ask whether the texts give each of those people a lawful answer, a forum to be heard, and a limit that cannot be talked away. Where the texts fail that test, criticism now is worth more than praise later. A model law is cheap to amend before adoption and expensive to amend after it has been used to justify an arrest, a dismissal, or a seizure. The invitation to review is, in that sense, the most democratic part of the package: it treats citizens not as an audience for a finished product but as participants in a design that will govern them.

The first day of any transition will be disorderly. Offices will be uncertain, records incomplete, rumors faster than facts. Its promise is narrower and more important: that even in disorder, there will be a written answer to who commands, who judges, who can be punished and how, when temporary power ends, and what continues without interruption. If those answers are published, debated, and tested before they are needed, then the first day begins not with invention under pressure but with a framework the public has already had a chance to judge. That is the single point on which the rest depends: coordination is not bureaucratic tidiness. It is the condition under which rights survive the very moment they are most at risk.

Disclaimer: This essay is not law and is not an official position until approved. It is a discussion of published model proposals for public review, and nothing in it creates legal rights, duties, or authority.

What is still open

Whether the seven areas will be considered together or pulled apart in debate; how the reserved permanent constitutional questions will eventually be addressed through democratically authorized procedures; how the common restraints will perform against a government determined to evade them; what the Day-0-to-Year-1 implementation experience would reveal in practice; and how public review will change the texts before any future lawful consideration.

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