



# Youth Policy, Youth Civic Engagement and Youth Civic Culture across Socio-political Settings: Comparing China and Europe

PhD dissertation 2019 | Xuan Li



DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE  
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
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XUAN LI

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**Xuan Li**

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## **Table of Content**

<b>Acknowledgments</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>List of Papers</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Dissertation Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Paper 1</b>	<b>92</b>
Public Narratives of Youth Policy in China and Europe	
<b>Paper 2</b>	<b>124</b>
Rethinking the Youth Policy Model in Europe and its Constituents: Civic Learning and Engagement	
<b>Paper 3</b>	<b>142</b>
The Critical Assessment of Youth Policies in Denmark and Three Danish Municipalities	
<b>Paper 4</b>	<b>169</b>
Youth Civic Engagement: Regularized Relations and Youth Elitism in Hong Kong	
<b>Paper 5</b>	<b>190</b>
Do Youth Policy and the Youth League facilitate Youth Civic Responsibility and Civic Engagement in China?	
<b>Paper 6</b>	<b>222</b>
Youth Civic Culture in Hong Kong and Mainland China: A Comparative Analysis	

## Table of Content of the Dissertation Introduction

<b>Chapter 1: Introduction.....</b>	<b>6</b>
Dissertation Themes and Research Questions .....	6
The Dissertation's Two Tracks.....	10
<b>Chapter 2: Theory.....</b>	<b>17</b>
Overview of State–Society Governance Theory.....	18
Urban Regime Theory.....	18
Urban (Community) Governance Theory.....	19
Meta-governance Theory.....	20
Communicative (Culture) Governance Theory .....	23
Cultural-institutional Congruence Theory.....	26
A Cultural Front: A Democratizing Trajectory in the Non-western World .....	31
<b>Chapter 3: Conceptualizing and Theorizing Key Words .....</b>	<b>36</b>
Definition of Youth, Age of Youth and Features of Youth.....	36
Youth Policy .....	38
Ontological Narratives, Public Narratives and Policy .....	40
Civic Engagement and Civic Responsibility .....	44
The Implications of the Conceptualization and the Measurement of Civic Responsibility: Bridging the Gap.....	49
<b>Chapter 4: Empirical Investigations .....</b>	<b>53</b>
Research Design.....	53
Overview of Sources and Methods .....	65
<b>Chapter 5: Contributions.....</b>	<b>66</b>
Conclusions.....	66
The institutional and cultural stories of the Dissertation.....	74
<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Abstrakt.....</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>82</b>

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## **List of Papers**

**Paper 1:** Public Narratives of Youth Policy in China and Europe; the paper is targeted at *Journal of Youth Studies*

**Paper 2:** Rethinking the Youth Policy Model in Europe and its Constituents: Civic Learning and Civic Engagement; conditionally accepted for Publication in *Urban Research and Practice*. (The paper presented here has been revised multiple times based on the original version submitted in the journal.)

**Paper 3:** The Critical Assessment of Youth Policies in Denmark and Three Danish Municipalities; conference paper presented at the Nordic Political Science Association, University of Southern Denmark, 2018.

**Paper 4:** Youth Civic Engagement: Regularized Relations and Youth Elitism in Hong Kong; conditionally accepted for Publication in *Urban Research and Practice*. (The paper presented here has been revised multiple times based on the original version submitted in the journal.)

**Paper 5:** Do the Youth Policy and the Youth League Facilitate Youth Civic Responsibility and Civic Engagement in China? The paper is targeted at *Journal of Contemporary China*.

**Paper 6:** Youth Civic Culture in Hong Kong and Mainland China: A Comparative Analysis; the paper is targeted at *Journal of Contemporary Asia*.

## Dissertation Introduction

### Chapter 1: Introduction

#### Dissertation Themes and Research Questions

The dissertation, a mixed-method cross-cultural study on youth policy, youth civic engagement and youth civic culture through a comparative lens in Europe and China, operates on different analytical scales. **I use the case of youth civic culture to investigate the extent to which modernization theory and post-materialist theory, as put forward by Lipset and Fukuyama, apply to non-western contexts, and to explore whether the youth civic culture patterns are compatible with the corresponding political institutions (such as youth policy, youth advisory institute, the Youth League), as suggested by Eckstein's cultural-institutional congruence theory.** Both general questions revolve around the two tracks of my dissertation, namely youth civic culture and political institutions. The first general question pictures the relationship of youth civic culture and youth political institutions from a modernization perspective; while the second general question addresses the relationship from a stability perspective. All my papers deal with parts of the stability perspective: papers 1 through 4 investigate youth-related political institutions, while papers 5 and 6 help to illuminate youth civic culture. Of the six papers, papers 5 and 6 seek to shed light on the modernization perspective. Modernization theory and its extensions, post-materialist theory and cultural-institutional congruence theory, are elaborated at length in Chapter 2. So I will not explain them here.

In order to answer my overarching research questions, I have chosen a comparative approach in Europe and China, so as to add place-specific socio-political perspectives that are missing in the existing literature. Overall, the general question is broken down into four sub-questions:

- What does youth policy mean in different socio-cultural and political contexts? (papers 1 and 2, analytical scale: China and Europe)
- How do political institutions operationalize and incorporate youth civic engagement differently in different geopolitical contexts? (papers 3 and 4, analytical scale: Denmark and Hong Kong)
- What does youth civic culture look like today? (papers 5 and 6, analytical scale: Hong Kong and Mainland China)
- Are political institutions compatible with contemporary youth civic culture? (the concluding synthesis of the institutional and cultural stories in Chapter 5 of this Dissertation)

Seeing these two general questions through a comparative lens ramps up the scale of difficulty and complexity to the dissertation, but it also highlights the place-specific socio-political parameters I seek to address. In the following, I articulate why I have chosen a comparative study. The pursuit of a comparative angle to these two general research questions enables me to fill some gaps in the existing youth study literature. In general, a substantial body of literature emanating from Europe is dedicated to devising the protocols of how European youth policy should be structured, based on theoretical and empirical findings related to psychological, and physical involvement of youth in politics (Wallace and Kovacheva 1998; Verschelden and Partnership (Organization) 2009; Williamson 2002c; Howard 2007; Williamson 2002b). Two quotes about youth work on the European side highlight collaborative European efforts to bring together youth workers and policymakers to learn from each other and build a model of youth policy that is grounded both in history and social change.

*The story of 'youth policy' development at a European level has been one of complexity and incoherence. The two major European institutions, the European Union and the Council of Europe, have both become increasingly committed to a youth agenda but their focus has often been on very different priorities. Not until after the turn of the millennium did they start to work more collaboratively on a framework of 'youth practice' incorporating youth work and training, youth research and youth policy. (Howard 2007, p. 57)*

*There are many histories of youth work in Europe as well as a more recent history of European-level youth work. Youth work is both complex and often misunderstood on account of that complexity. It is including reconciling youth research, policy and practice, making sense of different youth policy agendas (European, national, regional and local), establishing a position in cross-sectoral activity, as well as furthering pedagogical and methodological approaches to youth work. In today's Europe, youth work is guided and governed by principles of participation and empowerment, values of human rights and anti-discrimination and tolerance; it is informed by a range of policies and research knowledge. (Coussée, Verschelden, and Williamson 2009, p. 2)*

While a rich body of research informs youth politics in Europe, I found only one academic paper on China's youth policy (please see Ngan-Pun, Chau-Kiu, and Chi-Kei 2001) and none that look directly at the relationship between China's youth policy and youth civic engagement in policymaking. Many scholars study civic engagement in China, but they rarely connect it to China's youth policy: they instead study youth civic engagement through youth sport participation (Jin and Wiese-Bjornstal 1997), environmental program activism (Johnson, Johnson-Pynn, and Pynn 2007), the implications of mobile-based communication (Cheng, Liang, and Leung 2015) and media practices (Wallis 2011), and so on.

The much weaker theoretical and scholarly connection between China's youth policy and youth civic engagement, compared to European counterparts, might be linked to the empirical

reality that youth civic engagement in youth policy has been part of a clear strategic agenda for the revival of democracy in the West, where youth civic engagement is regarded as a substitute for conventional politics; in practice, both youth civic engagement and youth policy defend normative democratic values (Hüller 2007; Eimhjellen 2019; Krasny 2015; Wolfgang 2015; Naar M’fundisi-Holloway 2018). In stark contrast, the purpose of connecting youth civic engagement and youth policy in undemocratic or semi-democratic soil seems to be unclear, because it is hard to justify the insertion of youth civic engagement into the content of the youth policy when the political regime is not democratic. As a consequence, there is a striking contrast between the substantial study of youth policy and youth civic engagement in the West and the meager amount of scholarly effort in the East, let alone any comparative approach to the subject.

In order to find the proper justification for setting out the research agenda for the connection of youth policy and youth civic engagement in the non-western world, I have borrowed from **cultural-institutional congruence theory**, which originally derives from the democratic context with an academic purpose of searching for those civic values of **citizens** that are suited for **democratic institutions** (Eckstein 1966, 1988; Werlin and Eckstein 1990; Eckstein 1997; William 2013). Congruence theory is essentially a demand–supply model that expects democratic regimes to become stable when levels of citizen demand and institutional supply for democracy are in equilibrium (Shin 2007; Bratton and Houessou 2014; Fowler 2015; Fleischman and Solorzano 2018).

By contrast, I utilize as well as expand upon the congruence theory by asking which features of **youth** are suited to **political institutions, not necessarily for democratic end purposes, but for the purpose of stability, regardless of political regime type**. In this sense, I narrow