



Understanding Society

The Frozen Conflict between China and Taiwan  
through the Lens of Three International Relations Theories

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# Abbreviations

PRC: People's Republic of China (Mainland China)

ROC: Republic of China (Taiwan)

UNSC: United Nations Security Council

UNGA: United Nations General Assembly

IR: International Relations

# Introduction

At the 2022 winter Olympic Games held in Beijing, Taiwanese speed skater Huang Yu-ting represented Chinese Taipei - the name given to the Taiwanese team. But she ended up making international headlines for an entirely different reason than her sports achievements; she wore a Chinese tenue during one of her practice sessions.

Footage of this was retrieved from her Instagram account and was thereafter widely spread online, consequently sparking outrage amongst the Taiwanese especially. They massively flocked to her Instagram and Facebook account, leaving comments like “if you want to represent the Chinese team, get out of Taiwan” (Reuters, 2022a). This may not seem like a very notable interaction that stands out in the prevalent online outlashes, feuds and cancel culture, yet it is. These comments are particularly significant as they reflect the political backdrop and tensions against which the Taiwanese express their hostile attitude towards Huang Yu-ting. National identity is a very sensitive topic in Taiwan, as the country battles the influence China tries to increasingly hold over it. China namely regards Taiwan as part of China, as a province, and therefore posits that it has in no way any right to autonomy. Despite this, the Taiwanese people have increasingly turned against the influence of China over the past decades, giving rise to a process commonly referred to as Taiwanization (Horowitz & Tan, 2007; Jacobs, 2005). This includes Taiwan attempting to join the international political stage, with China consequently knocking every attempt down through their vast power and influential position.

Then how does the rest of the world perceive this uncertain yet hostile relationship? The everyday news shows how fickle the international position is on the conflict, depending on a variety of factors. Amongst those is the Chinese growing power (commonly referred to as the Rise of China) in the international sphere, which the United States, for instance, feels threatened by (Rudd, 2022). For this reason, the latter’s response and attitude towards the conflict is interesting, to gauge the progression of the situation. On May 23, 2022, for instance, the Guardian published an article discussing the American reaction to the conflict (Wertheim, 2022). The article explains that the American president in office in 2022, Biden, on a visit to Japan, has expressed the American support for Taiwan. Biden does not condone China’s display of power through its growing military deployment and threatening presence near Taiwan. Ultimately, the United States opposes the possibility of a Chinese annexation of Taiwan, especially through forcible and violent means.

Biden's statement is a significant development in the international stance towards China, as the country had never voiced its support for Taiwan so openly and directly (Davidson & Borger, 2021). In the past, the United States had only given careful and diplomatic answers to the question of whether they would support Taiwan in the conflict, in order to not strain their relationship with China. However, with this definite proclamation, which leaves no room for doubt, the United States has firmly taken a position on the conflict. This could signify a change in the international attitude towards Taiwan as well, leaving more possibilities for Taiwanese participation in the international sphere. However, as of 2022, this is still to be determined and thus leaves one only with speculative answers.

The two discussed significant occurrences reflect the development of Taiwanese and international attitude towards China, which has changed remarkably over the course of the past twenty years. This thesis will discuss the dynamic and uncertain political and economic relationship between China and Taiwan, and the interference of the United States in this relationship. More importantly, this thesis sets out to discuss the nature of the relationship between the two involved actors, and why this classifies it as a frozen conflict. Having determined that, this thesis aims to analyze this conflict through the lens of three theories from the study of International Relations (IR). This discipline concerns itself with the theories underlying the interactions between (sovereign) states. IR could therefore explain the interaction between Taiwan and China, and consequently shed some light on the nature of the frozen conflict between them. The research question this thesis aims to answer, therefore reads as follows:

To what extent can the IR theories of realism, liberalism and constructivism be applied to understand the frozen conflict between China and Taiwan?

To answer this question, this thesis will first discuss the three relevant IR theories and set out the theoretical framework. It thereby aims to answer the first of two sub-questions: *what do constructivism, realism and liberalism entail?*

Thereafter, the relationship between Taiwan and China will be explained in the third chapter, which is dedicated to the nature and history of their relationship. Based on this, the following fourth chapter discusses how this relationship meets the requirements and characteristics that are used to classify it as a frozen conflict. In addition, there will be an in-depth study of relevant legal cases which underlie and can help understand the development of

their relation and the attitude of the rest of the world towards this. Chapter three and four will collectively answer the second sub-question: what is the background of China and Taiwan's relationship and how does its nature benefit a frozen conflict?

Having established the answers to the sub-questions regarding the theoretical framework and the presence of a frozen conflict, chapter five will turn to answering the research question. The afore discussed theories will be applied on the conflict and will be used to shed more light on the conflict.

In the end, the reaction of the Taiwanese people to Huang Yu-ting's display of perceived solidarity with China denotes the changing nature and the end of the previously agreeable but unstable status quo between the two countries. This also reflects the currency of the conflict and the importance of discussing it. The thesis will therefore be of added value to the disciplines of international relations and political science. If anything, it will help people to understand the nature of the ongoing conflict that demands a global response. Especially so in light of the rising concern surrounding China's increasing power and its possible threat. The country is certainly at the top of the foreign policy agenda for many countries.

The likelihood of whether Taiwan will still compete in the Olympics under the name Chinese Taipei in the future, is determined by the extent to which either the realist, liberalist or constructivist approach and central concepts have been and will be maintained, which will be clear by the end of this thesis.

# Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

## 1.1 Societal and academic relevance

The international sphere has long been dominated by the US and Russia. However, with China emerging as a new superpower, the international system is experiencing a vast change in its longstanding status quo. Next to that, the 2022 war between Russia and Ukraine will cause a shift too, in the sense that Russia's global power will be affected (either diminished or expanded). The very fact that a frozen conflict (over Crimea) has "turned hot" in February 2022, will also add to the popularity of the topic (Herszenhorn, 2021).

On top of that, China's passive support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine has caused international anxiety over China's intentions with Taiwan. It is speculated that China may analyse the Western reaction to the Russian invasion and that the war could consequently function as an indication for China on how the world will react to a possible invasion of Taiwan (Davidson, 2022). Additionally, Russia and China have had a pretty close economic relationship, on top of similar political and cultural practices and systems.

The wariness has only increased with the rising tensions across the strait, especially in light of the active interference of the US. On top of that, developments in alliances and the political system, and the deployment of Chinese military close to the Taiwanese coast further destabilize the status quo (Reuters, 2022b; Davidson, 2021). The research of frozen conflicts and the study of International Relations, specifically in the Taiwan strait, is therefore now more relevant than ever – both academically and societally.

More specifically related to the frozen conflict between China and Taiwan, are the developments between China and Hongkong and the internal oppression of Chinese Uyghurs. These instances increase the societal relevance of this thesis. The unrest in Hongkong has played an important role in 2020-2021, and continues to be an important factor on the international agenda. The situation in Hong Kong can arguably be compared to that of Taiwan. The Uyghur genocide has changed the stance of many countries towards China and brought about sanctions, although still careful and limited (Gershman, 2019). In addition to these Chinese policies giving rise to growing resistance and criticism globally, the recent attitude of China towards Taiwan has only added fuel to the fire. China has namely mobilized troops and stationed them just off the coast of Taiwan, escalating the threat of an invasion (Reuters, 2022b). The United States has, in turn, clearly voiced their opposition to this and furthered their

support for Taiwan. Taiwan's defense minister has announced that the threat posed by China is at its highest point of the past 40 years, even stating that the country could act on its threats and mount a full-scale invasion against them by 2025 (Davidson, 2021). With each of the aforementioned acts and threats, China creates a greater divide with the United States and Europe.

Altogether, not only do the recent developments create global tensions, they also heighten the societal relevance of this thesis. It is more important and valuable than ever to understand the conflict between Taiwan and China. The issue is very current and will provide the starting point of how the Chinese actions and foreign policy will take shape in the future. The currency and impact of it makes it a highly debated topic in the news. Thus, not only would it put its policies into perspective, it would also provide possibilities for speculative future behavior.

International Relations (IR) is a longstanding academic field, dating back to 1919, but only gaining recognition and popularity after the Second World War. This is due to the fact that the Cold War brought about geostrategic concerns and an interest to understand and possibly predict the behavior of states during this conflict (Jackson & Sørensen, 2019). Politicians and scholars alike were interested and saw the benefit in the intense evaluations of the rapidly changing international system. With the 21<sup>st</sup> century globalization and interconnectedness of states, the discipline encompasses an increasing number of fields (including economics, law and history). All three of these fields will be discussed, therefore covering the majority and most prominent aspects in the theories of IR.

Moreover, the international relations field and its theories has constantly been changing and is subject to continuing criticism from other theories. The most relevant theories are liberalism and realism, which stand at opposite sides of the IR spectrum. This thesis therefore increases its relevance by touching upon the most prominent and widely accepted theories within the current and dynamic field of IR.

The applied study of International Relations theories on the frozen conflict between China and Taiwan will provide the world with different lenses that explain the conflict to varying extents. The currency of the situation makes this study societally relevant, in addition to the academic relevance of the widely popular topic. This thesis will touch on a wide variety of existing literature and add further insights and findings to that.

To conclude, in this thesis, the author will research the frozen conflict between China and Taiwan to understand the extent to which the three most prominent International Relations theories underlie the conflict. This knowledge will serve as an essential base for future research on this relevant and current topic, and can help to address the conflict. After all, understanding

should precede an active approach. This research of this topic therefore has both academic and societal relevance.

## 1.2 Position of the topic

Some research on the influence of China on Hong Kong and Taiwan has been published, for instance *China's influence and the center-periphery tug of war in Hong Kong, Taiwan and the Indo-Pacific* (Zhang, 2021). In addition, various articles are available that try to explain China's policies from an international relations perspective. Examples of these include a *Paradox of Political Realism: the Taiwanese and Chinese Perceptions on the Rise of China Compared* (Leng, 2013) and Chan's (2009) *Commerce between Rivals: Realism, Liberalism, and credible Communication across the Taiwan Strait*.

However, these works mainly focus on China's policies in general towards Taiwan, and do not necessarily focus on the nature of the conflict. The IR theory mostly applied in existing articles is realism. Next to the fact that the literature does not apply the theories on the nature of the conflict, the studies also do not approach the matter through three different IR theories- realism, liberalism and constructivism. For both reasons, this thesis is a valuable new contribution to the existing literature in the field of international relations and the specific studies of China and Taiwan.

## 1.3 Methodology

The thesis' main research question, which is to what extent liberalism, realism and constructivism from the International Relations discipline can be applied to understand the frozen conflict between China and Taiwan, will be answered through the review and application of existing literature and the use of legal cases. This thesis will therefore take a qualitative approach to the topic. The analysis of legal and literary sources form the foundation upon which the answer to the main research question is built, along with the answers to the two sub questions.

Regarding the study of International Relations theories, this thesis will mainly build on secondary literature, including the handbook *Introduction to International Relations* (Jackson & Sørensen, 2019). These books will serve as the starting point for definitions. Publications like *International Relations* (Sutch & Elias, 2007) and *The State and International Relations* (Hobson, 2000) will be referred to as well, since these also provide a general and comprehensive overview and would be suitable for extended further reading on this topic. The

most important authors of the realist theory are Machiavelli (in the early stages of realism) and Morgenthau. The pioneers of the liberalist theory are Keohane and Locke, which means that this thesis will build upon their definition. Prominent constructivist theorists include Onuf and Wendt. Some works from these scholars contributing to the theories, date further back than others. However, these are the philosophers whose works form the core of classical liberalism, realism and constructivism. Since then, new categories have emerged within each IR theory, adding emphasis on and exploring new aspects. Scholars leading the current-day debate between the three theories include Mearsheimer and Waltz (realism), Keohane (liberalism) and Katzenstein (constructivism). The classical debate within IR was predominantly led by realism and liberalism. These two theories are at opposite ends of the spectrum, one being pessimistic (realism) and the other optimistic (liberalism). The focus of the debate has, since then, increasingly shifted towards the notion of rationalism (constructivism) versus that of materialism (realism and liberalism). The prominent aspects of the debate are therefore accounted for in this thesis.

As for the study of the history and nature of the conflict between China and Taiwan, the author mainly makes use of academic articles, lightly touching upon the handbook *Beyond Frozen Conflict* (de Waal & von Twickel, 2020) as well.

As for the legal cases, letters addressed to the UNSC and the consequential repertoire published by the same organization will be utilized in order to shed light on the conflict from a legal aspect. The same applies for an UNGA resolution essential to the development of the conflict between Taiwan and China.

In line with the afore discussed research design, the theoretical framework of this thesis revolves around International Relations theories and the study of historiography. The former is part of the school of International Relations, in which the behaviour of states in the international system is analyzed. The historiographical framework is used in chapter three, in order to explain the evolution of the relationship between Taiwan and China. Although this thesis does not center around historical research, it is necessary to adopt this framework in this specific section in order to properly understand the nature of the conflict. In the end, the main theoretical framework for this thesis is that of International Relations, touching upon political sciences heuristics in the process.

Now arriving at the applicative and researched aspect of the thesis; the study and application of IR theories on the conflict between Taiwan and China is not something new. Multiple studies have been conducted, with only a handful standing out in regional focus and

similarity in research aim to this thesis. These few, however, almost solely focus on the application of realism, and only in the case of China, as mentioned in section 1.1. An instance of this is Mearsheimer's (2006) *China's unpeaceful Rise*. In the case that liberalism were to be mentioned, this is only in an economic context, which is already indicative of the extent of the theory's applicability to the conflict.

This thesis aims to add on to the existing literature by focussing on the behaviour of China towards Taiwan and the other way around, which constitutes the conflict between them. Moreover, next to realism, the theories of liberalism and constructivism will be discussed and applied. Yet, the reader may be interested in consulting further and more specific works on this topic, in which case the following are recommended, due to similarity in nature (theoretical framework) and regional focus. This includes the relevant and foundational works of Copper's (2014) *Believe Realist Theory and Say Good-Bye to Taiwan?*, Blazevic' (2010) *The Taiwan Dilemma: China, Japan and the Strait Dynamic* and Chen's (2009) *China and Taiwan: A Future of Peace? A Study of Economic Interdependence, Taiwanese Domestic Politics and Cross-Strait Relations*.

## 1.4 The referral to Taiwan as a country

In the Montevideo Convention, a number of requirements are set out that a territory must meet in order to be considered a country. North and South American countries and the European Union are the most prominent regions that adhere to its definition of a state. The Convention has been operative since 1934. Customary international law regarding statehood centers around article 1 of the Convention, in which the four basic requirements for statehood are listed; a defined territory, a permanent population, a functioning government and the capacity to conduct international relations.

Taiwan meets the first three requirements, as it has a defined area, considered large enough to be a country. In terms of exact scope, it encompasses a total area of 36,188 km<sup>2</sup>, which makes it slightly larger than Belgium (Copper, 2022). It also has a sizable permanent population number - with over 23 million inhabitants, it is deemed a densely populated country. Lastly, it has a functioning democratic government, with the country being consistently ranked amongst the freest countries in Asia on the 2021 House Freedom Index, Press Freedom Index and the Index of Economic Freedom.

However, as World Population Review (2022) accurately describes it, Taiwan can, as of 2022, only be described as a territory. This is because it does not meet the fourth condition set

out by the Convention. The only point refraining Taiwan from becoming a country is the capacity to conduct international relations, which is mostly at the hands of China. China, where possible, prevents Taiwan from participating in international organizations and events, except when competing under the aforementioned name of “Chinese Taipei” at the Olympic Games.

In addition, an indicator of a region's status is whether they are a member of the United Nations, where membership is intrinsically linked to statehood. This is because membership means diplomatic recognition by the 193 member states of the United Nations. However, Taiwan is not a member of the United Nations, which is because China is a permanent member and therefore has the authority to exercise its veto power against Taiwan's requests to join. China, due to its belief of the “One China” principle (which will be discussed in depth later), will block all of Taiwan's attempts to join the international atmosphere and any endeavors that promote Taiwanese independence.

Yet, despite only 13 UN member states recognizing the government of the Republic of China (Taiwan), a large number of countries maintain formal diplomatic relations and have substantive ties with it, including Australia, Canada, various EU countries, Japan, New Zealand and the United States (US Department of State, 2022).

Thus, Taiwan's legal status classifies it as a territory. However, Taiwan, without a doubt, meets three of the four requirements for statehood.

Its international participation is very limited due to China's interference, so this is the major factor refraining it from statehood. Even despite this interference, Taiwan still has economic ties with various countries over the world. In addition, the ROC holds several embassies in a total of 111 countries (Taiwanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). So, the international relations aspect is still, to an extent, met. In the eyes of the author, Taiwan meets all four criteria of statehood in practice, which is why it will be referred to as a country in this thesis. This is also done for the sake of clarity, as people commonly associate territory with a portion of soil, which might lead to misinterpretations.

In the thesis, the exact relations and history between Taiwan and China are discussed, which will further explain the dispositions of involved countries. On top of that, the role of UN membership and its controversy are set out.

# Chapter 2: International Relations theories

## 2.1 The discipline of IR

The academic discipline of international relations (IR) emerged shortly before and after the First World War, largely in reaction against the realist balance of power politics (Sutch & Elias, 2007; Hobson, 2000). The discipline was then reshaped immediately before and after the Second World War by prominent realists such as E.H. Carr, Hans Morgenthau, George Kennan and Henry Kissinger. The majority of the IR theories originate from the Anglo-American world, which was originally dominated by realist conceptions.

The world is made up of separate political communities, which are the cornerstone of International Relations. These communities are also called independent states, which Jackson and Sørensen (2019, p. 2) define as a clear-cut and bordered territory, with a permanent population, being legislated by a supreme government separate from all foreign governments. This is what makes up a sovereign state. The 200 independent states together form the international state system (Jackson & Sørensen, 2019). Everybody in the world is connected to and affected by at least one of these 200 independent states, and is in turn intrinsically bound to the international state system. States are all interconnected with each other and dependent on each other, and thus must learn to coexist. The global market and trading adds to that, with the countries' wealth and legislation depending on that. There are cases of states having been completely isolated from other states, like North Korea, but the past has shown that the people from those states tend to suffer from this (Jackson and Sørensen, 2019).

Like most other social systems, the state system can have certain advantages and disadvantages for the states involved and their people. IR is the study of the nature and consequences of these international relations.

According to Jackson and Sørensen (2019), there are at least five basic social values that states are expected to uphold: security, freedom, order, justice and welfare. These are social values that are so fundamental to human well-being that they must be protected or ensured in some way. In order to uphold these values, particularly security, states have a national security system. The protection of citizens from internal and external threat is essential,

especially in a world made up of armed independent states. Many states therefore, in order to heighten the protection of their national security, make alliances with other states. In order to uphold a balance of power and prevent a great power from achieving overall hegemonic domination, it is necessary for states to construct and maintain a balance of military power. The arms race between the US and Soviet Union leading up to the Cold War serves as a perfect example to illustrate this point. Security is one of the most fundamental values of international relations.

This approach to the study of world politics is typical of realist theories of IR (Morgenthau, 1960). It operates on the assumption that relations of states can be best characterized as a world in which armed states are competing rivals (for limited resources) and periodically go to war with each other. War threatens and sometimes destroys freedom, which is a second basic value that states are usually expected to uphold (divided between personal freedom and national freedom or independence).

Peace fosters the value of freedom. It also makes progressive international change possible. Peace and progressive change are obviously among the most fundamental values of international relations. This approach to the study of world politics is typical of liberal theories of IR (Jackson & Sørensen, 2019). Liberalism, which will be discussed more in depth in section 2.2, assumes that cooperation is key to maintain peace and freedom, which enable progressive change within international relations.

The third and fourth basic values that states are usually expected to uphold are order and justice, which further international coexistence and stability. These values are central to the International Society theories of IR (Jackson & Sørensen, 2019; Sutch & Elias, 2007).

The final basic value that states are usually expected to uphold is the population's socio-economic wealth and welfare, which relies on the stability of the international economy. Economic interdependence is an important feature of the contemporary state system. Liberalists and some realists consider that to be a good thing because it may increase overall freedom and wealth by expanding the global marketplace, thereby increasing participation, specialization, efficiency and productivity (Jackson & Sørensen, 2019). Others, mainly realists, consider national protectionism as preferable to economic interdependence, as the state would not be affected by global economic recessions.

It is usually when these five values (security, freedom, order, justice and welfare) are threatened, that the population becomes aware of their necessity. Instances of this are the First and Second World Wars and the collapse of the economic market in 2007. These moments of recognition led to the first major developments of IR thought. Particularly the Second World War

underlined the reality of the dangers of great-power war, but also revealed how important it is to prevent any great power from getting out of control (Hobson, 2000).

Similarly, the 2022 war between Russia and Ukraine also highlights once again the values, specifically security, freedom, order and justice.

The three IR theories discussed in this thesis agree on the importance of the state system and the five values. The point of disagreement between them lies with the varying importance the three theories put on the values. Where realists emphasize the importance of security and order, liberalists emphasize freedom and justice. Constructivism takes an entirely different angle, where the abstract and non-material notions of security and freedom are important. Section 2.2 will discuss the background and content in detail, but seeing as there are many subcategories to all three, the section will only focus on the general (classical) theories realism, liberalism and constructivism.

## 2.2 Theories in depth

### 2.2.1 Realism

The international relations theory of realism has a long history and is one of the core theories within the discipline. The notable historic figures Thucydides, Hobbes and Macchiavelli are perceived as the original founders of realism. The theory was namely mainly built upon their works, one of those being *The Prince* by Machiavelli (1532, reissued in 2003). More modern theorists have further framed and worked out the theory, and given it its current name. These include Carr (1939), Waltz (1979), Morgenthau (1948) and Mearsheimer (2001). The theory gained traction after the Second World War, when people wanted to understand the behaviour of states, and this theory was perfectly in line with this and was able to explain everything. The emphasis on national security, self-preservation and the quest for power holds immense explanatory power over the First and Second World Wars.

Realism assumes a pessimistic view of human nature, whereby everyone is driven by their self-interest and survival within the international sphere. Their core conviction is, accordingly, that international relations are in essence conflictual and that all conflicts are resolved through warfare. Important concepts thus include national security and state survival. According to realists, states and individuals alike are driven by self-preoccupation and their own well-being in all of their relations with others (Jackson & Sørensen, 2019). The self-preoccupation centers around the concern of not being taken advantage of and dominated by others, but instead holding an advantageous position over others. The entire attitude of people

and states is thus fuelled by an innate need for power, which consequently lies at the center of political activity. The international sphere is painted by power politics; every state's protection of national interest and drive for self-preservation and power results in an area painted by rivalry, conflict and war (Sutch & Elias, 2007).

Anarchy lies at the heart of this theory; there is no higher and overarching authority that holds all the states accountable, nor a world government. There are only states involved in conflictual relations. There is no belief in an organization which binds the states together, as the realists only think foreign policies to consist of the projecting and defending of the state on the international stage. In their book, Sutch and Elias (2007) describe realism as a "no-nonsense", "anti-utopian" and cut-to-the-chase practical science of international politics.

However, anarchy is not reflected in all aspects of the theory; there is an international hierarchy of power amongst the states, which makes them unequal. The states at the top of the hierarchy are the great powers, and they are essential to world politics. The landscape of international relations is thus painted by a struggle between the great powers for domination and security (the core realist principles). As of 2022, the great powers are China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States. These have been the major powers for quite some time now, although the balance is changing (partially due to the war between Russia and Ukraine). Waltz (1979) notes that the balance of power is an inevitable consequence of the international anarchic structure; states have a tendency to form alliances with the weaker rather than the stronger nations in order to ensure that no overall dominant power emerges, which maximizes national security.

Sutch and Elias (2007) further argue that, through a realist lens, one cannot objectively analyze international affairs without focusing on power relations between states. The authors go more into depth of the power aspect than Jackson and Sørensen (2019); states are the center of power in world affairs. Without the language of 'power politics', one cannot properly analyze and explain state action. It must be taken note of that this balance of power sustains the stability of international society.

On another note, international agreements are only followed and kept by the involved parties as long as it does not threaten their national best interest. As soon as an agreement and a state's self-interest clash, the state will always choose the latter and opt out of the agreement (Jackson & Sørensen, 2019). This means that all laws, regulations and agreements of any and all kind are provisional. The realist theory thus limits the legitimacy and stability of international law and regulation – in line with the pessimistic view that states are only after their own best

interests. The conclusion that inevitably is drawn from this is that there is no progress in world politics possible, only at national level.

In sum, the factors that conclude a state's foreign policy are national security, state survival and the drive for power. A good leader is someone who can guarantee the means and conditions of security to its citizens, according to realists. This also means that a leader can never trust nor rely on outside governments. In line with its pessimistic and egoistic outlook towards other states, a state will not show morals and societal standards towards them. They reserve morality for their own state and it does not extend any further than that. Outside of their own state, the international state system is painted by turmoil and conflict, in which the great powers dominate everybody else.

This quote by Machiavelli, written in his famous book *The Prince*, reflects the essence of realism:

The lion cannot protect himself from traps, and the fox cannot defend himself from wolves. One must therefore be a fox to recognize traps, and a lion to frighten wolves.  
— Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 1984, chapter 18

On a side note, Jackson and Sørensen (2019) distinguish different forms of realism. The original form, directly derived from Hobbes, Machiavelli and Thucydides is referred to as classical realism. Any and all forms after that are classified as contemporary realism (including Neorealism). In essence, all forms of realism center around the same core values of national security and state survival. The difference lies between the normative approach adopted by the classical realists and the scientific approach from the contemporary realists.

For instance, Hobbes (1651), the pioneer of classical realism, likens the state of nature to a state of war. Only a powerful sovereign can make them all submit (as is addressed in his work *Leviathan*). Hobbes takes note of the fact that there is no all-encompassing sovereign on an international scale, which leaves mankind to subject to an eternal state of anarchy and war.

## 2.2.2 Liberalism

Wherever Law ends, Tyranny begins.

- John Locke: Second Treatise on Government (1690)

Liberalism is at the very opposite end of the spectrum, its values in stark contrast with realism. The main point of conflict with realism is human nature; liberalism challenges the features of fear and self-interest key to human nature, and rather states compassion, morality, sociability as key features of human nature. It thus embraces a more utopian approach, whereas realism entirely distances itself from that (Sutch & Elias, 2007). Although liberalism is often discredited for its utopianism, it is the historical alternative theory to realism and forms the core of IR.

Similarly to realism, liberalism has seen the addition of many forms of liberalist thought to its theory. Between all the various subgroups, the original form of liberalism is now referred to as Classical Liberalism. Jackson and Sørensen (2019) explain that the different liberalist movements disagree on the magnitude and extent of human progress. For some theorists, achieving progress is a long road, where humans are faced with many setbacks. While for others, success is not seen as a long-term process but can be achieved rather effortlessly.

However, Jackson and Sørensen (2019) note that all liberalists groups can agree on the principle that in the long run, cooperation based on mutual interests will prevail. This is facilitated by the constant modernization of society, which demands increased cooperation. In general, liberalists thus have a positive view of human nature. They put faith in human reason - thereby completely contradicting the realists' assumption- and are convinced that rational principles can be applied to international affairs. Liberalists do, however, acknowledge that to a certain extent, humans are competitive and self-interested. Yet, unlike the realists suppose, individuals do share many interests and through this, they will collaborate and cooperate, both nationally and internationally. Conflict and war are certainly not inevitable, as realists assume. So long as people employ their rational reasoning, they can receive much greater benefits for everybody through mutually beneficial cooperation.

Furthermore, the belief in the extent of achievable progress has been highly contented throughout time – is it only possible on the technological and scientific aspects, or social and political as well? After the First World War, when liberalism was officially established as its own concrete theory, the theorists were visibly much more optimistic about progress that mankind is

capable of than after the Second World War. Liberalists then distanced themselves somewhat from the prior utopian liberalism. However, the optimistic belief of progress was revived after the Cold War, when the common universal belief was that liberal democracy would win over communism. This was again negated with the terrorist attacks starting with 9/11 in the US. Keohane (1989), one of the most prominent liberalist figures, concluded that, regardless of the time period, liberalists believe in at least the possibility of cumulative progress.

Liberalists emphasize that this progress is not only regarding states, but is specifically geared towards individuals. It is important to liberalists that the individuals within states have liberty and are consequently happy and content, which the states are responsible for. This contrasts the needs of security and survival that leaders must fulfill according to realists. The policies of states reflect the interests of individuals in domestic society. It can therefore be concluded that rather than states, individuals are the fundamental actors in international politics. Accordingly, Moravcsik (1997, revised in 2011) suggests that the most fundamental determinants of politics lie in society itself. In the end, state behavior is determined by national preferences and transnational social pressures.

In the realist view, the state serves as a concentration and instrument of power. Liberalism, on the other hand, sees the state as a constitutional entity, of which Locke (1690) explains its following obligation to its citizens:

The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one: and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions.  
- Locke, The Second Treatise on Government, sec. 6 (of the State of Nature), 1690

Jackson and Sørensen (2019) further note that in this obligation, states are also expected to respect each other and act according to norms of mutual toleration. Bentham (1789) officially introduced the term international law, which states are inclined to follow. This is due to the rational interests states would gain from adhering to it. Kant, another leading thinker for classical liberalism, added that a law-abiding world of mutually respectful states would lead to perpetual peace (Kant, Guyer & Wood, 1999).

Liberalists have also outlined the effects of war, and how it serves as a means to world peace. Over the course of history, liberalists – like all of mankind – saw the wars becoming increasingly destructive. With the introduction of nuclear weapons, the destructive threat is at an unprecedented high. However, liberalists deem this as a suitable means for achieving peace (Hobson, 2000). Of course, they note, this is not a favourable means, but if countries are unwilling to attack because of the risk of unlimited destruction through the inevitable nuclear war, then that is acceptable to achieve peace. A more favourable path towards peace is the establishment of a democratic society, with high levels of economic interdependence and overarching institutions that encourage cooperation.

To conclude, states are inherently intertwined and part of an interactive and interdependent international society. This requires transnational participation of states in economic, social and cultural areas. States gladly act on this, according to realism, as transnational engagement in world politics fulfills the demands and preferences of the nation's people.

### 2.2.3 Constructivism

The term constructivism was first coined and officially presented by Onuf in 1989. Later came many more variants of constructivism, though all building upon Onuf's theory. The theory has been linked to concepts introduced by the philosophical thinker Kant. Wendt is the most prominent (and current) advocate for constructivism in the distinct field of international relations, and played a big part in popularizing constructivism. The constructivist theory emerged in the aftermath of the Cold War, which the realist and liberalist theories had difficulty explaining the ending of. This conflict instigated debates in IR over the changes in Europe that could not be explained, on top of the increasing awareness of the inherent limits and ambiguities of technical and social progress (Guzzini, 2000). Hopf (1998) explains how constructivism offers alternative understandings of a number of central themes in IR theory, including the meaning of anarchy, the balance of power, the relationship between state identity and interest and the prospects for change in world politics. Much like with realism and liberalism, there are various subcategories to constructivism, which each have a differing focus. Although, what this chapter discusses, is what constitutes all of these forms and is key to constructivism.

Afore discussed IR theories focus on the importance of materialist aspects – especially realism. This is either through the culmination of material power (e.g. through military capability) or quest for economic and social interest (e.g. security and wealth).

Constructivism, on the other hand, puts emphasis on the role of idealist values underlying international affairs (Jackson & Sørensen, 2019). According to this theory, human awareness has an important place in world affairs. The aspect underlying the behavior of states is therefore social, and not material. The international system is made up of ideas and thus exists as a common understanding between states. Accordingly, these ideas change with the actors present in a particular time and place. History is not just an evolving external process that is set in stone and independent of human thoughts and ideas. Thus, if the thoughts and ideas of actors change at a certain time, the system of international relations changes as well. Wendt, a leading constructivist thinker, has therefore published his well-known journal article under the fitting title of “*anarchy is what states make of it*” (Wendt, 1992). The world of international relations is far less set in stone in an age-old structure of anarchy, with constructivists rather seeing the possibilities of change. People and states -the actors-, in their new ideas, start thinking about each other in new ways, which result in norms that may radically differ from the old ones. Ideas are thus inherent to a specific time and place, which Wendt (1995) elucidates in a clear and concise manner in his following comparison:

“500 British nuclear weapons are less threatening to the US than 5 North Korean nuclear weapons” (p. 73).

Through this quote, Wendt explains that anarchy and the distribution of power are insufficient to provide reasons for the perception of other states as either enemies or friends. It is not the material factor that is frightening to a state (in this case the 500 weapons), but the social relationship between them (the US is on good terms with the UK and therefore has less to fear from them than from North Korea). Material factors do enter the picture, but are definitely secondary to ideas. An actual instance of this is the ending of the Cold War, which was previously implied; it came to an end because Gorbachev (the leader of the USSR) adopted new ideas regarding how his country should behave towards the US and its Western European allies (Jackson & Sørensen, 2019). He no longer saw them as enemies, which resulted in the achievement of peace. Thus, if an actor’s perceptions on tangible aspects of the world change, the stage of international politics changes with it.

Rawls (1999) builds the social aspect of constructivism on several principles proposed by Kant, in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (originating in 1781). Kant namely argued that we can obtain knowledge about the world, but it will always be filtered by our own consciousness. Everything humans know about the world, is therefore subjective, as they give meaning to them. Humans rely on understanding of each other's actions and consequently assign meaning to them. In this, Kant is a forerunner of social constructivism, as Wendt (1995) later furthered this theory by stating that actors give meaning to each other, which is subject to time and space, and therefore subject to change. Adler (1997), in his definition of constructivism, has also emphasized the subjectivity of the world;

Constructivism is the view that the manner in which the material world shapes and is shaped by human action and interaction depends on dynamic normative and epistemic interpretations of the material world

- Adler in *Seizing the Middle Ground*, 1997, (p. 322)

When applying these notions of constructivism to war, one can conclude that for instance, "if the United States and the Soviet Union decide that they are no longer enemies, the Cold War is over" (Jackson & Sørensen, 2019, p. 168). War only exists so long as the involved actors give it that meaning. It is collective meaning that constitute the structures which organize our actions; the internal make-up of states affects their international behavior (Katzenstein, 1996).

Important in this theory is the distinction between consciousness and rationality. Realism and liberalism adhere to the rationality of mankind. Zehfuss (2002) points out that the main point of conflict in IR, which previously was between the pessimistic and positivistic conception of behavior of states, is constructivism against rationalism. As realism is seen as assuming solely economic and 'survival' rationalism in everything states do, it is more extreme in rationality principles than liberalism. So, in order to create a coherent overview, realism is on one far end of the spectrum of IR, with constructivism on the other far side, with liberalism in the middle. This spectrum only holds in the comparison of solely these three theories.

In summary, constructivism is a social theory that focuses on how ideational factors, like ideas, norms and identities, affect state and individual behavior within international relations. It

offers an optimistic perspective, as it follows a logic of appropriateness (instead of a logic of consequences); a country might set out to protect civilians in other countries (e.g. in the case of a genocide), which may not cater to its national interests, yet they do so because they consider it to be appropriate and acceptable.

## 2.3 Comparison of the theories

Having discussed the backgrounds and main principles of the three IR theories in detail, this section will shortly directly compare them against one another. At face value, realism is a pessimistic theory, whereas liberalism and constructivism assume a more optimistic attitude. The debate between liberalism and realism is one of the most keenly and historically debated issues in the discipline of IR, and form its core. Realism assumes core concepts of anarchy and power politics, where the survival of the own state is most important. The actors here are states, and they are economically rational and unitary actors. The goal of the state is enhancing their power, consequentially enhancing their security, in order to protect their state. Key concepts are thus security, power politics, anarchy and a self-help system.

However, liberals appear better equipped to study change when it occurs as a form of progress. On the other hand though, liberalism does not allow for setbacks in the process of cooperation. Moreover, the international arena seems to be ruled by a balance of power. A liberalist would argue though, that this balance is established through international organizations (e.g. the European Union and United Nations), which are supposed to secure peace. Realism argues that these international overarching organizations or laws hold no legitimacy and value, especially in the face of self-preservation. A critique to realism is that it cannot explain the peaceful end of the Cold War.

Liberalism, on the other hand, focuses on enhancing the global, political and economic cooperation. Actors, besides states, consist of NGOs and multinational corporations. Anarchy, which realism builds on, can be overcome. According to liberalists, states are not always seeking rational behavior as much as they are seeking compromise. Cooperation across states that have differing interests is key here. Goals of states are economic prosperity and stability. Key concepts are collective security (instead of individual, as with realism), international law and economic interdependence- anything cooperative falls within the liberal realm. This theory thus helps explain cooperation in an international system and to understand the economics of

international relations. However, this theory does not explain conflict that occurs in spite of cooperation, and how, if push comes to shove, states still fall back on their national security. In summary, liberals adjust their lenses to blur out areas of (realist) domination and instead bring areas of cooperation into focus.

Constructivism, having been a more recent emerging theory, provides a fresh theoretical perspective on international relations. Constructivists look at how and why the world has arrived at the current state of affairs in international relations. They emphasize the importance of culture and identity, as expressed in social norms, rules and understandings. The social and political world is made up of shared beliefs rather than physical entities. The theory takes the context of time and place into account, which also goes for wars. This is why the theory is able to explain behavior of states which at first glance might seem irrational. Its focus on social factors and the importance of ideas allows the theory to address problems that are not in the scope of realism. Liberalism has a similar view as constructivism in this sense; ideas and ideologies can change the world, which is not set in stone by an unchanging human nature (the optimistic view). However, constructivism differs from liberalism in the sense that its lack of acceptance of material factors driving the behavior of states. Where liberalism tries to explain international relations through economic and political means (economics brings states closer politically), constructivism places important on shared ideas. For constructivists, core aspects of international relations are socially constructed – shaped by ongoing processes of social practice and interaction.

So, whereas one of the main debates takes place between liberalism and realism on one level, constructivists critique both of these theories on another level. The contrast of the principles of rationalism that liberalism and realism assume and the ideational aspect of constructivism is clear. Constructivists allow for the changing nature of reality and see the social world as constructed, rather than given. States may be self-interested (which is a nod to realism), but they continuously redefine what that means. Their identities may change over time to be more selfless.

Thus, where realists and liberals, who believe that actors in international politics follow the *logic of consequences*, constructivists believe actors in international politics follow the *logic of appropriateness* (Jackson & Sørensen, 2019). The former logic means pursuing whatever

course of action seems most likely to support your interests (whatever seems most useful to you). The latter means pursuing whatever course of action seems most appropriate and legitimate according to the standards set by norms, rules, and principles. Following this, states and other actors in international politics tend to what is right, not necessarily what is useful. This is the essence of the gap between the materialist theories of liberalism and realism, and that of the rationalist constructivists.

## 2.4 justification for the three theories

There are more theories within the field of international relations than this thesis touches upon and applies. The field is continually evolving and changing, with new theories emerging over the years and competing with one another (Jackson & Sørensen, 2019). Since the establishment of the discipline following the First World War, many more theories have been introduced, with the most recent being positivist and post-positivist feminism variants. Other well-known theories include postmodernism, critical theory, international society, marxism and poststructuralism. However, the three most prominent schools of thought are realism, liberalism and constructivism. Arguably, realism and liberalism are at the very core and can be viewed as the foundation of international relations theory, as they also are diametrically opposed to one another. Constructivism, as outlined before, generally serves as the middle ground between these two theories. This is why this thesis focuses on these three theories. They are the major ones and represent a sufficient range of the spectrum of IR theories.

Additionally, for logical reasons, it would be unattainable to address all schools of thought within this thesis - not only time-wise, but also so as to retain a clear overview. It would be unfavorable for this thesis, its tone and aim to include more, let alone all, theories. It would be disorientating and leading away from its aim to learn about all the theoretical approaches. Exceeding the framework beyond the boundaries set by this thesis would do no favors. Not to mention the fact that there are many subtheories emerging within one school; there is no single theory, as each scholar has a particular interpretation of the world, also changing as time passes. An example are both realism and liberalism having been updated to more modern versions (neoliberalism and neorealism respectively), which represent a shift in emphasis from their traditional roots. Thus, in order to also not stray too far from the red thread and its aim, this thesis will focus on the major and differing theories of realism, liberalism and constructivism.

There is, however, plenty of room for future research; this thesis will not nearly cover all of the aspects of international relations, which future papers could complement. Moreover,

within the ever-changing landscape of international relations, this topic will remain popular and of interest for research.

## Chapter 3: China Taiwan relations

### 3.1 The development of the relationship since 2000

China and Taiwan share plenty of history and have a turbulent relationship (Tucker, 2011). Due to the vastness of this and in order to not stray too far from the red thread and to be more concise, this section will focus on the relationship between the two countries over the past 20 years, so from 2000 onwards (until the current year 2022). Additionally, it will focus on the economic and political nature of their relationship, thereby not touching upon cultural and social aspects, as this would stray too far away from the research focus.

Although the focus of this thesis lies on the last 20 years, some words are addressed to the period before. This is necessary to understand (the impact and background for) the last 20 years, providing context for the current relations as well. Section 3.3 on the economic relationship also encompasses time prior to 2000.

After the Second World War, Taiwan, which was previously under the rule of Japan, was returned to China, which at that point was governed by the Nationalist party (Manthorpe, 2016). Taiwan officially became part of the Republic of China in 1945. However, contrary to the people's expectations in Taiwan, China did not change Taiwan into a standard province. In turn, the ROC nationalist government started to withdraw from the Chinese mainland and located themselves in Taiwan in 1947. In 1949, the communists took over mainland China, which caused the nationalist fraction to flee to Taiwan. There, the Nationalist Party government established their seat of government, with Chiang Kai-shek as president. That same year (1949), the PRC was officially established in Beijing (Roy, 2002).

Since 1949 until the 1990s, the People's Republic of China (mainland China) and the Nationalist government residing in Taiwan have considered the latter to be a province of the former (Tucker, 2011). This is especially notable in light of the current-day perception of Taiwan on the "one-China" principle. During that time frame, the relationship between the United States and Taiwan grew closer, as they signed a mutual defense treaty and for thirty years, Taiwan

received support from the US (Saunders, 2005). Consequently, the latter's economy flourished. This period can be deemed as an economic and political success for Taiwan, as the country was also recognized as the representative of China in the United Nations assembly. However, this only lasted until 1971, when its chair was instead occupied by the People's Republic. The relation between the PRC and ROC became even more strained over the future status of Taiwan after Chen Shui-bian was elected president in 2000.

The inherent difference in political systems of the two countries separates them exponentially; already with the exodus of the ROC government in 1949, the ROC and PRC parties had different belief systems. The disagreement over nationalism and communism boiled down to the flight of the former party. Since then, China has been a communist regime. In the Taiwanese government, on the other hand, the spirit of nationalism further evolved, ultimately resulting in the Taiwanization movement. The Taiwanese democratic society is also in stark contrast with the Chinese dictatorship.

So, overall, from 1949 onwards, there was a concrete difference in parties and worldviews (Yu, 2009). This later developed into differing visions on the future of Taiwan and the rightful representative of China. The two rival governments claimed their status as the rightful international representative of China. Both adopted a "one-China" policy, meaning that diplomatic relations with China by third parties could only be maintained with one of the two governments. The same held for membership of international organizations and institutions, especially the UN.

The following long battle on which government should represent China in the UN will be discussed in more detail in the section Legal Aspects, but will be shortly touched upon here. The decade-long battle and disagreement over the governing position is particularly well-reflected in who fulfilled the membership status of China in the United Nations. Less than four years after the 1945 establishment of the United Nations, the People's Republic of China was victorious in a civil war against the nationalist government of ROC, claiming to be China's legitimate government. Although the ROC government was supported by the United States and through this, managed to retain the Chinese and permanent seat in the UN Security Council for two more decades after its move to Taipei, an increasing number of countries were choosing to recognize Beijing instead of Taipei. Taipei was on the losing side here, boiling down to 1971, when ROC lost its seat. These developments thus led to the PRC being recognized in the UN, as it still stands/holds today (Winkler, 2016).

The rest of this section will discuss the history of the relationship between Taiwan and China from 2000 onwards. Because from that time on, the relationship between China and Taiwan completely tore. Taiwan has, since then, seen the complete withdrawal of the KMT government and consequently seen as a process of democratization and quest for independence. This thus serves as a turning and starting point for the situation the countries find themselves in nowadays.

The history and policies of Taiwan in relation to China will be discussed, culminating in a precise study of the development of Taiwanese policies towards China in section 3.2. Over the past 20 years, Taiwan has started to evolve a culture independent of mainland China; local culture has flourished, and the presidency of Lee Teng-hui, the island's first native Taiwanese president, has signified the start of the changing political landscape and local identity (Li, 2013; Hambach, 2017). This new president, Lee Teng-hui, pursued the development of Taiwan's cultural and political identity, aiming to keep it separate from any connection with China. His ambition was to establish a state-to-state relationship between the two countries, entailing the characterization of China and Taiwan as two different jurisdictions. The proposition of his objective in 1996 -just prior to the last 20 years- was a direct catalyst for China to put pressure on the country and to take on a hostile position. Lee is openly remembered in Taiwan for his major political legacy he left behind, as it marked the strive for Taiwan's national identity in the country and thus the turn in the previously benevolent relationship between China and Taiwan. The president marked the start of the era of "Taiwanization", which as of 2022, is still pursued. Lee's election was also groundbreaking in the fact that he was the first president of the country to be elected by direct election (Li, 2016; Sabouret, 2012). Lee's Taiwanization caused outrage amongst mainland China and resulted in an acceleration of China's military preparations.

This was exacerbated by the outcome of the Taiwanese 2000 and 2004 elections, where Chen Shui-bian was elected president. He furthered Taiwan's aims to become independent from China, as he was the first president that was not a member of the nationalist KMT-party. He represented the Democratic Progressive Party, which explicitly called for Taiwanese independence from China. Chen has thus continued and built further upon Lee's efforts of Taiwanization to promote greater cultural and political separation from mainland China. Chen took it a step further with his announcement in 2002 that there was one country on each side of the Taiwan Strait (Chen, 2013).

## 3.2 Evolving Taiwanese attitude towards China

In 1992, it was reported that during a Hongkong meeting, China and Taiwan accepted a shared understanding of the “one China”, given that they have different interpretations of this one China (Felter, 2021). So in 1992, they informally agreed to disagree. Through this, Taiwan would not push towards independence, as that would cause China to break the (arguably) peaceful status quo and to follow up on its military threats. Moreover, as this understanding was informal and has been highly contested by many prominent Taiwanese politicians, this does not conclude the frozen conflict. The “one China, different interpretations” principle is -although controversial- the only semblance of agreement between the two countries, and Ma was the only Taiwanese president who supported this agreement and its legitimacy. Ma Ying-jeou was the Taiwanese president from 2008 to 2016, who built his campaign around furthering Taiwan’s economic relations with mainland China. The Taiwanese social structures however, which underlie international politics from a constructivist perspective, are vastly different from its policies. Ma’s presidency largely reflected the furthering need for independence from China, even preferring it over economic prosperity.

The social interactions between China and Taiwan are fickle and unstable at best, what with the only common ground being to somewhat agree to disagree. These social interactions and cultural norms shape the common identities of the two parties, while the interests of the state can facilitate intersubjective (or shared) understandings that are conducive to the improving of cross-strait relations. The state, under the presidency of Ma, has tried to improve the relations between the two countries in order to facilitate the interests of the state (i.e. furthering economic prosperity). However, the presidents after 2016, and the people during Ma’s presidency, wanted more independence, and preferred this over the interests of the state. This is reflected through his popularity numbers, which declined from 60% just after his election in 2008 to less than 25% in 2012 (Muyard, 2012).

Ma’s policies are similar to those prior to Lee, in which the former seemingly ignores the last twenty years of political, sociological and diplomatic evolution characterised by the assertion of Taiwanese identity and nationalism (also referred to as Taiwanization), in spite of limitations imposed by Beijing. Ma’s Chinese policy did not reflect this development, as it was based on a gradual economic, symbolic and political rapprochement with China. This put an end to the

approach of his predecessor, Chen, and the former president, Lee. Ma restructured Taiwan's Chinese policy based on accepting the aforementioned 1992 consensus and the principle of an only China, under the term, "one China, different interpretations". Ma and his government greatly depended on the expected economic benefits that this new policy would bring. He was ultimately mainly elected on his promises of economic "revival" (despite the economy also already having grown by 5% in the previous year). Ma's policy of pro-unification stood in stark contrast with the political and social developments taking place in Taiwan over the past twenty years. After his presidency (ending in 2016), Tsai Ing-Wen won the Taiwanese presidency elections by a landslide and, as of 2022, still holds this position. She represents the Democratic Progressive Party, which is highly in favour of Taiwanese independence from China. During the 2020 elections, Tsai was re-elected, with an even larger share of the vote, totaling to 57%, the largest number ever in Taiwanese presidency elections (Feng, 2020).

### 3.3 The role of the United States of America

This section will shortly describe the foreign policies of Taiwan towards the United States, as this country has a leading role in the nature and escalation of the relation between Taiwan and China.

The close relationship between the United States and Taiwan has played a stabilizing role in this increasingly hostile relationship. The presence of a fleet and the sales of arms from the United States act as an ambiguous deterrent for China to act on its threats to annex Taiwan. Especially from 2004 onwards, the relationship between the two countries flourished (US Department of State, 2022). The goal of Washington in this relationship is to preserve the status quo; the United States opposes any unilateral action by either side to alter it which threatens their definition of peace and stability. This message that the US sends to both Taiwan and China entails that it will not tolerate the use of force by Beijing nor Taiwan pursuing provocative policies that may result in destabilization. The US thus approaches the relation between Taiwan and China with a policy of strategic ambiguity. From this, Taiwan cannot assume that the US will defend it unconditionally. On the other hand, China cannot with certainty rule out the possibility of US involvement if it were to attack Taiwan. In light of the war between Ukraine and Russia in 2022, this possibility has become higher. This is due to the fact that China has not explicitly expressed its support for Ukraine nor has the country formally acknowledged it as a war. News

articles (Davidson 2021, 2022) report that amongst other things, the United States advises Taiwan to buy more weapons to defend themselves against China. In turn, this has angered China, which has called it political manipulation and it has actually started deploying ships near Taiwan.

The United States and Taiwan share similar democratic values, which form the foundation for their close relationship. As indicated by the short report from the US Department of State (2022), the United States views Taiwan as “a leading democracy and a technological powerhouse in the Indo-Pacific”. Additionally, the two countries have close commercial and economic (trade) ties, further motivating the expansion of US engagement with Taiwan. Their relationship is made concrete through the Taiwan Relations Act (1979), in which Taiwan’s relations with Taiwan are set out. In line with this Act, the United States provides Taiwan with defense material and services, in order to enable the country to maintain a sufficient self-defense force.

Notable is that their relationship is unofficial; the two countries do not share diplomatic relations, but have a “robust unofficial relationship [and] an abiding interest in maintaining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait ” (report from the US Department of State, 2022). Thus, overall, the United States takes a passive role in the relationship between China and Taiwan, but provides Taiwan with the materials necessary to defend itself against China. The most important factor for the US is to maintain a peaceful relationship between the two countries. This also serves their self-interest, as they have prosperous economic relations with Taiwan.

The benevolent relationship with the United States has enabled and heightened the economic growth of Taiwan. Consequently, the country was able to become less dependent of China economically, as will be illustrated in section 3.3.

### 3.4 The economic nature of the relationship in historical context:

In his paper, Leng (1998) discusses the dynamics of Taiwan’s and mainland China’s economic relations. The tensions between the two countries have caused the former to illegalize economic investments in mainland China. Leng (1998) outlines how out of national security concerns, the Taiwanese government forbade trade with mainland China. In the years prior to Leng’s paper, Taiwan had also put its theory into practice, by actively imposing restrictions on Taiwanese business community investment in China. It thus, for a couple of years imposed governmental policies that regulate these kinds of economic activities and investments. In his paper, Leng (1998) also explains how Taiwanese corporations have bypassed these regulations

and launched new investment projects on mainland China, as there was plenty of economic profit to gain there. Overall, Taiwan's restrictions have not proven to be very successful.

However, much like the rest of the world, Taiwan's and China's economic situation reflected the era of market internalization and the changing role of the state.

Leng (1998) and Chang and Gerbier (2008) have also put this into historical perspective, relating economic developments to historical events that characterized the relationship between Taiwan and China. The author notes that in the 49 years prior to his publication, the cross-strait economic relations between the countries have experienced various ups and downs. He relates the ups in this period mainly to Taiwanese President Chiang Ching-kuo's decision to open up interactions with China in 1987, which resulted in the cultural and economic ties between the two countries in that time period being greatly enhanced - especially compared to the strenuous relationship they had before due to the Chinese civil war. This period of economic and cultural cooperation ended, however, with the visit of the next Taiwanese President (Lee Teng-hui, who, as explained earlier, was not of the nationalist party and more in favor of Taiwanese independence from China) to the United States in 1995. China increased its military pressure on Taiwan, escalating the tension. With the increased engagement of the United States to the stage of the cross-strait relationship, the whole nature of the relationship changed; cross-strait declined to a new low, with no talks of resuming their relationship taking place until 1998.

National security became a major concern for Taiwanese economic policy makers dealing with cross-strait relations. This was due to the aforesaid political conflict with China and the expansion of trade. Taiwan assumed that China, through its attempts at entering into trade relations with it, was trying to use economic interaction to force political concession, and to push the business community to disrupt the Taiwanese government (Ezell, 2021).

Their assumptions were fueled by the growing economic dependence on China; where in 1997, their export accounted for 18.39% on China (Leng, 1998), it increased to a total of 21.6% in 2005 (Chang & Gerbier, 2008). China's presence in Taiwan's imports also became more noticeable; from 0.5% in 1990 to 11% in 2005 (Chang & Gerbier, 2008). The dramatic increases in Taiwan's trade with China also lead to a transformation in Taiwan's trade relationship with other countries - even that of the United States; it weakened Taiwan's trade dependence on the US. Both Taiwan's exports and imports to and from the US decreased after 1990, with Ezell (2021) also noting that over the past two decades (most notably since China joined the WTO in 2001), China has played a greater role in Taiwan's trade flows. In 2001, the share of Taiwanese exports to China and the US were almost identical; 25.8% and 22.6%,

respectively. Since then, the ratio has grown further apart; the share of Taiwanese exports to China has increased by 18.1% (thus totalling 43.9%), while those going to the US has fallen to a total of 14.6% (Ezell, 2021). This founds/is ground for the fears to grow that China is using its trade exports and imports to and from Taiwan as a means to gain political influence in the country. Moreover, Ezell (2021) notes another fear; that Taiwan would just become a channel for Chinese exports to go through, in order to then go to the US. However, these fears do not reflect actuality, as since 2003, China has replaced the US as Taiwan's top trading partner. Chang and Gerbier (2008) also observe the increasing link between Taiwan's economy and that of the mainland over the past fifteen years. China is Taiwan's largest trading partner, accounting for 30% of the latter's export value. In a way that is arguably ironic, most of this growth in export value towards Taiwan, took place during the presidency of Chen Shui-bian, who strived for Taiwanese independence from China.

However, the export dependence is not two-sided; where Taiwan's export depended for 18.39% on mainland China in 1997 (Leng, 1998), the other way around, it stood at only 1.53% that same year. This has increased even more, seeing as China has become an (economic) superpower and (one of the) biggest exporters in the world. The Taiwanese dependence on China has only grown more since, in spite of the assumption that one can make from the recent Taiwanization process taking place in the country (due to increasing adversity towards China). If not for the Taiwanese trade surplus in this relationship, Taiwan would have a deficit. Leng (1998) also notes that economic dependence on China may lead to capital outflow to this country and an overall decrease in domestic investments, which leads to Taiwan being more exposed to China's political interventions. The then-president of Taiwan -Teng-hui- as a result ordered the business community to be cautious regarding Chinese investments. The relationship between the two countries can therefore not be understood through a cost-benefit analysis, as Taiwan has stepped on the brakes to protect national security (due to concerns over political risk). Because the country, to an outsider, may behave economically irrationally. This is seemingly so as economic benefits have been sacrificed for the sake of protecting national security and autonomy. The speed of opening trade and investment with the PRC has also been influenced by the degree of political tension across the Taiwan Strait. The country has implemented three principles that govern cross-strait economic interactions: Firstly, the government will open up economic interactions if the political situation across the Taiwan Strait allows it. Secondly, the preservation of Taiwan's economic autonomy and its national interest is essential. Thirdly, striving towards the promotion of long-term political stability across the

Taiwan Strait (Leng, 1998). These basic guidelines determine the course of economic (in)action that Taiwan will adopt towards mainland China.

A notable event in the economic sphere was Taiwan's plan to establish APROC in 1995. This stands for Asia-Pacific Regional Operation Center, which intended for Taiwan to become the base for multinational corporations to settle, in light of the booming market in the Asia-Pacific region. This idea was brought to a halt because, as then-president Lee indicated, it would be detrimental to Taiwan's economic relations with China, which it tried to promote at that time. Afterwards, Taiwan's attitude was more focussed on trade and investment liberalization, subject to government regulations (Leng, 1998).

To sum up, the political and economic relations between Taiwan and China: before the 1996 Taiwan Strait crisis, the main theme of cross-strait relations was economic interaction. Thereafter, the main theme became stability, which reflects in the election outcomes and the prominent Taiwanization of the country for the past 20 years. However, the Taiwanization does not always reflect the trade flows with the mainland. This can be explained through the three principles proposed by Leng (1998) that determine Taiwan's economic attitude towards the mainland.

# Chapter 4: Frozen Conflict

## 4.1 Defining a frozen conflict

Over the years, the term 'frozen conflict' has become increasingly prevalent and popular, with constant subdued tensions between Eastern European regions for instance. The contemporary growing familiarity of the general public with the label is largely contributed to by the war between Russia and Ukraine, that started in 2022. One might also associate the term with the Cold War, as they are practically synonyms, and in essence, these denominations encompass the same occurrence. Both describe the nature between involved states as a hostile but passive conflict. Fundamentally, a frozen conflict is a conflict that stems from disagreement over land and/or its autonomy and is without formal conclusion or a peace agreement. The conflict is thus mainly ethnic in nature and is unconcluded. Grant (2017) has published a concise list of characteristics of a conflict that indicate for it to be frozen. All of these seven indicatives will be set out below:

1. "armed hostilities have taken place, parties to which include a state and separatists in the state's territory
2. a change in effective control of territory has resulted from the armed hostilities
3. the state and the separatists are divided by lines of separation that have effective stability
4. adopted instruments have given the lines of separation (qualified) juridical stability
5. the separatists make a self-determination claim on which they base a putative state
6. no state recognizes the putative state
7. a settlement process involving outside parties has been sporadic and inconclusive"

Grant, 2017, p. 390

The origin of the conflict is thus very decisive for its nature, as this decides whether there were armed hostilities, if this has resulted in the turnover of government and a clear juridical and regional separation of involved parties. The question of clear ceasefire commands (4) indicates that the conflict is not 'hot' anymore. Further characteristics include the separatist region/government declaring their independence, but with little to no recognition of this from the outside world. The matter of the absence of an officially recognized and legitimate settlement

agreement is also important, as this denotes the inconclusive nature of frozen conflicts and the ongoing dispute. Bebler (2015) has concluded the most important requirements for a frozen conflict as follows: “sharp intrastate conflicts within multinational states occur and culminate in armed violence along the lines separating ethnic, national, cultural and linguistic communities” (p.10).

The author adds on these characteristics by stating that historical experience has indicated that the separation between a state and a separatist region is more likely to occur when the latter is highly populated, spatially concentrated and display cultural and political differences from the state at large. Moreover, Bebler (2015) furthers Grant's (2017) seven characteristics by highlighting the importance of the involvement of third parties; “if actively opposed by the central government an attempt of separation could not be successful without an overt or covert external military support and/or intervention by a militarily stronger state(s) or by an international organization” (p.10). Bebler (2015) thus notes that the interference and protection of the separatist state plays a large part in maintaining the frozen status of the conflict. On top of that, the author recognizes the lack of universal recognition, international isolation and political deprivation of the separatist entity, which is mainly facilitated by the state it broke away from. Sometimes, there is some form of international recognition (although very little), which results in a partially recognized state (Antonova, 2012). Worldwide, there are a number of partially recognized states, the most notable of which include Northern Cyprus, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Nagorno Karabakh, Kosovo and Taiwan. Of these, Kosovo has the highest degree of international recognition; 81 out of the 193 UN members view it as its own country. However, Kosovo is the high exception here, as the majority of the other separatist and partially recognized states garner a lot less recognition, an example being the Republic of South Ossetia, which is recognized by eight other states.

Furthermore, as the term suggests, frozen conflicts can become hot, as the 2008 Russian-Georgian war has illustrated. A more recent example is the war between Ukraine and Russia, which started on February 24<sup>th</sup> 2022 and had previously been a frozen conflict since the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. From 2014 onwards, scholars have uncovered a trend, in which Russia has shown renewed military efforts in the separatist areas and consequently speculated that Russia will destabilize the frozen conflict (Kasapoglu, 2015 & Gressel, 2021). This is especially notable as arguably, the conflict between China and Taiwan is on the same path; China seems to be on the same trajectory as Russia with increased military mobilization and threats. One can only speculate whether the conflict might end up the same way that the Russian-Ukrainian did – hot.

There has been some discrepancy on the referral to these conflicts as “frozen”, as some authors (most notably de Waal & von Twickel (2020) and MacFarlane (2008)) have noted that many of the supposed frozen conflicts do in fact see constant violent conflict. The “frozen” notion could therefore be seen as “misleading” and “dangerous” (MacFarlane, 2008), with de Waal and von Twickel (2020) referring to it as a “misnomer”. De Waal and von Twickel (2020) explain that while the peace negotiation processes surrounding the two involved parties are frozen, the situation is anything but and constantly changing. The author alludes to the conflicts over the Donbas (Ukraine-Russia) and Nagorno Karabakh (Armenia-Azerbaijan), stating that both are experiencing ongoing violent conflict. MacFarlane (2008) further adds on this that the political and social context of disputes is constantly changing and largely displays a tendency towards violence, reflected in the deaths on the boundaries of the Donbas, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

However, while this continued violence at a lower level does apply to some denoted frozen conflicts in Eastern Europe, the criticism does not hold for the conflict between Taiwan and China. For this region, there has been no outright armed conflict- be it small-scale exchanges of fire by the military or the civilians. Yet, China has started increasing its military threat considerably since 2016 (Maizland, 2022), which increases the chance of violent escalation in the future. On top of that, the war between Russia and Ukraine may be a turning point in the nature of the conflict between China and Taiwan. China can namely arguably learn a thing or two from Russia’s actions, especially conserving how the countries have followed the same trajectory of increased military pressure. The actions or inactions, the general response of the West and its unity, and the extent to which the outside world supports Ukraine, may serve as an indicator for China on how the world will react to an eventual annexation of Taiwan. The Chinese president, Jinping Xi, is able to gauge the unity, strength and stability of the West (Osnos, 2022). Although the prospect of a possible prolonged and protracted war with tons of casualties – as has been the case for Russia-, may act as a deterrent for China to invade Taiwan.

What one can conclude from the controversy surrounding the definition of a frozen conflict, is that each dispute is unique in history, character and context. The considerable differences between frozen conflicts is what marks one conflict as ‘frozen’ and the other unrightfully so. It has to be noted that the criticism of the ‘frozen’ aspect is largely built on the conflicts prevalent in the post-Soviet territory, which are generally referred to as ‘frozen’. The discourse on frozen conflicts is namely mainly dominated by those situated in the Post-Soviet

region. This is largely due to the fact that the notion and presence of frozen conflicts emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and its concurrent establishment of several independent states in Eastern Europe in the early 1990s (Cuppuleri, 2020). This causes the majority of critics of the use of 'frozen' to be invalid for the study of Taiwan and China. Although China has increased its military presence and threat, the two countries do not engage in violent conflict, which makes it frozen in every way. The "frozen" characteristics set out by Grant (2017) and Bebler (2015) are thus very much applicable to the conflict between Taiwan and China, the details of which will be further discussed in section 4.2.

## 4.2 Is China-Taiwan a frozen conflict?

The main characteristics of a frozen conflict that have been discussed in section 4.1 and will be applied to the conflict between China and Taiwan are those derived from Grant (2017) and Bebler (2015). As priorly outlined, in his work, Grant (2017) has set out seven characteristics of the frozen conflict, which each will be compared and applied to the status quo between China and Taiwan. The first characteristic, that armed hostilities between a state and separatists have taken place, holds true for Taiwan and China. The conflict namely stems back to the Chinese Civil War in mainland China in 1949. The two opposing sides included the Chinese Nationalist Party Kuomintang (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). After its defeat, the KMT government -along with 2 million others- fled to Taiwan, where they established and maintained the KMT rule. The ROC rule continued in Taiwan instead of mainland China, where it resumed its representation of China (although that did not last long). Thus, the conflict was built on an armed conflict which drove the separatists (KMT) away. The armed conflict also meets the second characteristic of that it resulted in a change of effective control over the territory. In this case, the territory was mainland China, and the residing government was driven away, replaced by the CCP who now held control over the territory. The ROC government declared itself a state independent from mainland China and thus made a self-determination claim on which they based their state. The conflict hereby thus already meets Grant's (2017) first, second and fifth characteristics indicative of a frozen conflict.

After the dispute which resulted in the armed conflict, the two parties also failed to reach an official settlement, which is also key in the classification of a frozen conflict. (This concludes that the risk likely remains, even if a ceasefire has taken ahold.) The "one China" notion the key

controversial factor here, as China will argue that there is an official agreement, but Taiwan will not. This controversial agreement is the 1992 Consensus between the KMT – which was Taiwan’s ruling government at that time- and the CCP. However, what makes this understanding unofficial and illegitimate to count as a peace agreement, is that neither side properly agree on the content and that it was not intended to address the question of Taiwan’s proper legal status. The main takeaway from this agreement was that the countries agreed to disagree; they accepted their varying opinions on the One China principle. China namely, on the one hand, sees Taiwan as a province of China and views the PRC as the only legitimate government of China. Their aim is to unify Taiwan with mainland China, as the country has done with Hong Kong. China’s president Xi Jinping therefore perceives the agreement to state that both countries belong to one China and would work together towards national reunification. On the other hand, the government at that time -the KMT- perceived the agreement to mean something different; that there is one China, but different interpretations of it. The KMT thus understood it as a consensus on the fact that both parties think there is one China, but disagree about what China means (either the ROC or the PRC). An agreement to disagree of sorts. The legitimacy of the agreement is further limited by the fact that the regime of the KMT in Taiwan is over. Lee Teng-hui was president during the so-called consensus, and not in favour of the alleged outcome between semiofficial representatives of both states. He even denied the existence of the Consensus altogether. The current -quite popular- Taiwanese president, Tsai Ing-wen has altogether rejected the Consensus, together with the “one country, two systems” principle that China tries to enforce on Taiwan. Altogether, there is a clear absence of an officially recognized and legitimate peace agreement regarding the conflict. The 7<sup>th</sup> principle -of an inconclusive settlement- is therefore met.

There are also clear and juridically stable lines of separation between the two countries; the ROC has clearly established their territory where they govern. The Taiwan Strait serves as a clear-cut separation line between the two governments. The ceasefire between the two governments (i.e. countries) has been adopted as a result of the retreat of the ROC government. This reflects the orders that the political parties have given the commanders of the troops. Grant’s (2017) third and fourth characteristics are hereby met. Although this holds for the time up to 2022, as there is uncertainty whether the Chinese (PRC) or Taiwanese (ROC)

government will adopt more aggressive policies in the future and attack, which would end the ceasefire and consequently turn the frozen conflict 'hot'.

There is one remaining factor as set out by Grant (2017) that is indicative of a frozen conflict, which is that little to no state recognizes the declared state. In this case, the declared state is Taiwan, and the principle holds true; chapter 4.1 explains that the ROC has made, since the loss of its UN seat, several attempts and efforts to become part of the international political sphere and to be recognized by the world as an independent state. However, only 13 of 193 UN states recognize Taiwan as its own state as of 2022. This status of non-state due to no outside recognition is maintained by China, who is one of the five permanent UN members and thus holds veto power. This influential position allows China to block any attempt of Taiwan to join the UN, therefore also taking away their chance at recognition as an independent state. Chapter 5.3 will further touch upon the legal aspect of the correlation between membership of the UN and the relationship between China and Taiwan.

Bebler (2015) has, in addition to the afore discussed and applied seven characteristics, pointed out another important factor that is indicative of a frozen conflict. "if actively opposed by the central government an attempt of separation could not be successful without an overt or covert external military support and/or intervention by a military stronger state(s) or by an international organization". This applies to the Taiwan-China conflict as well, as the US has played an important and defining role in the evolvement of the conflict. If it were not for their support for Taiwan, it would be highly likely -although this is speculative- for China to have invaded Taiwan with military force. Especially considering that one of the main reasons that withholds China from invading is the consequent retaliation the country will face from the US.

Bebler (2015) also notes how a region or part seceding from the state is usually quite populous in numbers, and spatially concentrated. This is applicable for Taiwan, with a total population of 23 million people living in a spatially concentrated country. Next to that, Bebler (2015) shows some overlap with Grant (2017) in his further characterization; "... substantially different from the majority nation and hence cannot be easily culturally and politically absorbed and assimilated" (p. 10). Seeing as Taiwan has a drastically different view from China on the

political “one China” principle, next to the fact that they have different political systems (democracy vs dictatorship), this principle also holds for their conflict

In conclusion, the conflict between China and Taiwan covers any and all aspects set out by academics who have studied frozen conflicts. Although they derive/base these characteristics on the frozen conflicts in the post-USSR regions, they still are indicative of frozen conflicts in general. The nature of these conflicts namely does not change, regardless of the region of the world they take place in. All seven characteristics -and any additional ones- are applicable to the conflict between Taiwan and China, and therefore the conflict can rightfully be classified as a frozen one.

## 4.3 Legal aspect

### 4.3.1 Legal background

From the previous section follows that the relationship between Taiwan and China is a frozen conflict in nature. Over the years, this conflict is reflected in the legal domain, where the two countries fight over representation and sovereignty. To understand the cross-strait frozen conflict more, it would be valuable to look at three legal cases where one of the two raises a concern regarding the other. Legal disputes shed more light on the exact positions the two countries hold, and in what ways these are expressed. Moreover, overall, the legal perspective and opinions provide a valuable addition to understanding the frozen conflict and relationship between Taiwan and China, and the steps the international sphere is (un)willing to take.

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is a global organization concerning itself with peace and security. The Security Council determines the existence of a threat to the peace or act of aggression, which is especially significant in the case of a frozen conflict, also to determine the international position on this conflict. In practice, the Council can call upon the parties involved in a dispute to settle it by peaceful means and recommends methods of adjustment or terms of settlement. The General Assembly (UNGA) is the main policy-making body of the United Nations. The Assembly consists of all members of the UN, who all regularly meet and discuss international issues on the agenda.

The reason why the two legal cases discussed in this section are derived from the UNSC, is because the developments of the Taiwan-China relationship are particularly well-reflected in the UN. China has been a part of the United Nations since its establishment in 1945. It also is one of the “big five” members. However, back then, its seat belonged to a different Chinese government than it does now. It was the Republic of China, governed by Chiang Kai-shek that belonged to the founding members. However, in 1961, the UN passed Resolution 1668, which was the first official active step towards a change of representation. This resolution required the change in China’s representation in the UN to be determined by a two-thirds vote. With the seed being planted, the confrontation between China and Taiwan, both claiming to be the representative of the Chinese people, culminated in 1971. That year, the United Nations (UN) passed Resolution 2758. This resolution entailed the change in China’s representative in the UN, and gave this position to the People’s Republic of China (PRC) (the official name for China), effectively replacing the Republic of China (ROC).

These developments reflect the changing nature of the relationship between Taiwan and China, and the international position on this conflict. As of 2022, the PRC still holds its UN seat, claiming China’s representation, and is one of the five permanent members able to veto any substantive resolution in the UNSC. This powerful tool makes it impossible for Taiwan to succeed in its attempts at participation and representation in the UN. China (PRC) holds the power to completely exclude Taiwan from the international stage in any other way than as a province of China. The exclusion from the UN in 1971 ultimately led to the United States breaking off its diplomatic relations with Taiwan eight years later. Although, as described in section 4.2, the two countries have close -albeit informal and non-diplomatic- relations. In a number of legal cases, two of which will be discussed below in detail, Taiwan has made bids for UN membership. But rather than the focus being on representation of China, Taiwan now concentrates on participation in the UN (Winkler, 2012).

The original point of conflict over membership in the UN was about who gets to represent China, which China, for reasons described in the sections above, highly refuses Taiwan from attaining. With the change of nature of reasons for membership, China’s stance on the topic did not falter. The country argues that only sovereign states can enjoy membership in the UN, which Taiwan, as it highlights, is not. A quote from one of the Chinese embassies can serve as an illustration of the diplomatic Chinese stance on this issue: “Taiwan as a province of China is

completely not qualified and has no right to participate in [the United Nations]" (Embassy of the PRC in the United Arab Emirates, n.d.). China's language on the issue is clear-cut and leaves no room for doubt, furthering this by referring to the years prior to 1971, when the ROC held China's UN seat, as an illegal usurpation of China's UN seat "for as long as 22 years" (ibidem). China finalizes its arguments with "from [1971] on, China's representation in the United Nations Organization has been thoroughly resolved politically, legally and procedurally" (Embassy of the PRC in the United Arab Emirates, n.d.).

This shows the vast differences in standpoint and language between China and Taiwan. The controversy surrounding the principle of Taiwan's sovereignty thus reflects in the membership status, and the two are consequently inextricably linked (i.e. membership in UN as the highest form of participation and the question of sovereignty). As both sides have this high contrast and are aware of this connection, the question of UN membership for Taiwan (and all other forms of participation) is very sensitive for both countries, and thus very relevant for the nature of the frozen conflict. This is the reason why the UN membership question is so intertwined with the nature of the frozen conflict between the two countries, as any state that manages to enter into the UN system as a full member in its own right is seen by the other member states as a fully-fledged independent country. This is why the four legal cases discussed in detail below are derived from the United Nations. More specifically, three from the Security Council, as the assumption of the seat of first the ROC and then the PRC reflects in these cases. These three are referred to as UNSC S3354 and UNSC S3355, which are similar in nature, and S1822.

Another legal case will be discussed, namely aforementioned Resolution 2758, enacted by the UN General Assembly. This resolution was pivotal regarding the membership position within the UN.

#### 4.3.2 UNSC S3354 and UNSC S3355

In the 1955 formal letter preceding the case addressed by the UNSC, New Zealand implores the UNSC to consider the armed hostilities and alleged acts of aggression between the PRC and ROC and to hold a meeting on it (noted as S3354). New Zealand namely deemed the situation likely to threaten international peace and security. As a result, the UNSC convened and decided on this issue, the development and outcome of which was included in the UNSC

1952-1955 Repertoire. Specifically, this was published in chapter VIII, which discusses regional cases in the maintenance of international peace and security.

The contents of the letter submitted by New Zealand to the UNSC are discussed in this section, in addition to the procedure that will be followed. As described before, New Zealand was concerned for the international security and safety due to the conflict between the ROC and PRC. The UNSC resolution addresses in this same section (chapter 8) a similar letter proposed by the USSR in 1955 (UNSC S3355), as this one expresses its concern for the armed hostilities between the two countries, exacerbated by the interference of the United States. The latter country namely committed, as the letter states, acts of aggression against the PRC. This was a matter of concern for the USSR as this was the era of the Cold War, and the hostilities between the U.S. and the USSR were at their highest point. The USSR, in their letter, further explained New Zealand's similar concerns for the international safety, but reasoning that the intervention of the U.S. in the internal affairs of China and the acts of aggression against the PRC were increasing the threat of a new war. Both letters stated that it was necessary for the Security Council to intervene and to put an end to these acts of aggression between the PRC and ROC, and the involvement of the United States. Notable in their letter is that the USSR, through its wording, recognizes Taiwan as a province of China ("*Taiwan and other territories belonging to China*"). On the New Zealand and USSR item, the Secretary General concluded on a postponement of the meeting until the Council invited a representative of the PRC to participate in the discussion. However, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the PRC informed the Secretary-General that the PRC would not accept the invitation. The exact wording used in the UNSC Repertoire is as follows:

*"The People's Republic would not be able to send a representative to take part in the discussion of the New Zealand item, and would have to consider all decisions taken by the Council concerning China as illegal and null and void. It could agree to participate in the Council's deliberations only for the purpose of discussing the draft resolution submitted by the USSR, and only when its representative attended in the name of China and the other occupant of China's seat had been expelled."*

(1952-1955 UNSC Repertoire, Chapter VIII, p. 122).

This shows the strategic absence of China in this matter, as it hereby prevented any progress which may have favoured the ROC. Since international peace and security are its

main concern, one could be safe to assume that the UNSC would have ruled the PRC and ROC to stop its conflict, whereby the PRC would have to acknowledge and accept the matter at hand. At that point, the ROC still held the seat of China in the UN, which was not favourable for the PRC. If progress were to take place, the PRC forced the UN hereby to acknowledge PRC to assume China's seat in the UN.

As for the concern raised by the USSR concerning the involvement of the U.S., the UN Security Council responded in a similar manner, deciding that the Council "should not today seek to push matters further forward. [...] The wisest course for us to take now, is to adjourn without taking any further decision. The problem itself will remain under the constant and anxious consideration of the members of this Council." (1952-1955 UNSC Repertoire, Chapter VIII, p. 122). Overall, the involvement of the U.S. in the conflict between the PRC and the ROC was favourable to the UN, as with the involvement, the U.S. strove for a cessation of hostilities. This outcome was therefore very acceptable to the UN. The reaction of the PRC to the invitation on the New Zealand matter therefore allowed the UN to also apply their rejection to this matter ("the representative of the UK, commenting on the cablegram of the Prime Minister of the State Council and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the PRC, suggested that..."). The PRC did namely not specifically reject the invitation on the USSR matter; only on the New Zealand matter. As the PRC was not reached an invitation and they did not have a seat in the Council to decide on this matter, it never really was involved on the conclusion and course of procedure. After all, the acceptance of the involvement of the U.S. was not something the PRC would have accepted; the latter wanted to proceed with the hostilities in order to 'take back' the ROC and ultimately receive the seat in the UN. They did not want the status quo to persevere. In the end, however, the PRC got its wish, as the status quo was changed through the UNGA resolution 2758, which will be discussed next.

In sum, one can derive from these two UN concerns and course proceedings a picture of the political arena at that time (1955), and how this gradually tipped towards the changing international attitude towards the PRC. The UN Council namely, on the S3354 matter, required the involvement of the PRC in the discussion, and through this, prohibited itself from proceeding on this matter. The PRC also already announced its clear position and intention to occupy the UN seat.

The conclusion of the S3355 matter must have been a setback for the PRC, but, as it was unable to voice its input on this matter, it could not have done anything about the continued acceptance of the involvement of the U.S.. The UNSC legal response clearly portrays the long-lasting quest for representation of the PRC.

### 4.3.3 UNSC S1822

The letter addressed to the UNSC, referred to as S1822, dates back to 1950 and was submitted by the PRC. In this letter, the PRC raises the concern and opposition to armed U.S. forces being present in Taiwan. At that time, the ROC still held a seat in the council and was seen as a representative of China. Therefore, it is notable that the PRC has raised this concern, which is why it has also explicitly argued for their right to address this:

*In view of the divergency of opinion in the Council regarding the representation of China and without prejudice to this question, it may in accordance with rule 39 of the rules of procedure, invite representatives of the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China to provide it with information or assist it in the consideration of these matters*

(S1822, 1950).

The PRC recognizes its lesser position and eligibility to address this concern, as the state does not feel represented by the ROC. The PRC raises its concern of the U.S. interference on the grounds of the threat this may pose to international peace and security. This is in line with the concern raised in letter S3355 by the USSR. The letter resulted in the discussion of this matter at the 506<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Council in 1950. There, it was concluded that this matter would be deferred until later notice, but taken notice of the PRC's concern. More notably, the Council decided that the PRC was allowed to attend and participate in the further discussion. This, in light of the fact that the ROC was considered to be the legal representative of China in the UN, is very noteworthy.

It reflects how the international attitude was already slightly and subtly beginning to change towards the PRC; they were more welcome and invited to participate. At the time of the proposal and voting on this matter, the five permanent members of the Security Council consisted of France, the ROC, the Soviet Union, the UK, and the USA. While nothing is said on

the exact details of the voting procedure, the Repertoire did disclose that 7 votes were in favour of the final decision/course of procedure and 3 against, and of those three, two votes against were from permanent members (p. 157). This is only a matter of speculation, but it gives rise to the question as to whether the ROC was one of these two permanent members to vote against the final decision.

Nevertheless, the handling and response to the letter illustrates how the U.S. interfered in the Taiwan strait – back then supporting the ROC still. However, the response also reflects the changing attitude towards the PRC. The matter was ultimately finalized at the 530<sup>th</sup> meeting (1950), where the Council rejected the PRC letter's proposal (together with the USSR draft resolution discussed in the next section) to condemn the acts of the U.S. as an act of aggression and intervention in the internal affairs of China and to request the withdrawal of the U.S. military from the island of Taiwan “and from other territories belonging to China”.

#### 4.3.4 UNGA Resolution 2758

All the previously discussed legal documents ultimately concluded in the infamous Resolution 2758, passed by the UN General Assembly in 1971. This resolution has become one of the most defining documents in the modern history of Taiwan. The resolution marks the turning tide for the PRC and ROC, and the international sphere. There is plenty of controversy surrounding this resolution, stemming from differing and broad interpretations. Below, the full resolution will be quoted, as it feels like taking parts of it takes away from the overall meaning, together with the fact that the ruling is one long sentence.

*Restoration of the lawful rights of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations*  
*The general Assembly, recalling the principles of the Charter of the UN, considering that the restoration of the lawful rights of the People's Republic of China is essential both for the protection of the Charter of the UN and for the cause that the UN must serve under the Charter, recognizing that the representatives of the Government of the People's Republic of China are the only lawful representatives of China to the United Nations and that the People's Republic of China is one of the five permanent members of the Security Council, decides to restore all its rights to the People's Republic of China and to recognize the representatives of its Government as the only legitimate representatives of*

*China to the United Nations, and to expel forthwith the representatives of Chiang Kai-shek from the place which they unlawfully occupy at the United Nations and in all the organizations related to it.*

(UNGA on their 1976<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting, 1971)

UNGA Resolution 2758 focussed on the legitimate usurpation of the Chinese UN seat by the PRC, formerly held by the ROC. It clearly states that the Government of the PRC is the only lawful representative of China, where it formerly was the government of the ROC. This reflects the change in international attitude and stance towards the PRC. With the occupation of the seat, the PRC also became one of the five permanent members of the Security Council, which will later prove to be essential in ensuring and enforcing their plans, and blocking proposals that would recognize Taiwan in any way. The controversy stems from the later part (van Langenhove, 2014); the mention of Chiang Kai-shek, who only ruled in Taiwan until his death in 1976, 5 years after the resolution. The Chiang family had been out of rule for more than 30 years, since Taiwans transition to a democracy as explained previously. One could therefore argue that with the ending of Kai-shek's presidency, the ROC could also participate or even assume its previous seat in the UN again. There are, after all, no more representatives of Kai-shek currently in the Taiwanese government. These were the only representatives specifically addressed to be expelled from their seat at the UN and all related organizations.

However, with the ending of the rule of the Chiang family, also ended Taiwan's active quest for a seat. Instead, Taiwan started focussing on participating in any way in the UN and its related organizations. The country's main aim is to participate in the international global arena. The country is not even looking for representation of China through that seat, as they do not even see themselves as China anymore since Chiang.

Van Langenhoven (2014) also notes how a key difference between Taiwan now and to the country at the time of the passing of the Resolution (in 1971), is that it is no longer claiming to represent territorial China. The context in which the UN passed this resolution in 1971, was a very different one, in which the ROC claimed to be the legitimate government for all of China. This was deemed highly implausible and unfair to the one billion PRC people, resulting in the Resolution being passed. But, conditions have changed, which makes its long-lasting exclusion arguably ungrounded. Rather than seeing themselves as Chinese and thus aiming to overtake

the UN seat which represents China, the Taiwanese see themselves as members of a de facto independent state and not Chinese exiles (in line with the process of Taiwanization). Thus, in theory (and legally), Taiwan should be able to participate as its own independent country in the UN. It should also no longer pose a threat to the seat currently held by mainland China. But in practice, this is not possible, as China will veto any attempt of theirs to join or participate in any way.

From the view of mainland China, Resolution 2758 explicitly recognises “one China” - with Taiwan being a province of China - and the government in Beijing as the sole representative of this one China. With China’s influential position at the UN General Assembly, it is unlikely that the UN will rule otherwise.

It is a very disputed resolution, which is still the case nowadays, with Taiwan still trying to attain membership or participation in any form at that, in the UN or any other international organization. China, to the outside world, still claims Taiwan to be a threat and not a legitimate country to stake such a claim.

# Chapter 5: applying the three IR theories on the frozen conflict between China and Taiwan

Now, having discussed the nature and background of the relationship between China and Taiwan, and how this constitutes their frozen conflict, and respectively answered the sub-questions, this chapter will apply the afore discussed three international relations theories on the frozen conflict. This will help us understand the frozen conflict more, and provide different aspects on how to approach it (and maybe even find a solution in the future).

## 5.1 Realism

When looking at the frozen conflict between China and Taiwan from a realist perspective, it would be useful to look at the works of Leng (1998) and Chen (2003). These authors have researched the cross-strait economic interactions between China and Taiwan. The authors argue how the realist perspective on economic statecraft does not fully explain the current political economy between Taiwan and China. Realism, as outlined in section 2.2.1, assumes that states are the only meaningful actors in the world economy. In an anarchic international society, relative gains in wealth and power are the ultimate goals of these actors. The structure of balanced power, either in political or economic terms, determines the winners and losers in the international arena. Foreign trade and investment policies can thus be utilized as instruments to enhance national interests. The Chinese government fulfills the realist assumptions; China invests in Taiwan and tries to establish good economic relations with them in order to enhance national interests – namely, to have more influence on Taiwan's politics and increase its dependence and, in turn, decrease its sovereignty. From section 4.3 follows that, from the Taiwanese side, the cross-strait economic relationship does not follow the 'rational' cost-benefit structure. Rather, Taiwan makes choices, which from an economic and realist perspective are irrational.

Both countries make use of calculated coercive foreign policies towards one another, both acting according to their view of the "one China" policy. Thus, overall, the economic interaction between Taiwan and China is used to serve political purposes and to enhance one's own power. This is perfectly in line with the realist school of thought.

Overall, the key point of the realist school of thought is that wars are necessary tools of statecraft in an imperfect world and leaders must use them when it is in the national interest. It predicts the confrontation between the status quo hegemonic power (U.S.) and anti-status quo rising power (in this case, China).

Leng (2013), in his work, outlines the rise of China as a new hegemonic power, which aligns with Meirshheimer's theory – which was discussed earlier. In its stance and policies towards Taiwan, China also applies the realist theory, as it actively pursues the maximization of power. The country prevents Taiwan from participating, let alone taking its seat, in any way in any international organization. It has completely disabled Taiwan from entering the international political sphere. The fact that Taiwan has not been recognized as a country already, is because China vetoes any attempts to do so. Mainland China holds a position of maximum power in the UN, by being one of the five veto members. This function is so far-reaching and powerful in so many areas, that it is undeniably realist-motivated.

From section 5.3 follows how long mainland China has been working against the ROC occupying the seat in the UN. With the UNGA Resolution 2758 having been passed in 1971, it is very difficult, if not impossible, for Taiwan to usurp that seat. Yet, Taiwan has changed its course of action, to that being of participation in the UN. Again, China is able to prevent this through its veto membership, thereby successfully preventing Taiwan from being admitted as a member, which is interchangably linked with country-status.

As also shown in its one China policy, mainland China sees Taiwan as a province of China, and is therefore not eligible to become a country. Excluding Taiwan from being a country means that China has more influence on it. The former is unable to participate in any international organization, which leaves it very dependent on China. China, as discussed previously, highly benefits from this economically, but also politically. Spreading and maximizing its region of influence is, again, in line with the realist school of thought of maximization of power. This reflects the rise of China as a global hegemonic power in the international system.

## 5.2 Liberalism

The liberalist school of thought builds on the concept of cooperation and interdependence, as explained in chapter 2.2.2. Liberalism assumes that human nature is

fundamentally good and that conflict can be avoided. At first glance, this theory therefore is inapplicable to the frozen conflict between China and Taiwan. However, the point of interdependence does apply here, in the economic area. From section 3.3 follows that the two countries have strong economic ties, with the majority of Taiwan's export going to China. Arguably, the degree of dependence is bigger for Taiwan (on China) than it is for China (on Taiwan), partially due to the fact that China is bigger and as a state, plays a bigger international role.

Through the liberalist theory, Taiwan and China would have to cooperate and be at peace. However, the main reason characterizing the conflict as frozen, is that a peace agreement was never signed. That alone prevents the Liberalist concept of peace from being used. Cooperation is present in the economic sphere, but not politically. The countries have differing views on the "one China" principle. However, when it comes to these two countries alone, this has not manifested itself in the active use of military power over the past 20 years. China has often threatened with its military forces and military presence, but not acted on it during this period. This can thus be linked to liberalism, which posits that states have an interest in engaging in cooperation, since the consequences of using military power often outweigh the benefits. Applying this to China; the lack of active military aggression on China's side is more attributable to the presence of the U.S. military in Taiwan, which would no doubt retaliate. China knows that, if it were to attack, it would face retribution and condemnation from the United States, which has recently furthered their continued support for Taiwan, and likely from Western Europe (especially considering the reaction of Western Europe to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine) (Davidson, 2022). Thus, China recognizes the consequences of actively using its military power against Taiwan, in order to not damage its own interests and economy. Although, it has to be noted, the situation is precarious, with tensions rising between the military forces.

Moreover, liberalists state that sovereign states are not the only central actors in world politics; individuals, interest groups, and intergovernmental and nongovernmental organisations all have an influence on states. When applying this to the relation between Taiwan and China, one can conclude the following; Taiwan is, legally speaking, not a country or state. It is not internationally recognized as one, although it has all the characteristics of one. It would thus not fall under the category of sovereign states, but rather under the category "interest groups". However, the exclusion of Taiwan from the international political stage refutes the liberalist

assumption. Although China is the main reason behind Taiwan's lack of UN membership and country status, it still stands that it is not internationally recognized as a state. According to the liberalists, Taiwan should still, despite its lack of country status, be able to have an influence on states. However, this proves untrue in this case, as China prevents Taiwan from maximizing its political presence on the international stage.

Membership of the UN is pivotal here, as that entails that the member is a country, and it would mean participation in the international sphere.

Overall, the liberalist school of thought has a limited application to the frozen conflict between China and Taiwan, with its main premise of cooperation only being met in the economic sense. Politically, the two countries are far from cooperation. Although China does recognize the benefits of not using its military power to pursue cooperation.

### 5.3 Constructivism

As discussed in chapter two, the main assumption constructivists make, is that the fundamental structures of international politics are social and that these structures shape actors' identities and interests. When applying this to the frozen conflict between China and Taiwan, one can conclude that the actions of one of the two countries towards each other can be analysed through a constructivist lens. Taiwan's foreign policies over the past 20 years can be explained through and adhere to the constructivist view. Chapter 3 has discussed the nature of the Taiwanese government and policies over the years. This showed how the Taiwanese attitude towards China changed over the years.

The specific presidencies in Taiwan during the last twenty years discussed in chapter three illustrate the only irregularity in Taiwan's quest growing independence were Ma's terms in office. However, this can be explained by the fact that he garnered this support through his claims to largely improve the economic situation. His amicable attitude towards China in this, which stretched beyond economic ties, was not shared by the majority of the Taiwanese population. However, his presidency is the only real instance in Taiwan's foreign policies during the past twenty years where the IR theory of constructivism is inapplicable and where it does not explain Taiwan's behaviour towards China in the frozen conflict. While naturally, all

presidents over the past twenty years have governed with their country's best interests in mind, sometimes they do not behave in a rationally optimal way for their country.

Whereas Ma was prepared to strengthen Taiwan's relationship with China in order to further the own economy, other recent presidents such as Tsai, Lee and Bian were opposed to relations in any way with China, even if it would be (economically) harmful to their own country. These presidents prioritized opposition to China over improvement of their economic prosperity. This is completely in line with the constructivist school of thought, which, as explained before, assumes that the social structures in states influence actors' identities and interests. In this case, the actors are the Taiwanese president and governing bodies, and the social structures are the independence and Taiwanization movements. Taiwan is constructed by its social and cultural relations with others, particularly China. The Taiwanization occurring in the country is what has made the country and current situation the way it is. Taiwan is thus not formed by material entities, for instance through striving for economic benefits (which was the case under the presidency of Ma).

Despite the actions of Tsai, Lee and Bian seeming irritational from an economic perspective, they are acting in a socially and culturally rational way. Their policies are influenced by the social structure of Taiwanization present in the country. This, together with the fact that with their actions, they try to pursue their own interests (just not economically), shows that Taiwan is behaving in a constructivist way, when it comes to politics concerning China.

Moreover, the fact that the status quo between Taiwan and China -which could be considered a balance of power- has been the result of interactions and social practices over a period of time is indicative of constructivism. Finally, the interests that Taiwan has in its relation with China, are largely different for its other relations. In for instance Taiwan's relationship with Europe, Australia and the United States, it pursues economic interests. This one principle of independence that Taiwan bases its current policies on, can arguably ultimately not be beneficial for the state's safety, as mainland China may want to counter the movement with military action. However, its need for independence overrides the state's security in this case. As security is a major driving factor for international politics amongst liberalism and realism, it can be concluded that, also for this reason, only the constructivist view explains the behaviour of Taiwan within the frozen conflict.

On the other hand, the position of China within the cross-strait frozen conflict is not one that is in line with the constructivist theory. China has one interest in its foreign relations and that is of furthering its influence and power, whether it be through territory, ethnicity, economics or politics. China's interest does not change when it comes to different regions of the world. Furthermore, the pursuit of power is a material factor, as explained by Temperley (2013). Material factors exist independently of actors and are of a material nature, as the term suggests. These structures enable and constrain particular actions and presuppose particular behaviours. An example of these factors includes the balance of power, which can be defined in military or economic terms. As China can never have enough power, this is a material interest and can thus not be explained by the constructivist theory. There is an inherent ideological chasm between the United States and China, which, as of 2022, have been the most dominant actors to claim the position of world's most powerful states (Ambrosetti, 2012). China seeks, at the least, a balance of power, mainly relating to the U.S., and wants to spread its influence even more beyond that.

So, there are different interests underlying the foreign policies of Taiwan and China when it comes to one another. China acts out of materialistic interests (furthering its influence), whereas Taiwan's policies towards China adhere to ideational factors (furthering its sovereignty). These are the key differences between the two countries that underly the frozen conflict, from a constructivist perspective. The theory can only explain Taiwan's policies, as China assumes the constraining nature and set path of the international structures and power balance.

# Conclusion

This thesis has explained what IR theories of realism, liberalism and constructivism entail. The main concepts derived from these theories are central for answering the main research question. Chapter three has established that states focused on gaining power and the importance of balance of power are acting according to the theory of realism. Liberalism, on the other hand, stresses cooperation between states. Finally, constructivism emphasizes that states will act according to belief systems, instead of being driven by materialism.

To answer the research question, it was essential to first establish the nature of the relationship between Taiwan and China. Chapter five concludes that through the hostile attitude, absence of an official and conclusive peace agreement and the conflict over Taiwanese nationality and sovereignty, the conflict between China and Taiwan meets all the characteristics of a frozen conflict and can therefore rightfully be deemed one.

The two countries have a vast history, of which the discussion of the past twenty years only covers the tip of the iceberg. In their shared past, the two countries have had various attitudes towards one another, although the reviewed legal cases mark the turning point for Taiwan's path of recognition in the international sphere. After decades of attempts at international participation, Taiwan has taken a different path since 2000. Instead of being part of China, Taiwan seeks to steer away from the representative role and tries to become internationally recognized as an independent country. This has gained back the favour and support of various states, which further adds fuel to the tilting and unstable status quo. The point over which the conflict originated, the "one China" notion and consequent representation discussion, is not applicable anymore; Taiwan does not want to be part of China anymore. With this, the nature behind the conflict has changed, furthered by the wave of Taiwanization.

These in-depth discussions and explanations to both sub-questions (*"what do constructivism, realism and liberalism entail"* and *"what is the background of China and Taiwan's relationship and how does its nature befit a frozen conflict"*), answered in chapter three, four and five, are necessary to properly answer the final and main question. Through the application of the analysed theories to the frozen conflict, this thesis was able to answer the question of *"To what extent can the IR theories of realism, liberalism and constructivism be applied to understand the frozen conflict between China and Taiwan?"*

All three IR theories have been found to be applicable in some aspects of the conflict – to various extents. Where one theory is unable to explain a certain policy or action, another is. However, there are two theories that can explain the actions of both countries in the conflict to a higher extent; realism and constructivism. Although these are not applicable to the entirety of the conflict, they are explanatory for the behaviour of one country towards the other within the conflict. Realism underlies the policies of China, whereas constructivism is in line with the Taiwanese policies. In every aspect, China's policies towards Taiwan reflect the principle of power policies central to realism; every single of its actions and positions it holds, China uses to exploit its power over Taiwan. This is illustrated through UNGA Resolution 2758, due to which China now holds a position with veto power and uses this to suppress Taiwan's attempts to participate in the UN and other international organizations.

Taiwan, on the other hand, may act in a seemingly irrational manner towards China, as it does not always benefit the country economically. This is explained by constructivism; the country prefers to pursue its quest for independence over economic profit. Although close ties with China would result in economic benefits, the country, based on its immaterial ideals of sovereignty, chooses to engage as little as possible with China.

As previously established, liberalism revolves around cooperation, which, in the case of Taiwan and China, is nearly absent. The theory can only explain their (although weakening and fading) economic relationship to an extent, in which Taiwan relies heavily on China. This is to a relatively small extent, as China has ulterior motives that it aims to achieve through this link. These motives are not cooperative in nature, but rather power-oriented. China profits from this economic relationship, because Taiwan consequently becomes more dependent on the country. Through this, China hopes to be able to exert more influence on Taiwan's politics. Realist principles therefore underly the economic relationship (mainly actively pursued by China in the past two decades) at first glance based on, but very much unlike liberalism.

With the knowledge of constructivism underlying Taiwan's policies and stance towards China, and realism underlying China's, the academic field can be drawn upon for the more practical approach to the conflict. Because understanding the nature and underlying theories behind the conflict allows one to give more meaning to the conflict, and makes it possible to put it into perspective and come up with solutions (possibly also drawn upon from IR theories).

Referring back to the initial question posed in the introduction as to whether Taiwan will still be competing in the Olympics under the name of Chinese Taipei, the thesis has provided enough content to be able to answer this. The likelihood is, after all, determined by the extent to which either the realist, liberalist or constructivist approach and central concepts have been implemented and are adhered to by the Chinese and Taiwanese governments. If it were up to Taiwan, the country would not participate as Chinese Taipei, in line with its constructivist approach to a growing desire for independence from China. China, on the contrary, would like to see Taiwan compete under the name of China, as it is in line with its realist approach of increasing territory (i.e. power) and Taiwan becoming a province of China. Thus, the status quo is not supported by either country, but serves as a middle ground between them. Taiwan would, if it were to participate under the name of ROC or Taiwan (emboldened by the strong support of the US), be heavily scrutinized and could expect a reaction, possibly violent and repressing, from China. Taiwan would also likely be scrutinized by the international sphere and organizations, as it might be blamed for instigation of the conflict and disturbance of peace (central principles to the UNSC and UN). This would counter the efforts that Taiwan has made to gain favour and recognition from states.

Therefore, despite the strong constructivist approach suggesting otherwise, the likelihood of Taiwan adopting this very bold and controversial move in the near future is low. Thereafter, if the constructivist take remains, it would be probable for Taiwan to start seeking participation as ROC or Taiwan, depending on whether China's threats escalate, the position of the international sphere and the IR theories underlying the two countries' governing approach.

Of course, the question remains open as to whether these realist and constructivist approaches will be maintained in the future by both governments, especially since this thesis has shown how drastically a government's (i.e. Taiwan in this case) position and foreign policies can change. The future will tell whether Taiwan will be furthered in its actions by the constructivist take, but until then, regardless of its take, the world will have to expect to see the name "Chinese Taipei" on their television screens at the next Olympics. Although for how long this will remain, one can only speculate on.

# Discussion

As previously discussed, this thesis has high importance and relevance for the academic and societal world. It gives insight into the conflict between China and Taiwan, and the three IR theories provide valuable starting points as to the manner in which the conflict should be addressed.

The study and application of realism, liberalism and constructivism was done in the scope of the allocated time frame. These three theories were chosen as they these are the most prominent theories within the discipline of IR. Realism and liberalism form the core of the debate and sides within the school and serve as the starting point for many new theories. Constructivism has gained a central part in the discipline as well, through its new insights into human nature and ability to explain phenomena such as the ending of the Cold War. Many scholars thus refer to these theories as the main ones, which is why this thesis discusses these distinctive three.

However, it is possible for other IR theories to be more fit to study and explain the frozen conflict between China and Taiwan. International Society for instance, is another prominent school of thought and assumes a human-focussed approach. Similar to constructivism, central is the study of ideas and ideologies that shape world politics. An important concept is the promotion and preservation of international order. The theory may therefore be apt to explain and understand the relation between Taiwan and China. Other prominent IR theories include marxism (the communist nature of which would be particularly applicabnle to China, as the country has a communist regime) and feminism, which each would provide valuable new lenses through which to look at and understand the conflict.

Moreover, each IR theory is subject to constant moderation and criticism, from which new subtheories emerge. Neorealism and neoliberalism, for instance, propose a slightly different emphasis on e.g. economic relations. A future study might take these forms more into account in its research.

In terms of findings, this thesis provides a clear image of the attitudes of both countries towards one another. The image of the future that follows from the theories underlying the respective beahvior of both countries, is dynamic. The realist view and the constructivist view undelrying respectively China's and Taiwans policies, mean that they will drift even further apart. The Taiwanization will steadily grow, and especially under Tsai Ing-Wen's presidency, the call for independence will grow louder. China might become anxious and further its threats, which eventually might dissolve into an outright conflict. Independently of this, China will

continue to focus on furthering its power, which makes the country more likely to act on these principles. Especially so in the face of an increasing shift towards sovereignty within Taiwan. Both countries display a high degree of contrast in their policies, each underlined by different IR theories. The path that these two countries are on, steers them towards a hot conflict. Although how near in the future this will be, is still a matter of speculation.

## Limitations and room for further research

Some disclaimers and limitations need to be discussed to recognize any possible pitfalls that may have influenced the writing. In addition, this thesis leaves plenty of room for follow-up research, discussion and speculation. What this thesis did not succeed in addressing due to the limited scope, will be considered as pointers for future studies to build on.

To start off, it is important to recognize the fact that the academic field of international relations is largely dominated by American and European scholars (as illustrated by Jackson & Sørensen, 2019). Seeing as the theory of IR is central in this thesis and applied to the conflict, this brings with it the overwhelming presence of the Western view. Sources used in chapters 3 and 5 mainly stem from American authors, which means that these sections are limited to the Western view. While this does not immediately invalidate any of the findings, it is important to acknowledge this, in order to put the findings more into perspective. The International Relations discipline would benefit from including scholars originating from a non-Western background (Cooke, 2022; Eun, 2019). Young (2014) highlights how skewed the representation of various cultures is and how there is an inherent western bias in International Theory. The author has tried to mitigate the dominating presence of the Western view in the sources through specifically consulting Asian authors in the other chapters. Arguably, this could also be a limitation in itself. However, specifically using Asian sourcing is justified here, as it concerns mainly chapter 4, which discusses the Asian world. Talking about the politics of Taiwan from a predominantly Western view does not sit right, as the Taiwanese authors are more likely to have a more complete view of the situation, politics, relationship and history.

Moreover, the author of this thesis is subject to a personal bias, as they have grown up in a Western country. The (unconscious) Western values and perspective are thus inherent to the author and consequently have an impact on the research. However, this does not delegitimize the findings this thesis has brought forward.

Another limitation to this thesis is the fact that the application of an International Relations theory entails a restricted focus. This is due to the fact that theories only account for elements and occurrences which benefit them and their position. It would be contradictory for proponents or authors of a certain theory to discuss something which would damage the integrity or validity of their theory. Thus, each theory offers only a limited view of the world, seen

through their respective pair of glasses. However, the extent of this limitation is minimized, as three different theories have been used. All theories cover and focus on different aspects of international relations, which together result in a more complete view. When each of the three theories only take and discuss what suits them and their position, the combination allows for more coverage of the different aspects of the conflict. Nevertheless, there is still room for improvement, through research in which additional theories are applied to the conflict.

In line with this limitation, holds the fact that not the entirety of the conflict is reflected upon. Each theory focuses on parts of the conflict which are relevant to their theory. This has been minimized by the discussion of aspects of the conflict that could not be explained by a theory, thus critically reflecting on the extent to which each theory applies to the conflict. However, not every aspect of the conflict was thoroughly discussed from the perspective of all three theories.

The author merely discussed their main points and concepts and applied these to the frozen conflict, which results in a sufficient overview, although incomplete.

A limiting factor on the scope of information provided in this thesis was the allocated time. This limits the discussion of additional aspects, theories, elements and further implication or even solutions. However, it does ensure for the red thread to be predominant, as the researcher does not stray too far from only the most important and relevant information. Nevertheless, the scope of the thesis leaves plenty of room and inspiration for future research, as outlined below.

Throughout this thesis, but mainly concentrated in chapter four, it is noticeable that more attention is paid to the Taiwanese political system than to the Chinese. While the Chinese system is merely explained as a dictatorship and only explained superficially, the Taiwanese political system is examined in great detail, with close attention being paid to each individual president. There is thus a huge gap between the discussion of both systems, which is due to the scope of the thesis; if the author were to examine the Chinese politics in as much detail as they did for Taiwan, the thesis would become too long and would have required more time. Arguably, the author could then have delved less into the Taiwanese system, in order to distribute the attention more evenly. However, the focused discussion of e.g. Taiwanese presidents are essential in understanding the varying and developing Taiwanese attitude towards China. In

addition, this lends itself perfectly to follow-up research, in which there would be more focus on the Chinese side. That would highlight aspects that this thesis did not take into account.

In addition, as becomes clear from the research and discussion, the conflict and relation between the two countries are constantly evolving. For all we know, China could act on its threat of implementing military force or Taiwan could accept to become a province of China. The future is unpredictable. However, with the changing situation, it is valuable to conduct this research again in the future, to see whether the same still applies and whether similar conclusions can be drawn.

Moreover, when discussing the relationship between Taiwan and China and its underlying nature, the author had to limit themselves to a specific timeframe in order to keep within the allocated time and to not pay an unproportioned amount of attention to this chapter. The author chose to focus on the time period between 2000 and 2022 (spanning two decades), which worked out nicely in the end, as this time frame exactly marks the era in which Taiwan has seen a growing independence movement. However, the thesis would be more thorough to discuss the history of and between the two countries that dates further back. It would allow better understanding of the two countries. Especially considering that the two countries have an impactful and vast history, both separately and collectively.

On the other hand, it would be undoable to discuss all the history in a thesis focusing on the application of IR theories. In addition, there is room for further research to focus on the social and cultural aspects of the relationship between Taiwan and China, seeing as this thesis only focusses on the economic and political aspects.

Furthermore, future research could build upon the conclusions drawn by this thesis. Taking the analyzation of the frozen conflict as a starting point, future studies could focus on possible solutions to the frozen conflict. Because, to offer solutions, one first needs to understand the conflict, which this thesis has taken care of. With the foundation in place, one would then look at the various approaches the International Relations theories suggest. Liberalism, Realism and Constructivism each have a different view of the conflict, and based on this, the researcher can analyse which theory offers the best solution. Or, perhaps, what the best path of procedure is according to the theories (and whether the best outcome is peace or war), or how this will further evolve. Although the latter involves more speculation.

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