

US Foreign Policy toward Hong Kong Protests

A Neoclassical Realist Assessment of US foreign policy

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Abstract

It is puzzling why would the US intervene in 2019 Hong Kong Protest under President Trump and his “America First” policy. Neoclassical Realism suggests that while system stimuli set the grand strategy for US foreign policy, unit-level factors determine the character and venue of the US foreign policy. In an attempt to test such claim by Neoclassical Realism, this thesis adopts the Semi-Orthodox approach, which argues that domestic factors act as a channel through which the system’s imperative is translated regularly into states’ foreign policy. By using the process tracing method to test the case - *Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act of 2019*, this thesis found that in a permissive environment without imminent threat, domestic factors weighed more heavily on US foreign policy. System stimuli set the grand strategy for US foreign policy, unit-level factors such as perceptions of foreign policy elites (FPE), legislative branch influence, the dominance of liberal ideals in US foreign policy discourse, and political structure determine the characters of US foreign policy toward Hong Kong protests. In general, the explanation by Neoclassical Realism is plausible when applying to US foreign policy toward China regarding human right issues.

Keywords: Neoclassical Realism, system stimuli, domestic factors, the US, the Hong Kong protests

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 2019 Hong Kong Protests

The 2019 Hong Kong protests was a mass movement that involved series of protests in Hong Kong in 2019. The protests were triggered by the introduction of a controversial law bill, the Fugitive Offenders amendment bill, by the Hong Kong government. There had been no extradition agreement between Hong Kong and China, however, If the bill had been enacted, it would have allowed the extradition of Hongkonger fugitives to China. This led to concerns of Hongkonger that the bill would be an excuse for the Chinese government to extradite political dissidents to China. It would also subject Hongkonger and even visitors who travel to Hong Kong to the Chinese jurisdiction and legal system.¹ Hongkonger were afraid that the bill would undermine Hong Kong's autonomy and their civil liberties.

Despite a demonstration by an estimated one million Hongkonger on 9 June, the government did not back down, and persisted with passing the bill with a first reading in the Legislative Council (Legco). On 12 June, protesters attempted to stall the second reading of the bill by surrounding the Legco, and it ended with a bloody clash between the protesters and the police. Carrie Lam, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, announced that the bill was suspended three days after. However, the protestors insisted on a complete withdrawal of the bill instead of a half-hearted suspension, and they believed that the bill would be brought back to the second reading once the protests were gone. Thus, an even greater number of people, an estimate of 2 million people, participated in the demonstration took place on 16 June, just the day after the suspension of the bill. As the protests progressed, although the majority of the protesters had remained peaceful, Hong Kong Police Force had responded with excessive violence, firing tear gas and rubber bullets at protesters indiscriminately, beating the under control arrestee in the head with batons, committing torture and inhuman abuses during detention, attacking journalists, etc.

¹ Hong Kong was a semi-autonomous region which had its own independent judiciary system separated from China

As a result of the violent suppression, they had demanded not only a simple withdrawal of the bill, but Hong Kong needed a fundamental political reform. Many had realized that only a democratic government could solve the political problems in Hong Kong. They demanded universal suffrages for electing the Chief Executive and Legco. In addition, fuming at the police's actions, the protestors came up with three other demands: (1) an independent inquiry into police misconduct and brutality, (2) retracting the classification of protests as "riots", (3) and amnesty for all arrested protesters. Under the strong pressure from the prolonged protests, Lam decided to withdraw the bill on 4 September, but she remained unyielding to concede on the other demands.

Entering November, tensions further increased. The deaths of two students, who were believed to be murdered by the police, and police shooting with live rounds, further intensified the protests and the clashes between the protestors and the police. On 12 November, student protesters called for a general strike, and occupied several university campuses to block key thoroughfares, which locate next to these university campuses, attempting to paralyze the traffics. The police had responded with besieging the university campuses. Two most violent clashes successively took place in the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. In the second half of November, the university campuses had been descending kind of into "warzones", where the police fired countless tear gas, rubber bullets, bean bag rounds, sponge grenades, water cannons to try to break into the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, but the protestors resisted bravely and refused to give in. In the end, the sieges were ended peacefully when the protestors gave in. Many were injured and arrested after the incidents.

1.2 International Reactions

Back in May, Carrie Lam held a special meeting with 11 European Union representatives after they issued a démarche to formally protest against the bill. Meanwhile, on 24 May, eight commissioners from the US Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC), Marco Rubio, Tom Cotton, Steve Daines from the US Senate, and James McGovern, Ben McAdams, Christopher Smith, Thomas

Suozzi and Brian Mast from the House of Representatives wrote to Carrie Lam and urged the Hong Kong government to withdraw the bill. In the letter, they expressed their worry that the extradition bill would irreparably damage Hong Kong's autonomy and human rights by allowing the Chinese government to request extradition of businesspersons and political activists in Hong Kong. In addition, the commissioners warned that the bill could negatively impact the US policy which gave Hong Kong special and preferential treatment over mainland China based on the United States–Hong Kong Policy Act of 1992.

Since 9 June 2019, Council of the European Union of the EU had released several declarations regarding the situation Hong Kong, on 17 August, 2 October, and 18 November. It had urged the Hong Kong government to respect fundamental human rights and freedoms, including the right of assembly of Hongkonger. The EU has called for restraint of violence from the law enforcement authorities and from protestors, as well as a dialogue between themselves. It had also urged the Hong Kong and Chinese government to uphold the ‘One country, two systems’ principle; and to respect the Hong Kong Basic Law and the high degree of autonomy of Hong Kong. However, although the EU had been continuously emphasizing its support to the fundamental rights and freedoms of the Hongkonger committed by the Hong Kong Basic Law, no concrete action had been taken to put sufficient pressure on Hong Kong and Chinese government. It is merely a “support on paper”. Apart from being part of the EU declarations, the UK had not done much more (Council of the European Union, 2019a; 2019b, 2019c).

The US had taken quite a different foreign policy toward Hong Kong protests. It had been the leading or even the only country passed a law in supporting for the protests. The Congress introduced the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act of 2019 (HKHRDA) and the bill was passed by both Senate and the House almost unanimously. Despite President Trump’s swinging position toward the Hong Kong protests, from restating his respect for the internal sovereignty of China to threatening not to sign a trade deal with China if China did not handle the protests in a “humanitarian fashion”, in the end, he signed the HKHRDA into law on 27 November. The US would impose sanctions on human

rights violators in Hong Kong, and restrict exporting crowd control weapons and devices to the Hong Kong Police Force.

International Relations theory attempts to provide a conceptual framework to analyze international relations and it may have an answer to explain why did the US have such foreign policies. In the following, this thesis will look at how do the two of the most prominent theories, Neoliberal Institutionalism and Neorealism, explain the US response to the 2019 Hong Kong protests.

1.3 Neoliberal Institutionalism and Neorealism Perspectives

Neoliberal Institutionalism claims that international organizations and global governance significantly affect how states behave in the international system. The theory also focuses on interdependence and absolute gains, and it argues that states cooperate despite anarchy in the international system. (Stein, 2010)

However, there was a lack of evidence showing that the US response to Hong Kong protests had been influenced by any international organization. Given that China is one the permanent member in the Security Council in the United Nations, with its veto power, the United Nations would never able to intervene in Hong Kong protests. Besides, influences of any other international organizations on member states' reactions to the Hong Kong protests remains unclear. It was highly doubtful that United Nations or any other international organizations had governed the US foreign policy toward Hong Kong protests.

In addition, Neoliberal Institutionalism would suggest that the US and China (and Hong Kong) would resolve their conflicts together because there was economic interdependence between them. However, did the US pay more attentions on absolute gains rather than relative gains? By looking at the trade war between the US and China, the inference by Neoliberal Institutionalism is contestable. Despite the constant warnings from China that Hong Kong protests was an internal affair of China and the US intervention would seriously harm the relationships between the two countries, the US still passed the

HKHRDA. Economic interdependence did not really constraint the US behaviour in responding to the Hong Kong protests.

On the other hand, Neorealism claims that states always try to maximize their power in order to survive in the anarchy system. States want to achieve hegemony, and at the same time they want to prevent others becoming a hegemony. (Ripsman et al., 2016) According to Neorealism, the US should try to maximize its power as much as possible, and prevent China from becoming the regional hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region. The Neorealist would then argue that the US would make use of the HKHRDA to hinder the growth of China. The US would use it as a “weapon” to support or even escalate the protests. Hong Kong, being the important economic and financial center of China, if the protests continued there, the political instability would definitely hinder the rise of China to become the regional hegemon, and it would be what the US wants to see.

1.4 Puzzle

Neoliberal Institutionalism claims that states will cooperate to achieve common interests and to solve common problems under the influence of international institutions. If the US respected China’s sovereignty on Hong Kong, then why would the US have a unilateral foreign policy siding with the protestors against the Chinese regime, despite the HKHRDA would harm the relationship between the two countries?

On the other hand, if Neorealism could describe the world system perfectly, then why would the US continue to recognize Hong Kong being part of China? Shouldn’t the US make use of this opportunity to split Hong Kong from China to further weaken China? However, the US response did not seem to be about protecting its interest or hegemony only. In fact, as the name implies, Hong Kong “Human Right” and “Democracy” Act seemed to have a strong relation with liberal democracy and human rights norms. Besides, the HKHRDA was made in the Congress. So, did domestic factors, for example the perceptions of elites or institution dynamics, play the important roles in the making of the US foreign policy? Power politics did not seem to be the only explanation as Neorealism suggests.

Furthermore, President Trump is famous for his “America First” isolationism, why would the US under Trump administration intervene in Hong Kong protests?

Then it comes to the general research question of the thesis:

What explain the US foreign policy toward the 2019 Hong Kong protests?

Hence, a theory that take the international system and domestic factors into account seems to make a more plausible explanation. Neoclassical Realism (NCR) is a relatively new but important approach to international relations. By analyzing the interaction of the international system and the internal dynamics of states, NCR seeks to explain the foreign policy of individual state. NCR suggests that while system stimuli set the grand strategy for US foreign policy, unit-level factors such as perceptions of foreign policy elites (FPE), legislative branch influence, the dominance of liberal ideals in US foreign policy discourse, etc. determine the character of the foreign policy (Ripsman et al., 2016).

Applying NCR’s theoretical insight to the case of Hong Kong, it can be understood as the following: When the US and China were competing in the international system, the US had a relatively stronger power position. This determined the parameter of the US foreign policy. The US would try to maintain its hegemony status and contain the rise of China. Furthermore, the US domestic factors acted as the intervening variables. They determined the character of the foreign policy toward Hong Kong protests. Given that the HKHRDA was passed by the Congress, so the legislative power of the Congress was one of the most important domestic factors. The Congress set the character of the US foreign policy toward Hong Kong.

Therefore, a more specific sub-research question for this thesis would be:

To what extent can Neoclassical realism explain US foreign policy toward 2019 Hong Kong protests?

In addition, since there had been frequent protests in Hong Kong and the protests triggered by the extradition bill in 2019 had been carried on to date, it is important for this thesis to set a timeframe of analysis. The thesis focus on two phases, prior and during the Hong Kong protests in 2019.

The period prior the protests refer to the first half of 2019, the days before 9 June and the year 2018 and some parts of 2017 are also included. Using 9 June as the watershed because it was the day which marked the beginning of the clashes between protestors and police. Also, the events on 9 June triggered the introduction of HKHRDA in the Congress. This thesis will analyze the empirics in the period prior to the protests to determine what was the system stimuli the US was facing?; what was the perception of the FPE?; and What had the US foreign policy toward China been before the protest?

The second phase, during the protest, refers to the period starting from June 9 to the end of November, when the foreign policy toward Hong Kong protests was officially formulated. This thesis will analyze the empirics in the period during the protest to trace the process that led to the HKKRDA.

1.5 Method

This thesis will make use of qualitative case study research design. More specifically, a single case, the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act, will be used to test the theory, Neoclassical Realism. In terms of method of data collection and data analysis, by using qualitative data, this thesis will conduct the analysis based on the process tracing method, seeking to trace the causal relation and causal mechanism between system stimuli and foreign policy, and the role of intervening variables, domestic factors, in the causal chain.

1.6 Scientific Relevance

This thesis intends to use the least-likely case, HKHRDA (US foreign policy toward Hong Kong protests), to confirm NCR. It intends to test that, instead of assuming an international system

governed by international institutions as suggested by Neoliberal Institutionalism, the international system is more like an anarchy as suggested by NCR. Besides, cooperations between countries are not always preferable even they are economically interdependent. NCR contends that system stimuli would set the grand strategy of states, and two states can still be non-cooperative and rivalry if they are competing for relative power in the system regardless their economic interdependence. Are NCR's assumptions more plausible (Ripsman et al., 2016)?

Furthermore, although NCR's arguments mentioned above are based on Neorealism, can NCR provide a more thorough explanation than Neorealism? Does the international system dictate all state behaviours? Is there only self-help in international system? Are all states amoral and only hungry for powers? NCR added that system stimuli needs to be transferred through domestic factors to shape states' behaviours (Ripsman et al., 2016). Domestic factors act as the intervening variables linking the system stimuli and states' actions. Hence, this thesis intends to find out is it more plausible for NCR to include domestic factors, in addition to system stimuli, in explain US foreign policy?

This thesis will find out is NCR a more plausible International Relations theory than Neoliberal institutionalism and Neorealism in explaining states' foreign policy.

1.7 Societal relevance

By understanding the different motives and actors behind US foreign policy, the Chinese and Hong Kong government, and other societal organizations can decide their responses accordingly. Also, the Hong Kong protestors should learn the grand strategy of the US, and apply protest tactics that will align with the US grand strategy to gain their support. They need to have a better understanding in what kind of actions are acceptable to the US, how radical can their protests be? If the US response is highly motivated by liberal democracy idea held by the elites, protestors' actions should align with these ideas. Furthermore, protestors can learn which actors influence the making of the US foreign policy the most from the findings, and, thus, they can find out which actors they should appeal to if they want to ask for help from the US.

1.8 Structure

This introductory chapter gives a brief overview of the protests in Hong Kong and the international responses to the protests. It attempts to illustrate the empirical discrepancies of Neorealism and Neoliberal Institutionalism in the case of the US foreign policy. Also, it illustrates the puzzles associated with the two theories, and proposes a research question. Furthermore, Neoclassical Realism has been briefly introduced as a theoretical framework that might provide the answers that the other two theories cannot. The method will be used in this thesis and the relevance of this thesis are discussed as well.

Chapter 2 introduces the Neoclassical Realism as the theoretical framework. This chapter begins with a brief introduction of NCR. Secondly, it compares NCR to other theories. Thirdly, it gives an overview of empirical research conducted within NCR. Fourthly, it discusses the major criticism of NCR. Then, it provides this thesis's position on NCR approach in answering the research. After that, it provides an NCR expectation of American foreign policy on Hong Kong protests. Finally, this chapter ends with hypotheses of American foreign policy on Hong Kong protests.

Chapter 3 talks about the method of the thesis. This chapter will demonstrate the theoretical purpose of a single case study research design. What are the pros and cons of single case? Why the case chosen, Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act, is relevant to NCR? What is the research design? How does this thesis operationalize? What is the generalizability of the case? What are the sources?

Chapter 4 is the empirical research. This Chapter begins with tracing the phase prior the protest. First, it will determine what kind systemic environment the US was having? Was it a permissive environment? Then it will look at the perceptions of the FPE to see did the system signals successfully transferred to their perceptions, and did they adopt risky foreign policies toward China based on the perception of the system stimuli? It will be followed by the political views of the three important figures in the Congress. Were they having Wilsonian foreign policy outlook toward Hong Kong?

After that, it will turn to the tracing of the second phase. How was the decision-making process of the HKHRDA? It will look at why the HKHRDA was introduced in the Congress and what were the responses of the FPE and the members of the Congress in respect to their perceptions? Then, it will demonstrate how was the HKHRDA being passed in the Congress. Finally, it will show that did the HKHRDA become the foreign policy toward Hong Kong protests without objection?

Chapter 5 is the conclusion and discussion. This chapter starts with a summary. Then it provides answers to the research questions. After that, it reflects on the methodology and theory used in this thesis. Finally, it discusses the policy implication and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

As mentioned in chapter 1, two IR theories, Neorealism and Neoliberal Institutionalism, both have their limitations in explaining the US response on the recent Hong Kong protests. Hence, this thesis seeks to examine to what extent NCR offers a plausible explanation of US foreign policy toward 2019 Hong Kong protests.

This thesis uses a NCR middle-ground approach in examining US foreign policy, and it treats NCR as a theory of foreign policy rather than theory of international relations. The dependent variable of NCR causal logic should not be the outcomes of state interactions, instead, it should be the particular foreign policy of individual states. As, Taliaferro, Lobell, and Ripsman (2009) put it:

Neoclassical realism seeks to explain variation in the foreign policies of the same state over time or across different states facing similar external constraints. It makes no pretense about explaining broad patterns of systemic or recurring outcomes. Thus, a neoclassical realist hypothesis might explain the likely diplomatic, economic, and military responses of particular states to systemic imperatives, but it cannot explain the systemic consequences of those responses. (p. 21)

Theoretically, NCR retains Classical Realism's and Neorealism's concerns while providing greater richness and fit in explaining state's foreign policy by incorporating both systematic and domestic factors into its theory.

There are different approaches in NCR, but this thesis contends that different NCR approaches more or less contain two major elements: 1. System stimuli primarily influences the scope and ambition of a state's foreign policy; 2. Yet, the system incentives on foreign policy are rather indirect and complex, and systemic incentives are filtered through intervening domestic level variables.

This chapter begins with a brief introduction of NCR. Secondly, it compares NCR to other theories. Thirdly, it gives an overview of empirical research conducted within NCR. Fourthly, it discusses the major criticism of NCR. Then, it provides this thesis's position on NCR approach in answering the

research question. After that, it provides an NCR expectation of US foreign policy toward Hong Kong protests. Finally, this chapter ends with hypotheses of US foreign policy toward Hong Kong protests.

2.1 The Emergence of Neoclassical Realism

The term NCR first appeared in Gideon Rose's work in 1998. Rose contended that NCR is a kind of realism because the theory argues that the relative power of a country, especially its material power capabilities, in the international system, drives the scope and direction of a state's foreign policy first and foremost. NCR also argues that it is neoclassical because the theory suggests that the system incentives must be transferred through the intervening variable at the domestic level, thus, the impact of the system stimuli on a state's foreign policy is rather indirect and more intricate. NCR is a theory that "explicitly incorporates both external and internal variables, updating and systematizing certain insights drawn from classical realist thought" (Rose, 1998, p. 146).

Soon after the publication of Rose's article, NCR approach has been employed by other scholars. For example, Brooks and Wohlforth (2000) investigated how the shift of relative power and its interaction with the domestic constraints of the Soviet administration influenced the Soviet response to its relative decline in the international system in 1980; Davidson (2006) researched on Italy's revisionist grand strategy in the interwar period; Ripsman (2010) looked at how domestic factors constrained great powers' abilities to establish long-term settlements after major wars, etc.

2.2 Classical Realism and Neoclassical Realism

What makes NCR neoclassical is that NCR retains some core assumptions and elements found in Classical Realism and combines them with the central insight of Neorealism. Taliaferro et al. (2009) summarized three core assumptions of Classical Realism that NCR also shares. First, human beings are always members of groups that provide them security from external enemies. The political and social life of human beings are in the form of tribalism. Thus, all kinds of Realism, including

Classical Realism and NCR, are group-centric. Second, because of scarcity and uncertainty, self-interested groups struggle for scarce commodities, material capabilities or social resource, such as status and prestige. Third, power determines groups' capability to secure their goals, whether those goals are self-preservation or world domination. Furthermore, Classical Realism focuses primarily on states' resources and the uses of these resources in international politics, and problems state leaders encounter when they are conducting foreign policy. Classical Realists put their emphasis on power distributions among states, and they also looked at the characters of states and their relation to domestic society. Despite they wrote a lot about state and nation power, the constraints of international system are largely neglected by Classical Realists.

NCR shares Classical Realism's core assumptions and the focus for the state and its relation to domestic society. Nonetheless, unlike Classical Realism, which is a bunch of repositories of texts without a coherent research program, NCR aims to develop researches that have a greater methodological sophistication. In addition, NCR also acquires the assumption of Neorealists that the structure of the international system constrains the choices of states' foreign policy. "Neoclassical realism builds upon the complex relationship between the state and society found in classical realism without sacrificing the central insight of neorealism about the constraints of the international system" (Taliaferro et al., 2009, p. 13).

2.2.1 Neoclassical Realism conception – State

As outlined above, NCR is a theory that builds upon the complex relationship between state and society suggested by Classical Realism, and at the same time keeping the core idea about systemic constraints and opportunities proposed by Neorealism. Just like other variants of Realism, NCR also identifies states as the most important actors in the international arena. NCR sees state and society as a "top-down" relationship, which means that top government officials, who are also the national security executive, including the head of government, ministers and other top officials, are in charge of the making of foreign policy. These top government officials, acting between and within state

structure and the international system, obtain the most privileged information. Thus, they should be well-equipped to understand the systemic constraint, and hence able to deduce to a foreign policy that best suits the national interest. Still, they are not completely autonomous from society. Very often, they are required to bargain with the domestic constraints, such as the parliament, political parties, lobby groups, different economic, social sectors, etc. However, NCR does not treat states as an aggregate of national demands as liberalism and Marxism do. Instead, the state leader, subjected to domestic constraints, defines the national interest and implements foreign policy based upon not only their own assessment of relative power in the international system, but also the bargaining with other stakeholders and actors within the society. (Taliaferro et al., 2009)

Moreover, Schweller (2004) wrote that in NCR, states do not always function as unitary actors. For example, consensus and conflicts between the elites' perceptions on the external threats, constant competition for the state leadership or a lack of social cohesion, etc. can seriously undermine the unitary nature of the state.

2.3 Neorealism and Neoclassical Realism's conception – International System

Unlike Classical Realism, which primarily studies the domestic factors, NCR is a theory of foreign policy that studies the complex interactions between the structure of the international system and domestic factors. NCR argues that a state's relative power in the international system sets the parameters for how states define their interests and thus, its grand strategy. Similar to Neorealism, international system is an important element in NCR. NCR defines the international system as an anarchy and a self-help system same as Neorealism. However, although state leaders are anticipating others' actions and future power distribution, feedback from the system can be indirect and can be delayed. One of the main themes of the NCR literature is that state leaders encounter difficulties in assessing the power distribution, especially when there are relative power shifts. A self-amplifying positive or self-dampening negative feedback from the system is thus often dependent on the assessments by the top government officials. (Taliaferro et al., 2009).

Rose (1998) also pointed out that although systemic pressures and incentives shape the grand strategy and direction of a state's foreign policy, these systemic pressures and incentives are not robust or precise enough to determine the actual foreign policy. This means that instead of being forced to choose a particular foreign policy on the menu over another, the systemic influence can significantly limit the number of options for a state's leader to choose from at a particular time, but does not trigger uniform behaviour. Therefore, the indirect system influence and the inclusion of domestic factors distinguish NCR theory from Classical Realism and Neorealism.

Furthermore, Ripsman, et al. (2016) introduced an important concept of system stimuli. One important intervening variable concerns the perception of FPE. The FPE have a monopoly on intelligence and possess private information about other countries, therefore, they are the most important actor to look at when seeking to explain foreign policy. Their perceptions are significant because they can affect the translation of the incoming systemic stimuli into domestic level. All incoming information about the system are filtered through their cognition, and it can lead to personalized and biased perception of the external system stimuli. Thus, depends on their perception, FPE will behave differently to system stimuli. "A good deal of neoclassical realist scholarship has utilized perceptual intervening variables, which affect how leaders assess the balance of power and anticipated power trends. Neoclassical realists distinguish between the actual or real distribution of power and elites' perceptions of the balance of power in various times and places" (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 65)

2.4 What NCR Can Do Better Than *Innenpolitik* Theories?

Innenpolitik theories focus solely on domestic factors, however, predictions based only on domestic factors are often oversimplified and inaccurate.

There are different types of *Innenpolitik* theories, and each favours a specific domestic independent variable that is different from one another, however, all these difference theories share a common assumption. They all contend that country's internal dynamics determine its foreign policy.

Innenpolitik theories argue that domestic factors like political ideology, national characteristics, partisan politics, or socioeconomic structure determine how states behave in the international politics. (Rose, 1998). Although one must open the black box and examine the beliefs and preferences of key domestic actors in order to account for a particular foreign policy, the major problem with *Innenpolitik* theories is that pure unit-level analysis often has difficulty to account for why most-unlike states in similar situations behave alike and why most-alike states behave differently in the foreign policy sphere (Rose, 1998).

NCR argues that if there is any single dominant factor that shapes the repeating behaviour of states' foreign policies in long term, it is the relative material power in the international system, and the relative power distribution should be the independent variable, instead of domestic factors. Yet, NCR further argues that a theory of foreign policy only look at systemic factors alone is also doomed to be inaccurate from time to time. To learn how do states interpret and respond to the system constraints, NCR contends that theories must analyse how systemic constraints are translated through unit-level, domestic intervening variables, such as elites' perceptions and domestic political structure. (Rose, 1998)

Thus, NCR represents a significant improvement on *Innenpolitik* approaches by incorporating both system stimuli and domestic factors into its theories.

2.5 Overview of Empirical Researches Conducted within Neoclassical Realism

Since Rose first came up the idea of NCR, other scholars have also employed NCR approaches in their researches.

Schweller (2006) agreed that systemic pressures are filtered through intervening domestic factors to produce states' behaviors of foreign policy. States assess the changes in the international system and adopt to these changes as a result of their own domestic political structures and environments. He wrote:

More specifically, complex domestic political processes act as transmission belts that channel, mediate, and (re)direct policy outputs in response to external forces (primarily, changes in relative power). Hence, states often react differently to similar systemic pressures and opportunities, and their responses may be less motivated by systemic-level factors than domestic ones. (Schweller, 2006, p, 6)

He then contended that, after 1898, the grand strategy of French foreign policy during the Third Republic was stimulated by consensus and cohesion of French elites, relatively improved regime, political stability and social cohesion, and more importantly, the increasing nationalist sentiment against Germany. Thanks to the lower level of domestic constraints on its foreign policy, France was able to adopt the balancing strategy against Germany by mobilizing its military resources and by strengthening the Triple Entente (Schweller, 2006).

In Ripsman's research, he distinguished the differences of democratic states. Some heads of state or government have extraordinary powers in formulating foreign policy; while others respect the checks and balances, and limit the powers of the executive branch of government. In addition to the institutional difference, political cultures also vary in different democratic states. Political attitudes and norms about the use of powers also have great impact on the state's foreign policy. (2002)

Ripsman (2002) noted these differences:

Surprisingly, however, international security scholars pay little attention to these differences and assume that they do not affect the way democracies choose their national security policies. Indeed, the conventional wisdom is that democracies react in similar ways to international threats and opportunities. This conventional wisdom is wrong. (p, 2)

The author further pointed out that these differences between democratic states affect the autonomy of executive branch and the policies that they are allowed to select when there are public and legislative oppositions. He argued that these differences have profound effects on states' foreign policy, especially when the foreign policies chosen by the democratic government are at odds with domestic preferences. It seriously undermines the freedom and ability of a democratic government to choose

their preferred foreign policy. For example, shortly after WW2, the Truman administration had to deal with the domestic pressure that demanded to bring the American troops home. Anyway, Truman was able to keep the American troops in Europe to serve the security purpose. In contrast, also in the post-war period, the French multi-party parliamentary system, unstable coalition governments, legislature-dominated decision-making process, and obstructionist norm in legislative, gave French leaders little autonomy in foreign policy (Ripsman, 2002). Thus, it is false to treat democracies as a group of like actors that behave the same in the international system. It would be logical to examine under what conditions can domestic factors affect foreign policy in different democratic states. Ripsman suggested to examine institutional, procedural, and normative differences between democratic states to discover how these domestic factors affect their foreign policies (2010). However, Ripsman also pointed out that, in general, NCR suggests that the differences between democracies and the resulted constraints from domestic actors are limited. Rather than determining the definition of the national interest or the grand strategy of a state's foreign policy, domestic constraints are more likely to influence the timing and character of a state's foreign policy (2002)

Other NCR identified states' extractive and mobilization capacity as an essential intervening variable. Some scholars examined how institutions, nationalism, and political ideology interact to facilitate or constrain government to extract and mobilize resources for foreign policy, especially those concerning national security.

By citing historical examples of rising or declining great powers in the past 300 years, Taliaferro (2009) argued that states with high extraction and mobilization capacity, while facing high external risks, are more likely to emulate the behaviour of the superpowers in the system, at least in the short run; states with low extraction and mobilization capacity and facing high external risks are incapable of emulation, at least in the short run. On the other hand, states with high extraction and mobilization capacity and low external risks is capable of enhancing their long-term security and relative power by innovations; states with low extraction and mobilization capacity and facing low external risks, are unlikely to pursue emulation or innovation. Moreover, in the long run, states can enhance their

extractive and mobilization capabilities by nationalism sentiment or statist ideologies. Consequently, they will be able to pursue emulation or innovation.

Schweller (2009) explained under which conditions will superpowers forgo expansion opportunities despite favourable power balances in the international system. He contended that the barriers of superpowers in pursuing hegemony lie in the difficulties of superpowers in mobilizing the domestic resources necessary for expansion, rather than in the deterrence effect of another power in the system. In order to carry out a successful hegemonic bid, the leaders and governments must be capable of extracting and mobilizing enough domestic resources for foreign ventures and expansions, particularly in the present era of mass politics.

So far there is no single NCR theory, but rather a diversity of similar researches that seek to examine the structural influence on foreign policy of states, while at the same time including the unique domestic settings of states into their analyses, in order to understand foreign policy outcomes. NCR can provide both theoretically and empirical relevant insights on why a specific state would act against the structural influence and undertake a particular foreign policy.

Derived from Neorealism, NCR stresses the importance of relative power distributions in the international system. The independent variable, system stimuli, is treated as the causal primacy in NCR. However, NCR seeks more to explain variations in the foreign policies of most similar states or the same state over time, it is less ambitious to explain broad systematic patterns or recurring outcomes like in Neorealism. Thus, foreign policy is the dependent variable in NCR researches, instead of “international outcomes”. With regard to intervening variable, NCR researches were rather inconsistent. Since there isn’t a consensus among the NCR scholars that what kind of intervening variables should be selected and operationalized, it resulted in ad hoc selections. NCR researches are often quite different in their research designs. Examples of these intervening variables include ideational variables such as ideology or identity; cognitive variables such as interests or perceptions; or institutional variables such as the foreign policy making process or institutional dynamics (Smith, 2018).

2.6. How did Neoclassical Realists Look Upon US Foreign Policy?

Taliaferro (2004) argued that the foreign policy of a great power in maintaining their relative powers and reputations in the international system is filtered through an overwhelming intervening domestic variable. This intervening domestic variable that he referred to was the perception of state leaders. State leaders are aversion to loss. If state leaders perceive that there is an unfavourable balance of power, for example, counter balancing behaviours by an enemy state, and that there are chances that the great power state would lose its relative power and reputation in the international system, it will drive the great power state to adopt a risk-acceptant strategy, such as carrying out risky military intervention in peripheral regions, in order to preserve the state's reputation and international status. The author used US foreign policy in Korea War to illustrate his claim. According to Taliaferro (2019), the Truman administration's intervention in the Korea War was to avert perceived losses to the US's superpower status and reputation in the international system. Although Truman administration at first concluded that another major war after WW2 would be disastrous, the North Korean invasion, together with other events like Communist victory in China, the Sino-Soviet alliance and the creation of Soviet atomic bomb, posed a dramatic challenge to the status quo or to the balance of power in the eyes of Truman administration. They were afraid that the US would lose its prestige and reputation if they did not offer help to South Korea. Thus, Truman adopted the risky foreign policy of sending troops to defend South Korea. Truman administration's aversion to loss led to the risky military intervention in Korea.

Dueck (2009) is another NCR who examined how domestic factors shape US foreign policy. According to the author, when the US faces a possibility of military intervention, the president usually first consults the cabinet what is the perceived best national interest. Then, they have to consider how possible to pursue those national interest in light of domestic incentives or constraints. However, domestic constraints are often leading the state leader to implement suboptimal or dysfunctional foreign policy that might contradict to the system stimuli. However, domestic factors do not act as a primary cause of military intervention, instead as an influence on its exact form.

Edelstein (2002) also put his focus on beliefs and perceptions of state leaders, and more specifically, how does the Washington perception of the intention of China affect its foreign policy on China. He wrote that to understand Sino-American relations, it is important to first understand how past great powers behaved in response to the uncertainty about the intentions of each other. It helps us predict what would be US foreign policy toward China. There are two scenarios: First, if Washington believes that cooperation can induce benign Chinese intentions and perceive that the threat of the rise of China to its superpower status and the status quo is low, then the US is likely to pursue cooperative foreign policy toward China, even though the US is uncertain about Chinese intentions. In addition, domestic political and economic pressures are also the other intervening variables. Domestic factors can compel Washington to attach importance to the present advantages of cooperation. In contrast, if Washington perceives that Chinese intentions appear to be malign, risks greatly increase and the merits of cooperation disappear, and if domestic pressures further reduce, then the US is likely to adopt a more competitive or aggressive foreign policy. Cooperation may be harmful to the US superpower status in the international system if cooperation somehow strengthens China and better enables China to pursue its malign ambitions, then the US interests are seriously undermined. A wise US leader would be very careful in interpreting Chinese intentions and opt for a more competitive strategy in order to maintain the current hegemonic status of the US and its relative power advantage in the international system.

Furthermore, Taliaferro et al. (2009) contended that both in 1945 and 1990, after the victories of the United States in WW2 and after the Cold War, the grand strategies of US foreign policy could not be predicted solely by an analysis of the distribution of relative power either in the international system or the domestic dynamics in the U.S. The bipolar distribution of power in the post-war period did not sufficiently explain the US containment policy and the US sphere of influence in post-war Europe, which were a mixture of realpolitik and liberal internationalism, both in means and ends. It was expected that there were some sorts of competitions between two superpowers in an international system, however, the system could not dictate how the superpowers perceive their competitive relations among themselves, nor the nuances of their foreign policies. The authors also criticised that

Innenpolitik theory like democratic peace theory, which stresses the influence of internal factors on foreign policy, was unable to sufficiently explain US foreign policy under George H.W. Bush and Clinton administrations in the 1990s. Despite a lack of a great power competitor at that time after the collapse of the USSR regime, and weak domestic pressure to pursue adventure in the Eurasia continent, both presidents sought to preserve or even expand the US influence in Asia and Europe. The grand strategy of US foreign policy during that decade was governed by a combination of opportunities in the international system, absent of or relatively low levels of external threats, and a low level of domestic constraints (Taliaferro et al., 2009). Taliaferro et al. (2009) wrote that

Neither a purely systemic theory of international outcomes, such as neorealist balance of power theory, nor a purely *Innenpolitik* theory of foreign policy, such as liberal or democratic peace theory, can explain why the George H. W. Bush and Clinton administrations sought to preserve and expand US influence in Europe and East Asia in the 1990s, despite the absence of a great power competitor (at least in the near term) and despite strong domestic pressure to reap the benefits of the so-called peace dividend following the Cold War. (p. 2)

Furthermore, following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001, the George W. Bush Administration declared its grand strategy, “the War on Terror”, aiming to destroy the Al Qaeda and Taliban regime in Afghanistan by military means. In addition, the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the vision to defeat Islamist terrorism by fostering the doctrine of liberal democracy in the Middle East under Bush administration showed that the foreign policy of Bush administration could be simply explained by either the international system or domestic factor alone. Instead, both factors have to be taken into consideration. When there were external threats (Islamist terrorism in this case) and when the US was relatively strong and powerful in the system, it set the parameters for the US foreign policy (a military response in this case). Moreover, domestic factors should not be neglected, and they also played an important role in shaping the US response. These factors, such as the dominance of liberal idealism in American foreign policy discourse, the dominance of the executive branch in national security foreign policy and the policy entrepreneurship, all contributed to the “War on Terror” foreign policy under Bush administration (Taliaferro et al., 2009).

In the examples mentioned, imperatives or opportunities from the international system filtered through the medium of the US state structure, and it influenced how the US presidents and the cabinets assessed potential threats and opportunities, and the likely strategy and responses to them. Ultimately, the presidents made the decisions to extract and mobilize the societal resource in order to implement and sustain their grand strategies in foreign policy.

2.7 Criticism of Neoclassical Realism

However, many other theorists are fiercely critical toward the eclecticism nature of NCR. Philosophical incoherence of NCR has been under heavy criticisms also. The theory is accused of being ontological and epistemological incoherence. Most NCR works are based on middle-ground ontology lying somewhere between rationalism and constructivism, accepting the role of both materials and ideas. (Rose, 1998) In term of epistemology, Smith (2018) commented that NCR predominantly based on neopositivist epistemology which concerned more with generating empirically informed inferences rather than objective truth.

Another major criticism on NCR come from Legro and Moravcsik (1999). The authors wrote that NCR suffers from “namely theoretical indeterminacy and a reliance on exogenous variation in state preferences” (p, 28). By incorporating a variation of underlying domestic constraints, which taken from constructivists ideas about ideologies or interests, or liberalists ideas about domestic institutions, it weakens the NCR’s theoretical distinctiveness as a branch of Realism. Nevertheless, NCR fails to provide the necessary prerequisite philosophical justification before incorporating domestic factors into their theoretical frameworks.

A third criticism regards NCR as a toolkit for foreign policy analysis rather than an unambiguous theory. NCR do not explicitly indicate what kinds of intervening variables should be included and operationalized, and thus it results in ad hoc selections in NCR researches. Some NCR may choose ideational and cognitive intervening variables such as ideology or perception while others may choose institutional intervening variables such as decision-making process or political structure. Hindered by

its eclectic nature and ad hoc selection of variables, NCR has little to say about international relations in broader contexts (Smith, 2018).

2.8 Summary - Three Schools of Neoclassical Realism

Ones (2012) tested the explanatory power of three main schools of NCR on US foreign policy after the Cold War. Before his test, Ones pointed out that NCR of all sorts share a major assumption that states aim to expand their influence in world politics. Rose (1998) also shared the view:

The central empirical prediction of neoclassical realism is thus that over the long term the relative amount of material power resources countries possess will shape the magnitude and ambition - the envelope, as it were - of their foreign policies: as their relative power rises states will seek more influence abroad, and as it falls their actions and ambitions will be scaled back accordingly. (p. 152)

However, beyond this consensual assumption, NCR scholars view the condition of expansion differently. Some authors believe that superiority in material capabilities is a sufficient condition for state to expand; some believe that domestic politics and ideology can make states to expand albeit structural contradiction; while for some others, despite system provide the opportunity for states to expand, this opportunity must be supplemented by favourable domestic politics and a congenial ideology.

By identifying how different schools weigh the influence of structural and non-structural variables; and what are their emphasis in foreign policy making, on either the domestic or the international sphere, Ones (2012) summarized that there are three schools competing in the NCR family. He categorized the first school as “orthodoxy” because it is closest to orthodox Neorealism; the second school as “revivalist” because it is trying to revive Classical Realism; and the third school as “semi-orthodoxy” because it attempts to straddle the two other schools, but at the same time leaning more toward orthodoxy.

2.8.1 Orthodox School

Orthodox School argues that a great power has a stronger urge to expand when it has more capabilities at its disposal than its competitors. As Schweller (2003) put it:

In theory and practice ... structural-systemic alternatives ... can and should be used by neoclassical realists as a first cut, providing a baseline expectation for state behavior. Only when behavior and outcomes deviate from these structural-systemic theories expectations should unit-level variables associated with neoclassical realism be added to these theories to explain why. (p. 346)

For the orthodox, not every foreign policy decision is interfered by non-systemic domestic variables, and domestic variables are only interfering when states choose to behave that ways. Non-structural domestic effects will only be temporary. Hence, the relative advantage in capabilities of the US is a sufficient condition for the US to expand, however, the US's decision in expansion can be deviated. Expansion could be delayed because of domestic concerns, but this anomalous behavior is only temporary, eventually, the US will expand its influence in the world in long term.

2.8.2 Revivalist School

Revivalist School contests the absolute supremacy of the structural influence, and argues that the structural influence is seldom as severe as Neorealism claims.

It contends that the interactions between states is not only determined by the power distribution of the system. Instead, factors such as geopolitical position, previous interactions with each other, the perception of the decision makers, and the anticipation of other parties' responses also shape the states' foreign policy. Revivalism agrees with the argument that domestic politics rarely define states' grand strategy. Although the material capability ultimately guides or limits what state can achieve, it does not completely determine or absolutely indicate what state's exact foreign policy is. When the

influence of anarchy is not absolute, states do not have to act alike and respond in the universal way to strike for security by expansion. Expansion or not is not predetermined by the state's material capabilities, but by the goals chosen by the decision maker, either prestige, security or gain. It is because even if there is opportunity for states to expand, states still need to have a motive to do so. (Onea, 2012) Onea (2012) wrote that:

This is why the study of foreign policy is the study of motive par excellence: decision makers are rarely content to inquire what competitors are able to do and leave the matter at that. Instead, they spend considerable time and effort investigating what their counter parts seek to achieve by a given course of action. (p. 145)

Revivalist School contends that expansion of the US was the result of its strategic interactions with other states. When the US decision makers perceive that non-expansion policy would threaten its world leader status, then the US would seek to expand.

2.8.3 Semi-Orthodox School

The Semi-Orthodox School holds the orthodox view that expansion is mainly induced by the material capabilities of a state, but domestic politics also play an important role in foreign policy making. Non-structural factors are not just used to account for anomalous behaviours, instead, domestic factors act as a channel through which the system's imperative is translated into states' foreign policy.

Thus, Semi-Orthodoxy argues that non-structural factors are the intervening variables which affects foreign policy regularly, especially in times of absence of threats. When at times of low security threats, domestic politics can exercise a pivotal role in determining states' foreign policy. However, at times of security scarcity, domestic politics only affects the tactics of foreign policy. Onea (2012) made two forecasts:

First, American foreign policy prior to 9/11 should have been heavily affected by the domestic agenda. Second, following the terrorist attacks, America should have undergone an

adjustment as a result of the more threatening international environment, ultimately leading to expansion in Iraq. (p. 146)

2.9 Theoretical approach of this thesis

2.9.1 Adopting the Semi-Orthodox School

As Onea (2012) mentioned, the Semi-Orthodox School of NCR attempts to straddle the two schools.

To strike a balance, the thesis adopts this “middle-ground” approach.

Since this thesis treats NCR as an approach to foreign policy, rather than just as a toolkit to explain suboptimal policy choices, thus, non-structural domestic factors are the intervening variable that affects foreign policy regularly. However, for the Orthodox School, domestic factors do not influence every foreign policy, but are at work only when states behave contradicting to system stimuli. In this sense, the Semi-Orthodox would have a better explanation power and generalizability than the Orthodox School when the domestic factors of Semi-Orthodox represent the regular and normal channel through which the system stimuli is translated into foreign policy.

On the other hand, Revivalist School is the study of motive par excellence. Revivalist argues that it is the goals pursued by the domestic actors and how the actors pursuing their goals determine a state's foreign policy. In addition, their goals are not determined by the system stimuli, but rather by the non-structural variables. The Revivalist downplay the influence the relative distribution of power in the system, instead, revivalist contends that states' strategic interactions with one another determine their foreign policies. However, mainstream NCR would not go that far in downplaying the role of system stimuli, and system stimuli still is the most important variable that shapes the grand strategy of a state. If this thesis adopts the Revivalist approach, the important imperatives from the system will be missing out. In contrast, the Semi-Orthodox School argues that the system stimuli must be translated through the domestic factor in shaping the foreign policy. Thus, adopting the Semi-Orthodox approach can keep track of the effect of the system brings.

Moreover, since the Semi-Orthodoxy argues that domestic factors affect foreign policy regularly, and can exercise a pivotal role in determining states' foreign policy, especially in times of absence of

threats. This argument suits the thesis well because this thesis is also dealing a time of peace when the US had quite a low level of security threat. Using the Semi-Orthodoxy approach would allow this thesis to find out the role domestic factors play when there is an absence of threat for the US.

2.9.2 Theoretical Expectation

When there is security plenty, or the other term “permissive environment” used by Ripsman et al. (2016), the domestic factors play a pivotal role in determining the state’s foreign policy.

In general, NCR would although China was a rising power and tried to catch the US up, however, since the US still had a relative advantage in material capability compared to China, if not even the hegemony in the international system, it is still expected that China could not challenge the US militarily, thus the US did not face any imminent threat, and there was security plenty for the US. The US was having a permissive environment. It is expected that domestic factors could play a pivotal role in determining the exact American foreign policy on Hong Kong protest.

Domestic factor 1: If the elites perceived that China’s intention was malign, it is expected that the US would adopt a more risky foreign policy on China; If the elites perceived that China’s intention was benign, it is expected that the US would adopt a cooperative policy toward China.

Since US is a democratic state, the legislative branch was assumed to be able to play a pivotal role in foreign policy making. Domestic factor 2: If the majority of the members of the Congress had a Wilsonian foreign policy outlook, it is expected that the US would intervene in Hong Kong protests; If isolationist ideology was dominant, it is expected that the US would refrain from intervention despite its advantage in material capability.

Was there any constitutional right for domestic opponents to reject of intervention? Domestic factor 3: If there wasn’t any substantial domestic objection of US intervention in Hong Kong protests, it is expected that the US would intervene in Hong Kong protests; If there were substantial domestic objections against US intervention in Hong Kong protests, it is expected that the US will refrain from intervention despite its advantage in material capability.

2.10 Hypothesis

H1: If (a) there was a permissive environment for the US (a security threat to the US is absent), and (b) by consequence, domestic factors weighed more heavily on US foreign policy.

H2a (Domestic factor 1): The more the US foreign policy elites' perceptions of China's intention were malign, the more likely a risky US foreign policy toward China was.

H2b (Domestic factor 2): The more members of Congress embraced a "Wilsonian" foreign policy outlook, the more the attitude of the Congress toward Hong Kong democratic movements was supportive, the more likely a risky US intervention in Hong Kong protests was.

H2c: (Domestic factor 3): The fewer constitutional right for domestic opponents to reject intervention, the more likely a risky American intervention on Hong Kong protests was.

Chapter 3: Method

The thesis employs a qualitative single case study research design. More specifically, this thesis seeks to apply NCR on a US foreign policy to see to what extent is NCR relevant in real world. This chapter demonstrates the theoretical purpose of a single case study research design. What are the pros and cons of single case? Why the case chosen, Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act, is relevant to NCR? What is the generalizability of the case? What is the research design? How does this thesis operationalize? What are the sources?

3.1 Pros and Cons of Single Case

Through the application of single case study analysis, it provides a complex, empirically rich, and holistic account of a particular phenomenon. Single case study analysis could be especially useful for phenomena that are less likely to fit into sophisticated form of quantification or phenomena that require relatively subjective understandings and reasonings. From the analytical point of view, single case study analysis still has its potential for generalisation, as well as suitable for the building or testing causal hypotheses. Moreover, single case study analysis transcends theoretical level to practical level, providing more substantial relevance to international relations. (Gerring, 2016)

Nevertheless, single case study analysis has its own limitations. The common criticism is the problems of research subjectivity. However, qualitative research in general has been accused of the same problem. Single case study analysis has troubles in constructing reliability and validity thanks to less formalised and researcher-independent methods used by qualitative researchers. Thus, the results of single case study analysis are sometimes unable to replicate. Undoubtedly, the low level of external validity and generalisability could undermine the findings in single case study analysis in some cases, but one must keep in mind that not every research aims at analysing a broader phenomenon. These criticisms become less valid when one's intention is in particularisation. Furthermore, generalisability

of single case study analysis can be improved by the strategic selection of the case. An appropriate choice of case can provide the richest insight of a phenomenon. (Gerring, 2016)

Since NCR requires researchers to investigate, among other factors, the role of idiosyncratic state institutions and processes on policy choices, it is better to conduct a careful, qualitative case study, rather than large-N quantitative analysis.

3.2 Why the Case Chosen, Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act, Is Relevant to NCR?

Before looking at the theoretical implication of HKHRDA, the case was chosen because the case itself is just intrinsically important and simply too important to ignore. HKHRDA is an exemplary cases of US foreign policy toward China, especially with regard to human rights issues.

In terms of theoretical implication, HKHRDA is a least-likely case of NCR. On all dimensions in the US under Trump's administration except the dimension of NCR's theoretical interest is predicted not to intervene in Hong Kong's protests, and yet does so.

Since the handover of Hong Kong in July 1997, when the United Kingdom ended colonial administration for Hong Kong and returned Hong Kong to China, the US has been respecting the sovereignty of China over Hong Kong. This also applies to the presidency under Trump. As he commented on Hong Kong protests: "That's between Hong Kong and that's between China, because Hong Kong is a part of China," and that China would have to "deal with that themselves" (The White House, 2019d)

Trump's approach towards Hong Kong protests would not be surprised to many as he identifies him as an isolationist who put "America first". Trump administration prioritizes the US domestic affairs and economic interests abroad, and refuses to handle global affairs, such as promoting and protecting human rights and democracy in other countries. "Americanism, not globalism, will be our credo" said Trump (POLITICO Staff, 2016).

Hence, based on Trump's position on China sovereignty over Hong Kong and his isolationist policy, it should be expected that the US would not intervene in Hong Kong protest, and yet, the HKDRDA was adopted. Therefore, the HKDRDA serves as the least-likely case of NCR's theoretical prediction. The HKDRDA is used as a least-likely case to test and confirm NCR's proposition that while external threats and US relative power set the grand strategy for US foreign policy, unit-level factors determined the character and the scope.

3.3 Generalizability

Unlike more ambitious grand theories, which aim at explaining continuities or recurrences, the current strands of NCR prefer the more modest, foreign policy focused approach. Therefore, it means that NCR is rather limited to explaining specific state behaviours.

Identifying the unit of analysis is important because it indicates how generalizable is the case or what broader conclusions can this thesis draw. The unit of analysis in this thesis is US foreign policy toward China, and this is the phenomena that this thesis seeks to analyse.

Anyway, although NCR is still a developing theory, and is mostly applied narratively, it is still an insightful study if one wants to find out whether NCR's mechanism can be generalized at a broader level. Thus, this is the reason for this thesis to employ the least-likely case study design to test the empirical relevant of NCR. The HKHRDA will act as a confirmatory case to show that all other dimensions except the dimension of NCR's theoretical interest is predicted not to achieve a certain outcome, and yet does so. During his election campaign, Trump named his diplomatic policy as "America First." It is an isolationist policy pertaining to foreign and security policy. It is expected that Trump should not be interested in solving human rights problems abroad as he said the US would not be the "world police". However, the US still intervened in Hong Kong protests. NCR suggests that in a permissive environment, the US foreign policy might be influenced by several domestic factors. Thus, if the NCR mechanism works in the least-likely case, it should also work in other cases of US foreign policy toward China. (Gerring, 2016).

3.4 Research Design – Process Tracing

To discern a causal impact on foreign policy choices, one would need to examine the decision making processes of particular states to determine why they did what they did and whether the researcher's variables of interest were at all relevant to their decisions. The most appropriate strategy for investigating causal chains in specific cases is the process tracing method. It is insufficient to identify the correlation of hypothesized variables or multiple correlations over time, rather, it is necessary to specify the causal mechanisms, and then carefully discern whether the independent and intervening variables brought about the observed changes in the dependent variable. Because neoclassical realism requires researchers to answer questions about the reasons why particular policies were selected, it requires them to get inside the black box of the state to be able to answer these questions with reasonable certainty. (Ripsman et al., 2016) Therefore, the process tracing method is the most appropriate method.

As mentioned in chapter 1, the process tracing will be separated into two phases, prior and during the Hong Kong protests in 2019. The period prior the protests refer to the first half of 2019, the days before 9 June and the year 2018 is also included. The empirics in the period prior to the protests are analyzed to determine what was the system stimuli the US was facing?; what was the perception of the FPE?; and What had the US foreign policy toward China been before the protest?

The second phase, during the protest, refers to the period starting from June 9 to the end of November, the period when the foreign policy toward Hong Kong protests was officially formulated. This thesis analyzes the empirics in the period during the protest to trace the decision making process that led to the HKKRDA.

3.5 Operationalization of Variables

H1: If (a) there was a permissive environment for the US (a security threat to the US is absent), and (b) by consequence, domestic factors weighed more heavily on US foreign policy.

According to Ripsman et al. (2016), the system stimuli can be seen as the nature of the strategic environment. Strategic environment can be determined by 4 elements: (1) absent or present of imminent threats; (2) absent or present of readily discernible opportunities; (3) the length of time horizon for states to respond to threats or opportunities; and (4) absent or present of an optimal policy option.

While strategic environment can be categorized into two types, permissive and restrictive environment. Permissive environment entails absents of imminent threats and readily discernible opportunities, longer time horizon for states to respond, and an absent of optimal policy option; restrictive environment entails present of imminent threats or readily discernible opportunities, short time horizon for states to respond, and present of optimal policy option (Ripsman et al., 2016).

In (a) of *H1*, the first variable that is needed to be operationalized is permissive environment. Permissive environment entails (1) absent of imminent threats; (2) absent of readily discernible opportunities; (3) longer time horizons for states to respond to threats or opportunities; and (4) absent of an optimal policy option.

Security threat in this thesis refers to military threats or other direct threats to losses of lives or properties of American. To determine the level of security threat, this thesis looks at two factors: (1) Did the US involve in any arm conflict or war that (potentially) threatened the homeland security? Any security threat was as imminent as the Attack of the Pearl Harbor or the Cuban Missile Crisis?; and (2) The level of threats of terrorism in the US homeland. It should be clarified beforehand that terrorism only refers to the terrorist attacks carried out by foreign terrorists. Homegrown terrorism, such as Poway synagogue shooting and El Paso shooting carried out by local right-wing extremists, is not counted. Besides, another indicator is that was there any terrorist attack in 2019 similar to the scale of September 11 attacks?

In term of opportunities, this thesis looks at: Did the US have an overwhelming relative advantage in power in relation to China in 2019, in terms of (1) overall military power, (2) nuclear power, and (3) economic power?

Thirdly, how long did the US have to pass the HKHRDA into law? A time horizon less than 1 week should be considered as short; if the US had months or years to determine its foreign policy, then it should be considered as a long-time horizon.

Lastly, if there was an imminent threat or a readily discernible opportunities, plus a relatively short time horizon to react, then it would have an optimal policy option. Otherwise, the US could choose a wide range of policy options.

In (b) of *H1*, three domestic factors will be discussed in the followings:

H2a (Domestic factor 1): The more the US foreign policy elites' perceptions of China's intention were malign, the more likely a risky US foreign policy toward China was.

US foreign policy elites should include at least the President, the Vice-president, the Secretary of State, and the National Security Advisor. Their perceptions of China's intention will be operationalized as their levels of concerns on China's military capability and expansion threat, economic threat, as well as the threat to human rights and democracy by the authoritarian regime. Their concerns are categorized into three levels: high, medium and low. If majority of their concerns are high, then they should perceive China's intention as malign.

In terms of operationalization of risky foreign policy, this thesis looks at: did the US opt for an economic confrontation with China, were there any military actions in South China Sea or Indo-Pacific region, did the US show its supportive attitude to Taiwan's sovereignty and Hong Kong's democratic movement? If the majority of answers are yes, then the US was adopting risky foreign policy toward.

H2b (Domestic factor 2): The more members of Congress embraced a “Wilsonian” foreign policy outlook, the more the attitude of the Congress toward Hong Kong democratic movements was supportive, the more likely a risky US intervention in Hong Kong protests was.

Wilsonian foreign policy outlook should at least feature supporting human rights and democracy abroad. (Cox, 2017) However, they do not have to be Wilsonist in every issue. This thesis focuses on their foreign policy outlook toward Hong Kong or China. Three important figures in the Congress are analyzed independently. The Speaker of the House and the Majority Leader of the Senate are looked at for two reasons. First, they are the leader of the majority party in each chamber. Second, they have agenda-setting power in their own chamber. The other law maker to be looked at is Senator Marco Rubio. He was the sponsor of the HKHRDA, thus, he played an important role in formulating the foreign policy.

Furthermore, what was the number of members of Congress vote in favor of intervention on Hong Kong protests? It can be assumed that they are Wilsonians and support Hong Kong protests if they vote for intervention. If Wilsonians were the majority, they would support a riskier intervention.

H2c: (Domestic factor 3): The fewer constitutional right for domestic opponents to reject intervention, the more likely a risky American intervention on Hong Kong protests was.

Constitutional right will be operationalized as veto power. How many veto points were there in the US? It supposed that the Congress (legislative branch) and the Supreme Court (judicial branch) had their veto powers against the president, while the president had its veto power against the Congress. Were there any other veto points? Furthermore, did either branch used its veto power against intervention on Hong Kong protest? If there were only three veto points, and if either branch did not use its veto power, a risky US intervention is more likely.

In addition, risky American intervention in this thesis does not refer to military intervention. It refers to non-military means such as diplomatic pressures, economic sanctions and targeted sanctions.

3.6 Sources

This thesis makes use of both primary and secondary sources.

To assess was there any arm conflict or war that (potentially) threatened the US homeland security, this thesis looks at a government report; while to assess the level of terrorism threat in the US, this thesis makes use of the alert from the National Terrorism Advisory System.

This thesis does not intend to find out the US relative capabilities compared to China, this could be a whole new research. Thus, a research conducted by Lowy Institute is used. Although the research conducted by Lowy Institute only concerned the power distribution in Asia, but it makes sense to make use of this Asia power index because the US intervention happened in Asia. The Index ranked 25 countries, including the US and China, with regard to their capacity to influence regional events by evaluating state power across eight areas: (1) military capability, (2) defense networks, (3) economic resources, (4) economic relationships, (5) diplomatic influence, (6) cultural influence, (7) resilience, and (8) future resources. (Lowy Institute, 2019). The index provided an overall power ranking, and rankings in each area. It is a useful analytical tool to track the distribution of power in the Asia region.

In terms of matters related to HKHRDA, this thesis makes use of the official documents provided on the Congress website.

Furthermore, this thesis makes use of existing literature, official statements and speech transcripts from the government websites, personal webpages and news reports to determine the perceptions and political stances of the FPE and some of the Congress members.

For risky foreign policies the US had have, existing literature, government documents and news reports are used.

Moreover, a Senate document indicates what kind of constitutional right are there to veto a policy.

Chapter 4: Empirical Research

This Chapter begins with tracing the phase prior the protest. First, it will determine what kind systemic environment the US was having? Was it a permissive environment? Then it will look at the perceptions of the FPE to see did the system signals successfully transferred to their perceptions, and did they adopt risky foreign policies toward China based on the perception of the system stimuli? It will be followed by the political views of the three important figures in the Congress. Were they having Wilsonian foreign policy outlook toward Hong Kong?

After that, it will turn to the tracing of the second phase. How was the decision-making process of the HKHRDA? It will look at why the HKHRDA was introduced in the Congress and what were the responses of the FPE and the members of the Congress in respect to their perceptions? Then, it will demonstrate how was the HKHRDA being passed in the Congress. Finally, it will show that did the HKHRDA become the foreign policy toward Hong Kong protests without objection?

4.1 System Stimuli

The process tracing begins with the independent variable system stimuli.

As mentioned in chapter 3, the system stimuli is treated as the nature of the strategic environment. Strategic environment can be determined by 4 elements: (1) absent or present of imminent threats; (2) absent or present of readily discernible opportunities; (3) the length of time horizon for states to respond to threats or opportunities; and (4) absent or present of an optimal policy option. Strategic environment can be categorized into permissive and restrictive environment. Permissive environment entails absents of imminent threats and readily discernible opportunities, longer time horizon for states to respond, and an absent of optimal policy option; restrictive environment entails present of imminent threats or readily discernible opportunities, short time horizon for states to respond, and present of optimal policy option (Ripsman et al., 2016).

In terms of the first element, was there any imminent threats for the US in 2019?

Imminent threats involve two components. The first component was that did the US involve in any arm conflict or war that (potentially) threatened the homeland security?

The US was not involved in an active war with another state in 2019. The US had mainly deployed its military forces to conduct counterterrorism operations in other countries. Most of the battlefield remained in foreign territories, such as in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria (Trump, 2019). These arm conflicts in foreign countries posed relatively very low threat to the US homeland security. The reference points this thesis employs are that the threats of arm strikes should be as imminent as the one such as Attack on Pearl Harbour by the Japanese in WW2 or Cuban Missile Crisis in the 1962. However, the threats from a foreign state striking the US homeland is very low in 2019, referred to the standards of these two examples. Thus, the US did not involve in any arm conflict or war that threatened the US homeland security.

The second component was that the level of threats of terrorism in the US homeland. The US Department of Homeland Security had used the terrorism threat scale – the National Terrorism Advisory System (NTAS) to indicate and warn the public the level of threats of terrorism. There are 3 types of advisories by the NTAS. The first type represents a low-level of threat – Bulletin, which describes the current developments or general trends of terrorism threats; the second type represents a medium-level of threat – Elevated Alert, which warns of a credible terrorism threat against the US; the third type represents the a high-level of threat – Imminent Alert, which warns of a credible, specific and imminent terrorism threat against the US. (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2019a)

In 2019, the NTAS issued two advisories on January 18 and July 18. Although both advisories emphasized that “the United States is engaged in a generational fight against terrorists who seek to attack the American people, our country, and our way of life.”, both advisories was issued as Bulletin, representing a low-level of threat of terrorism. (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2019a; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2019b)

Beside the official indicator of threat of terrorism, another way to determine was there an imminent threat of terrorism is to use the September 11 attacks as a reference. Was there a similar scale terrorist attack in 2019? Fortunately, as far as we know, there wasn't.

Thus, since the threat of strikes by foreign states and the level of threat of terrorism was low in 2019, there wasn't any imminent threat to the US homeland.

In terms of the second element, was there any readily discernible opportunities for the US to exploit on China?

Firstly, did the US have an overwhelming relative advantage in power in relation to China in 2019? Although the US does not locate in Asia, it was still the most preeminent power in Asia. The US claimed the top spot, with China came with the second place, in overall power score in Asia Power Index (Lowy Institute, 2019). In terms of military power, the US also claimed the first place, and it was still the dominant military power in the region. It had an unmatched military and regional defense capability compared to China. Yet, even the US had a relative advantage in military capability, in normal scenarios, the power differential between itself and China had become narrower, and the relative difference in military power was not large enough for US to conquest China. Furthermore, nuclear weapons held by China would deter the US from attacking, through the assurance of retaliation and mutually assured destruction. Besides, the US fell to second place in terms of, and China claimed the top spot in these areas (Lowy Institute, 2019). Although the US had a relative advantage in overall capabilities and in terms of military power, its advantage was not great enough to evoke the US to change the status quo in Asia. , As long as China still owns nuclear weapons, it is quite impossible for the US to fight a war with China. Moreover, given that China had relative advantages in areas of economic, resource and diplomatic relations in Asia, there wasn't any readily discernible opportunities for the US to react as soon as possible.

The third element was that how long did the US have to pass the HKHRDA into law? The 2019 Hong Kong protests were triggered by the introduction of the extradition bill by the Hong Kong government back in February 15, 2019. Since then, there were a lot of small- and large-scale protests in the city all

the way through November. From November 13 to 18, the situation deteriorated quickly when the police besieged Chinese University of Hong Kong and Hong Kong Polytechnic University. The police attacked the protestors with great amount of tear gases, water cannons and rubber bullets, etc. while the protesters responded by throwing petrol bombs and different types of projectiles. In response to the police action, the Congress passed the HKHRDA on November 20, and on November 27, President Trump signed the bill into law. From the start of the introduction of the extradition bill to the adoption of the new law HKHRDA, it had a time horizon of almost 9 months. A short time horizon should be as short as few days or even few hours, thus, when the US had almost 9 months to decide its response, it was a long-time horizon.

The fourth element was the clarity of options. A clarity of options is relatively rare in international politics. As discussed in previous chapters, clarity of options will only appear when there is imminent threat or readily discernible opportunity, plus a short-time horizon. Since there wasn't any imminent threat or readily discernible opportunity, and the US had almost 9 months in formulating its foreign policy toward Hong Kong protests, an optimal policy response did not exist either.

In combination, , since there were an absent of imminent threat, an absent of readily discernible opportunity, relatively long time horizon to react and an absent of optimal policy option for the US in 2019, the US was enjoying a permissive environment. According to Semi-Orthodox School in NCR, in a permissive environment, states can choose to balance or select other strategies, depending on the domestic factors (Ripsman et al., 2016); and hence, the domestic factors of the US as the intervening variable will be traced in the followings. The following sections will show how did the system stimuli translate through the domestic intervening variable.

4.2 Perception of FPE Prior to the Hong Kong Protests

In this section, it shows what system signal did the FPE receive.

Before becoming the US President, Donald Trump called his future foreign policy "America First" during his election campaign. There were two dimensions of his America First policy: (1)

Isolationism from political affairs of other countries, and (2) Protectionism in trade policy. After he became the president, he did keep his promise in protectionism in trade policy. However, he abandoned the Isolationism policy in terms of foreign and security matters, and adopted the Reagan-style diplomacy of strength, “Peace through Strength”, which by the way was also the slogan Trump used in his foreign policy speeches. (Reagan’s “Peace through Strength” policy was the hardline foreign policy checking military expansions by Soviet Union, which was a direct opposite of Isolationism.) (Kubo, 2019)

During Trump’s presidency, the Trump administration had criticized China fiercely, from trade to military South China Sea, Taiwan, human rights and Uighur concentration camps, etc. Documents like National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, and other White House documents are helpful sources in assessing the perceptions of FPE under the Trump administration.

In general, the Trump administration was aware of the system signal. They saw the differential growth rates between the US and China and worry that it would undermine the relative advantage of capacities of the US, especially US economic power. President Trump particularly blamed the slower US growth rate and US trade deficit on China’s unfair trade practices. The Trump administration was also aware of China increase of military capacities and malign intentions in South China sea. Besides, Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo paid more attentions to China’s threat to the status quo of liberal democracy order.

In National Security Strategy of 2017, the Trump administration viewed China as a “revisionist power” that secretly planned to challenge the US with its economic power and aggression. (The White House, 2017) In addition, the National Defense Strategy released in 2018 listed two main goals: (1) “To restore America’s competitive edge by blocking global rivals Russia and China from challenging the U.S. and our allies”; and (2) “To keep those rivals from throwing the current international order out of balance” (Lange, 2018) The U.S. Department of Defense explicitly proclaimed China as the rival of the US and was committed to restraint China’s intention to overthrow the current international order.

Anyway, President Trump's perception on China focused heavily on economic issues. He perceived that the US huge trade deficit with China was one of the most serious problem of the US. Other economic issues, such as China subsidizing state-owned enterprises in the high-tech field and China's attempts to manipulate its currency Renminbi, were Trump's other major concerns. In terms of economics issues, other members in the Trump administration shared the view with the president. They had a very negative view on China's intention. The Trump administration also accused China for a wide variety of other issues. They accused China that it had been stealing US trade secrets and technologies, acquiring US companies maliciously, forcing US companies to transfer their technologies, and having a lack of respect for intellectual property rights. Furthermore, Trump administration believed that trade and national security are interconnected. They perceived China as a security threat if China was an economic threat. (The White House, 2017)

The Trump administration were also aware of the Chinese malign intent in its "Belt and Road Initiative" project. The Trump administration accused China using the infrastructure projects to exploit and control the strategic infrastructures of other countries which were not able to pay back their debts to China (Whit House, 2017). Kubo (2019) also presented that, before the Trump administration, the Obama administration had already noticed the malign motive of China's activities in South China Sea, criticising the militarization of the South China Sea by China, and rejecting to recognize the self-claimed Chinese territory in the South China Sea. The Trump administration inherited the Operation Freedom of Navigation in Obama era to counterbalance the security threats China posed in the Indo-Pacific region. The US navy entered the South China sea to put its stance into action.

Although Trump did not see human rights in China as a key issue, his administration members, especially Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, had shown a lot of concerns to the human rights situation in China, especially to the Uighurs and Tibetans. Both Pence and Pompeo had condemned serious human rights abuses by Chinese government in several occasions. They both criticized China heavily for sending Uighur people to "re-education" camps. (Pompeo, 2018; The White House, 2018a)

Overall, FPE under President Trump had very harsh perceptions toward China. “The Trump administration’s diplomatic and security team, consisting of former Secretary of Defense James Mattis, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and National Security Advisor John Bolton, is hawkish toward China in general.” (Kubo, 2019, p, 66) On October 4, 2018, Vice President Pence provided an extreme, systemic and comprehensive criticism of China. He said “And when it comes to Beijing’s malign influence and interference in American politics and policy, we will continue to expose it, no matter the form it takes.” In addition, the trade team under the Trump administration, Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and National Trade Council Director Peter Navarro are two other influential hardliners on China in term of economics. (Kubo, 2019) However, it seems that President Trump himself was not necessarily perceiving China as being malign in all areas, he was rather not interested in human rights issues as it is in economic issues.

Anyway, Trump administration had been adopting hardline policies in a variety of areas toward China.

Besides Trump’s well-known Trade War with China by setting tariffs and other trade barriers on China, there were many other measures had been taken by the US. In August 2018, the “National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019” was established, and the “Foreign Investment Risk Review Modernization Act” was part of the pact. The acts aimed at strengthening the authority of the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States, allowing the committee to scrutinize more effectively whether acquisitions of US companies by Chinese companies would pose a threat to US security. The Export Control Reform Act was another act that belongs to the National Defense Authorization Act. The Export Control Reform Act imposed export restrictions to technologies that were foundational and necessary to US security. Because of these acts, the US government restricted Chinese investments in the US, prohibited the uses of some Chinese products, such as Huawei’s telecommunications equipment, and imposed export restriction on essential technologies to China.

The abovementioned National Defense Authorization Act also set a USD717 billion national defense budget, which had been the largest in recent years with 16% increase, for the new fiscal year starting in October 2018. Trump also pulled the US out of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF)

Treaty. Kubo (2019) predicted that part of the reason for this could be a countermeasure against China, which possessed intermediate-range nuclear weapons but had not signed the treaty. In addition, the Trump administration continued to implement the Operation Freedom of Navigation in the South China Sea inherited from the Obama administration.

The Trump administration had been getting closer with Taiwan. In March 2018, the US government established the Taiwan Travel Act. The act allows two-way visits of officials on all levels between the US and Taiwan. The Trump administration also reinforced its military support for Taiwan. For example, on July 8, 2019, the State Department announced it approved to sale to the Stinger missiles and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$223.56 million.

In terms of human rights issues, as mentioned above, Vice President Pence and Secretary of State Pompeo had been monitoring the human rights abuses in China and using strong language to criticize China. For example, on July 24-26, 2018, Pompeo hosted the first Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom in Washington. It was the first-ever Ministerial to advance religious freedom globally. China was indeed one of the countries that the Ministerial targeted. Pompeo picked on China, accusing it being one of the greatest challenges to religious freedom in the world (U.S. Department of State, 2018). At the same event, Pence labeled China as the “religious freedom violator,” and denounced China of sending millions of Uyghur Muslims to the so-called “re-education camps” and brainwashing them “around-the-clock.” (The White House, 2018a)

The Trump administration had a whole-of-the-government approach to China, countering China as a threat of security, economic, politics and human rights. President Trump perceived China as a threat in terms of national security, and exclusively put economic threats from China in his first concern. However, Trump was less interested in the human rights issues in China than his cabinet Vice President Pence and Secretary of State Pompeo. Pence and Pompeo shared Trump’s view on China’s threat of security, economic. Moreover, they were also very critical on China’s intention to destroy the liberal democratic order that the US had long promoted since the post-war period. They perceived that the Chinese government was one of biggest threat on democracy, human rights and religions, etc.

Therefore, the system stimuli had been able to be transferred to the FEP perceptions. Trump administration saw the change of distribution of power in the system, an increase of China's relative advantage at the expense of the US. They can sense the economic treats from a rising China and its intention in overthrowing the status quo, especially in the South China Sea area. In fact, all of the FPE saw China as a high level of threat. They perceived China's intention as malign. Thus, they responded with risky foreign policies. President launched his Trade War with China; sent navy to the South China Sea; set up a closer diplomatic link with and sold weapons to Taiwan; "stood with" Hong Kong's protestors.

Thus, "*H2a (Domestic factor 1): The more the US foreign policy elites' perceptions of China's intention were malign, the more likely a risky US foreign policy toward China was*" is accepted.

4.3 Political Views of Important Congress Figures – Wilsonian Foreign Policy Outlook? At least toward Hong Kong or China?

4.3.1 Speaker of the House - Nancy Pelosi

The first Congress member to look at is the Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi. Pelosi explicitly expresses her Wilsonian foreign policy outlook on her House of Representatives website. She believes that the US must protect human rights both at home and abroad, and throughout history, the US international standing has rested on American commitment to human rights and democratic values. For her, human rights violations must be solved, and it is American moral duty to protect and defend those fighting for a democratic society. She emphasizes that "The world needs America to lead. We must work towards a sustainable foreign policy that reflects American values" (*Human Rights*, n.d.)

Pelosi thinks the world needs the US bold leadership, and demands that the US must stand as a fierce advocate for human rights abroad, working to advance: "freedom of expression, assembly, and religion; respect for the rule of law; and freedom from political persecution." In doing so, the US would create a safer world and a better place to live (*Human Rights*, n.d.).

Throughout her career in Congress, Pelosi claims that she has stood at the forefront in fighting for human rights improvement in China, and called for the Chinese government to respect the human rights and to stop political persecution. As a leader of Democrats, she has led the party to work tirelessly to defend civil and human rights both within the US and abroad. According to Pelosi, Democrats will continue to speak out until people ruled by the Chinese Communist regime can live freely from political abuse and persecution by the Chinese government (*Human & Civil Rights*, n.d.). Pelosi's official webpage shows her views on American role in protecting human rights and democratic values abroad. It is quite clear that Pelosi has a strong Wilsonian foreign policy outlook.

4.3.2 Senate Majority Leader - Mitch McConnell

It is rather controversial to call McConnell a Wilsonist given his close relations with President Trump. However, what is his stance on foreign policy, especially his foreign policy outlook toward Hong Kong?

Unlike Pelosi, McConnell does not explicitly display his stance on foreign affairs on his website. Thus, this thesis has to look at his activities in the Congress and from his speeches to determine his perception.

There was one particular evidence shows McConnell's political stance on foreign policy toward Hong Kong. Surprisingly, not many people aware that McConnell was in fact the sponsor of the United States-Hong Kong Policy Act of 1992 in Congress, which set the base for the US to continue to treat Hong Kong as a separate territory in economic and trade matters, and to consider Hong Kong for most-favored-nation trade status after the 1997 handover. The law drafted by McConnell emphasizes that the US should play an active role in maintaining Hong Kong's prosperity and autonomy, and the US should continue to fulfill its obligations to Hong Kong. In addition, the law also states that in case Hong Kong is no longer autonomous from China, the special treatments guaranteed by this law should be repudiated (Congressional Research Service, 1992). This law had run smoothly until recent years when the autonomy of Hong Kong had been deteriorated. Another evidence is that McConnell was

one of the consponsor of the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act of 2019, which aims at, obvious by its name, to protect the human rights and democracy in Hong Kong, and to re-access the special treatments enjoyed by Hong Kong (Congressional Research Service, 2019).

Apart from his involvement in two major policy acts that guide US foreign policy toward Hong Kong, McConnell's speeches are the more direct evidence showing his political stance. McConnell said that he was proud to be the author the of United States-Hong Kong Policy Act of 1992 codifying the US stance on Hong Kong autonomy and special state, and he was grateful for Congress's bipartisan works on the subject of autonomy and democracy in Hong Kong. He claimed that the world was watching democracy and human rights in Hong Kong, and the US would march alongside with Hongkonger (*McConnell on Democracy and Autonomy in Hong Kong: "The World Is Watching,"* 2019). On 20 August, *The Wall Street Journal* published McConnell's article titled "We Stand With Hong Kong" (McConnell, 2019). Furthermore, in his interview on *The Hugh Hewitt Show*, McConnell explicitly expressed that the US should intervene in Hong Kong if Chinese government suppresses peaceful protests in Hong Kong:

I think it requires a significant response from us, in my opinion. I think that if the Chinese do crush this what I would call 'peaceful' attempt to maintain their rights, it requires, it seems to me, America, which is known internationally for standing up for human rights, to speak up and to take more forceful action. (*McConnell on 'The Hugh Hewitt Show,'* 2019)

Based on his sponsorships in Congress and his speeches, McConnell was also a Wilsonist toward Hong Kong.

4.3.3 Senator Marco Rubio

Rubio was the sponsor of the HKHRDA in the Senate. He described that the HKHRDA is a law that reaffirm U.S. commitment to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in Hong Kong, and stated that "the U.S. must send a strong message that we stand with those peacefully advocating for freedom and the rule of law and against Beijing's growing interference in Hong Kong affairs" (*Rubio, Cardin,*

Risch, Menendez Reintroduce Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act, 2019) Rubio had not only sponsored the HKHRDA once in 2019, in fact, he was the one the five cosponsors of the same legislation in 2014 amid the 2014 Hong Kong protests (Congressional Research Service, 2014). However, the bill in 2014 did not pass to voting. By reintroduced the HKHRDA 2019, he said:

I am proud to re-introduce legislation that places the U.S. firmly on the side of human rights and democracy and against those who would erode the freedoms and autonomy guaranteed to the people of Hong Kong, freedoms that have made the city a prosperous global commercial hub governed by the rule of law. (*Rubio, Cardin, Risch, Menendez Reintroduce Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act*, 2019)

On Rubio's personal webpage, he claims that he is "...the leading voice in the Senate championing human rights across the globe..." (*Marco's Work*, n.d.) Throughout the recent years of protests in Hong Kong, Rubio has been one of congress member who has had the closest link with Hong Kong activists. In his letter to Hong Kong activists, he encouraged them: "It is important that you know in the days, months, and years ahead that you have friends in the United States that stand with you, ..." (*Rubio, Cardin Express Solidarity With Pro-Democracy Activists In Hong Kong*, 2017)

Hence, based on his works in the congress and from his speeches, Rubio has a strong Wilsonian foreign policy outlook toward Hong Kong.

All three of the important figures in the Congress had demonstrated their Wilsonian foreign policy outlook toward Hong Kong. The following section will show how did their political views influence the US foreign policy toward Hong Kong protests.

4.4 Decision Making Process

This section deal with the second phase of the process tracing. It focuses on the actual decision-making process of the HKHRDA.

4.4.1 Earlier stages

On 9 June, 2019, an estimated one million Hongkongers marched on the streets to protest against and to demand the Hong Kong government to withdraw the controversial extradition bill. However, despite widespread opposition, Chief Executive Carrie Lam did not back down and reaffirmed that she would not retreat the bill. The day after, the State Department Spokesperson Morgan Ortagus gave a speech of the US concern about the extradition bill and the erosion of “One Country, Two systems” (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

On 11 June, 2019, the Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi issued a statement in support of the protestors in Hong Kong describing them as “courageous” and “freedom-loving”. “America stands with the people of Hong Kong.”

On 12 June, the bill was passed to the Legislative Council (Legco) for its second and third reading simultaneously. In response, protestors called for a general strike, and tens of thousands took part in sit-ins outside the Legco began in the early morning attempting to stall the readings. In the afternoon, the police tried to disperse the crowd with numerous canisters of tear gas and violent clashes broke out. In addition to tear gas, the Police had also deployed tons of rubber bullets and bean bag rounds, and many protestors were shot in the heads. Amnesty International descried the police action as “unlawful use of force” and the excessive use of force by the police violated international human rights law and standards” (Amnesty International, 2019)

In the US, when Trump was asked about his reaction to the demonstration in Hong Kong, he said: “That was as big a demonstration as I’ve ever seen. So, I hope it all works out for China and for Hong Kong” (The White House, 2019a). When he was further questioned that was he sending any message to China, he reinstated the demonstration in Hong Kong was “demonstration that they’re having” and “I hope they’re going to be able to work it out with China” (The White House, 2019a). Trump’s speech showed that he was unwilling to intervene directly on the Hong Kong protests at the early stage.

Meanwhile in the Congress, in response to the controversial extradition bill and the suppression by the Hong Kong government, On 13 June, senator Marco Rubio reintroduced the HKHRDA in the Senate. The bill was cosponsored by other senators including Ben Cardin, Jim Risch, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and Bob Menendez, Ranking Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. At the same time, Representative Chris Smith introduced a companion bill in the House. Compared to the Trump's indifferent attitude towards the protests in Hong Kong, some Wilsonist members of the Congress were much more enthusiastic in intervening in Hong Kong and had sided with the protestors since the beginning of the protests.

Protests carried on in the rest of June, and clashes between the protestors and police intensified starting in July. On 1 July, Trump was questioned that the US had traditionally supported democracy movements around the world, would he support the democratic in Hong Kong? He told the journalist that he talked with president XI and hoped that the protests would be solved. His reply was again ambiguous and he refused to intervene in Hong Kong protest (The White House, 2019b). Besides dealing with the issue of the Hong Kong protests, the Trump administration was amid its trade talk with China. President Trump was especially eager to conclude a trade deal with China, a deal that Trump believed would restore the relative economic advantage of the US in facing the rise of China. *Financial Times* reported that, according to several people familiar with the G20 summit meeting, Trump promised Chinese President Xi that the US would lay back in its criticism of Beijing's approach to Hong Kong protests in order to secure a trade deal with China (Sevastopulo & Wong, 2019). Recently, Trump was alleged by the former National Security Advisor John Bolton to had refused to support the protestors in Hong Kong. Bolton disclosed that Trump told him that "I don't want to get involved"; and "We have human rights problems too" (Wintour, 2020). Bolton further accused Trump that he was only excited at the prospect of a trade deal and refused to condemn the human rights problem in China (Wintour, 2020). Up to date, it is unsure whether these allegations were true or false. However, these allegations might be proven by some of Trump's speeches. On 22 July, when he was questioned about his view on the ongoing protests in Hong Kong, he turned the topic to his trade talk with China, and replied: "We're working on trade deals right now. We'll see

what happens. In the meantime, they're paying us billions and billions of dollars of tariffs, which is fine with me;" in addition, he added that "I'm not involved in it very much" (The White House, 2019c) This may imply that as long as China was paying the US billions of dollars, the it would be fine for Trump whatever would happen in Hong Kong. On 1 August, Trump described the protests in Hong Kong as "riots", and he would not intervene in Hong Kong. "...they've had riots for a long period of time...But that's between Hong Kong and that's between China, because Hong Kong is a part of China. They'll have to deal with that themselves. They don't need advice." Said Trump. (The White House, 2019d)

However, Trump's aides and allies, including Vice President, Secretary of State, National Security Advisor and supporters in the Senate, took a clear position siding with the protesters and send warning to Beijing not to intervene in Hong Kong protests. The officials of the Trump administration signaled their support for protesters in Hong Kong by granting a series of high-level meetings to Jimmy Lai, who was one of the Beijing most hated activists in Hong Kong. Lai met with Vice-President Mike Pence, Secretary of State Michael Pompeo and Republican Senators Ted Cruz, Cory Gardner and Rick Scott and National Security Adviser John Bolton one after another. It was very rare for the top US government officials offering such a warm welcome except for the most senior visiting dignitaries, while Lai's meetings with them was very unusual, given that he was just a newspaper publisher in Hong Kong. This political gesture sent Beijing a clear message that the US administrations supported for protests in Hong Kong. It came to no surprise that this move angered the Chinese government, and it made a formal protest to the US consulate.

As mentioned in 4.2, President Trump put economic threats from China in his first concern, and he was much less interested in the human rights issues in China. Thus, the system imperative regarding economic issues was transferred to Trump's perception more successfully. However, his cabinet Pence, Pompeo and Bolton were very critical on China's intention to destroy the liberal democratic order. They perceived that the Chinese government was a big threat on democracy and human rights in Hong Kong. Their different perceptions led to different responses on the Hong Kong protests. Trump showed his indifferent attitude toward the Hong Kong protestors, and he was adopting some

sort of “appeasement policy” so that he could continue his trade talk with China; while his aides had more sympathy for the protestors and sided with the protestors.

On the other hand, the reintroduction of the HKHRDA in the Congress, and the supports from the two most important figures in the Congress, the House Speaker Pelosi and the Senate Majority Leader McConnell, further reflected their Wilsonian foreign policy outlook toward Hong Kong. They supported the protestors, and expressed their views that the US should be committed to safeguard the human rights and freedom of Hong Kong.

4.4.2 Trump Changed of Position and Agenda Setting by the Congress

In the Congress, although the bill was reintroduced as early as in June, it still hadn’t been scheduled to the plenary meeting until July. In addition, except one Senate session in the first week on August, there wasn’t any session scheduled until the second week of September. Meanwhile in Hong Kong, protests and clashes intensifies. Another general strike was called on 5 August attempting to paralyze the economy. Violent clashes began as early as 1 a.m. in the morning and hadn’t stopped until the midnight. Throughout the whole day, the police had fired approximately 1000 canisters of tear gas and more than a hundred rounds of rubber bullet and bean bags round. Next day, on 6 August, the Speaker Pelosi issued another statement reinstating her support for the pro-democracy protestors in Hong Kong and promised to quickly advance the legislative work of the HKHRDA. “When we return to Washington, the bipartisan, bicameral Congress will begin our work to advance the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act, and fight to preserve democratic freedoms and the rule of law in Hong Kong” (Pelosi, 2019b)

On 11 and 12 August, protestors occupied the Hong Kong International Airport to paralyze the economy. This move triggered the nerves of the Chinese officials. Chinese state media warned that protesters are “asking for self-destruction,” as they released a video showing that military vehicles, including tanks, were amassing near the border of Hong Kong. Other online videos had also shown that a mass of Chinese military assembled in Shenzhen, the adjacent city of Hong Kong. On 13

August, President Trump tweeted: “Our Intelligence has informed us that the Chinese Government is moving troops to the Border with Hong Kong. Everyone should be calm and safe!” While McConnell warned Beijing that “any violent crackdown would be completely unacceptable. ... The world is watching” (Brunnstrom, 2019). Pelosi also reaffirmed the US commitment to Hong Kong’s democracy, human rights and rule of law and she urged President Trump to “work to advance peace, justice and democracy in Hong Kong ”(Pelosi, 2019c).

Afraid of a violent crackdown similar to the Tiananmen Square Massacre, Trump began to speak up for the protestors, and urged Beijing to react in humane way: “... I really would like to see China, in a humane way, solve the problem in Hong Kong — humanely solve the problem in Hong Kong” (The White House, 2019e) Three days later, Trump reinstated his concern and again, urged Beijing government to act in a humanitarian fashion. Importantly, it was the first time that Trump expressed he would consider the Hong Kong issue in his trade talk with China. “And I think it would be much harder for me to sign a deal if he did something violent in Hong Kong” (The White House, 2019f) On 19 August, Pence reaffirmed that it would be much more difficult for the US to conclude a deal with China if violent crackdown happened in Hong Kong (The White House, 2019g). When being asked why he changed his mind, Trump replied that as the US president, he had to consider the tremendous political sentiment if he would not prevent the violent cracking from happening. (The White House, 2019f) The political sentiment he referred to would be the sentiment from the Congress. As Bolton put it: “what I’ve heard, just in the past few weeks, the mood in Congress is very volatile at this point, and a misstep by the Chinese government, I think, would cause an explosion on Capitol Hill” (Reuters, 2019)

Beijing’s clear threatening message did not scare off the protestors and protests continued. Another 1.6 million marched on the street on 18 June. On 3 September, McConnell reinstated his support for the Hong Kong protestors:

I think it requires a significant response from us, in my opinion. I think that if the Chinese do crush this what I would call ‘peaceful’ attempt to maintain their rights, it requires, it seems to

me, America, which is known internationally for standing up for human rights, to speak up and to take more forceful action. (McConnell on 'The Hugh Hewitt Show,' 2019)

On 17 September, the Congress invited several Hong Kong activists, including Joshua Wong, to attend the congressional hearing - Hong Kong's Summer of Discontent and U.S. Policy Responses. On the next day, House Speaker Pelosi announced that the Congress would swiftly advance the bipartisan HKHRDA (Pelosi, 2019d). Pelosi kept her promise. Within a month, on October 15, she moved the HKDRDA bill to the House of Representatives for voting with the method of voice vote, which was the simplest and quickest of voting methods so that the bill could be passed as soon as possible. In the US, voice vote is only used when there is an overwhelming majority favors one side or a unanimous consent. The House unanimously passed the House version (H.R.3289) of the HKDRDA without objection.

Although the bill was unanimously passed in the House on October 15 and passed to the Senate for deliberation, the Senate Majority Leader McConnell had been accused of delaying a vote for the Senate version of the bill. Meanwhile, violence continued to escalate in Hong Kong. On 11 November, a policeman shot an unarmed protest with live round. Jim McGovern, the House Representative and the Chairman of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, was furious after the shooting incident, and called the Hong Kong Police "out of control", and urged Trump to take action on Twitter (McGovern, 2019b). McGovern also urged McConnell to bring the HKHRDA to the Senate floor in that week (McGovern, 2019a).

Just in a few days, the human rights situation in Hong Kong have deteriorated sharply. The Hong Kong Police besieged the Hong Kong police the university campus of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Numerous shots by different weapons had been fired by the police and protestors responded by throwing bricks and petrol bombs. It was not exaggerated to call the siege "little warzones". In response to these incidents, McConnell tweeted: "I was encouraged by a productive conversation with @MarcoRubio yesterday on legislation to further help the people of Hong Kong. The Senate needs to stand with Hong Kong and I hope we can take action soon" (M. [Leader M. McConnell, 2019).

On 14 November, McConnell made use of his agenda setting power and officially moved the bill for voting in the Senate. This time, the Senate used method of the clearance process, or the so called “hotline”. As long as there wasn’t any Senator raising objections within the specified time (5 days in this case), the process of debate and voting can be skipped, and the bill would be deemed to be unanimously approved by all members of the Senate. On 19 November, the Senate version (S.1838) of HKHRDA was passed unanimously as well.

However, there were minor differences between House version and the Senate version. Therefore, the House and Senate needed to negotiate and vote again for a merged version before submission to the President for signature. Under normal circumstances, when the House and Senate are controlled by the two different parties and when they want to coordinate a bill, there are often political struggles and delays in the schedule. However, in order to pass the bill quickly, Pelosi and the House decided to adopt the Senate version to save time for negotiation, and speed up the voting process so that they could pass the bill before the Thanksgiving holidays. Pelosi was so determined that she passed the Senate version for nominal voting just the day after the Senate voting. On 20 November, the House passed Senate version with an overwhelming majority, 417 votes in favour, 1 against and 13 abstentions.

Below is the brief summary of the passed HKHRDA: (Congressional Research Service, 2019)

- (1) Assess annually whether Hong Kong is sufficiently autonomous from China to justify its unique treatment
- (2) Assess annually on China's efforts to use Hong Kong to evade U.S. export controls and sanctions
- (3) Will not deny visa applications from political prosecuted Hong Kong residents
- (4) Bar officials responsible for human rights violations in Hong Kong from entering the United States and imposes sanctions on them.
- (5) Restrict export of teargas and crowd control technology to Hong Kong Police Force

On November 21, Pelosi signed the HKHRDA under the witness of cross-party members of the Congress. The bill was then sent from to the White House, waiting for President Trump to sign it into law.

As shown in 4.3, three important figures in the Congress, the Speaker of the House Pelosi, the Majority Leader of the Senate McConnell and Senator Marco Rubio had shown their support for Hong Kong human rights and democracy movements. They reinstated “stand with Hong Kong” many times. In addition, Pelosi used her agenda setting power in the House to advance the bill quickly; while McConnell was rather inactive in the beginning, he also used his agenda setting power in the Senate to pass the bill swiftly later. More important was that the bill was passed almost unanimously, with only one voted against. Almost every member of the Congress support for risky intervening in the human rights situation in Hong Kong. They favour a bill that put huge diplomatic pressures, imposes economics and target sanctions on Hong Kong and China.

Thus, “*H2b (Domestic factor 2): The more members of Congress embraced a ‘Wilsonian’ foreign policy outlook, the more the attitude of the Congress toward Hong Kong democratic movements was supportive, the more likely a risky US intervention in Hong Kong protests was*” is also accepted.

4.4.3 President Trump signed HKHRDA into Law

After the HKHRDA bill was passed by the Senate and the House, President Trump had 10 days to sign it into law, but the President also had the veto power to refuse to approve the bill passed by the Congress and thus prevent the bill enacted into law. During the 10 days window, the President could return the legislation to the Congress with a formal explanation of the rationale for his decision to veto the bill. However, the US constitution also allows the President veto to be overridden by a two-thirds majority in both the Senate and the House. If this is the case, the bill becomes law despite President's objections. (*Veto*es, n.d.)

On 22 November, President Trump spoke on the “*Fox & Friends*” morning program that he might veto the bill to pave the way for a trade deal with China. “We have to stand with Hong Kong, but I’m

also standing with President Xi, ... but we also are in the process of making the largest trade deal in history." Trump also added that "If it weren't for me, Hong Kong would've been obliterated in 14 minutes, ... Please don't do that, it's going to make a tremendous negative impact on the trade deal" (Lynch, 2019).

While in the US, a survey conducted by Ronald Reagan Institute (2019) showed that a majority (68%) of American said the US should support the protest in Hong Kong, even if it would anger China. American supports on the pro-democratic movement in Hong Kong were not limited to rhetorical or moral support only. A majority (69%) of favored imposing sanctions; and another majority (59%) would even favor responding with security assistance or aid If China intervene by military means. It would be difficult for Trump to veto the bill that support by the majority (Ronald Reagan Institute, 2019).

Meanwhile, Trump's uncertain remarks attracted criticisms from members of both parties. Given that both chambers passed the HKDRDA almost unanimously, it was highly likely that the Congress would easily have a two-thirds vote to overrule the President if he tried to veto the bill from becoming law. Trump signed the bill into law on 27 November, rather reluctantly. The White House released a statement from the President: "Certain provisions of the Act would interfere with the exercise of the President's constitutional authority to state the foreign policy of the United States" (The White House, 2019h). In the end, Trump was still discontent that the Congress interfere with his authorities with respect to foreign relations. Anyway, the HKDRDA became the US foreign policy toward Hong Kong.

Besides, there was another veto point. The Supreme court may veto the HKHRDA if it considered the law as unconstitutional. However, since no one had brought the law to judicial review, and the law was passed within the constitution, the judicial veto point was largely irrelevant.

In general, only the President would be able to veto the foreign policy passed by the Congress. However, since the US constitution also allow a two-third majority in the Congress to overrule the

President's veto, and given that the bill obtained overwhelming support in the Congress, the President knew that he was "forced" to sign the bill into law, even he might be reluctant to.

Hence, "*H2c: (Domestic factor 3): The fewer constitutional right for domestic opponents to reject intervention, the more likely a risky American intervention on Hong Kong protests was*" is accepted.

Overall, in 2019, the US was enjoying a permissive environment. It did not encounter any imminent threat that could harm the US homeland. System incentives were not strong enough to indicate an optimal foreign policy. Hence, there were time and space for the domestic factors to formulate a foreign policy toward Hong Kong protests. The FPE perceived the threats and malign intentions from China. Hawkist risky foreign policy had become their grand strategy in response to the rise of China. However, the most important FPE, the President, was rather less interested in the malign intention of China on human rights issue than his allies. Furthermore, almost all members in the Congress favor a Wilsonian foreign policy toward Hong Kong. The Congress had been the most important actor in determining the character of the US foreign policy toward Hong Kong protests. Lastly, the legislative procedure under the US constitution prevented the President to veto the Congress's decision. A bill introduced by the Congress became the actual US foreign policy toward Hong Kong protests.

"*H1: If (a) there was a permissive environment for the US (a security threat to the US is absent), and (b) by consequence, domestic factors weighed more heavily on US foreign policy.*" should also be accepted.

This Chapter begins with tracing the phase prior the protest. First, it shows that the US was having a permissive environment. Then, by looking at the perceptions of the FPE, it also shows that large parts of the system signals were successfully transferred to their perceptions, except for Trump's unconcern for the erosion of the liberal democratic order. It follows by a list of risky foreign policies toward China under Trump administration. In terms of institutional factor, the political views of the three important figures in the Congress were having Wilsonian foreign policy outlook toward Hong Kong.

After that, it turns to the tracing of the second phase, demonstrating the decision-making process of the HKHRDA. It shows that the HKHRDA was introduced in the Congress in response to the protests in Hong Kong. Trump was reluctant to intervene in the Hong Kong protest in the earlier stages, and he was sort of appeasing Beijing to get his trade deal done. However, other FPE and the members of the Congress were more consistent. They supported for the democratic movement in Hong Kong since the beginning. Then, this chapter demonstrates that the HKHRDA was passed in the Congress almost unanimously with the help of the agenda setting power of Pelosi and McConnell. Finally, it shows that the HKHRDA was signed into law by the President, and become the foreign policy toward Hong Kong protests without facing much objection.

Furthermore, based on empirical evidence in this chapter, all 4 hypotheses are accepted. In general, if there was a permissive environment for the US, domestic factors weighed more heavily on US foreign policy. In terms of domestic factor, the more the US foreign policy elites' perceptions of China's intention were malign, the more likely a risky US foreign policy toward China was; the more members of Congress embraced a "Wilsonian" foreign policy outlook, the more the attitude of the Congress toward Hong Kong democratic movements was supportive, the more likely a risky US intervention in Hong Kong protests was; the fewer constitutional right for domestic opponents to reject intervention, the more likely a risky American intervention on Hong Kong protests was.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Summary

This thesis starts with a brief introduction of Hong Kong protests in 2019. In response to the protests, the US passed a law, the HKHRDA, to support the democratic and human rights movement in Hong Kong. It was puzzling that neither of the two IR grand theories, Neorealism and Neoliberal Institutionalism, were able to fully account for this US foreign policy. Furthermore, another puzzle was that even President Trump is famous for his “America First” isolationism, then why did the US still intervene in Hong Kong protests. Thus, the first question had been raised: What explain the US intervention in Hong Kong protests?

A theory that take the international system and domestic factors into account might be useful in explaining the foreign policy. By analyzing the interaction of the international system and the internal dynamics of states, NCR seeks to explain the foreign policy of individual state. NCR suggests that while system stimuli set the grand strategy for US foreign policy, unit-level factors such as perceptions of foreign policy elites (FPE), legislative branch influence, the dominance of liberal ideals in US foreign policy discourse, political structure, etc. determine the character and venue of the foreign policy. Then, it raised the second question: to what extent can NCR explain the US foreign policy toward Hong Kong protests?

This thesis provides a brief introduction of NCR, and states its theoretical approach. It adopts the Semi-Orthodox approach, which argues that domestic factors act as a channel through which the system’s imperative is translated into states’ foreign policy. This thesis tests NCR with the case of the HKHRDA. It used the process tracing method in order to reveal the black box of the causal link between the independent variable – system stimuli and the dependent variable – HKHRDA.

This thesis found that in a permissive environment without imminent threat, domestic factors weighed more heavily on US foreign policy. The perceptions of FPE determined the grand strategy of the US in response to the rise of China. They perceived China as malign and a threat to the US, eventually

Hawkist risky foreign policy toward China became the US grand strategies. However, the most important FPE, President Trump was adopting a policy of appeasement in the earlier stages so that he could secure a trade deal with China, a deal that Trump believed would restore the relative economic advantage of the US in facing the rise of China.

Then, the Congress, dominated by Wilsonists, had drafted and passed a bill to become the US foreign policy toward Hong Kong protest. It designed and determined the actual US response in Hong Kong protests. The response included heavy diplomatic pressures and sanctions. President Trump was not competent to veto Congress's decision thanks to the more than two-thirds majority supports for the HKHRDA in the Congress. The Trump administration had to respond to the Hong Kong protests based on the HKHRDA passed the Congress.

To answer the first question: What explain the US foreign policy toward the 2019 Hong Kong protests? There wasn't any single factor able to explain the US foreign policy toward the 2019 Hong Kong protests. Instead, to explain the foreign policy, it is crucial to look at the causal mechanism between the independent variable and dependent variable. The US was enjoying a permissive environment. It did not encounter any imminent threat that could harm the US homeland. System incentives were not strong enough to indicate an optimal foreign policy. Hence, there were time and space for the domestic factors to formulate a foreign policy toward Hong Kong protests. The FPE perceived the threats and malign intentions from the rise of China. Hawkist risky foreign policy had become their grand strategy in response to the change in relative power distribution. However, the most important FPE, President Trump, was rather less interested in the malign intention of China on human rights issue than his allies. He adopted an appeasement policy to secure his trade deal with China, a deal that he believed would restore the relative economic advantage of the US. Furthermore, almost all members in the Congress favor a Wilsonian foreign policy toward Hong Kong. The Congress had been the most important actor in determining the character of the US foreign policy toward Hong Kong protests. The Congress passed the HKHRDA bill to support Hong Kong protests. Lastly, the legislative procedure under the US constitution prevented the President to veto the

Congress's decision. A bill introduced by the Congress became the actual US foreign policy toward Hong Kong protests, overriding the original appeasement policy by the President.

To answer the second question: To what extent can Neoclassical realism explain US foreign policy toward 2019 Hong Kong protests? The least-likely case HKHRDA confirms NCR theoretical insight that the grand strategy of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by the country's relative material power, and the systemic pressures must be translated through intervening unit-level variables such as decision-makers' perceptions. Furthermore, domestic dynamics will determine the actual character of a foreign policy. This process was very similar to the casual mechanism of the HKHRDA. In the case, the grand strategy of the US was driven by its rivalry with China. However, because President Trump perceived economic threat as the most important system signal, he opted for an appeasement policy secure a deal China, a deal he believed would restore the relative economic advantage of the US. In the end, the domestic dynamics, such as the institutional factor and political structure of the US, determined the actual character of the foreign policy toward Hong Kong protest, the HKHRDA. Thus, NCR can explain US foreign policy toward Hong Kong protests to a large extent.

5.2 Reflection on Methodological Choices

Single case study was important to understand a particular casual mechanism between the independent and dependent variable. Using the method of process tracing opened the blackbox of this causal mechanism. It revealed the causal effects of each intervening variable step by step. However, one drawback of using process tracing in the research is that there are not enough primary sources. Since the case was only happening last year in 2019, any confidential documents, such as records of cabinet meetings will not be published until several decades later. Process tracing would be more effective if there were more primary sources; or if this thesis would have chosen an older case, such as the Korean War, or Vietnam War, which can offer more primary sources. Certain data used may

contain biases. For example, press releases or speeches were two major types of data used by this thesis, however, those authors may not tell all the truth. Politicians may “lie” to the public for their own favors. Thus, the best sources to use are primary sources such as internal meeting transcripts.

In addition, the Asia power index by Lowy Institute turns out to be a good choice. It provides the relevant rankings that were useful to the analysis of the relative power distribution in Asia. However, even using an alternative research on power distribution, such as relative power distribution in the whole world, instead of only in Asia, it is still expected to have a similar finding because China was still challenging the US hegemonic status internationally, not limited to Asia.

Furthermore, the new book, *The Room Where It Happened*, written by the former National Security Advisor John Bolton revealed the secrets and details of President Trump’s perception on intervening in Hong Kong protests and his deals with China, and it could be a very important source for this thesis. Unfortunately, Bolton’s new book only released couples of days ago, and it was too late to be used in this thesis. Future researches on similar topics are recommended to make use of Bolton’s book.

5.3 Reflection on the Implications of the Findings for NCR

Since this thesis treats NCR as an approach to foreign policy, rather than just as a toolkit to explain suboptimal policy choices, thus, non-structural domestic factors are the intervening variable that affects foreign policy regularly. The Semi-Orthodox would have a better explanation power and generalizability than the Orthodox School when domestic factors in Semi-Orthodox represent the regular and normal channel through which the system stimuli is translated into foreign policy. On the other hand, the Revivalist downplay the influence the relative distribution of power in the system; in contrast, the Semi-Orthodox School preserve the importance of system stimuli. System stimuli should be translated through the domestic factor in shaping the foreign policy.

In term of generalizability, the generalize power of the case is quite high. The unit of analysis in this thesis is US foreign policy toward China, and this is the phenomena that this thesis seeks to analyze.

Several other foreign policies toward China, or to be more precise, US foreign policies toward China regarding human rights issues, have taken the same causal path of the HKHRDA. When it comes to human issues, the generalizability is very high. These examples are: *A bill to prohibit the commercial export of covered munitions items to the Hong Kong Police Force*; *Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2020*; *Hong Kong Autonomy Act* (in progress).

Moreover, the finding contributes to the debate in International Relations theory. Economic interdependent states do not always cooperate as suggested by Neoliberal Institutionalism; while system stimuli is not the only variable that determines a state's foreign policy as suggested by Neorealism. NCR added that system stimuli needs to be transferred through domestic factors to shape states' behaviours. Domestic factors act as the intervening variables linking the system stimuli and states' actions. This explanation by NCR seems to be more plausible when applying to US foreign policy toward China regarding human right issues.

5.4 Policy Implication for Stakeholders

The Chinese and Hong Kong government should understand that some fundamental values such as human rights and democracy are important to the US politicians. Although the President is the most powerful actor in foreign policy, he cannot dictate the decision-making process. The Congress can also exercise its legislative power in formulating foreign policy. Thus, it is important for the Chinese and Hong Kong government to understand the different motives and actors behind US foreign policy, in order to decide their responses accordingly.

Also, the Hong Kong protestors should learn the perception of the US politicians, and apply protest tactics that will not go against the principle of human rights and democracy. Furthermore, protestors in Hong Kong should not incline to a single actor in the US. If they want to ask for help from the US, they should appeal to both the FPE and the Congress. In addition, it is best to gain the support from both Democrats and Republics, and do not only appeal to the ruling party.

5.5 Discussion of Future Research

Future research can keep on using NCR as the theoretical approach. However, it may consider using different methods. For example, it can choose another least-likely case to see if the causal mechanism suggested by NCR is still plausible; or instead of using least-likely case, it can try to use most-likely to disconfirm NCR. Apart from single case study, future research can compare two similar cases in US foreign policy toward China. A good example would be comparing the US foreign policy toward China regarding human rights issue with the US trade policy with China. Both are US foreign policy toward China, however, the former is more dominated by the Congress while the latter is still largely controlled by the executive branch. Future research can find out why different branches dominate in different issue areas.

Future research can also make use of other theoretical approaches. One suggestion is using the postcolonialism approach. Although Hong Kong had been handed over to China for more than 20 years, why would the Western countries still exercise their influences on Hong Kong?

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