

JENTLESON, CHAPTER I: KISSINGER & ZHŌU

Jentleson offers three key takeaways of the Kissinger-Zhōu dialogues which preluded the Nixon visit. First, personal rapport between the two diplomats greased the wheels of their relationship; the two men were exactly the person for the job at the exact moment they were asked to do it. Not a very useful lesson, in my opinion.

Secondly, Jentleson argues that the dialogues wielded transactional disputes positively to construct transformational change when it could have just as easily bogged down talks. The Taiwan Question was chief among the contentious issues, with Kissinger reminding Zhōu that there was very little room for him to budge. The compromise reached was to allow the sticking point to endure, to recognise the dispute and work around it.

Jentleson has one glaring factual error, however: the historians have not arrived at a consensus on whether Lín attempted a coup d'état. Even a cursory reading of the literature about the Cultural Revolution will attest to this fact, which seriously undermines the credibility of his historical narration elsewhere. He need not be an expert in history, or an expert in China, but we should expect him to at least dedicate a paragraph at minimum to the nuances of this particular event, since this narrative irks an expert like Xià so much.

The third point which Jentleson makes is that the *possibility* of a Lín coup as well as bureaucratic hardliners in Langley constrained the nascent relationship further. This makes Jentleson's bad history worse: he didn't *need* to positive assert the coup attempt's existence to make his point anyway. (On another note: Jentleson clearly has no clue that Maotai is to báijiǔ as bourbon is to whiskey, and not a cocktail).

Jentleson concludes by saying that Kissinger and Zhōu forged the foundations of peace, but I honestly have no idea what he's talking about. Normal relations were certainly an improvement, but it came at a undeniable cost to the inhabitants of Taiwan, who lost stature in the international system. It took fifty years for that loss of stature to manifest materially, but in the 2020s, the US acceptance to the Shanghai communiqué formed the basis for the Taiwan Extradition and Hong Kong Protests. So it must be asked: for whom does normalised relations count as 'peace'?

Secondly, Nixon's downfall from Watergate and the death of Máo and Zhōu meant that normal relations led nowhere for a decade. Dèng Xiǎopíng would get the ball rolling again by reforming China's economy along market liberalisation lines and opening it to export manufacturing – policies pursued with the assistance of another shrewd, anti-Communist Republican from the Nixon era, George H.W. Bush. Surely both would credit the 1972 dialogues to the success of this policy, but looking back over the course of China's rapid industrialisation, from cancer villages to the 1989 student protests, should we really be so certain that normal relations are a necessary condition for positive peace?

CHÉN, 2003