

AIS General Research Fund (GRF) and Early Career Scheme (ECS) Success Round 2018-19

Project Title: Changing Patterns of Threat Securitization in Democratic Taiwan

Brief Abstract:

The main point of this research is to illuminate and explain a critical but understudied development that has helped to stabilize the entire East Asian (Northeast and Southeast Asia together) regional security complex: the reduced proclivity of Taiwanese elites to define various moves by the PRC as security threats. Compared to the previous DPP presidency of Chen Shui-bian (2000-2008), Taiwanese elites have been far less likely to try to “securitize” PRC moves of multiple types during the current DPP presidency of Tsai Ing-wen, which began in May 2016. The question is: Why? Note that the difference in personalities between Chen and Tsai is not enough to explain the critical change because securitization can be attempted by all manner of political and even non-political elites, not just those in government. The reduced proclivity of Taiwanese elites to securitize PRC moves must be a function of infrastructural changes in the Taiwanese political system, culture, and society.

Concretely, this research will test three propositions: (1) integration of the “local knowledge” concerning Mainland affairs that Taiwanese businesspeople have accumulated from over a quarter-century of living and working in the PRC into policymaking processes back in Taipei increases the confidence of Taiwanese leaders that they can exercise “agential power” in dealing with cross-Strait problems -- and this in turn keeps them cool-headed; (2) the same effect results from the near-universalization throughout Taiwan of a Taiwan-centric consciousness -- gone are the divisive struggles over the core question what it means to be an ROC citizen; and (3) external balancing: convincing the globe-level superpower (the U.S.) to continue supporting Taiwan as a result of its democratic consolidation, which has the effect of increasing Taiwanese self-confidence even though, paradoxically, it also reduces agential power.

Investigator: Prof Daniel LYNCH

Biography:

Prof LYNCH took his Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor). He is the author of three books: *China's Futures: PRC Elites Debate Economics, Politics, and Foreign Policy* (Stanford, 2015); *Rising China and Asian Democratization: Socialization to Global Culture in the Political Transformations of Thailand, China, and Taiwan* (Stanford, 2006); and *After the Propaganda State: Media, Politics, and Thought Work in Reformed China* (Stanford, 1999). Prof LYNCH moved to the CityU Department of Asian and International Studies in 2017, after having taught for two decades in the University of Southern California's School of International Relations.