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Contemporary Chinese IR Theory: Processual Constructivist Thought as a Way to Further Chinese Communist Party Soft Power

Guiot, Alexandre Mr.

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Universiteit Leiden

Alexandre Guiot

2950928

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First Reader: Dr. Black

Second Reader: Dr. Chang

Email Address: s2950928@vuw.leidenuniv.nl

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**Contemporary Chinese IR Theory: Processual Constructivist
Thought as a Way to Further Chinese Communist Party Soft
Power**

Contents

Introduction	5.
Literature Review	7.
1. Basis of Chinese IR: Tradition in Policy	9.
2. Processual Constructivist Theory: Relations as the heart of Exchange	11.
3. Critiques of Chinese IR Theory	14.
Methodology	18.
First Case Study: The Umbrella Protest: Proof of the Lack of a Processual Constructivist Relation in Between the CCP and Hong Kong Civil Society	21.
1. Legal Premise of the CCP-Hong Kong Relation	22.
2. The Umbrella Movement: a lack of Processual Constructivist Dynamics	25.
Second Case Study: Taiwanese and Hong Kong Civil Society Relations: Proof of Processual Constructivist Theory	31.
1. CCP Taiwanese Relations During the Sunflower Movement	31.
2. Evidence of a Processual Constructivist Dynamic: Taiwanese and Hong Kong Civil Societies	34.
Conclusion	38.
Bibliography	40.

Introduction

Following the end of the Cold War, the US became the world's main superpower. The lack of alternatives to the liberal model, embodied by the fall of the Soviet Union, caused the US to become the world's sole hegemon, and hence consolidate the liberal world order around itself.

Through the Trump administration, the US assumed a less prevalent position on the world stage. Current Chinese president Xi Jinping indicated that he would support a globalist oriented world to counter Trump's "American Fist".¹ With this declaration going hand in hand with China's increasing presence on the world stage politically since Hu Jintao, China has since called for a development of academic spheres in order to provide new ideas in an effort to develop Chinese power domestically and internationally.²

China was the world leader until it entered the century of humiliation in the middle of the 19th century.³ Recently, China's return to power has been studied under a myriad of aspects: the risk for the Chinese Communist Party to cause a rise in authoritarianism in the world, China's increasing control on the world's material economy through the Belt and Road initiative, or even China's abuse of human rights in the context of the Uighur minority.

Yet it would appear obvious that those that have been threatening the hegemon would cry wolf when witnessing the economic miracle China has gone through in the last 40 years. This thesis sets out to bring a more focussed understanding of Chinese aspirations. An overreliance on classical international relations (IR) theory begs the research puzzle: why focus on classical theories to explain China's foreign relations when China is actively investing in the creation of Chinese schools of politics and IR.

This thesis will focus on Qin Yaqing's school of IR theory, processual constructivism. It will also use Zhao Tingyang's thoughts on the Tianxia principle as they are echoed in Qin's writings. Understanding IR from a Chinese perspective helps to understand what China

¹ The New York Times, 'In Era of Trump, China's President Champions Economic Globalization'.

² Callahan, 'Introduction : Tradition, Modernity and Foreign Policy in China', pp. 5-6.

³ Kissinger, *On China*, pp. 10-12.

believes its path should be, and more importantly what it intends the global order to believe its path is.

The thesis will be divided in four main parts. The literature review will aid in grasping the principles of the new Chinese schools of thought. The methodology sets to explain the process that will be used in the case studies. The two case studies will be as follows: CCP-Hong Kong relations and Taiwan-Hong Kong relations.

After a rigorous critical analysis of processual constructivist ideas, the case studies shall empirically test if processual constructivist thoughts can be applied as a way to conceptualize the dynamics of the relations in between the Chinese central government and the regions of Hong Kong and Taiwan. This thesis demonstrates that while Chinese schools of IR may bring interesting new ideas to IR theory, these ideas cannot yet be empirically used to describe neither Chinese domestic policies, not Chinese foreign policies. Instead, processual constructivism serves to understand what China wants other countries to perceive is its foreign policy. Processual constructivist theory therefore is used as soft power tool, for now at least, in the field of IR theory.

Understanding Processual Constructivism: a Review of Chinese IR Theory

The two main classical theories relating to IR, namely realism and liberalism, have predicted vastly different outcomes for China's return to power. Mearsheimer, an eminent realist scholar, believes that Chinese rise could put pressure onto the liberal world order that was created in 1945 and blossomed after the end of the Cold War in 1991. This would inevitably bring an end to Chinese peaceful rise to power. While this would not directly lead to an act of war between the world's main super powers, tensions would rise in between the US and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) inside of the liberal world order as both compete for the role of hegemon.⁴ An example of a realist interpretation may be seen through the trade war started under the Trump administration. This shows a Trump administration adamant on containing Chinese rise.⁵ China answered at the Davos forum in 2017 by stating the nation was willing to step in after Trump's "America First" policy.⁶

The realist thesis poses an interesting interpretation of China's rise. This is supported by the affirmations of presidents Hu and Xi that China's foreign policy would now be set on global issues all while being more assertive, as well as the rapid build-up of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) offensive navy.⁷ Yet when looking at China's recent history since Deng's campaign to allow liberal reforms of the economy, China has integrated well in the global liberal order. China joined various liberal institutions: the United Nations, the World Health Organization, World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

Liberals such as Ikenberry recognize China's integration into liberal spheres as a statement that China desires a peaceful rise.⁸ Overtime, this liberal sphere would cause China to liberalise its society progressively all while remodelling the liberal world order as

⁴ Mearsheimer, 'Realism and Restraint', pp. 12-13.

⁵ Mearsheimer, 'Bound to Fail the Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order', p. 29.

⁶ Puranen, 'Liberal International Order without Liberalism: Chinese Visions of the World Order', pp. 262-263.

⁷ Ibid, pp.262-265. / Callahan, 'Introduction', pp. 2-5. / Brad Lendon, 'China has built the world's largest navy. Now what's Beijing going to do with it?'

⁸ Ikenberry, 'The Future of the Liberal World Order: Internationalism After America', pp. 62-65.

to encompass a less Western-centric view of how to conduct global politics.⁹ For liberals, it seemed clear that overtime the Communist leadership would push for a liberalisation of Chinese society.¹⁰

Yet even after 70 years and several domestic crises in its less stable regions of Xinjiang, Southern Mongolia, Tibet and Hong Kong, the Communist system still stands strong. The high Chinese authorities show little interest in liberalising its society. To the contrary, there has been a push towards more authoritarian policies in recent years, starting under Hu and drastically accelerating under Xi.¹¹

While realism and liberalism are longstanding theories that help to bring parts to the puzzle of how China operates in a globalised society, they fall short in several aspects. Both are supported by various examples as stated above, but realism overestimates China's aggressive nature. China might be at odds with several of its neighbours as well as the US on economic relations but it has not yet moved to a warmongering policy moving to invade or attacks its neighbours. Liberal thought has proved to be too optimistic in its predictions of liberalisation of Chinese society. Both Western theories, on the other hand, were correct in predicting a movement of China into the liberal world order and trying to shift global governance principles to a less-Western stance. This can be seen through China being at the head of four of the UN branches. This caused these branches of the UN, as well as the WHO to be increasingly lenient towards the CCP government and its actions, most notably not blaming mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Chinese government.¹²

Looking at Chinese views of international relations (IR) adds on to pre-existing theory. Rather than focussing on Western interpretations of Chinese rise to power, analysing thoughts present in Chinese academia serves two main purposes. It gives an inside view of what some of these main academics deem as an important path for China to follow in terms of domestic an international relations. Furthermore, it serves a part in

⁹ Dams, van der Putten, 'China and Liberal Values in International Relations', pp. 11-12. / Puranen, 'Liberal International Order without Liberalism', pp. 263-264.

¹⁰ Mearsheimer, 'Bound to Fail', p. 42.

¹¹ Blumenthal, 'China's Steps Backward Began Under Hu Jintao'.

¹² Lee, 'It's Not Just the WHO: How China Is Moving on the Whole U.N.'. / McCaul, 'It's Time to Stop Chinese Communist Party's Shadow Campaign for Power at the United Nations'. / Hartman, 'China's manipulation of international organizations'.

decolonising IR theory which some researchers, most notable the late Edward Said, advocated for. Xi Jinping also called for creation of Chinese think tanks that would be able to bring Chinese ideas that could both help the CCP and the world.¹³

One school in particular is worth mentioning: processual constructivism. This train of thought was created by Chinese academic Qin Yaqing in the late 2000s. It builds on Western constructivist thought all while incorporating a substantial amount of Chinese traditional concepts. While the analysis and critique present in this thesis are centred on Qin's school, other ideas that are referenced by Qin, as well as popular in China, will be analysed.

Qin's processual constructivist ideas as well as Zhao Tinyang's contemporary concept of Tianxia are interesting schools of thought to analyse and criticize due to the importance they play in the articulation of new IR ideas in China.¹⁴ As emphasized above, they develop a new point of view within which relations between powers may be consulted. These new thoughts that have been developing in Chinese academia are not only confined to scholarly circles. They receive popular attention, as these concepts are discussed on CCTV, China's national television network.¹⁵ These theories tie in to the Chinese government's will to develop its soft power through various means, one of them being a diffusion of ideas that serve to imagine a new form of global governance.¹⁶ This is in line with the CCP being increasingly focussed on their foreign relations during the Hu and Xi presidencies.

Basis of Chinese IR: Tradition in Policy

Qin Yaqing's willingness to develop a new school of IR lies in his belief that the main IR theories in the past 30 years, neo-liberalism, structural realism and structural constructivism, have ignored the intricate complexity of relations.¹⁷ He asserts that relations should be at the centre of what is examined in IR, the outcome of a relation being

¹³ The People's Daily Online, 'Xi calls for new type of think tanks'.

¹⁴ Feng, 'The Tianxia System: World Order in a Chinese Utopia Reviewed by Feng Zhang', p. 112.

¹⁵ Callahan, 'Introduction', pp. 7.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 7.

¹⁷ Qin, 'Relationality and Processual Construction: Bringing Chinese Ideas into International Relations Theory', p. 5.

only a result of said relation. Qin believes that Chinese traditional thought and culture may help in this process as “processes and relations are two important factors in Chinese socio-cultural context and key concepts of Chinese political philosophy”.¹⁸

Qin expresses that for a Chinese-culture inspired theory to be considered as noteworthy, it must: 1) Be of Chinese cultural heritage and discourse, and 2) must aspire to and acquire a universal value.¹⁹ It is important to consider the importance of Chinese philosophical tradition as well as Chinese history in order to fully comprehend the core tenants, not only of Qin’s ideas but, of Chinese IR theory.

Chinese traditional concepts heavily influence Chinese philosophical thought and their impact on Qin’s and Zhao’s ideas are clear. Confucian thought is a central part due to the importance of his writing on classical Chinese culture. His ideas are best summed up as being a guide to live a harmonious life. The virtues of Confucianism are: “proper behaviour, humanity, doing one’s duty, knowing what is right, reciprocal care of others, and respect, fulfilling the obligations of a child.”²⁰ This idea of harmony can be seen in Chinese policies, for example in the “harmonious world” policy that is meant to be an extension of Chinese domestic ideas to the rest of the world, inaugurated by Hu Jintao in 2005.²¹

Harmony in Confucian doctrine is often compared to the relation of a son to his father.²² This marks the second core idea in Chinese IR: filial piety. In Chinese tradition, this idea of a harmonious relation in between a father and his son must be extended to the state and is an ideal way to conduct state affairs. This explains the importance of family in Chinese culture. Overall, harmony is more important in Chinese culture than other concepts that are valued in the West such as equality or freedom.²³ This stems from a holistic view of society. Rather than viewing history as a succession of events, Chinese tradition emphasizes historical events as an alternation of unity and disunity. This is best exemplified by the numerous civil wars that brought an end to a period of harmony in Chinese society, only to replace it with disunity. The victor of the war would be the one to

¹⁸ Ibid, p.6.

¹⁹ Qin, ‘The Possibility and Inevitability of a Chinese School of International Relations Theory’, p. 41.

²⁰ Crossick, Zhou, ‘Mutuality: Confucius and Monnet’, p. 201.

²¹ Callahan, ‘Introduction’, p. 1.

²² Crossick, Zhou, ‘Mutuality’, p. 202.

²³ Ibid, p. 203. / Zhao, ‘Rethinking Empire from a Chinese Concept ‘All-under-Heaven’ (Tian-xia),’, pp. 32-33.

restore harmony and usher a period of growth. While some might see the CCP under Mao as a break with this traditional ideal, Mao emphasized permanent revolution as a way to erect a state of great harmony.²⁴

The last traditional aspect that is important when understanding contemporary Chinese IR theories is Tianxia. Both Qin and Zhao heavily inspire themselves from Tianxia, literally translating to “All-Under-Heaven”. Tianxia is a way to approach the world through a Chinese lens. It is an amalgamation of concepts. In his writings, Zhao attributes three meanings to Tianxia: 1) the earth or all lands under the sky, 2) universal agreements based on people’s wishes, 3) a political system that ensure universal order.²⁵

Zhao emphasizes the more humane aspect of the Tianxia system that he believes could be a viable as a “world institution”.²⁶ Both Zhao and Qin argue that while the Western model is based on theoretically good ideas such as democracy and universalism, this only serves to benefit the Western powers at the expense of the other on the world stage.²⁷ Zhao argues that the Tianxia model is an ideal that all should strive for. Its essential character lies in the democratisation it could bring within the international order, not only helping China but other nations that are not as favoured as the West in worldly institutions.²⁸ Zhao argues that Tianxia is not only a more comprehensive system than the current liberal world order, but that even in the past, this system was better than the European ideal of the nation state. Contrary to the European system, Tianxia brought populations together as it pictured not nations, but the world, not citizens, but people, making it more humane than its Western counterpart.²⁹

Processual Constructivist Theory: Relations as the heart of Exchange

Probably the most important aspect of Qin’s theory is that it vividly goes against Western IR theory. He claims that the realists and liberals have misunderstood China’s rise,

²⁴ Kissinger, *On China*, pp. 14-16, 92-95.

²⁵ Feng, ‘The Tianxia System: World Order in a Chinese Utopia Reviewed by Feng Zhang’, p. 109.

²⁶ Zhao, ‘Rethinking Empire from a Chinese Concept’, pp. 29-30.

²⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 33-37. / Qin, ‘International Society as Process: Institutions, Identities and China’s Peaceful Rise’, pp. 135-137.

²⁸ Qin, ‘Relationality and Processual Construction: Bringing Chinese Ideas into International Relations Theory’, pp. 13, 16-17.

²⁹ Zhao, ‘Rethinking Empire from a Chinese Concept’, pp. 35-37.

the firsts seeing war as inevitable between the US and China, the seconds being too preoccupied with the spread of China's system within the liberal world order. He goes on as to pit the English school as too euro-centric as well as the neo-liberals and neo-realists placing too much importance on worldly institutions.³⁰

Instead, Qin emphasizes the importance for a more nuanced, less Euro-centric, approach based in IR, centred on traditional Chinese values. He is not the only one to do so as other academics, Zhang Weiwei, Zheng Xianghong and Zhao Tinyang for example, have continuously denounced the US' hegemony and its Western values as constrictive within the international order.³¹

Qin's main focus in his theory lies within the importance of relations and the dynamics that motivate them. He states: "Processual constructivism is a theory that is social and processual. It emphasizes the function of social construction, taking sociality as the key factor for IR (theory)". Therefore, his focus is on the relation that two or more actors share.³² He does not care as much for the outcomes of a relation as this is only a result of the relation between the actors. For Qin, "process and agents are symbiotic and inter-constitutive, both actively involving in the practice of socialization". The actors, overtime through their interactions, are shaped and their identity is never fixed: it is ever-changing. Identity is best understood as "identity in process".³³ This, Qin argues, brings to a more harmonious relation that is based on understanding and cooperation. This is taken from Chinese tradition. Both Qin and Zhao do not picture the individual as the basic unit of action in relations, or within the world for that matter. They see that the individualistic ideas are purely Western, as Chinese doctrine sees the individual only as a part of a larger group. This individual is only himself due to the relations he has with other actors, be it other individuals or state organs.³⁴ This importance of relations is based on the importance of Confucian thought in Chinese tradition. Qin mentions the importance of the father-son relationship and overall family model as a base for a well-functioning system.³⁵

³⁰ Qin, 'International Society as Process: Institutions, Identities and China's Peaceful Rise', p. 129. / Qin, 'Relationality and Processual Construction', pp. 5-6.

³¹ Puranen, 'Liberal International Order', pp. 261-263.

³² Qin, 'Relationality and processual construction', pp. 8-9.

³³ Ibid, p. 9, 15. / Qin, 'International Society as Process', p. 149.

³⁴ Qin, 'Relationality and Processual Construction', p. 7.

³⁵ Ibid, pp. 8-9.

The importance of family as a base for a functioning system is also emphasized by Zhao in his modern conception of Tianxia. For Zhao, the concept of Tianxia extends the idea of the nuclear family to a system, therefore making it a more humane and worldly system than the ones that have been devised following Western philosophical principles.³⁶ Both academics emphasize the importance of a harmony within the Tianxia system. This is best embodied by the popular nature of the system. Zhao proclaims that there is no need for democratic institutions, as democratic elections “become spoilt by money, misled by media and distorted by strategic votes”.³⁷ In the Tianxia system the leader manifests himself through his will to lead and is seen as legitimate by the people. This notion is echoed in Qin’s ideas as he states that Western doctrine places too much importance in the rational element that they associate with leading people. Instead, Qin affirms that rational focus eliminates emotions from a discussion, whereas emotions are the centre of a population’s thought.³⁸ Therefore, for these Chinese scholars, Tianxia as it is expressed by Zhao and taken as an example by Qin, is a model that could be at the centre of a worldly society.³⁹

This emotional bond that stems from an understanding, highlights the fact that the processual constructivist relation must be consensual, and may not be forced upon one actor.⁴⁰ As expressed by Qin during one of his answers to a question asked in an academic summit, “China no longer exports ideology. (...) people have their rights to choose their system, to choose their road to development (...) the key thing is not here, is that we shall not impose our own ideas on others, this is democracy. (...) The most important thing is tolerance”.⁴¹ The strength of processual constructivism lies in the dynamics of the relations that actors partake in. Just like Tianxia, it is a system in which actors may or may not choose to partake in.⁴² This ties in the idea of a peaceful Chinese rise as the theory emphasizes that if one does not choose to take part in a processual constructivist nation, he may refrain from doing so. Any forceful interaction would go against Qin’s theory. This

³⁶ Zhao, ‘Rethinking Empire from a Chinese Concept’, pp. 29, 32-33.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 31.

³⁸ Qin, ‘Relationality and Processual Construction’, p. 12.

³⁹ Qin, ‘The Possibility and Inevitability of a Chinese School’, pp. 39-42.

⁴⁰ Ibid, pp. 43-44.

⁴¹ 日本外国特派員協会 オフィシャルサイト FCCJchannel, ‘Updated/caption correction, July 10th P.L.: China’s diplomacy and the Thoughts of President Xi’. / Note here that democracy is meant in the international sense, as in a democratic world order.

⁴² Zhao, ‘Rethinking Empire from a Chinese Concept’, p. 34.

is in fact one main critique both Qin and Zhao have for the Western world order. They view a forced relation as a will to homogenize a society and therefore contrary to Chinese tradition. Both attribute force to the Western system that colonised most of the world in the 19th century and forced China into its century of humiliation.⁴³ This specific type of relation implies an aggressive dynamic. It therefore goes against the principles of processual constructivism. In opposition to the Westerners, the Chinese pursue their integration in the world order following economic liberalism. This has and continues to be done using traditional “Chinese wisdom” based in cultural values, heavily based in their sentiment vis a vis the century of humiliation, to restructure the liberal world order in order to be more accepting and harmonious.⁴⁴

Critiques of Chinese IR Theory

Processual constructivism is an important IR theory that brings something new to the field. Focussing on the relation itself is interesting as too often the “relation” aspect of “International Relations” is forgotten. Paying attention to the dialogue in between two, or more, actors helps understand the context and dynamics of a relation. This can only bring more understanding when analysing the result of such relation.

The contemporary interpretation of Tianxia by Zhao is intriguing from a Western point of view. It serves to challenge philosophical conceptions that are taken for granted in academia, for example the focus on the individual. Chinese philosophy is extremely rich, and concepts such as Tianxia or other Confucian traditions⁴⁵ bring a new interpretation to IR as a discipline.

Yet Qin’s and Zhao’s theories do have quite clear limitations. Several academics from Asia as well as the West have criticised their thoughts as too dismissive of historical context when referring to Tianxia, and too simplistic when talking about processual constructivism.

⁴³ Ibid, pp. 35-38. / Qin, ‘International Society as Process’, pp. 136, 141. / Cheng, McCarron, ‘A new Type of Major Power Relationship?’, p. 159. / Xiang, ‘China and the International Liberal (Western) Order’, p. 117.

⁴⁴ Ibid, pp. 109-110, 115.

⁴⁵ As used by Qin: *He, Shi, Bian*. Respectfully meaning harmony, direction and becoming. / Qin, ‘International Society as Process’, pp. 147-149.

Historically speaking, Tianxia is a term that has many meanings and possible interpretations. It is intrinsically linked to the tradition of the Chinese emperor being the link in between the heavens and the earth. Due to China's geography, the notion was quite Sino-centric as not many ideas could come and go to neighbouring civilizations for a long period of time. This means that the notion of Tianxia stayed central to the Chinese empire for over 3000 years, proving its importance in Chinese tradition.⁴⁶

The oldest iteration of Tianxia dates back to the Western Zhou period, stretching from 1045 BC to 771 BC. The term in its oldest appearance already meant 'that which is under heaven' and could be interpreted as a political system that consisted of *fengjian*, translating to feudalism.⁴⁷ Over the next thousand years the term gains other possible interpretations, ranging from simple geographical understanding to political or philosophical systems.

Zhao indicates that the Tianxia system was much more inclusive and tolerant than the Western notion of nation states that would ultimately bring the West to export its belief system by force. At the time of the warring states, taking place from 475 till 246 BC, one of Tianxia's interpretations was referring to Chinese people and their neighbours. Zhao affirms that the Chinese system was void of oppression while in reality it was not.⁴⁸ Historical sources allow academics to assert that the Tianxia system where actors could partake if willing was deeply codified and a steep hierarchy. The emperor was at its head, and the Chinese lords would be under the emperor. The "siyi", foreign lords and merchants, were not directly ruled over by the emperor but were inferior to all other Chinese lords, regardless of their wealth, strength or rank. If they willed to barter with Chinese society, they had to recognize the emperor as the holiest being. The only part of such system that could be remarked as open lies in the fact that a "siyi" could become emperor.⁴⁹ Over Chinese history this occurred, although rarely. For example, the Yuan dynasty ruled over China from 1271 till 1368. They were a Mongolian dynasty established under the Kubilai Khanate.

⁴⁶ Kissinger, *On China*, pp. 7-9, 12-13.

⁴⁷ Chang, Chen, 'Tracking Tianxia On Intellectual Self-Positioning', pp. 269-270.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 275.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 272-273.

The issue of an over-reliance on a biased interpretation of Chinese traditional notions is that while Qin and Zhao desire to make the world more open to various world views, they fall in the trap of replacing what they deem is a Euro-centric world view with a Sino-centric world view. There is, as Feng and Callahan point out, an over-reliance on traditional concepts in Chinese academia.⁵⁰ As seen through Qin's and Zhao's weariness of Western IR theory, both place a Chinese interpretation of IR as a better alternative, therefore superior all while being universally applicable. The irony in this is that they fall prey to the same framework they dislike in Western IR.⁵¹

Critiques such as Callahan and Shiu vehemently disagree with the China schools as they see it as a means by the Chinese government to legitimate its foreign policy. The Chinese schools position themselves as morally superior to their Western counterparts, advocating for principles of relations, understanding and tolerance but not delivering on these promises.⁵²

Chinese scholars usually go against any accusation about overstepping the boundaries they have set by explaining that they have adapted to the international system by adopting the principle of sovereignty, and that outside countries have no say in internal affairs.⁵³ Homogenization of society and ethnic groups is seen contemporarily in China through the campaigns launched by the central government in Xinjiang. This practice even has precedence in Chinese history, as traditionally the Chinese would first sinicise a conquered people before integrating them in the state apparatus.⁵⁴ This is done by force but is justified by Qin due to the infringements of processual constructivist thought taking place on domestic land.⁵⁵

In order to avoid this type of criticism from any commentators, the case studies of this thesis are focussed on relations between Taiwan, Hong Kong and China. Taiwan and Hong Kong are, for the Chinese Communist Party, under Chinese sovereignty. Yet the mainland laws apply in neither island, making these two lands regions of China, but not

⁵⁰ Callahan, 'Tianxia, Empire, and the World: Chinese Visions of World Order for the Twenty-First Century', p. 91.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 96. / Shiu, 'Tianxia: China's Concept of International Order', p. 44.

⁵² Ibid, p. 46.

⁵³ C-Span, 'Munk Debate on China's Role in the World'.

⁵⁴ Kissinger, *On China*, p. 17.

⁵⁵ 日本外国特派員協会 オフィシャルサイト FCCJchannel, 'Updated/caption correction, July 10th P.L'.

fully a part of China. Therefore, seeing how processual constructivist theory holds up in these case studies is much more compelling.

Methodology

This thesis is designed as a test of Qin's processual constructivist theory. The following case studies are conducted to show that while the processual constructivist theory may appear as a humane world system, its principles are not empirically verifiable when paying attention to Chinese domestic and foreign policy. This thesis shows that the ideas devised in Chinese academic circles serve mainly to grow China's soft power as well as its internal political machine. The Chinese government advocates for processual constructivist relations on the international stage, but do not follow up on their declarations both on the foreign and domestic stages.

Now that the core tenants of processual constructivism have been highlight in the literature review, the case studies that have been chosen to empirically test Qin's ideas are Honk-Kong relations with mainland China and Taiwanese relations with Hong Kong. These two regions were chosen due to their intricate relation vis à vis mainland China and the CCP. Historically, both regions were a part of the Chinese empire and therefore under the jurisdiction of the emperor. Hong Kong was seized by the British from the Qing dynasty in 1841 as war reparations for the first Opium War. Taiwan was the last region of China to resist to the Communist conquest of the mainland during the 1940s. The Kuomintang, fighting against the Communists in the later stages of the 1940s, was forced to flee to Taiwan. They viewed themselves as the rightful rulers of China, both mainland and Taiwan, but since then have moved past those claims. To this day, the CCP pictures themselves as the rightful rulers of the historical Chinese regions.⁵⁶

Both regions are interesting to look at due to their position vis à vis the CCP in a contemporary setting. Hong Kong is not fully a part of China, although it is under its direct sovereignty, while Taiwan and mainland China are separate political entities. Therefore, when adopting a neutral outlook on Chinese relations, Hong Kong qualifies as domestic and Taiwan as foreign.⁵⁷ Taiwan has a complex political relation to the mainland. The island is only recognised by 14 countries and has informal relations with an additional 57

⁵⁶ Kissinger, *On China*, pp. 151-152.

⁵⁷ BBC News, 'What's behind the China-Taiwan divide?'

members of the UN.⁵⁸ The CCP consider Taiwan to be a part of the Chinese nation.⁵⁹ Over time the relations between Taiwan and China have normalised but tensions have risen lately due to Chinese maritime build-up. US military commanders fear that the People's Republic of China (PRC) could move to formally annex Taiwan in the next decade.⁶⁰

The focus within these case studies shall be on the Umbrella movement in Hong Kong and the Sunflower movement in Taiwan, both taking place in 2014. Both movements display a strong sentiment of concern by the island's civil societies regarding the rising impact the PRC has on their lives. The data analysis is therefore focussed on the civil society's relation to the PRC. Even though the movements had certain ties with the opposition, the manifestations were led by civil society, not by the Taiwanese or Hong Kong political parties.

An analysis will be conducted following a qualitative case study approach to evaluate the relevance of the Chinese IR theory. The qualitative study is based on a small-N sample of the two selected cases: PRC Hong Kong civil society relations and Hong Kong Taiwan civil society relations.

A limit arises when looking at the supposed unity of the CCP. Factional opposition is rampant in the CCP and with a bureaucracy so extended, regional and national offices are not always aware, and do not have the time, to address each other's issues.⁶¹ Therefore the CCP in this case is considered as the national standing Politburo. This thesis therefore looks at the domestic and foreign policies the Politburo follows.

The principles of the processual constructivist dialogue will be looked for in the relations in between the chosen entities. They are derived from the literature review and can be summed up as: a harmonious relation that is shaped through dialogue and understanding and a minimal use of force on both sides. When dealing with manifestations force is to be expected and cannot easily be avoided. Therefore an excessive use of force is characterized as an arbitrary violence directed against a group specifically in regard to that

⁵⁸ Maizland, 'Why China-Taiwan Relations Are So Tense'.

⁵⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 'A policy of "one country, two systems" on Taiwan'.

⁶⁰ Maizland, 'Why China-Taiwan Relations Are So Tense'.

⁶¹ Persico, Pueblita, Silverman, 'Factions and Political Competitions', p. 252.

group's position vis à vis an issue. If the relation is in accord with Qin's theory, these principles will be clearly observable.

Overall, the method of analysis used here will be critical discourse analysis. This will be used when addressing the analysed primary sources. The chosen primary sources are, in majority, PRC-CCP-Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) texts of law, diplomatic statements and party journal sources. Historians have indicated that government documents are not properly archived by the Hong Kong government. Documents from the mainland government as well suffer from this treatment. There have also been statements indicating that archived documents are sometimes tampered with.⁶² Therefore, the main primary sources used will be the state media journal articles. They provide a useful insight on the PRC's reactions to the protests due to the media being controlled by the state. Critically analysing these sources is necessary as it will provide knowledge on what the party line was during those events as well as what has been left out on purpose.

⁶² Lo, 'Why Hong Kong Needs and Archives Law', pp. 121-125. / Wu, 'Hong Kong's vanishing archives and the battle to preserve history'.

The Umbrella Protest: Proof of the Lack of a Processual Constructivist Relation in Between the CCP and Hong Kong Civil Society

Processual constructivism is important as in the articulation of its theory, its sets to apply a more humane standard in political relations. Processual constructivist theory has clear similarities with the principles the CCP stresses in its foreign policy doctrine. Both stress a Chinese interpretation of foreign relations based in understanding, dialogue, harmony and peace. This can be seen through the CCP initiative to extend its development focus to the rest of the world, all while advocating for a peaceful coexistence at political forums.⁶³

The development of China in the 2000s shifted from a power that wanted to apply socialist doctrine to its domestic territories to a worldlier objective in the “harmonious world” project launched by Hu Jintao in 2005.⁶⁴ The new Chinese schools of IR are important in this aspect as their role is to develop Chinese ways of thought that can enhance world relations. This is seen in president Xi’s calling for more think tanks with “Chinese characteristics” that can help China modernize its governance and better its international reputation.⁶⁵ This way of thought ties in to Zhao’s interpretation of Tianxia as this “worldly system” sets to introduce a more tolerant and democratic world order.⁶⁶ These new Chinese IR schools are popularly known in China due to some of the academics being invited on national television to propagate new visions of Chinese world governance.⁶⁷

The literature review established that the principles in the processual constructivist theory are based in Chinese tradition, using ethics such as harmony, Tianxia or even Confucian thought to build a Chinese understanding of IR.⁶⁸ As developed by Qin Yaqing, a theory has to be larger than a simple context and has to be applied in a broad manner to

⁶³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, ‘Wang Yi: China, a Staunch Defender and Builder of International Rule of Law’. / Callahan, ‘Introduction’, pp. 2-5.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 1.

⁶⁵ The People’s Daily Online, ‘Xi Calls for new type of think tanks’.

⁶⁶ Zhao, ‘Rethinking Empire from a Chinese Concept’, pp. 33-34.

⁶⁷ Callahan, ‘Introduction’, pp. 6-7.

⁶⁸ Cossick, Zhou, ‘Mutuality: Confucius and Monnet”, pp. 201-203.

be considered as such.⁶⁹ Therefore, processual constructivism, in theory, can be applied to all areas of foreign and domestic relations, as it has a worldly and holistic understanding of relations between states and people.

These following case studies serve as a test of the processual constructivist doctrine. By applying its principles to two cases, this thesis hopes to show that China uses such rhetoric as a way to develop its soft power on the world stage in a hope to validate its actions. This will be done by looking at relations in between Hong Kong civil society and The Chinese government in the context of the 2014 umbrella movement, and Hong Kong's civil society in relation to Taiwanese civil society referring to the similarities and understanding in between the sunflower and umbrella movements.

This analysis shall be done through use of secondary sources relating the events in both cases as well as the primary analysis of Chinese state media and CCP speeches and texts of law referring to Hong Kong. This will show that while the theory of processual constructivism is appreciated by the Chinese leadership, it cannot be applied as a comprehensive framework for the CCP's reaction to the umbrella movement. Meanwhile, it is clear that the theory can be used to understand umbrella-sunflower relations for a multitude of reasons.

Legal Premise of the CCP-Hong Kong Relation

Hong Kong-CCP relations are heavily dependent on the former's status as a former British colony. The issues that plague the relations of the ex-colony with the mainland do not begin with the retrocession in 1997 but in 1980. In 1980, Thatcher and Deng Xiaoping agreed to come together in order to make sure the retrocession of Honk Kong occur with as little complication as possible. This amounts to the Basic Law signed in 1984 and agreed upon by both parties. The Basic Law is the legal document in which Hong Kong law is based, as Hong Kong is a Chinese region with semi-autonomy.⁷⁰

China has made it clear that it desires to uphold the "one country, two systems" policy under which Hong Kong is allowed to be a semi-autonomous region of China under

⁶⁹ Qin, 'The Possibility and Inevitability of a Chinese School of International Relations Theory', p. 41.

⁷⁰ Chen, 'The Law and Politics of Constitutional reform and democratization in Hong Kong', p. 67.

the latter's sovereignty. This can be seen in declarations where the PRC emphasizes the importance of the policy in regards to both Hong Kong and Taiwan.⁷¹ In theory the "one country, two systems" policy falls under a processual constructivist dynamic in between the region and the central government. The promise made by the central government in 1984 shows a concern in letting Hong Kong life thrive under its own set of rules. This shows values of understanding and tolerance that are emphasized by both Qin and Zhao. However, in practice, articles published by CCP controlled media as well as the central government's interpretation of the HKSAR texts of law show a will to homogenize Hong Kong society following CCP ideals. Empirically, this goes against the idea of an understanding leading to a harmonious relationship conforming to Qin's processual constructivist theory.

The "one country, two systems" framework was the adopted solution in 1984 for Hong Kong's retrocession. Technically, the central government greets Hong Kong back into China and does not impose its socialist economic-political system onto it. Hong Kong is under Chinese sovereignty and will be allowed to continue to thrive in its capitalist system.⁷²

When looking at the umbrella movement in Hong Kong, it is quite clear that there is an issue in between what the CCP advocates for, which are in line with Qin's theory, and the information they propagate in the state-run journals. What is to be expected, as states in the methodology, is a relation that can be qualified as processual constructivist. Therefore if the relation should abide by Qin's principles, it is expected to have the CCP listen to the pleas of the people in Hong Kong by engaging in a dialogue, as well as not reply with excessive force. The movement started on the 26th of September 2014 as students protested against central government's white paper released in June as well as its statement on the 31st of August, both stating that the regime wants to open up the election of the Chief Executive (C.E) of Hong Kong to universal suffrage as it is stated in the

⁷¹ Communist Party of China, 'Constitution of the Communist Party of China (Adopted on Nov. 14, 2012)'. / Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, 'The Practice of the "One Country Two Systems" Policy in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region'. / Chinese Government, 'One Country, Two Systems'.

⁷² Ibid.

Hong Kong Basic Law article 45.⁷³ This, however, can only be done following party lines stating that the candidate must be approved by Beijing, making the executive branch in Hong Kong pro-CCP. This was decried as “fake democracy” by the pro-democracy parties and a substantial part of civil society.⁷⁴ It is true that “the ultimate aim is the selection of the C.E. by universal suffrage upon nomination by a broadly representative nominating committee in accordance with democratic procedure”.⁷⁵ Yet both parties have different understanding of this law, which is one of the most contumacious articles in the Basic Law. If interpreted by a protestor, article 45 sets universal suffrage as the final objective of C.E election of the HKSAR. Yet from the CCP’s point of view, this law can only be interpreted by the people’s congress. The CCP’s interpretation of the Basic Law trumps that of the region itself. While the “one country, two systems” policy indicates that Hong Kong is semi-autonomous with its own laws, the act of the CCP having the monopoly over the interpretation of these laws points towards a will of the CCP to homogenize Chinese society following its own lines.

This goes against the ideas of relations as a fluid process in Qin’s ideas as the CCP legally has the ultimate say on how the law is to be interpreted. A fluid relation, based on the values of tolerance and understanding promoting harmony would have the HKSAR and the CCP come together to settle differences over the Basic Law interpretation. This is guaranteed by the Basic Law articles 158 and 159. Both articles stress that the correct interpretation for this law lies within the guidelines that the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress set (NPCSC). There is another committee that must be consulted that represents the HKSAR but this second committee is appointed by the NPCSC.⁷⁶ This gives the CCP monopoly over interpretation at the expense of the Hong Kong government. Yet the legal conundrum does not stop here as the law in Hong Kong is not the same as on the mainland. Hong Kong has its own set of judicial and executive

⁷³ Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, ‘The Practice of the “One Country Two Systems”’. / Constitutional and Mainland Bureau, ‘Chapter IV – Political Structure’, section 1, article 45.

⁷⁴ Rühlig, ‘Hong Kong’s umbrella movement in search of self-determination’, p. 4.

⁷⁵ Constitutional and Mainland Bureau, ‘Chapter IV – Political Structure’, section 1, article 45.

⁷⁶ Constitutional and Mainland Bureau, ‘Chapter VIII – Interpretation and Amendment of the Basic Law’, article 158-159.

apparatus guaranteed by the Basic Law.⁷⁷ The judicial system being biased towards the pro-democracy parties and civil society, the former usually use this to their advantage.⁷⁸

Due to the lack of dialogue, this contradicts processual constructivist theory as the CCP are stifling any sort of civil society demands that come out of Hong Kong. As seen above, this is enshrined in law, but is also reminded in the white paper that states that it is the central government that appoints the development of the Chinese regions, not local governments. This echoes the interpretation of law being dictated by the NPCSC. Furthermore, the statement on the 31st of August goes against the notion of dialogue as the NPCSC have their interpretation of law prevail and explain that there will be universal suffrage, but that the civil society demands of universal suffrage will not be applied due to the lack of a “broadly representative committee” in the considerations, thereby rendering their interpretation of a universal suffrage unlawful.⁷⁹

The Umbrella Movement: a lack of Processual Constructivist Dynamics

The umbrella movement commenced on the 26th of September and ended in the 15th of December 2014. It pitted student movements and the Occupy Central with Peace and Love organization against the HKSAR government and its police. Groups of counter protesters also sporadically joined the executive government. The aims of the umbrella movement differed from organization to organization, but overall it is a movement that practiced acts of civil/democratic disobedience in order to protect democratic self-determination, and Hong Kong’s unique identity. In some fringe cases independence was advocated for but the majority of protesters did not desire this outcome.⁸⁰ It was in the most part strongly supported by the youth, less so by the adults and can be considered a

⁷⁷ Constitutional and Mainland Bureau, ‘Chapter II – Relationship between the Central Authorities and the Hong Kong Administrative Region’, article 16-17.

⁷⁸ Fu, ‘Political protest in high-income societies’, pp. 93-94.

⁷⁹ Constitutional and Mainland Bureau, ‘Chapter IV – Political Structure’, section 1, article 45. / Rühlig, ‘Hong Kong’s umbrella movement’, p. 5.

⁸⁰ Ibid, pp. 4-5.

student's movement as the three people in charge of Occupy Central movement relinquished their leadership in favor of the student movements.⁸¹

Overall the movement was quite peaceful. Several of the leaders of the movement were detained. Lester Chum and Joshua Wong, both leaders among the students were detained and released by the HKSAR authorities. Benny Tai, Chan Kin-man and Chu Yiu-ming, organizers of the Occupy Central movement turned themselves in on the 3rd of December as a final act of resistance but were not detained and were let go.⁸² This act on behalf of the executive authority falls in line with Qin's thought. The fact they were not prosecuted after blocking three main roads of the city for over two months shows a certain tolerance and understanding on behalf of the HKSAR authorities, allied with the CCP. However, it must be taken into account that the protestors have accused the HKSAR police of an excessive use of violence on numerous occasions. The instances were compiled in a report. The report states that the Honk Kong Post-Crisis Counselling Network has concluded 80% of the frontline protestors and police forces showing traces of PTSD. This high level of PTSD diagnosis reflects the high level of violence that both parties suffered in the frontlines. It is important to consider that the police have publicly and repeatedly denied the serious health complications exposition to pepper spray and tear gas as the protests occurred. There are also instances where the police voluntarily use batons to strike the protestors on the head, which goes against guidelines of escalation of response. They are also accused of arbitrarily using force against the protestors but not against anti-protest groups that have illegally blocked access to a pro-democracy media outlet in the city.⁸³ This evidence, coupled with the police constantly affirming that they have behaved correctly while using the minimum amount of force, shows that there is a dissonance in between the position adopted by the police publicly and its actions.⁸⁴ This excessive and arbitrary use of violence against protestors in certain instances goes against processual

⁸¹ Chen, 'the law and politics of Constitutional reform', p. 65. / Chan, 'The Hong Kong Umbrella Movement: A Student's or a People's Movement?'. / BBC News, 'Hong Kong protests: The key players'.

⁸² Ibid. / Rühlig, 'Hong Kong's umbrella movement', pp. 1, 9-11. / Chan, 'The Hong Kong Umbrella Movement'.

⁸³ The Professional Commons and Hong Kong In-Media, '2014-2015 Report on Police Violence in the Umbrella Movement'.

⁸⁴ 政府新聞處 Information Services Department, HKSARG, 'Don't storm gov't buildings : Police (30.11.2014)'. / 政府新聞處 Information Services Department, HKSARG, 'Police want protests to end (3.11.2014)'.

constructivist theory. Both the HKSAR and CCP reactions to the protests attest of an opposition to processual constructivist values.

A part from expressing their support for the HKSAR authorities, the CCP high authorities did little to intervene directly in the region's affairs as they legally cannot send any men to help the executive efforts of the HKSAR police. Yet the reporting of the umbrella protests in the People's Daily, the official CCP journal, shows clearly how the party's reaction to the protests can by no means be described as a processual constructivist relation. There is no interview of the students or the Occupy Central leaders in any article that was published on the journal's website from the 26th of September till the 15th of December. Due to the CCP's control of the journal, all articles are de facto propaganda when the CCP's attitude to the Hong Kong movement is taken into account. Due to this lack of interviews or even pro-Hong Kong articles, the mainland citizens that desire to read upon this subject are confronted with a purely homogenous idea of the umbrella movement. This homogeneity of ideas strictly goes against Qin's theory as he believes that this will to impose one's way of life on another is a purely Western way of conceptualizing relations in an IR setting.⁸⁵ Furthermore, protestors have accused China of wanting to impose its views on the region. Joshua Wong first came to fame through his protest against the central government's push "patriotic education" in Hong Kong which would have emphasized the party's line as opposed to what Hong Kong would have wanted with its guaranteed free press, freedom of thought and expression.⁸⁶

Homogenization is pushed by the party through the state media by emphasizing key principles that are central to maintaining a unified country: the rule of law. The protests, from as early as the 29th of September, have been targeted by a media slander campaign both from HKSAR media as well as mainland media, both pro-CCP. The article on the 29th of September portrays the HKSAR as the defender of the rule of law against the protestors that threaten the stability of Hong Kong society. The article states that the CCP sends its support to the HKSAR authorities and that the protestors have occupied and stormed

⁸⁵ Qin, 'International Society as Process', p. 141.

⁸⁶ BBC News, 'Hong Kong protests: The key players'.

government offices, without mentioning police retaliation with gas against the protestors from the 26th till the 27th of September.⁸⁷

The article of the 1st of October focusses on C.Y Leung, Hong Kong's C.E during the protests as he emphasizes the importance of the "one country, two systems" policy as well as the importance of pursuing socialism with Chinese characteristics. While the latter part of this declaration serves as a testimony of homogenization contrary to processual constructivism due to the 1984 signing of the Basic Law stating that Hong Kong would be allowed to pursue its capitalist development.⁸⁸ This serves to enforce a mainland vision over the events, and goes against the values of processual constructivism.

As a way to give the central authorities leverage in their opposition to the protests there is a trend of the journal only citing people that support the central government and the HKSAR. On the 5th of October Yin Haoliu says "What's wrong with the Communist Party of China which hopes to see a person who loves China and loves Hong Kong elected as Hong Kong's chief executive? Are you willing to choose a chief executive that sells Hong Kong and the whole country?". He then cites powers that have placed their support behind the CCP: Singapore and Russia.⁸⁹ This is key as it is from this date that the journal as well as government publication denounce the protest as being influenced by foreign governments trying to weaken China's achievements and its place in the world. This accusation comes back on the 11th of October as the Chinese government explains its discontent with U.S congressional support behind the Occupy Central and student movements. The day before the CCP pronounced itself as a power that will not let any foreign intervention act upon Chinese domestic affairs or use the movement as a "bargaining chip".⁹⁰

Three pieces written by David Ferguson are interesting for they serve the same purpose as the previous articles. David Ferguson is a pro-CCP journalist that writes for Chinese media. In all three pieces that came out on the 21st of October, 18th and 27th November he defends the CCP and uses a common tactic of the party against all western critique: the war on terror, accusations of past crimes against humanity such as

⁸⁷ The People's Daily Online, 'Illegal assembly in Hong Kong leads to clashes'.

⁸⁸ The People's Daily Online, 'HK must capitalize on "One Country", "Two Systems": HK Chief Executive' / Chinese Government, 'One Country, Two Systems'.

⁸⁹ The People's Daily Online, 'Hong Kongers' free will shall not be held hostage to protestors'.

⁹⁰ The People's Daily Online, 'China denounces U.S. support for HK protest'. / The People's Daily Online, 'HK govt shelves talks amid protests threat by students'.

colonization or slavery and overall accusation of these powers being condescending towards China and the CCP's achievements. Fergusson's articles show that the CCP does not apply processual constructivist values in its relations with other powers as it does not try to understand the other power and is not at ease with any type of critique, often forcing a trumped up rhetoric on its criticizer as a form of defense.⁹¹ This is done here in regards to foreign critiques that the party brushes off as foreign trespassing on Chinese domestic affairs. It is also a fate suffered by the protestors whose arguments are not available in a single issue of the People's Daily.

Qin's theory cannot accurately be applied to the relation in between Hong Kong civil society and the CCP because of Beijing's refusal to meet the protestors. Protestors were interested in voicing their ideas in the capital and a small number of them were ready to make the journey. The CCP did not give the five representatives access to the mainland because the party considers them as agitators and their protest is illegal. This refusal to acknowledge a relation based in dialogue and understanding is contrary to Qin's ideas, once more showing that the CCP uses such theories as a way to advance its soft power on the world stage rather than applying its principles.⁹²

During the protests, the CCP went through its fourth plenary session of the 18th Central Committee. While the state media repeated that the mainland was unshaken by the movement in Hong Kong, the analysis of the communique says otherwise. The phrase "rule of law" is mentioned 50 times throughout the document, emphasizing the importance of such a concept to the party. This ties in to the homogenization of Chinese values through all the territory, despite Hong Kong's semi-independence. At the same time the document proves yet once more that dialogue is non-existent between the party and the protestors as the party sets to "ensure that citizens' economic, cultural, and social rights are respected", which is not the case in Hong Kong through dismissal of acknowledging civil society issues within the context of universal suffrage as well as refusing dialogue.⁹³ This was previously emphasized through the white paper of June 2014

⁹¹ David Ferguson, 'Bringing Western Depocrisy to Hong Kong'. / David Ferguson, 'British Depocrisy and Freedom of Speech'. / David Ferguson, 'Britain and Hong Kong – What say we start with an apology?'

⁹² The People's Daily Online, 'Occupy representatives unwelcome guests in Beijing'.

⁹³ Communist Party of China, 'Communique of the 4th Plenary Session'.

with the reminding of the people that “the high degree of autonomy of the HKSAR is not full autonomy, nor a decentralized power”.⁹⁴

These primary sources demonstrate an importance of processual constructivist thought when looking at Chinese relations with other foreign powers as best exemplified by Wang Yi’s castigating of the use of “double standards” when it comes to international law and politics, yet its lack of implementation in domestic politics.⁹⁵ Qin’s theory, while being applied in the rhetoric used in speeches that are directed to foreign actors, cannot be verified when looking at relations in between the central government and Hong Kong. This shows the uses of these new schools of IR are, at least for now, directed towards soft power development.

⁹⁴ Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, ‘The Practice of the “One Country Two Systems” Policy’.

⁹⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, ‘Wang Yi:’.

Taiwanese and Hong Kong Civil Society Relations: Proof of Processual Constructivist Theory

As demonstrated in the first case study, the relation in between the CCP and Hong Kong civil society cannot be qualified as a processual constructivist dynamic. Furthermore, the HKSAR government being deeply linked to the mainland government reveals that the government of Hong Kong does not have a processual constructivist relation with a great part of its own people, especially the younger generations. The following case study serves as an example of what a processual constructivist relation should resemble. The irony is that this relation is clearly visible between the two regions that show dissent towards the CCP leadership: Hong Kong and Taiwan.

A first part will demonstrate a lack of processual constructivist relation in between the Taiwanese civil society and the PRC government despite normalization of cross-strait relations in recent years. The focus of this part will be on the CCP reaction, or rather lack thereof, during the Taiwanese sunflower protest of 2014. There will also be a short analysis on what the sunflower movement changed in Taiwanese-CCP relations.

A second part will be dedicated to the relation in between the Taiwanese and Hong Kong movements. This part will concentrate on proving that the principles of processual constructivism can in fact be applied to the dynamics relating the movements in both regions.

CCP-Taiwanese Relations During the Sunflower Movement

The sunflower movement preceded the umbrella movement in 2014. The protestors that partook in the movement originally opposed the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA) bill that was forcibly passed by the Kuomintang political party. The CSSTA bill was signed by the Kuomintang (KMT) leadership and the CCP in Beijing behind closed doors. It was an economic bill to facilitate Chinese investment in Taiwan as well as

cross-strait relations, a first since the end of the establishment of the PRC in 1949.⁹⁶ President Ma who was in power at the time of the sunflower movement ran his campaign on a promise to normalize cross-strait relations by passing bills such as the CSSTA or the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement.

The opposition and civil society expressed concerns with CSSTA. Both were weary that such agreements might be too favourable to the CCP and might increase the influence of the mainland government on the island, ultimately forcing a re-integration in the PRC. The KMT and opposition agreed to have the bill reviewed article by article in order to make sure the bill would not threaten Taiwanese businesses, freedom of thought and press, nor threaten direct influence over local politics by the CCP.⁹⁷

The CSSTA was reviewed, article by article, as convened after it was signed by the KMT and CCP in 2013. The CSSTA had not received much media coverage for months. Only two groups had formed in 2013 directly opposing its measures: the DF, a coalition of Taiwanese NGOs and BIY, a student activist group.⁹⁸ Yet on the 17th of March 2014, an emboldened KMT announced that it cleared the procedure and submitted the law for a final reading. A KMT politician, Chang Ching-Chung used a private microphone to announce that the second reading of the CSSTA had been conducted. He had previously been stopped from going to the legislative podium by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) opposition. This was a breach of the process that was agreed upon. This event came to be known as the “30 seconds incident”. It took both political and civil society spheres by surprise.⁹⁹

This event emboldened the opposition to harden its anti-China stance. The two civil-society groups that had formed in 2013 stormed the legislative building on the 18th of March as a move to force the KMT to retract the CSSTA. The DPP soon voiced its support of the occupation movement as the civil society support grew. This movement came to be known as the sunflower movement and lasted 23 days, with the occupation ending on the

⁹⁶ Rowen, ‘Inside Taiwan’s Sunflower Movement: Twenty-four Days in a student-occupied parliament, and the future of the region’, p. 6. / Ho, ‘Occupy Congress in Taiwan: Political Opportunity, Threat and the Sunflower Movement’, pp. 76-77.

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 80. / Jones, Su, ‘Confrontational Contestation and Democratic Compromise The Sunflower Movement and its Aftermath’, pp. 20-23.

⁹⁸ Ho, ‘From Mobilization to Improvisation : the Lessons from Taiwan’s 2014 Sunflower Movement’, p. 194.

⁹⁹ Ho, ‘Occupy Congress in Taiwan’, pp. 79-80.

10th of April 2014 after the protestors were able to convince the government to stop the passing of the CSSTA until another agreement, the Cross-Strait Agreement Supervision (CSAS) had been formally passed. The CSAS was to be a pre-requisite to the legal passing of the CSSTA.¹⁰⁰

While the election of President Ma in 2008 and the signing of the CSSTA were events that hinted at a normalization of cross-strait relations and a resuming of dialogue in between the PRC and the Republic of China, these events cannot be qualified as a processual constructivist dialogue.

The PRC does not consider Taiwan to be its own country. The CCP leadership still believes that it should bring all Chinese people together, including the inhabitants of Hong Kong and Taiwan.¹⁰¹ The Chinese government does not show any concern for how the population or the Taiwanese political opposition feel regarding their will to be integrated into China. This is nothing new as the “one country, two systems” policy is legally applied to Hong Kong and is also extended to Taiwan, without the Taiwanese people or government agreeing to any such policy. This has been the case since the signing of the policy with Great Britain in 1984 by PRC President Deng Xiaoping.¹⁰² Such relation in between the PRC and the Taiwanese people goes against the processual constructivist idea as the PRC seeks to homogenize the Chinese speaking world under its own sovereignty regardless of the people’s emotions. This reveals contradiction when considering that Qin argues that people’s emotions are of the utmost importance when leading a country. A poll released by the DPP before the sunflower movement protest, showed that 41% of Taiwanese society was unhappy with the KMT’s stance vis à vis China.¹⁰³ As the protest grew, more and more of Taiwanese society supported it. This support was manifested in the 300000 to 500000 people that took to the streets on the 30th of March.¹⁰⁴ With 1.2% to 2.1% of the Taiwanese population in the streets and many more supporting the movement, taking into account that this was the largest pro-democracy demonstration in

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, pp. 69-70. / Ho, ‘From Mobilization to Improvisation’, pp. 194-195.

¹⁰¹ Communist Party of China, ‘Constitution of the Communist Party of China’. / Communist Party of China, ‘Communique of the 4th Plenary Session’.

¹⁰² Chinese Government, ‘One Country, Two Systems’. / Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, ‘A policy of “one country, two systems”’.

¹⁰³ Ho, ‘Occupy Congress in Taiwan’, p. 80.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 87. / Cole, ‘Hundreds of Thousands Protest Against Trade Pact in Taiwan’.

Taiwanese history, the Taiwanese population does not feel that it is Chinese. Rather, the sentiment of being Taiwanese rather than Chinese has soared in the last years, especially among the youth.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, Taiwan ranks as one of the lowest likely population to join or support hard-line protest.¹⁰⁶

During the events of the sunflower protest, the CCP did not reach out to the Taiwanese government in a way that could suggest a dialogue following processual constructivist lines. A CCP politburo member, Yu Zhengsheng, simply asked the labour unions in Taiwan to support the trade deals. There was also little mention of the protests in the party newspapers. An article on the 23rd of March in the People's Daily Online states that students have stormed the legislative building in Hong Kong. The CCP indicates that the deal can only be beneficial to the economy of the island. The protestors, civil society and the opposition on the other hand voiced concerns about the issues small and medium businesses would have adapting to neo-liberal market tendencies. This proves a lack of understanding between the island's people and the mainland's government. The CCP slanders the protestor's actions as undemocratic, blaming the opposition for not letting the article lecture procedures run as planned.¹⁰⁷ The other article published was on the last day of the protests. This type of coverage seems quite poor and biased when speaking of the largest pro-democracy protest in Taiwanese history. The CCP does not care to accurately portray the protestors' concerns, showing a lack of understanding by the mainland government, an act going against Qin's ideas.

Evidence of a Processual Constructivist Dynamic: Taiwanese and Hong Kong Civil

Societies

There was an absence of a processual constructivist dialogue in between the CCP and Taiwanese civil society. Yet when comparing the protestor movements in Hong Kong and Taiwan, there is clear evidence of a relation that can be described as following Qin's ideas.

¹⁰⁵ Rowen, 'Inside Taiwan's Sunflower Movement:', pp. 5, 14, 18.

¹⁰⁶ Ho, 'Occupy Congress in Taiwan', p. 70.

¹⁰⁷ The People's Daily Online, 'Taiwan's leader defends service past against protest'. / Jones, Su, 'Confrontational Contestation and Democratic Compromise', pp. 20-23.

The similar tactics used in both movements show similarities. Both movements were mainly supported by civil society in Taiwanese and Hong Kong regions. In both regions there is proof that the protestors were animated by similar ideals of preserving their way of life against an ever growing spectre of Chinese influence. Both societies took to the streets even though they are traditionally known to be non-confrontational.¹⁰⁸

The actions used in the sunflower protest clearly influenced the methods of manifestation that would be utilised by Hong Kong civil society months later. The Taiwanese protest commenced by the storming and occupation of the Legislative Council (LegCo) on the night of the 18th of March 2014. A small group of protestors planned this action after the “30 seconds incident” on the 17th entered the LegCo, barricading themselves inside. The news spread quickly and people gathered around the LegCo to prevent policemen and security officers to access the building, thereby protecting the hardened protestors.¹⁰⁹

The scenario that played out on the 18th of March in Taiwan follows this scenario: 1) A small band of emboldened protestors fighting for an ideal of democracy and freedom storm into a government building. 2) The police try to prevent the protestors’ action with violence. 3) This aggressive reaction brings more people to the help of the hardliners as media reports on the event. 4) The original occupation has gathered such attention that it is now a fully-fledged movement.¹¹⁰

The umbrella movement, while taking place over a longer period of time, followed the same initial steps.¹¹¹ Emboldened protestors, Joshua Wong and 3000 others, stayed in front of the LegCo building in Civic Square on the 26th of September 2014. After these protestors called to retake Civic Square they storm the LegCo building, to no avail. The police arrested Joshua Wong and replied by firing tear gas and pepper spraying the remaining protestors that stayed in Civic Square. This violent repression by the police was relayed by Hong Kong medias and soon more protestors flocked to the help of the protestors that had stayed in Civic Square the night of the 26th and day of the 27th of

¹⁰⁸ Ho, ‘Occupy Congress in Taiwan’, p. 70. / Fu, ‘Political Protest in High-Income Societies’, p. 97.

¹⁰⁹ Ho, ‘From Mobilization to Improvisation:’, p. 194.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, pp. 191, 194-195. / Jones, Su, ‘Confrontational Contestation and Democratic Compromise’, pp. 20-23.

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 16. / Chen, ‘The Law and Politics of Constitutional Reform and Democratization in Hong Kong’, p. 65.

September. The protestors were able to stand thanks to those that join. The police stood down on the 29th and the Occupy Central with Peace and Love movement was in motion.¹¹²

The original phases happening in a very similar manner show that the Taiwanese protest served as an example for the Hong Kong protestors. The Hong Kong movement gathered more media attention than its Taiwanese counterpart and served to show the Western world what youths were increasingly against the Chinese autocratic pressure over its neighbouring regions. Just as in Taiwan, the protests garnered a substantial amount of support. Before the protests commenced, an online referendum was conducted on the week of the 22nd of June 2014. This referendum was organized by the Occupy Central group and more than 700000 people answered. The answer was overwhelmingly in support of the election of the C.E. to be conducted by universal suffrage. This shows the popular base these protests have as in 2014, 700000 people was equivalent to more than 10% of the Hong Kong population.¹¹³

The similarities in between the two movements continue when looking at the demographics involved and the objectives of the protestors. Both protests were broadly supported by Hong Kong and Taiwanese citizens but the majority of the people in the streets were students. The highest support rates were also found among students.¹¹⁴ In Hong Kong, the Occupy Central leadership even relinquished their positions and passed the torch to the student movements.¹¹⁵ As the movements progressed, the objectives became more and more similar. This shows a similarity in thought and feeling, demonstrating that the hearts of Taiwanese and Hong Kong Civil societies are in the same place. This value is central to Qin's and Zhao's theories. As proved by the popular support for these protests, this value is absent from CCP relations with Hong Kong and Taiwan, yet present in the dynamics of Hong Kong and Taiwanese relations. Originally, the protestors opposed bills or declarations from their respective governments. The Hong Kong protests were opposed to the white paper released by the CCP. They were also a protest to force the CCP to have

¹¹² Rühlig, 'Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement in Search of Self-Determination', p. 1. / Chan, 'The Hong Kong Umbrella Movement'. / BBC News, 'Hong Kong protests: The key players'.

¹¹³ Gelb, 'A Tale of Two Movements: Student Protests in Hong Kong and Taiwan'. / Chen, 'The Law and Politics of Constitutional Reform and Democratization in Hong Kong', pp. 74-75.

¹¹⁴ Chan, 'The Hong Kong Umbrella Movement:', p. 1.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 3.

universal suffrage in the 2017 C.E. elections. Taiwanese protests were originally against the “30 seconds incident” as well as an opposition to concentration of power in the hands of the executive.¹¹⁶ As the protests continued, they became manifestations of an opposition to the autocratic politics of the CCP. This feeling of opposition common to both societies, especially among the youth, tie in the idea of the people’s heart being in the same place in Zhao’s Tianxia theory.¹¹⁷

The support Taiwanese activists have shown while the umbrella movement was occurring is the sign of a processual constructivist relation between the two regions’ civil societies. Taiwanese students gathered in late September in Taipei as a way to give hope to Hong Kong protestors. The sunflower movement sent a powerful message to Hong Kong indicating that change was possible. Taiwanese students indicated it was important to stand with Hong Kong during the umbrella movement. A strong feeling of impending catastrophe unites the Taiwanese protestors to the Hongkongers. As indicated by activist Karen Cheng: “we're worried that today's Hong Kong will be tomorrow's Taiwan”.¹¹⁸ This strong emotional bond that unifies the youth in both societies indicates that both societies increasingly want to go their separate ways from mainland China. This shows in polls, confirming that youths increasingly identify as Hong Kong Chinese or Hongkonger in Hong Kong as Taiwanese students increasingly feel less Chinese and more Taiwanese.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Rühlig, ‘Hong Kong’s Umbrella Movement in Search of Self-Determination’, p. 7. / Jones, Su, ‘Confrontational Contestation and Democratic Compromise’, pp. 20-23.

¹¹⁷ Zhao, ‘Rethinking Empire from a Chinese Concept’, p. 32.

¹¹⁸ Sui, ‘Why Taiwan is watching Hong Kong protests’. / Kaiman, ‘Taiwan shows growing support for Hong Kong protests’.

¹¹⁹ Rowen, ‘Inside Taiwan’s Sunflower Movement’, pp. 18-19.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to show that Chinese schools of thought bring new ideas to a broader IR debate such as a democratization of the world order, but empirically fail to deliver when applied to domestic politics. The case studies of CCP relations with Hong Kong and Taiwan were used as proof of the overly idealistic principles of processual constructivist theory. Processual constructivist theory may be applied to the dynamics of a Taiwan-Hong Kong relation, but in no way can be applied to Chinese relations with those two regions.

The principles of processual constructivism can also be applied to international Chinese rhetoric. This was seen in speeches given by representatives of the CCP in great summits all while those same values were violated in the Hong Kong protests by use of excessive force and an unwillingness by the CCP to understand the regions' civil society. Meanwhile, in Taiwan, the lack of reporting or interaction with the Island during the sunflower movement also showed an unwillingness to engage in any sort of dialogue.

The two protests did not have the same impact vis à vis the societies they took place in. In Taiwan, the protestors obtained concessions from the government, ending the occupation of LegCo on the 10th of April 2014. New parties were formed, headed by activists, and these parties gained seats in Taiwanese chambers in 2016 allied with the DPP. The DPP candidate also became president of Taiwan in 2016.¹²⁰ DPP president Tsai Ing-Wen was re-elected for a second mandate in 2020, attesting of the long-term changes the sunflower movement caused in Taiwanese society.

The Hong Kong protest yielded much less success in comparison. No concessions were obtained from the central government. However, the umbrella movement did send out a message, more so than the Taiwan sunflower movement. The Hon-Kong protests received more media coverage and enabled the world to see that a substantial part of Hongkongers opposed CCP rule. The continuation of protests in Hong Kong during 2019, this time much more violent show that the fight for Hong Kong is not over yet.¹²¹ Once

¹²⁰ Jones, Su, 'Confrontational Contestation and Democratic Compromise', pp. 24-25.

¹²¹ South China Morning Post, 'China's Rebel City: The Hong Kong Protests'.

again, Taiwan stood with Hong Kong in 2019.¹²² Though not for the same original reasons, the protests in 2019-2020 also were motivated by a heavy anti-CCP sentiment. The passing of a law in Beijing against vandalism and terrorism on the 30th of June 2020 was criticized, being unjustly targeted at protestors in Hong Kong. This again is a more recent proof that processual constructivist theory cannot be applied to the dynamics of the CCP and Hong Kong relations. The policy has been decried as being the first major leap to the end of the “one country, two systems” policy.

The developing Chinese academic schools and think tanks provide an increasing amount of theories. The issue with such theories is that they are idealistic and lack any formal empirical application when applying them to Chinese domestic and foreign relations as explained in this thesis. They bring new thoughts that are interesting and overall, due to these ideas being impossible to apply to Chinese relations for now, they favour Chinese rhetoric and are used on the international stage. They benefit Chinese soft power, propagated through an idealistic lens of Chinese behaviour on the world stage. This serves to meliorate outlook on Chinese projects that are being developed today: Chinese investment in Africa or the Belt and Road initiative for example. This rhetoric favours China as being the rival of the US, offering a more democratic and tolerant world view, while not being able to deliver on these promises as of now.

¹²² Morris, ‘Hong Kong Protests: The View From Taiwan’.

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