



The Internationalist

Yale International Students' Organization x The Globalist

A Discussion with Professor Daniel Mattingly

by Aurelia Dochnal

OUR NOVEMBER 5, 2020 seminar-style discussion with Professor Daniel Mattingly, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Yale, touched on topics ranging from the improbability of military intervention in Taiwan to leading Chinese Marxist intellectuals like Jiang Shigong.

Professor Mattingly opened by introducing three different frameworks for understanding international politics: neorealism, liberalism, and Marxism. Neorealist theory sees the international system as anarchic, and states as unitary, rational entities focused on self-preservation. Supporters of liberalism, on the other hand, question neorealists' emphasis on power politics, asserting that states are important but not unitary, and therefore should focus on building interdependence and cooperation through international institutions like the United Nations to preserve peace. Marxist international relations theory, championed by scholars like the aforementioned Jiang Shigong, elevates class conflict and economic and material aspects over neorealist and liberal conceptions of international politics. Broadly speaking, China's main concerns in the international sphere include increasing economic and military capabilities and accruing soft power. China has achieved purchasing power parity with the US, and its modernization of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is in line with the 2015 Defense White Paper calling for "independent innovation", still a top priority for technological development and military modernization.

Professor Mattingly discussed the broadly worsening relationship between the US and China, exacerbated by trade war, isolationist policies and the aggressive, sometimes racist, language of Donald Trump and his allies. In response, Chinese "wolf warrior diplomats" like Zhao Lijian, who often operate on Twitter, have been posting increasingly strongly-worded defenses of China and attacks on various US issues and policies. Under the Biden administration, Professor Mattingly predicts that diplomacy will return to the more subtle character of the pre-Trump era. Nevertheless, he expects to see similarly hard-line policies regarding trade, defense, and technology, albeit without the disastrous immigration regulations pushed by the Trump administration. The Biden administration, according to Professor Mattingly, will involve US allies such as Japan and South

Korea to work closely on promoting American interests in Asia. Regardless of Mr. Biden's promised tough political stance, Professor Mattingly expects much closer cooperation on issues like public health and climate change between the Biden administration and the Chinese government.

Professor Mattingly, who has experience in the public health sector, noted that for over thirty years before the Trump presidency, the US and Chinese centers for disease control were intertwined, sharing research and cooperating on major issues. Donald Trump slashed the number of staff at the US CDC in China, reducing its capabilities to close to nothing, a decision Professor Mattingly expects Joe Biden to reverse. Clearly, Mr. Trump's villainization of China for the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak is an unproductive, unhelpful strategy, and collaboration between the countries could lead to fruitful conclusions for the public benefit. Professor Mattingly expressed his hopes that the US and China will be able to cooperate in the future. While some participants asked about the possibility of a technological cold war, referring to Mr. Trump's proposed bans on WeChat and restrictions on Huawei, Professor Mattingly argued that an outright cold war is improbable, particularly under the Biden administration. Mr. Biden will keep Chinese technology companies a focus of his policymaking, but in a more targeted, de-escalated manner than his predecessor, in a similar manner to how US lawmakers first took action to discourage US companies from using Huawei networks in 2012.

Our discussion also touched on the issue of Taiwanese security, with some participants wondering about the possibility of war breaking out between Taiwan and the PRC. Professor Mattingly emphasized that a Chinese attack on Taiwan is highly unlikely, given the potentially disastrous repercussions not only for Taiwan, whose military is smaller and likely not able to defend itself against a PLA invasion, but also for China from a diplomatic standpoint. The US has repeatedly signaled its intentions of moving closer to Taiwan, most recently by approving massive-scale arms sales and sending its way delegations of the highest-ranking diplomats since the US officially recognized the One-China Policy in 1979. Although alarming to China

and to the overall state of US-China relations, Professor Mattingly expects the Biden administration to continue drawing close to Taiwan. Nevertheless, the probability of military intervention on the island is extremely low, given that the PRC would not launch an attack without serious and direct provocation that could be interpreted as an inadvertent escalation. The PLA has not fought a war in half a century, and although public opinion has been reported as increasingly hawkish, scholars suggest that support is low for direct military intervention. Unlike during the Taiwan Straits crisis of the 1950s, today's PLA lacks the political will, modernization and strength to involve itself in such a conflict. Moreover, it is highly unlikely that the US would directly engage in a PRC-Taiwan dispute.

The last topic discussed was Chinese President Xi Jinping's consolidation of power over the last few years. Professor Mattingly outlined three main motives: firstly, the widespread corruption within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) that Mr. Xi took upon himself to eliminate, along with his enemies. Secondly, many Party cadres saw the 2012 Bo Xilai scandal as a threat to the CCP's legitimacy, exacerbated by collective rule. Power consolidation was necessary to retain Party leadership and focus the CCP's direction. Lastly, a large problem within the Chinese state at the beginning of Mr. Xi's ascendancy was the lack of control over local officials: even when the Party implemented a policy, there was no way to guarantee that officials would carry it out. The breadth and depth of Mr. Xi's policies span across these issues, consolidating centralized power and returning greater strength to the Party. •

*Professor Daniel Mattingly is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Yale. His research focuses on authoritarian regimes, historical political economy, and China. His book, *The Art of Political Control in China* (Cambridge University Press) examines how the Chinese state controls protest and implements ambitious policies from sweeping urbanization schemes to family planning initiatives. His current work examines the role of the military, nationalism, and surveillance technology in Chinese politics. He received a Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley, and a B.A. from Yale University.*

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