

On Tuesday, the UCL Economist's Society had the privilege of hosting Guy de Jonquières to speak on the topic of "What China Power Shift?". Mr de Jonquières is currently a Senior Fellow at the European Centre for International Political Economy, and was previously a journalist with The Financial Times. His research interests include international economic policy and Asia's political economy, which places Mr de Jonquières in a position to comment extensively on the popular and widely accepted perception that power in today's world is shifting gradually but surely towards China and away from the West, on the basis of China's explosive economic expansion in recent years. And this perception was what Mr de Jonquières sought to challenge throughout the entire duration of the session on Tuesday.

During the first half of the session, Mr de Jonquières examined the different aspects of the idea of *China power*, specific the economic, political and military manifestations of *China power*. For those who argue that China's rise to its current status as the world's second-largest economy accords Beijing significant influence in the world of today; Mr de Jonquières points out that there does not exist a linear relation between the scale of a country's economic output and the clout that said country possesses on the basis of its economic performance; a point in case would be Japan in the latter half of the 20th century. For those who claim that Chinese power is being exercised in the form of a more aggressive Chinese foreign policy; Mr de Jonquières first highlighted that Beijing has always been consistently keeping a low profile on the diplomatic front so as to devote the bulk of its attention towards enabling economic growth within China, which the Communist Party of China believes to be the bedrock of the legitimacy of its rule. In particular with regards to the recent flare-ups in incidents involving the contested sovereignty of various islands and shoals in the vicinity of China and its various neighbours, Beijing's stance on these issues appear to be a queer combination of pragmatism and nationalism, which ultimately belies the lack of a coherent guiding ideology. For those who suggest the recent increases in military spending by the Chinese government as evidence for the military rise of China; Mr de Jonquières opines that foremost, the People's Liberation Army remains a largely unproven and untested military force, given that the last war the Chinese were involved in took place some 30-odd years ago against Vietnam; furthermore, Beijing recognises that the United States's role in securing the world's energy supply lines and ensuring global security will persist into the near future, and that the People's Liberation Army is unlikely to be capable of challenging the status quo in the short run.

During the second half, Mr de Jonquières went on to visit the contents of the idea of *China power*. Mr de Jonquières argues that Beijing's perceived growing influence in the world of today stems from the following: first, the scale of the Chinese economy; second, Beijing's financial muscles as a result of rapid economic growth over the past 30-odd years; third – and what Mr de Jonquières feels to be the most crucial – the ability to grant and withhold access to China's domestic market. Even so, Beijing's ability to derive power from the control it exercises over foreign access to the Chinese market is largely contingent upon a series of variables, of which China's ability to sustain the accelerated rate of growth it has been experiencing in recent years is most fundamental. Mr de Jonquières also explored several other proposed sources of *China power*. For instance, some have argued China's foreign exchange reserves have enabled Beijing to engineer a power shift towards China away from the West in the world of today. In response, Mr de Jonquières points out that China's foreign exchange reserves, as impressive as they may be, are still ultimately limited by the

inter-connectedness experienced between China and the rest of the world in the world's financial markets; despite it all, China still remains a servant to the international financial markets rather than a master.

Guy de Jonquières' analysis of modern China and its politico-economic status in the current international context certainly departs from some of the mainstream perceptions we have come to accept about China and the Chinese economy. However, this should not be a reason for us to reject Mr de Jonquières' ideas about the nature of *China power*; instead, it is a rejoinder to us all to remain healthily skeptical about certain perceptions of China's rise perpetuated by the media and by the powers that be. Perhaps, even more importantly, it is a reminder of the complexities and intricacies associated with our attempts to understand modern-day China as a politico-economic entity in the current context, and a thorough demonstration of the importance of China to the world and of the world to China as we move into the future.