

China Through the Looking Glass: Exploring the Swedish China Image Through Framing

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Abstract

Building on the assumption that the image of China within the Swedish state is pluralist, the aim of this study is to explore this plurality through the lens of Pan Chengxin's paradigms "China threat" and "China opportunity". A second aim is to contribute to the theory by applying it in a different context compared to where it originated. This is explored through the method of frame analysis and interpretive text analysis. The study shows that the image is indeed pluralist and differs between entities. Frames that are commonly used by one entity are non-existent in texts by another. There are also differences in emphasis within frames and within entities. Understanding how China is framed and imagined in different parts of the Swedish state can be useful in itself as it helps us understand that the relationship between Sweden and China is complex and dynamic. Furthermore, the study shows that while Pan's paradigms can be a useful outset point, one cannot understand the Swedish image of China without also looking beyond them. The Swedish China image holds nuances unaccounted for by the theory, particularly in the perception of China as heterogenous to a higher extent than anticipated.

Keywords: *Framing, Sweden, China, National Images, Threat, Opportunity, Interpretive Text Analysis*

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1. Introduction

Ten years ago, I began studying the Chinese language. It was offered as an elective language course at my lower secondary school and I jumped at the chance. Since then, I have continued to study not only the Chinese language, but also its history and society. The topic of this thesis sprung out of personal observations and reflections over The People's Republic of China (PRC, henceforth China) and China watching during this decade. In the early years of my studies, the reaction I got when I talked about studying Chinese was overwhelmingly positive and excited. Learning Chinese was perceived as a great way to gain an upper hand in accessing a new and expanding market. I was told it would be a road to riches. As I recall, the media- and political attention was also leaning into the idea of China as an economic opportunity, and there was a great hopefulness regarding the future relationship between China and Sweden. National television news (TV4) even came to my high school to interview students of Chinese. The topic was why we had chosen to study this difficult language, what opportunities we thought it would grant us in the future, and what our thoughts were on the continuation and expansion of Chinese language studies in Swedish schools. Chinese and China was exiting in all the positive senses of the word.

During the latter half of my time as a student of Chinese, I experienced a shift in perspective. Instead of the excited and positive reactions I used to get when speaking about my studies, I am met with cautious interest. Instead of talking to me about all the money I could make, I am advised to look for work in the security sector. China is still perceived as interesting, but also threatening or dangerous. This perception does, as this study will show, also exist in some areas of the political sphere. Initially, it was this seemingly stark shift in the opinion and image of China that interested me. Upon realising that perhaps it was not only a matter of a generally shifting image of China- but also a matter of my context and what sources I looked to during any given period, I began investigating the China image in Sweden. This duality of opportunity and threat is not unique to my experience. Chengxin Pan argues that in the Western view of China the two themes, what he labels paradigms, "China threat" and "China opportunity" are dominant (Pan, 2012:7-8). He further claims that these paradigms build on Western neo-colonial desire, identity, fears and fantasies. Hence, they reveal more about the West than China (Ibid.:44).

Recently, this duality in the China image has come to light in Sweden through the government strategy on issues concerning China from 2019. In it, it is clearly stated that China is conducting intelligence operations against Sweden and attempts to counteract freedom of speech and expression in Sweden on matters relating to China (Skr. 2019/20:18:11). Regardless of this, an aim expressed in the strategy is to continue to develop and expand trade, export and investments with China. Promotion of Sweden and Swedish companies to China is also to be further developed (Ibid.:14). This example of duality does, at face value, correspond well to the bifocal paradigms of Pan and my personal observations, but is there more to the story? Pan studies the Western image of China by looking to English-language sources from mainly the USA, but also Great Britain and Australia. Since his scope is limited, he is wary of using the results to generalise too broadly (Pan, 2012:8-9). Using Pan's paradigms as a starting point, I will study the image of China in Sweden.

Since the duality of images can be found even in a state strategy, the state will be subject to analysis in this thesis. By analysing the differences in the framing of China within three different entities connected to the Swedish state, understanding can be gained of the complex and seemingly contradictory China image in Sweden. Some of the geographical and geopolitical limitations of Pan's theory can also be addressed.

1.1 Aim and Research Question

Building on the assumption that the image of China within the Swedish state is pluralist, the aim of this study is to explore this plurality through the lens of the paradigms "China threat" and "China opportunity". Additionally, describing the multiple competing frames presented by different state entities would contribute to the understanding of the seemingly opposing stances on China expressed in the government's national strategy document. Three different entities have been selected for analysis due to their expected differences in the framing of China: The Swedish Armed Forces, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Business Sweden. These entities will be presented in more detail in Chapter 4.2 Source Material.

Furthermore, this thesis aims to contribute to Pan's theory of paradigms by applying the theory to a different context. Sweden is a small state in northern Europe, not a great global power like the USA which is what Pan mainly based his theory on. Assuming that the China image is contextual, these differences between observers should lead to different perceptions of that

which is being observed. Understanding how the theory can be applied and where it might fall short in a different context will benefit future research into China watching.

To fulfil the research aim, the following questions will be investigated:

- 1: How is China framed by the selected Swedish state entities?
- 2: How do the paradigms of “China threat” and “China opportunity” relate to the Swedish context?

The aim is not to determine the “accuracy” of one frame over than another. Neither is it to explain why different frames originally developed. Instead, it is an exploration into the perception and framing of China within the context of the Swedish state.

1.2 East and West

When East or West is referenced in this study, the meaning of the words is separate from the cardinal directions. While not delving too deeply into the complexity and controversy of the terms and their meaning, I will clarify how they are used in this thesis. I have found myself in the same difficult situation as Pan when he writes,

Given its finite vocabulary, language is necessarily reductionist in its representation of an infinite world. It is in this context, as well as for stylistic reasons, that I have to employ such generalised, inherently problematic terms as ‘China watching’ and ‘Western representations’, even though I cannot emphasise enough that their specific usage here should never be misconstrued as an indictment to *all* China watchers or *all* Western representations of China (Pan, 2012:9, emphasis in original).

Similarly, I use the terms East and West not because they are perfect but because they are useful. Even without placing harsh boundaries on what it means for something to be Western or Eastern, the terms can be used to broadly capture how the two “sides” refer to and view each other. To paraphrase Kenneth. E. Boulding, the question regarding the ultimate definition of East and West is mightily problematic and complex, and will be neglected in this thesis (Boulding, 1959:125).

1.3 Disposition

The second chapter provides a review of previous research in the field. Beginning with an overview of national images and national image theory it then narrows to focus on research into China images in particular. The third chapter contains the theoretical foundation of the thesis in which Chengxin Pan's paradigms are outlined, followed by an introduction to framing as a theory. In the fourth chapter, frame analysis as a method and how is it applied in this thesis is presented. Additionally, the source material is introduced as well as a discussion regarding the trustworthiness of the research. The fifth chapter contains the main analysis and results of the study organised by frame. In the sixth and final chapter the conclusions are presented and the research questions are answered. This is followed by a discussion and suggestions for further research.

2. Previous Research

The first part of this chapter is dedicated to previous research into national image theory. The second part contains a literary review of studies of the Western China image. First giving a historical overview, which is followed by a review of USA- and hegemonically focused literature. Lastly, research on smaller states and their China image is presented.

2.1 National Images

Kenneth E. Boulding pioneered the research on images of other nations as core pieces of the international system. He argues that nations and their leaders do not act based on how other states behave, but on how that behaviour is perceived, writing:

We must recognize that the people whose decisions determine the policies and actions of nations do not respond to the "objective" facts of the situation, whatever that may mean, but to their "image" of the situation. It is what we think the world is like, not what it is really like, that determines our behaviour (Boulding, 1959:120).

He is careful to point out that images are complex, and even more so when attempting to connect them to actions. Nevertheless, Boulding constructs a simplified matrix to illustrate his ideas. His matrix rates nations' images of other nations on a one-dimensional scale between friendliness and hostility. This theoretical model can be used to illustrate the national image of one particular state, as well as the general hostility or friendliness within a group of states (Ibid.:125-128).

Martha L. Cottam later expanded on the simple model of Boulding. In Cottam's study on interventions in Latin America by the USA, she writes "Country images include at a minimum the enemy, the ally, the neutral, our dependent, and the enemy's dependent" (Cottam, 1994:19). According to Cottam, these images are derived from economic, military and cultural attributes of the viewed state, together with its perceived domestic policy and policy goals. These attributes are contextual; hence, a country image is not simply the sum of its parts. How one state perceives for example military power in itself will consequently shape how it perceives a state viewed as militarily powerful (Ibid.:19-20). Studying how national images affected the events in the Persian Gulf between the years 1977 and 1990, Richard K. Herrmann and Michael

P. Fischerkeller proposes a model with a different set of images. These are the enemy, the degenerate, the colony, the imperialist, and the ally. They then assign expected sets of actions for states depending on the images they have of each other (Herrmann & Fischerkeller, 1995:426, 435). Their model can well recount for images and the actions they lead to in the relationship between the USA and the Soviet Union, both great powers. However, it lacks in finesse and cannot accurately account for the connection between image and behaviour of the smaller regional states - Iran and Iraq (Ibid.:448).

Using pre-constructed models to attempt to explain the complexities of all of reality has significant weaknesses. Oversimplification and potentially overlooking the unexpected are present risks. Nevertheless, the theory's core, allowing images to play a key role in understanding the international system, is solid. In this study, images will be approached as a key component of the international system. However, Sweden will not be assigned a national image of China based on a few attributes which then will be used to predict action. Since Sweden is not a great power, approaching the question with a framework seemingly designed for one could lead the study astray. This connects to the study's aim of finding and illuminating different images of China present within the Swedish state.

Later scholars, for example Dell'Orto et al., have attempted to connect national images to the theory of framing. In their experimental study (conducted in the USA) they found that even subtle media frames can affect how a state is viewed by the reader. This is perceived to be contextual. They connect the sympathy expressed for people living in a state perceived as non-democratic to USA's contemporary foreign policy, which highlighted the saving of innocent people from tyrannical rulers. In another place or time, the image of a population in a state which image is non-democratic could look very different (Dell'Orto, et al., 2004:307-308). This study will focus on understanding and mapping frames, rather than investigating their impact. Nevertheless, Dell'Orto et al.'s study shows that framing can be a tool used to shape a national image, and thus, if approached in reverse, to understand a national image.

2.2 China Watching in the West

The West has viewed China from a distance for centuries. The images of China have changed with the times, sometimes even circling back to previous images. Understanding this foundation is crucial in understanding the contemporary images of China. As such, the first chapter in this

section will provide a brief historical account of China watching by the West. When looking at contemporary studies of China and the China image of other states, the most prominent images of China are from a perspective of, or in relation to, the USA. The USA is cast as the current hegemon and leader of the liberal world order. The image of China then, cannot be detached from the relation it has, or might have in the future, to the current world order and its leader. The second chapter will delve into different images of China that have been found in this context. The third chapter will take a closer look at studies of the China image from the perspective of small Western states, illuminating how their view of China relates to, and is different from, the USA's view.

2.2.1 Historical Images

Fengyuan Ji accounts for the changes in the Western perception of China from the fourteenth century onwards. Since then the image of China has undergone several changes. During the Middle Ages, China was generally viewed as a place of wonder and order, worthy of admiration. This shifted sharply during the Enlightenment when China was viewed as unmodern and unable to develop as well and quickly as Europe. As the West continued to regard itself at the forefront of modernity during the nineteenth- and early twentieth century, the image of China was one of a nation hopelessly stuck in the past (Ji, 2017:327-329). The discourse of China as inferior had begun as culturalist but morphed into racist discourse around the 1850s. Furthermore, the image became connected with fear; fear that China, together with Japan, would somehow be able to modernise enough to challenge the Europeans for world power. It is in this nineteenth-century discourse that the well-known image of China as “yellow peril” was first coined by the German Kaiser Wilhelm II (Ibid.:330-331). The nineteenth century was also the time when China watching and the academic study of China began to flourish in Sweden. Swedish sinologist Torbjörn Lodén describes that little attention was paid to contemporary China, as the scholars and adventurers venturing into “the Far East” were mostly concerned with gathering ancient treasures and texts (Lodén, 1994:9-12).

According to Ji, the Western image of China became more favourable after the First World War, as imperialism began to fall out of favour. After the founding of the People's Republic of China by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) the images of China in the West shifted again to that of a political enemy. Racist discourse referencing the “yellow peril” returned too. At the same time there also existed leftist counter narratives which glorified the CCP and their reforms;

China was again admired as a role model in these political spheres (Ji, 2017:333-334). Lodén describes how these leftist views were common within Swedish academia and politics. He recounts that he and many of his fellow scholars were deceived by the propaganda of the Cultural Revolution and lacked critical analysis (Lodén, 1994:22). Ji notes that since the beginning of the Chinese Reform Era in the late 1970's, a multitude of images of China have flourished in the West. As economic interdependence has grown so has the Western enthusiasm for the economic opportunities perceived to be available in China. The idea of China as a threat has also made a comeback since the 1990's economic expansion, notably absent since the American President Richard Nixon visited China in 1972 (Ji, 2017:334-335). As illustrated by this brief historical account, the Western China image has not been stable over time. Some images have persisted for centuries while other have waxed and waned with the political climate. Understanding that this imagining of China is dynamic and never absolute helps us study and contextualise current China images.

2.2.2 China Relative to the Liberal World Order and the USA

The image of China as a threat to the USA, and by extension to the liberal international order, is common. Herbert Yee and Ian Storey attempts to illuminate the theoretical origins of the "China threat" idea which they found prominent in Western IR scholarship. They argue that "China threat" is employed mainly by three theoretical positions. The first is the historical position, which holds that since the rise of great powers (for example nineteenth century Great Britain or twentieth century USA) historically has led to reformations of and instabilities within the international system. Hence, China rising like the great powers before it will also bring about instability as the current international system is challenged. The second theoretical position is the realist one, which holds that the rise and fall of great powers are central to altering and developing relations between states. Power-struggle between great powers is viewed as inevitable. The perceived rise of China must therefore be a threat to the hegemon the of current world order. The third theoretical position emphasises culture, mainly strategic culture. Here China's strategic culture is perceived as inherently expansionist. As such, China will follow its strategic culture and seek to expand its power and borders (Yee & Storey, 2004:6-9). Yee and Storey argue that economic and technological "threat" viewed as brought about by China's rise to a great power should be viewed as separate from the military and security aspects of threat. They instead regard the former as "competition", upholding that a too wide view of the concept of "threat" risks making the concept meaningless (Ibid.:10).

The perception of China as a rising power and thus a rival to the USA is not unique to the findings of Yee and Storey. This image, Aaron L. Friedberg argues, commonly underpins predictions of a great power war between the two states. He finds that China watchers he labels *realist pessimists* place a significant weight on China's power as rising and the perceived aims of China as expansionist, leading to a perceived intense security dilemma. Hence, war or conflict between the reigning hegemon and its perceived challenger is viewed as inevitable (Friedberg, 2005:39-41). Similarly, Oriana Skylar Mastro points to China eventually desiring to challenge the current international system out of dissatisfaction, together with its autocratic system of rule as the two main factors which could ignite a great-power war (Mastro, 2019:38).

Su-Mei Ooi and Gwen D'Arcangelis demonstrate the idea of "China threat" in practice in their study of the framing of China in news- and political discourse in the USA. They find that China is consistently framed as a potential enemy in three distinctive forms: a cheat, a thief, and a lawless bully (Ooi & D'Arcangelis, 2017:270). They conclude that,

China has, since the end of the Cold War, occupied a space in the US imaginary as the *potential* enemy Other (...) These images have been drawn from older tropes of the Yellow and Red Perils and also newer incarnations of the "sleeping" or "awakened" giant. As previous work has shown, such tropes have the ability to do the cultural work that shapes and justifies US policies (Ooi & D'Arcangelis, 2017:279, emphasis in original).

They thereby connect the frames they found, not only to historical Orientalist discourses but also to the justification of current political actions.

China is, however, not a bully or enemy in the eyes of all Western China watchers. The images of China in relation to the USA and liberalism are highly diverse. Friedberg has, for example, distinguished five groups of China watchers who do not perceive China as a direct existential threat to the USA or the current world order. These diverging perspectives serve to illustrate how the Western perception of China is connected to the fundamental ideological assumptions of the observer, perhaps even to a higher degree than they are connected to China. First, there are *realist optimists* who still place great emphasis on intentions and capabilities but argue that China's intentions are non-expansionist and its capabilities too weak to become a real threat to

the USA (Friedberg, 2005:25-27). Second, the *liberal pessimists* who place focus on internal affairs. China will probably develop into a democracy, they claim, but that does not automatically lead to stable and positive relationships with other states. There is a worry that Chinese nationalism will prevent the realisation of the expected positive outcomes of democratisation. Additionally, democracies tend to be hostile and suspicious toward non-democracies, which shapes how China is treated by the West and the USA. This suspicion is perceived as possibly hampering further democratic development (Ibid.:31-32).

Third, the *constructivist optimists* who hold that norms and beliefs are at the core of international relationships. The low-level interaction and dialogue that, according to this view, brought the Cold War to a peaceful close, can also keep China's rise peaceful and prosperous (Ibid.:36). Fourth, the *constructivist pessimists* who argue that since China is continuously viewed and thus also treated as a villain by the liberal West, it will act like one. Loss of trust or increased suspicion are self-reinforcing and will shape future interactions negatively (Ibid.:38). Fifth, Friedberg points to the *liberal optimists*, who see a causal chain between economic interdependence and peaceful global relationships. In this view, China becoming a democracy is not a matter of if, but when, as the perceived ties between economic growth and democratic rule are definite (Ibid.:41). Mastro also perpetuates an idea of negative peace between the USA and China, if China were to democratise. She further argues that a collapsed Chinese economy, rather than economic growth, could lead to a more peaceful relationship between China and the USA (Mastro, 2019:39).

Evidently, there are many competing and conflicting images of China in relation to the world order in modern scholarship and politics. Many of them are preoccupied with the future, rather than creating images of what China "is" currently. Shelley Wick argues that what China will be in the future not only hinges on Chinese motivations, but on its interactions with the USA (Wick, 2014:293). In this she is similar to Friedberg's both constructivist perspectives. Wick investigates the perceived ambivalence she finds in the foreign policy of the USA regarding China. China is not treated or spoken about as a full-fledged enemy, but neither is it approached as an ally or friend. As she studies perceptions of China experimentally, she finds that the political aspect of China is where most negative perceptions originate. Positive images of China, on the other hand, originates in perceptions of the economic or cultural aspects of China (Ibid.:291, 305-306).

2.2.3 China and Smaller States

Sweden is not a great power or a global hegemon, but a small state. This means that the positionality of Sweden is substantially different compared to that of the USA. While most studies on images of China centres around USA and China, there have been studies conducted in relation to small states too. Dragan Pavličević, for example, has studied the Serbian view on China from the perspective of Pan's paradigms. He finds that both "China threat" and "China opportunity" are clearly present within the Serbian media and politics, but that some aspects seem to differ due to the particular regional context of Central and Eastern Europe. He finds that economic growth and prosperity expected from Chinese investments mirror the idea of "China opportunity". Strong economic ties to China are placed in a narrative of development and closing the economic gap to the rest of Europe, mainly the EU. The chance of greater international and geopolitical influence is viewed as partially tied to the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with hopes of it catapulting Serbia into a favourable position for foreign investments. Meanwhile, the narrative of China as a threat is also present. Pavličević finds that there is widespread suspicion that Chinese investments are a path to illicit influence, rather than the win-win cooperation it is presented as. The Serbian ties to the EU are also viewed as in jeopardy if China gains too much political and economic influence (Pavličević, 2018:962-965). The difference between the threat of great power struggle emphasised as central within Pan's notion of "China threat" is here reimagined through concerns of a different nature. War is not on the table, but financial losses and damaged ties to the EU are. Much of the Serbian image as found by Pavličević centres on a tug-of-war between either approaching China or a future EU-membership, which are viewed as fundamentally opposed. Sweden is already a member of the EU; hence this central political tension cannot be directly applied to the Swedish context regardless of other similarities.

Sibo Chen and Shane Gunster, who studied the image of China in the independent media British Columbia in Canada, make similar findings to Pavličević. They describe the images of China as "Janus" after the two-faced, multifaceted Roman god. While they find that negative images of China are more common than positive images, both types of frames are highly used. Writing about China they conclude that,

On one hand, it has been framed as a powerful, foreign entity that unduly influences Canada's economic policies and decisions on energy infrastructure. On the other hand, it has been framed as an inspirational global leader in

renewable energy and, increasingly, in global climate negotiations (Chen & Gunster, 2019:445).

In his review of the general European China image, Joachim Glaubtiz finds that there are many factors relating to China that are viewed as threatening or concerning. Militarily, China is not viewed as posing a direct threat but is more of a geographically distant concern. Concerns that are often brought up in political dialogue with China by European states are human rights, environmental pollution, and organised crime. In all of these aspects, there is a push for China to do more and take more responsibility by European states (Glaubtiz, 2004:118, 122, 124-125). While not threats per se, the image of China as a perpetrator of these things is a negative one. Even for Glaubtiz though, there is not just negativity. He concludes his chapter with the hopeful statement that China could “gradually become an integrated part of the international community, and that this process will also improve the domestic political culture” (Ibid.:128).

3. Theory

This chapter begins with a presentation of Pan's paradigms and their ontological underpinnings. A brief overview of framing as a theory follows.

3.1 Pan's Bifocal Paradigms

Based on post-colonialism and the concept of othering, Chengxin Pan argues in his 2012 book *Knowledge, Desire and Power in Global Politics: Western representations of China's rise*, that China is observed and understood by the West through the lenses of two fundamental images – “China threat” and “China opportunity”. He calls these images paradigms since “both are particular, widely (albeit not universally) shared normative concerns and cognitive habits, which determine certain acceptable ways of making sense of China and facilitate the production of knowledge along those lines” (Pan, 2012:22). He further describes the paradigms as expressions of Western “fears and fantasies” (Ibid.:42). In Pan's analysis the truth or falsehood of these paradigms and the image they produce of China is largely irrelevant. Instead the focus is on how the images of China in the West are self-representations rather than representations of China in itself. Moreover, the paradigms of “China threat” and “China opportunity” also give meaning to the research and political discourse on China. The paradigms are not just a tool for researchers and politicians to make sense of or explain reality, they also constitute reality (Ibid.:10).

3.1.1 “China Threat”

Pan divides the “China threat” paradigm into two subcategories of discourse. The first category is labelled “capability-based China threat” and is based on the core assumptions of structural realism. In this discourse, China's rapidly growing economy and increasing military budget are together perceived as a direct threat to the global power of the USA. Thus, since China is perceived as possessing the capabilities to pose a threat, it automatically becomes one (Pan, 2012:25-27). The second category is “intention-focused China threat”. The main security concern in this reading is that China is not a democracy but instead ruled by one authoritarian party. This is perceived as a threat against the Western values of democracy and liberalism. Additionally, Chinese nationalism and the difference in culture compared to the West has given rise to the belief that China must inevitably challenge the USA for global hegemony at some point in the near future (Ibid.:28-30).

Pan argues that “China threat” is closely connected to the American military-industrial complex, and its search for a new state enemy after the Soviet Union collapsed. The fear that came to manifest in the image of China as a threat could, he writes, turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Leaning into the constructivist notion that China will develop into what it is treated as, Pan upholds that continuous treatment of China as nothing but an enemy and villain could be what leads to China becoming an enemy (Ibid.:85). This is not to say that Pan negates Chinese agency in the construction of the “China threat” paradigm. On the contrary, he understands the paradigm as a sum of mutually responsive and constitutive actions of different parties. In his view, “China threat” places the sole blame of the tit-for-tat cycle of animosity on China for “being threatening”. His point is, essentially, that it takes two to tango, and that the USA (and the West in general) needs to be mindful of how their actions in the international arena affect China. Mutual suspicion cannot be one-sided, after all (Ibid.:106-107).

3.1.2 “China Opportunity”

By contrast, the “China opportunity” paradigm paints a rosier picture. Pan explains that there are three main opportunities generally referenced with regards to China in the West, economic, political and international. The economic opportunity is often illustrated by the image of a new expanding market with more than one billion potential customers. Moreover, cheap labour and high-quality infrastructure contribute to China being perceived as “the world’s workshop”. The dual image consisting of both a nearly endless line of new customers and an abundance of low-wage laborers has enticed Western enterprises and investors alike since the industrial revolution. The political opportunity follows liberal logic in upholding that since China is growing richer and more developed economically, it will naturally also grow more democratic and liberal politically (Pan, 2012:31-33). The international opportunity centres on China becoming a “responsible stakeholder” in the current USA-dominated world order. By filling this assigned role and engaging in international institutions China would, this paradigm holds, increase economic and democratic opportunity even further. Resting on the idea of interdependence and international norms as keys to peace and prosperity, the international opportunity draws on constructivist and neoliberal institutionalist understandings of international relations (Ibid.:37-38).

Pan argues that this paradigm is founded on false premises. “China opportunity” tends to treat China and the West/USA as dichotomous homogenous entities ordered hierarchically with the

West/USA as the centre. China is viewed as a passive object orbiting ever closer to the modern and liberal world that is the West/USA, without having much agency of its own. China will eventually be fully integrated, and “the other” will become “like us” (Ibid.:110-111). These premises are false, he argues,

Since the West and China are not homogeneous wholes, we can no longer assume a neat bilateral relationship of the Western/American knowing subject transforming a passive Chinese object. International relations, like human relations more generally, are always intersubjective. Intersubjectivity means, among other things, the existence of agency on the part of all actors, who are able to interpret, appropriate, and/or resist the influence from the other in accordance with their ‘own’ subjectivity (Pan, 2012:115).

As such, “China opportunity” is a liberal dream that cannot come true as envisioned. Nevertheless, it informs the image of China and the political choices relating to that image (Ibid.:128).

3.2 Framing - Origins and Key Concepts

Framing can be both a theory and a method, then called frame analysis. In this chapter the theoretical foundations of framing and the relevance of the theory to this thesis are presented. How frame analysis as a method is approached and applied is outlined in chapter four.

The concept of framing in the social sciences comes from sociology and was pioneered by Erving Goffman in his 1974 book *Frame Analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. In it, Goffman theorizes that it is through the act of framing (conscious or not) that humans understand, or make sense, of the world around them. He explains,

I assume that when individuals attend to any current situation, they face the question: "What is it that's going on here?" Whether asked explicitly, as in times of confusion and doubt, or tacitly, during occasions of usual certitude, the question is put and the answer to it is presumed by the way the individuals then proceed to get on with the affairs at hand (Goffman, 1974:8).

The response to the question “What is it that’s going on here?” depends on the framework, or primary frame, that an individual perceives a given situation to be part of. Based on the

framework employed the individual will perceive background information such as the agency and will of the participants in a particular way. The framework informs how the situation is identified and labelled, and thus also what actions are or are not appropriate (Ibid.:21-22). According to Goffman, reality is what we make of it. Everyday life, which is his focus in the study, is made up of patterns and roles governed by the frames they are perceived through. Through framing, how something is *perceived to be* also becomes the way it simply *is* (Ibid.: 560-563).

From this largely subconscious understanding of the world, framing has also evolved to encompass conscious efforts to affect other's perceptions of reality, including framing of political issues. David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford studied participant mobilization and collective action through framing to understand the potency of such movements. To them, framing "provides a conceptual handle" when studying how political movements reach consensus and then act according to that consensus (Snow & Benford, 1988:199). This rests on the ontological assumption that meaning is produced through interaction and therefore cannot be taken for granted (Ibid.:198). Robert M. Entman similarly connects framing to political power as he argues that politicians utilize frames to win public support. To him, framing analysis a tool used to illuminate how humans can influence each other's consciousness through speech or text. The concept of framing then centres on two terms, salience and selection. To frame is to *select* an aspect of something and make it *salient* in communication. He upholds that if a frame reaches salience and becomes widely accepted it is both risky and difficult for political opponents to attempt to alter it (Entman, 1993:51-52, 55). Hence, framing is not only a useful tool, but a requirement for successful political communication (Entman, 2003:417).

There have been several attempts to conceptualise and concretise framing by distilling it into a list of tasks. Snow and Benford listed three such tasks, namely: problem diagnosis, suggestion of solution, and a call to act in accordance with the proposed solution (Snow & Benford, 1988:199). Entman builds on the work by Snow and Benford when he expands this concretisation to include four tasks rather than three. His proposed tasks of framing are: defining a problem, diagnosing the problem, make moral judgements regarding the cause of the problem, and present solutions to the problem (Entman, 2003:417; Entman, 1993:52-53). In this thesis, such distillations of framing will not be applied directly, as that would constrain the interpretation of the material to a high extent. Nevertheless, understanding these tasks broadly is helpful in illuminating the central aspects of framing.

While Pan uses the word paradigm rather than frame when he maps the images and imaginings of China in the West, the two concepts overlap. The paradigms can therefore be approached as competing frames. According to Martin Rein and Donald Schön, there will always be competition over frames and the framing of political issues in democratic policy making. Competition over frames in this context is also is competition over both meaning and funding or resources (Rein & Schön, 1996:95-97). Furthermore, competing frames mean that any “facts” and “evidence” presented related to a policy issue can be used by both competing sides to further their own cause. This is a consequence of the fundamental differences in perception of reality that is held in competing frames (Rein & Schön, 1991:265). As Sweden is a democracy it is expected that competing frames will be found in the political perception of China.

Merlijn van Hulst and Dvora Yanow revisits the combined works of Rein and Schön and finds that framing competitions can remain unresolved and seemingly unsolvable if the fundamental differences in frames are not acknowledged. Understanding of frames, like understanding of culture, is often tacit. Only through reflecting on these underlying understandings of meaning can resolution be possible, they suggest (van Hulst & Yanow, 2016:96). The theory of framing allows for insight into and understanding of that which might otherwise go unnoticed. By investigating and analysing what meaning each of the frames/paradigms hold in a Swedish context we can uncover the underlying assumptions about China that are unique to this setting. Because, as shown in previous research, the image of China is contextual.

4. Method

This chapter begins with a description of frame analysis as a method and of how it is applied in this study. This is followed by a presentation and discussion of the source material and its trustworthiness before addressing the trustworthiness and limitations of the thesis as a whole.

4.1 Frame Analysis

Frame analysis is, as D'Angelo et al. puts it, "at its core, the interpretation of language" (D'Angelo, et al., 2019:18). The authors further highlight that interpretation is different from coding. They place language as the dominating factor, and explicit and detailed attention to it as the most important features of a meaningful frame analysis (Ibid.:18). Interpretive text analysis which rests on the abductive logic of inquiry is the method through which this study's research questions will be investigated. Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow explain that "the abductive logic of inquiry that characterizes interpretive research rests on the idea that researchers will learn more about their research question in the process of conducting their research" (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012:34). Hence, it is important to begin the analysis with an open mind. Allowing text and theory to, in tandem, lead the analysis to its results means that the search for evidence should not be narrowed down too much before the initial analysis.

As outlined in Chapter 3.2, there are multiple ways to define what a frame is and what it does. With the open-ended approach of interpretive text analysis in mind, following any of these set of criteria blindly risks overlooking that which is not explicitly included, but could still be understood as constituting of a frame. Therefore, a broad understanding of the concept of frames guides the analysis. Framing is combined with the paradigms of Pan to form the theoretical foundation of this thesis. The reading and interpretation of the selected text are as such conducted with attention to how the generated frames relate to Pan's paradigms. This is not to say that frames which differ from the paradigms will be excluded, only that their relationship to the paradigms will be at the centre of the interpretation.

On a practical level, the analysis begun with reading the texts and interpreting the images of China that appeared in them. No frames apart from the broad context of Pan's paradigms were defined prior to reading. Instead they were developed in the process of the interpretation, meaning that they were often dynamic and shifting as more and more material was analysed. After the initial analysis of the texts had been conducted, key passages and quotes were read

again, and the interpretation refined by the knowledge of frames and images gathered during the initial analysis. Similar images were as a result clustered together into more comprehensive frames. The relationship between the frames and Pan's paradigms was continuously analysed and considered. Much like the generation and compilation of the frames themselves, this was a dynamic process.

In selecting the theory of framing as the theoretical starting point for this thesis, using frame analysis as a method naturally followed. No other method would have been coherent with the selected theory. If the topic had been studied solely through Pan's paradigms as the theoretical anchor, other methods could have been applied – for example discourse analysis. Haste et al. write that discourse “frames meaning making because the narrative both makes sense of events and situations, but also justifies why this interpretation is appropriate, and why certain subsequent actions are inevitable—or obligatory—consequences” (Haste, et al., 2015:317). Thus, they place discourses very close to frames. Nevertheless, since the aim is to study how the image of China is constructed and framed by the Swedish state rather than how the discourse on China has shifted over time, or how the positionalities of the different entities affect their agency and power, framing analysis is a more suitable tool. It is, however, difficult to argue that discourse analysis, if coupled with an appropriate theory, would be directly unsuitable for this type of research.

4.2 Source Material

As mentioned previously, the three following entities within the Swedish state were selected for analysis: The Swedish Armed Forces, the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Business Sweden. Business Sweden is an organisation owned jointly by the Swedish government and the Swedish business sector. Their tasks are commissioned by the government. The three entities can be approached as a spectrum where the Swedish Armed Forces are expected to produce a frame closer to China as a threat, and Business Sweden a frame closer to China as an opportunity. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the centre of Swedish foreign policy and is thus expected to balance both perspectives, economy and security, in their produced frames. These expectations are based on how the respective entities describe their mission and responsibilities, outlined below.

The mission of the Swedish Armed Forces is to “defend Sweden and the country's interests, our freedom and the right to live the way of our choice” (Swedish Armed Forces, n.d). The key

point is defence, and not necessarily of territory but also values and interests. Business Sweden has a very different focus when describing their entity as having “a mandate and a mission to help international companies gain access to the Swedish market and help domestic ones utilize it as a platform for expansion” (Business Sweden, n.d). This mission is fixated on economic gains and the financial market. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a comparatively broad duty as it is “responsible for Sweden’s foreign, development, cooperation and trade policy” (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs , n.d).

To select material from these entities for analysis the online search function was used on their respective website. The searched term was “Kina” (Swedish for “China”). For Business Sweden and the Armed Forces, no filter was used. For the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the search was conducted by searching the Government Offices of Sweden’s website and selecting the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a filter. Web-television and remittances were excluded through filtering since web-television is not text material, and remittances are addressed to the Ministry instead of from it. Initially, the Armed Forces produced 77 hits, Business Sweden 72 hits and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs 259 hits. Any material predating the year 2015, or lacking a date, was then excluded. Limiting the analysis to the last five years still left abundant material, while focusing on the current state of frames rather than investigating historical material. Any material where the entity in question was not the sole producer was also excluded since it would lead to difficulties in assessing whether the produced frame truly is representative of the framing by the entity in question.

After this further narrowing, 31 documents from the Armed Forces, 41 from Business Sweden, and 114 from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs remained. To reduce the material to a size suitable for text analysis, whilst being mindful of how the researcher’s influence on material selection can affect the analysis and conclusion, the choice was made to use word-search and count the number of times “China” (or “Kina” if the material was in Swedish) appeared in each of the remaining documents. The five documents containing the highest number of mentions per entity were selected for analysis. This method was selected in favour of choosing texts based on topic. While selecting based on a topic might ensure texts which centre on seemingly relevant information, the risk is that unforeseen relevant material is excluded unjustly. Additionally, since the three entities generally cover different topics as a part of the frames they utilise, the trustworthiness of the analysis would suffer under topic-based selection. It was also assumed that texts mentioning “China” a high number of times would have China as the main theme,

rather than simply mention it in passing. The texts selected from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs range in mentions of China from 78 to 13. Two texts had the same number of mentions at 13 each and were both included to avoid arbitrary exclusion. Hence, six texts from the Ministry are analysed. Five texts are included from Business Sweden ranging in mentions of China between 297 and 77. Five texts are also included from the Armed Forces in which mentions of China range from 19 to seven. Only four of the selected texts are originally in English while the remaining texts are in Swedish. Swedish is my mother tongue and I am proficient in English; thus, I have been able to read and interpret them in their original language. When the texts in Swedish are quoted in the analysis, I have translated the used quote into English.

Immediately striking is the sheer difference in volume regarding how much relevant content related to China is produced by the different entities. While Business Sweden produced the lowest number of initial hits - the mentions of China in the selected material far outnumber both the Armed Forces and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Business Sweden has published several full reports on different aspects of China and its business climate, topics as different as the BRI and e-commerce in China are investigated and presented. Four such reports are included in this study. The last selected text from Business Sweden is a report on crisis management and possible future crisis scenarios. The analysed texts from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is made up of two reports on human rights regarding China and Hong Kong respectively, two annotated agendas, a press release and an op-ed, which shows a wider variety of material. While the Ministry produced the highest number of texts mentioning China, the majority only mentioned China once. The Armed Forces publish comparatively little about China. Four of the analysed texts are general defence reports, either yearly reports or as results of larger studies. They mention China so sparingly that the last text selected, a news article, only references China as a geographical location in which a global military sports-competition is to be hosted (Eriksson, 2019).

The empirical material used is publicly available. Consequently, it is material that the studied entities have knowingly published with the intent that it be read by, at least parts of, the general public. Rather than this being a hindrance in the context of frame analysis, I would argue it is an advantage. Since what is studied is not the texts at face value, but an interpretation of the frames and meaning-making which underpins them, biases and discrepancies are the most significant elements. However, as Entman points out, framing as salience is a communicative act between text and audience. This means that the presence of a frame does not in itself

guarantee that, or how, the audience is impacted (Entman, 1993:53). This study will focus only on the frames produced and not on the influence they might exert on an audience. This is in line with the aim; since how different state entities frame China, rather than how the public is affected by these framings is the interest of the study.

4.3 Trustworthiness

As interpretivist research rests on “phenomenological–hermeneutic sense-making”, the positivist variables of research assessment such as validity and reliability are not adequate tools for assessing interpretivist research (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012:91-92). Interpretivist logic opposes the idea that the researcher can be fully separated from that which is researched. When studying the sense-making and meaning-making of others, the researcher also becomes part of that process. The aim when conducting trustworthy research is hence not to attempt to limit or disregard researcher presence, but rather to transparently and reflexively embrace it as part of the research (Ibid.:98). Dvora Yanow maintains that interpretivist policy researchers should

attempt to establish and maintain an awareness of how their own lived experiences shape and filter what they attend to in the research project, what they observe and to what they might be "blinded," what question they ask (and don't), what they are told - and what might be being kept from them, who talks to them and who doesn't, and so forth (Yanow, 2007:114).

Reflecting on my own positionality it becomes obvious that the topic selected for this study is rooted in personal experience and interest. As described in the first chapter, I am a student of Chinese and have been for some time. The topic for this study can therefore be said to have been selected out of both personal and academic curiosity. I do not strive for objectivity, as that is impossible. My positionality as, among other things, a Swedish university student of politics and war does unequivocally affect how I interpret the texts in this study. It goes almost without saying that another analyst would bring attention to elements of the material that I overlook, and vice versa. Nevertheless, through reflexivity and transparency, the research is made trustworthy.

This study and the conclusions drawn are limited to the Swedish state. While noting that not all entities of the Swedish state have been studied, this study is expected to broadly encapsulate tendencies within it. Wide generalisations are not advised, and narrower ones only with great

caution and attention to contextuality. This study is one of understanding and exploring rather than explaining and providing a checklist of variables and factors for future researchers to go by.

5. Analysis

This analysis is divided into three main chapters. The first chapter concerns the generated frames related to “China threat” and the second those related to “China opportunity”. Differences between the three Swedish entities are presented together with how the generated frames relate to the broader paradigms. The third subsection is a summary.

5.1 “China Threat” in Sweden

This chapter is divided into two parts, as I have identified two frames related to “China threat” in the analysed texts. The first frame is *China as Risk* which has much in common with “China threat”, but also differs based on the contextuality and positionality of Sweden. The second frame is *China as Oppressor*, which has common strokes with “China threat” but emphasises an aspect of viewing China that Pan has not accounted for in his paradigm – namely sympathy for the Chinese population and disapproval of China based on how the government treats the populous.

5.1.1 China as Risk

China as Risk is a frame that is present in texts from all three entities in some way, however, it features most prominently in the texts from The Swedish Armed Forces. The frame I have labelled *China as Risk* is closely related to the “China threat” paradigm in that China is perceived as gaining military or economic power which in turn could negatively affect the liberal international world order. While “China threat” highlights this as a direct threat to the great power and hegemon USA, *China as Risk* as seen in the Swedish context is a more indirect framing. Sweden is not a great power. As such, the threat that China may pose to the USA is not a direct threat to Sweden, Swedish global power or the Swedish state. Rather than China being an immediate threat, the great power politics of China are described more in terms of risk. Furthermore, the Chinese actions in the international arena are presented as intertwined with the actions of the USA, together constituting a risky environment. The following passage from the Swedish Armed Forces depicts this aspect of the frame:

Asia and especially China’s growing political and economic power is of fundamental significance when it comes to changes in the international system. Both China and Russia are in different ways attempting to challenge the leading role of the USA in world politics. The development of the

relationship between China and the USA is the single most important factor regarding the global geopolitical and geo-economic development of the foreseeable future (Swedish Armed Forces, 2020:32, my translation).

China and its growing power need to be monitored as the development of global great power politics will affect Sweden in some way. Uncertainty is at the core of this frame, which is another reason I have labelled it a risk rather than a threat in this analysis.

China as Risk holds aspects of both capability-based and intention-focused “China threat”. The Swedish Armed Forces frames China’s intentions and capabilities as connected, together leading to the outcome of potential global instability and change, writing “China’s growth *and* ambitions lead to challenges for the current world order” (Swedish Armed Forces, 2020:48, my emphasis and translation). It is the combination of perceiving China as having the means and power to act, while also intending to act in a way not consistent with the current liberal world order that makes China a risk according to the Armed Forces. This passage also highlights what is at stake for the Swedish Armed Forces, namely the “current world order”. China thus poses a risk to something immaterial rather than something more concrete like Swedish citizens or borders. Furthermore, the Swedish Armed Forces describe how a multipolar world order is under development. They perceive Russia and China as the challengers to the hegemonic USA in both geopolitical- and value-based aspects of power (Swedish Armed Forces, 2018:19).

It is also evident that the Armed Forces view China and Russia differently. In the quote above they are both framed as antagonists to the USA, but Russia is much more than that. Russia is anticipated to remain the “dominant security challenge in the Swedish vicinage” until at least the year 2035 (Swedish Armed Forces, 2016:17, my translation). By contrast, China is rarely referenced in terms of a current threat, rather it is something looming in the future. China is for example described as “wanting to develop into an actor who is involved in shaping the rules of the global arena” (Swedish Armed Forces, 2019:32, my translation), rather than as an actor who already has that type of influence and power. However, China is often bundled up with Russia as the two main actors opposing the USA-led liberal world order, as in the following example:

The power balance of the world has undergone a shift which has led to a move from a unipolar to a multipolar power balance. The relative economic and

military power of the USA has been reduced, while that of for example China and Russia has increased (Swedish Armed Forces, 2016:12, my translation).

Since Russia is often referenced as a threat to Sweden, the connection that is made between the two states strongly suggests that China also belongs in that category. In this context there is also room for othering, we- the liberal West, against them- the anti-liberal East.

The frame *China as Risk* is also present in writing from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but in these cases, the explicit connection to great power politics and the USA is much weaker. The frame is also much rarer than in texts from the Armed Forces where it was the most prominent frame, only appearing a handful of times over the analysed texts. To the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the risk China poses is a risk to liberal values beyond its borders. To be sure, the risk as seen by the Armed Forces is also value-based, as the liberal international system is that which is at risk rather than for example territory. However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not relate this risk to the USA as does the Armed Forces. Rather, it frames China as actively pursuing its own value-based agenda regardless of other great powers. An example of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs using *China as Risk* in this way can be seen in the following quote:

China is actively conducting politically motivated research into human rights as part of a global ambition to alter the meaning of the concept, not least within the UN, and among other things move the focus from individual rights to “collective rights” (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019a:18, my translation).

The risk here is the redefinition of the concept of human rights to no longer encompass individual rights as they are known today. This is mainly intention-focused, as it connects to the perceived political will of China to alter and affect matters in the international arena.

Business Sweden also frames *China as Risk*, but like for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it is a rare occurrence. It is only used in a report meant to illustrate possible future risk scenarios in which global trade is negatively affected. One of these fictive scenarios is a trade-war between China and the USA, in which military provocation is also present. In this case, it is the relationship between the two great powers that pose a risk to trade if it were to deteriorate, rather than China being a risk in and of itself (Business Sweden, 2017:5). This is similar to the

great power politics aspect underlined by the Armed Forces in their view of *China as Risk*. However, whereas the Armed Forces make clear that the USA is an ally and China the potential adversary, Business Sweden seemingly holds the great power relationship as mutual and does not show clear animosity towards either side.

Interestingly, Business Sweden also seems to present a counter frame to the *China as Risk* frame on a few occasions. This counter frame acknowledges that China is viewed as a risk or threat in many global contexts but upholds that there are two sides to every story; and that China denies having any geostrategic ambitions. In relation to the BRI, Business Sweden lets the perspective of the Chinese government defend against any concerns regarding possible ulterior motives. In a section opened with a quote from the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi denying any geostrategic motives behind BRI, the following is written: “The Chinese government denies that the Belt and Road Initiative carries any geopolitical intentions, emphasizing that it aims to “build a community with a shared future for mankind together with other countries around the globe”” (Business Sweden, 2019a:7). While interpretations of BRI from other states are also presented at other points in the text, China’s voice is the clearest. This shows that Business Sweden is aware of the framing of China as a risk or threat based on China’s perceived global ambitions and growing capabilities. So much so that they feel the need to counteract that frame. Potentially this is related to Business Sweden’s mission – promoting Swedish trade and investments. Reproducing a frame of risk could negatively impact their ability to successfully act in accordance with that mission. Promoting a counter narrative could thus be an attempt to balance the negative images produced by other actors.

The only cases in which China is referenced as a more direct threat, rather than a risk residing in the future, is in relation to cyberspace and cyberespionage. In two of the analysed text from the Armed Forces, China is described as conducting intelligence operations against Sweden (Swedish Armed Forces, 2020:62; Swedish Armed Forces, 2019:37). This topic is not touched upon in the analysed texts from the other entities.

5.1.2 China as Oppressor

China as Oppressor is the most common frame in texts by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Notably, the two texts containing the highest number of mentions of “China” were reports on human rights, democracy and rule of law in mainland China and Hong Kong respectively. Not

only is China and the Chinese government framed as oppressors but the situation regarding issues of human rights is also commonly described as worsening, which will be shown in this analysis. The Armed Forces do not use the frame often, but they too note the oppressive tendencies of the Chinese government, and express that the CCP has been cracking down harder on political opponents and critics in recent years (Swedish Armed Forces, 2019:32).

The first page of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' report on human rights in China neatly summarises the general frame of *China as Oppressor* as it is used by the Ministry.

The Chinese constitution guarantees freedom of opinion, speech, press, organisation, gatherings, demonstration and religion. However, in practice all freedoms are restricted to varying degrees. Especially the freedoms of organisation, information and speech as well as the rights of minorities have been reduced in recent years. Even though private media is in large supply, the party holds significant influence over what is allowed to be published or shown. Media is used to control and govern public opinion (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019a:1, my translation).

This is just one example of many similarly written paragraphs. The rest of the report expands on the restriction of the aforementioned rights in different contexts. One issue that receives much attention is the situation in regions mainly inhabited by ethnic or religious minorities. Oppressive methods like restrictions in teaching local languages (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019a:17), travel restrictions (Ibid.:21) and banning of religious dress (Ibid.:13) are acknowledged and explained. Hong Kong experiencing reduced autonomy resulting in, for example, increased self-censorship and more difficult working conditions for both domestic and foreign journalists are also highlighted (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019b:1).

It is noteworthy that the domestic aspect of China and the treatment of the Chinese population by its government is lacking in the paradigms drawn up by Pan. He underscores how the West tends to view China as homogenous and not differentiate between state and population. If such a differentiation is made, it often portrays the Chinese government as fragile or not truly Chinese, while casting the population as helplessly longing for freedom (Pan, 2012:110). In the Swedish context, this is not the case. On the contrary, the oppressive rule of the CCP is at the forefront of the China image for the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, without casting either

the government or the population in the stereotypical roles found by Pan. This implies that the Ministry is more capable to separate “China” into different subcategories like “government” and “population”, while still maintaining that both are Chinese, than assumed by the theory.

There is, however, little explicit critique of the Chinese government and its actions. The reports mainly feature explanations of what the Chinese government is doing and how that affects the rights of its population. The reader is then left to draw their own, not too far-fetched, conclusions that this type of disrespect for liberal human rights is considered bad by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Nevertheless, there are some instances in which the Ministry does take a clear stand against the oppressive methods of the Chinese government. Note in particular the uncommonly strong wording of the last sentence in the following paragraph about the treatment of the Uighur population in Xinjiang:

A very large number of people are held in extrajudicial so-called re-education camps in Xinjiang. Freedom of movement for people belonging to certain minorities, especially Uighur Muslims, is limited regarding travel both within and outside of China. Pressure is exerted against people living abroad with connections to Xinjiang. Foreign journalists and diplomats are routinely supervised when visiting the region, which makes the possibilities of conducting independent evaluations difficult. In practice, China’s policy in Xinjiang is disproportionately strict and contributes to extensive discrimination based on ethnicity or religion (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019a:21, my translation).

While it is evident that the actions of the Chinese government are not approved of by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the explicit critique does not go further than that in any of the analysed documents. In an annotated agenda regarding a meeting between EU’s Foreign Ministers, it is explained that the Swedish government will “express concern regarding the human rights situation in China (...) and China’s treatment of the Swedish citizen Gui Minhai” (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020a:my translation). Even in an instance where China is not present, the words used to describe what the Ministry of Foreign Affairs thinks about China and human rights are quite restrained.

China as Oppressor is notably absent from the frames used by Business Sweden. Things that are noted as, at least concerning, in the texts by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs like internet censorship (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019a:11), are treated only as business inconveniences. It is, for example, warned against using an international website as an online store in China, “If running an international website, aforementioned obstacles are slow loading times and the risk of the Chinese consumer not being able to reach your site due to the “Great firewall of China”” (Business Sweden, 2018:35). The “Great Firewall” is not critiqued or explored further, only mentioned as a minor hick-up easily avoided by businesses wanting to access the Chinese market and its customers. Another example of this is the change of the one-child policy to a two-children policy. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs upholds that even though Chinese couples now are allowed to have two children, “the right to sexual- and reproductive health and -rights are restricted through the general family-planning policy” (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019a:16, my translation). Business Sweden, on the other hand, frames the abolishment of the one-child policy as an opportunity to sell more baby products and toys as the birthrate is expected to rise. There is no mention of the fact that the government’s family-planning policies are still in effect, only slightly loosened (Business Sweden, 2018:23).

It should also be noted that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs not only mentions the more explicitly oppressive actions taken by the Chinese government against its citizens; they also provide examples of social policies negatively impacts its citizens regardless of motivation. The Hukou-system¹, for example, faces explicit criticism for how it restricts education, healthcare and social services, especially for migrant workers and their children. It is acknowledged that the government is attempting to improve the situation, but also that many challenges remain (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019a:10, 20, 24). While this is perhaps not outright oppressive, it is still an example of how the Ministry of Foreign Affairs paints the government of China in a negative light in terms of providing the best possible life for the citizens of China. Whether the cause of, for example, restricted access to education is oppressive policies or bad governance might not be the main point. The main point is that the citizens of China are not living the free lives the Ministry of Foreign Affairs believes they are entitled to.

¹ Hukou is a part of the Chinese system of population registration, in which every person is registered to their home province. If one is not registered, for example a hidden second child under the one-child policy, one cannot access public healthcare or schooling. A registered individual can access these services, but only in the province they are registered in. Changing Hukou registration is a complicated process. Hukou can in a simplified manner be thought of in terms of a domestic passport.

5.2 “China Opportunity” in Sweden

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section delves into the frame *China as Profit* which matches up closely to Pan’s economic opportunity. The second section focuses on the frame *China as Future* which somewhat correlates to the international opportunity of Pan, while also containing elements of techno-Orientalism. The third and last section is devoted to exploring how Pan’s view of “China opportunity” as a false promise shines through in the analysed texts.

5.2.1 China as Profit

One of the most common frames used by Business Sweden is the frame *China as Profit*. In this frame, China is presented as a source of financial profit to Swedish companies and an important market to expand into. This is consistent with the economic opportunity outlined by Pan. There are a few different ways in which this is done. One way is framing China as a source of millions, if not over a billion, potential customers with many millions of RMB to spend. Statistics and large numbers are often used to express how Swedish companies are profiting off the Chinese market, for example:

Furthermore, when looking at the total sales of Swedish companies in China – a broader measure than exports – this figure now exceeds 350 billion SEK, i.e. around 10 percent of Swedish companies’ global sales. Several big Swedish companies now have China as their most important market globally (Business Sweden, 2019a:5).

Moreover, the large size of the Chinese population is commonly referenced to make the point that this market is simply too large to miss out on,

While China can seem daunting for Western retailers, the market cannot be ignored for three key reasons. Firstly, China has the world’s largest population with 1.4 billion inhabitants and is on track to become the largest consumer market. Capturing just a fraction of the cake can be hugely profitable (Business Sweden, 2019b:3).

The great size of the Chinese consumer market is often connected to the growing urban and technologically advanced middle class, as these people are the intended customers. Growing salaries (Business Sweden, 2018:14) and China becoming the largest market for e-commerce in the world (Business Sweden, 2019b:5, 7), are examples of developments in China that Swedish companies are expected to be able to capitalize on.

Interestingly, while Pan finds that the image of “one billion customers” together with the image of “the world’s workshop” to be the dual foundation of the paradigm “China opportunity”, only the first of these images is found in the Swedish texts. The image of China as a factory for the West seems largely abandoned. Business Sweden even points to how modernisation and development “has seen China evolve from being a base for manufacturing and exports to become the world’s biggest market in many sectors” (Business Sweden, 2020:9). Thus, their image of China as an economic opportunity, *China as Profit*, is not fully consistent with Pan’s paradigm. Instead of being a place where items are made to be shipped abroad to other markets, Business Sweden frames China only as a market that in itself is worth investing in.

An adjacent manner in which China is framed as a source of profit by Business Sweden is through framing it as an investment opportunity. In this case, the number of potential customers is not at the forefront, but rather the general opportunity to expand a business globally in general, or into the Chinese market in particular. In these cases, partnerships or joint investments with Chinese companies are often mentioned as recommendations for expanding into the Chinese market, or to profit off a Chinese company wanting to go global.

Expanding beyond China’s borders [*sic*] has proven difficult for many Chinese companies as they have followed the ‘go out’ strategy promoted by the Chinese state. This challenge to internationalise offers a unique opportunity for Swedish companies to ‘trade their global sales channel’; providing support in overseas market expansion in exchange for local support in the Chinese market (Business Sweden, 2020:22).

These kinds of arrangements are referred to as “joint win-win” (Business Sweden, 2020:17), a phrase which echoes the official Chinese policy of “win-win cooperation” related to global development and trade (Zhang, 2019). Contrary to the frames most commonly used by the

Armed Forces and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Business Sweden rarely paints China in a negative light.

While not nearly as prominent as the *China as Oppressor* frame, this frame is also featured in two of the text from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. One of the texts is an op-ed by the then Swedish Minister of EU and Foreign Trade Ann Linde², in which she writes about what the government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are doing to promote Swedish-Chinese trade relations, mainly through a state visit to China (Linde, 2017). Hence, it is evident that trade and good trade relations with China are important also for the Ministry. Where Business Sweden and the Ministry differ is in how they approach the topic. As seen above, Business Sweden is mainly focused on the opportunity to turn a profit or make a good investment. While the Ministry also emphasises the significance of the Chinese market to Swedish companies, sustainability is upheld as a core criterion. The minister writes:

I want to continue to develop our cooperation with China regarding sustainable business in order to improve working conditions and workers' rights, fight environmental pollution, counteract corruption, strengthen the position of women in the workforce, and thus engage companies in Agenda 2030 and the implementation of the global goals regarding sustainable development. I will work to make the Team Sweden visit to China contribute to this and to strengthen the possibilities of Swedish companies to conduct business in China (Linde, 2017, my translation).

In that, she makes it clear that while business with China is important and the Chinese market is one of great opportunity, it is not unconditionally so. For the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it seems engaging with China to make a profit must come with the caveat of also contributing to sustainable development. Perhaps since the frame of *China as Oppressor* is so prominent within communication from the Ministry, *China as Profit* has to be justified through contributions to sustainability. By linking trade to sustainability or social improvements, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs can be interpreted to express faith in China's ability and will to improve and become "more liberal like us" if continuously interacted with. This will be further expanded on in

² Ann Linde left her post as Minister of EU and Foreign Trade in 2019 and is at the time of writing the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

section 5.2.3 China as Improvable?, as this type of reasoning can be connected to Pan's political and international opportunities.

China as Profit is not present in any of the analysed texts from the Armed Forces. This is not surprising as the Armed Forces do not relate their goals and mission to economic gains at all. Still, it is noteworthy that the overlap between Business Sweden's China image and the Armed Force's China image is nearly non-existent.

5.2.2 China as Future

The second commonly used frame in the texts by Business Sweden is *China as Future*, which features a mainly positive rendition of China as technologically advanced and rapidly developing. This is encapsulated in the statement that in China, "Technological advancements are faster than anywhere else" (Business Sweden, 2018:32). When compared to Western states, China is described as quickly surpassing them in technological advancements like digitalisation, "The digital marketplace in China is one of these examples, where innovation and change is [*sic*] fast not only in relative terms but has already surpassed its Western counterparts" (Business Sweden, 2018:10). There often seems to be a sense of awe in the images of China a technologic powerhouse, commonly coupled with depictions of an ever richer, ever more connected population.

The Chinese retail landscape has transformed rapidly over the past decade as millions of people have migrated from rural areas to cities. Rising wages and easier access to shopping opportunities have given retail sales a major boost – but there are other growth drivers too. Besides shifting consumer demographics and higher disposable income, digitalisation is fundamentally changing the playing field. China is now at the global forefront of e-commerce, social online interaction and Big Data deployment (Business Sweden, 2019b:3).

Overall, China represents the future of doing business. A future that is fast-paced and digital, with limitless potential to those who dare enter it.

But this is not only positive, as China grows more advanced in terms of technology Chinese companies become business rivals. I have chosen to differentiate this type of business rivalry

or competition from the frame of *China as Risk* based in part based on the differentiation by Yee & Story where they argue that a “threat” to business might be more apt to view as competition, rather than place it together with other more existential and traditionally security related threats or risks (Yee & Storey, 2004:10). The competition brought on by Chinese companies expanding to the global market is also described as “competition of a more benevolent kind” by Business Sweden (Business Sweden, 2019a:6). Hence, it would be an unfair interpretation to place it in the category of threat or risk as this connection is not made in the source material. Business Sweden does not perceive economic competition in terms of threat. It is instead framed as a natural consequence of China’s developing economic landscape with domestic enterprises willing and able to expand their business abroad.

I have chosen to present *China as Future* under “China opportunity” as the frame is more hopeful than fearful. Nevertheless, it does not fit perfectly into the scope of the paradigm. Business Sweden’s view of *China as Future* as described above can be incorporated under Pan’s economic opportunity in a broad sense. However, there is also another aspect to *China as Future* which seems to relate more closely to Pan’s international opportunity. China is framed as taking on more responsibility on the world stage and playing a more active role in the international political landscape. In the analysed texts this is not connected to democratic development, but to economic opportunity (for Business Sweden) or geopolitical developments more broadly (for the Armed Forces, as seen in *China as Risk*).

China is not only described as a futuristic and technologically advanced competitor but also as an actor to which the future belongs. This relates to the international opportunity of Pan in the sense that it is an image of China decisively entering the world stage, seemingly to stay. When describing the BRI, Business Sweden frames China as a great power risen anew, needing to be monitored as its global influence grows,

The Belt and Road Initiative is likely only at an early stage. It will be one of the driving forces behind China’s transformation into a global business power. For Swedish companies, this may both lead to opportunities for partnerships as well as intensified competition on global markets. Both call for a higher level of attention toward China (Business Sweden, 2019a:22).

For Business Sweden, China growing into a more present global power seems to bring both positives and negatives. The advised cause of action is to pay greater attention to China, both to reap the benefits of the positive and to perhaps avoid or mitigate the negative. Crucially, even though Business Sweden here notes that the economic opportunity is not just an opportunity for foreign companies to profit off China, but also is true for the reverse, they do not advise caution or restraint. Change is coming; the future is now. Abstaining from it is not an option. China is part of the future, and the future is part of China, is seemingly the message.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while not showing any signs being awestruck by China's recent technological advancements, does seem to also view China as a state which has begun to and will continue to influence Sweden and the rest of the world. Although *China as Future* is much less prominent than for Business Sweden, there are aspects of it present in the Ministry's texts. The future global developments in sectors like trade, finance, technology, innovation, research and environmental policy are listed as being affected by China's development. This is explained as something will bring both challenges and opportunities for Sweden as a whole (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020b).

The Armed Forces could also be interpreted as utilising the *China as Future* frame, but only in relation to risks. As previously stated, the Armed Forces' most common frame is *China as Risk*, and risks are temporally set in the future. Hence, when the image of China is one of risk, it is also an image of a future scenario or negative development. For example stating: "China aim for greater international influence, and China's assertions, priorities and economic activity thus affects the world in general and by extension the security of Sweden" (Swedish Armed Forces, 2019:32, my translation). Similarly to how the Armed Forces view China as a risk located in the uncertainty of the future, Business Sweden also places China temporally ahead of the now. Crucially, Business Sweden does not seem to expect malice or bad intentions from China, but rather opportunities for profit and friendly business rivalries. This temporal similarity nevertheless highlights the relationship between opportunity and risk. They both reside in the future and depend on uncertainty. This then becomes, in a way, true also for China. The three frames *China as Future*, *China as Profit* and *China as Risk* all provide an image of China as somewhat shrouded in mystery. The same temporal tendency is also present in the image of *China as Improvable?* presented in the next chapter. China could be a futuristic land of great prosperity, but it could also be an enemy to the liberal world order lurking in the shadows. The

uncertainty is perhaps what allows this duality to form and exist. Without uncertainty there would be no need for fears or fantasies.

5.2.3 China as Improvable?

The “China opportunity” paradigm as explained by Pan is built on the liberal idea that continued interaction, dialogue and trade between China and the liberal democratic West will inevitably lead to China becoming more liberal and democratic. As previously underlined, Pan argues that this notion is little more than a sham, something that says more about the Western states thinking it will happen than about China (Pan, 2012:109).

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs seems, however, to support the idea that Pan so strongly criticises. There is a belief expressed by the Ministry that dialogue and cooperation can change China for the better. They also place Sweden in the centre of this possible improvement,

Sweden monitors the development of human rights, democracy and rule of law in China. The embassy’s work regarding human rights in China encompasses an array of areas. Aspects concerning human rights are continuously integrated, for example within the embassy’s center of corporate sustainability and responsibility (CSR) and within the embassy’s outward culture- and communicative work (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019a:25, my translation).

Framing *China as Improvable* is consistent with the international opportunity of Pan. Through interaction with other liberal democratic states like Sweden, China is presented as able to change and embrace liberal democratic values.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs underscores the significance of the EU in the diplomatic effort to push China in a more liberal democratic direction, writing “EU should act to include common EU interests in the high-level summits with China, including respect for the rule of law and a rulebound world order” (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020a:2, my translation) and “Sweden is playing an active role in EU’s work with human rights in China. EU has ongoing collaborations with both Chinese authorities and civil society organisations, and makes statements regarding the situation for human rights within China” (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019a:26, my translation). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs essentially

frames China as an improvable oppressor. Importantly, this allows Sweden and the EU to be framed as actors actively working against oppression as supporters of human rights. However, this is not a completely separate matter from that of trade and investments. Statements like “The government will push for ambitious negotiation between the EU and China regarding agreements which facilitate trade and investment, and secures European market access and equal competition” (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020c:3, my translation), reveals that interaction between China and the EU is not limited in scope to the liberalisation of China.

Business Sweden, on the other hand, expresses disappointment over the ineffectiveness of this method of bringing change. Instead, they give examples of China in some cases going backwards and undoing previous market liberalisation efforts,

With national programs and reforms contributing to strengthening of the State, several market actors are wondering if it is ‘reform and opening’ or rather ‘reform and closing’. Many foreign observers have disappointedly given up hope that China will open up and become a more liberal market driven economy like those in the West (Business Sweden, 2020:12).

There is a sense of disappointment in statements like the one above. China not becoming more like the West in terms of openness and market economy like expected is treated almost like a betrayal. When describing how the Chinese government’s approach to market liberalisation has shifted in recent years, Business Sweden references “dashed hopes” and unmet assumptions and expectations,

Until a few years ago, the general assumption or expectation among the business community was that China would continue to open up, meaning that market forces would play a more decisive role in the economy. That was the working assumption of the ‘new normal’. Now, administrative reforms are strengthening the role of the State in many areas, including economic and technological development. This is a clear new direction from what was expected and has dashed hopes of a more hands-off approach to the economy by the Chinese government (Business Sweden, 2020:8).

While the Ministry of Foreign Affairs still seem to have faith in the process of liberalisation, the dream of a liberal China seems to be somewhat fading for Business Sweden.

Notably, Business Sweden only views this from an economic perspective, while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs upholds the democratic and human rights-related side of liberalism. In that sense, the images are not necessarily opposed as they relate to different aspects of liberalism and different things happening in relation to them. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that Business Sweden pushes for export and investments while simultaneously expressing worries that the liberal development is going backwards. Just as it is noteworthy that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs frames China mainly as an oppressor, while also upholding that change is possible through the diplomatic measures employed by Sweden and other liberal states. This shows that the image of China is thoroughly dynamic, even within singular entities. For Business Sweden this means that the generally positive image of China as an economic opportunity is sullied slightly by fears that the base of that fantasy could be crumbling even before it becomes fully realised. For the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the image is somewhat reversed. Although China is framed as an oppressor and the rights of the population are feared for, an effort is made to put a spotlight on how this can, and will, be turned around. Hence, the image of China contains much tension. Looking at the China images of Business Sweden and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, one can understand that even though they lean differently, they are not fundamentally opposing each other anymore than they are opposing themselves. There is tension and opposition both within and outside of the frames and the framing actors.

According to Pan's theory, the efforts made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are more connected to justifying a self-image as a defender of liberal ideals than to China. Additionally, the disappointment expressed by Business Sweden is a consequence not of Chinese betrayal but of their own belief in a fantasy. As noted above, Business Sweden relates the non-liberalist development to unmet expectations. It is in this reading of the China image that the connection to self-image emphasised by Pan shines through the clearest, begging the question "why was a further liberalisation expected?". Pan would suggest that expectations are more closely connected to those expecting something than to the context they are expecting something from.

This line of reasoning has not been found in texts by the Armed Forces. When the Armed Forces relate to China as a risk or threat, they do so without referencing unmet expectations or hopes of improvement. Unlike Business Sweden, they do not relate to China in a clearly positive way at all.

5.3 Summary

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Armed Forces seemingly share the two frames related to “China threat”. *China as Risk*, emphasising the immaterial and value-based aspects of risk appears in texts from both entities. The same is found for *China as Oppressor*, together with the implication that the situation is worsening. The difference lies mainly in prominence. While *China as Risk* is found throughout the texts from the Armed Forces, it is only briefly touched upon by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For *China as Oppressor* the level of prominence is reversed. Business Sweden can be seen to present a counter frame to both the *China as Risk* and *China as Oppressor* frames. Business Sweden instead commonly frames China as an economic opportunity. It is noteworthy that Business Sweden actively presents not just competing frames like *China as Profit*, but also actively presents counter frames where the images of *Risk* and *Oppressor* are acknowledged only to be downplayed.

In relation to Pan’s paradigm of “China threat”, the frames found in the analysis are different in significant ways. Most notable is how *China as Oppressor* showcases that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs views China in a more complex manner than Pan expected from Western observers. Expressing empathy and a clear division between the image of the Chinese state and the Chinese population, *China as Oppressor* does not neatly fit into the paradigm of “China threat”. Similarly, *China as Risk* is more indirect and immaterial than what is expected from “China threat”.

China as Profit as expressed by Business Sweden is closely related to the economic opportunity of Pan. The main difference is that while the image of China as the “factory of the world” is a core image for Pan, it is largely abandoned by Business Sweden. Instead, the emphasis is on entering and excelling in the Chinese market. This frame also appears in the texts from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but with an emphasis on sustainability which is not found in Pan’s paradigm. *China as Future* and *China as Improvable?* contain much tension. *China as Future* underscores the close relationship between risk and opportunity, the first mainly featured by the Armed Forces and the second by Business Sweden. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs appears as caught in a balancing-act between the two other entities. When relating China to democratization and liberalisation, it is noteworthy that the entity with the most positive image, Business Sweden, is the one to express doubts. Similarly, an entity with a more negative and

cautious image, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, seems to have faith in the improvability of China.

6. Conclusions

Returning to the first research question, *How is China framed by the selected Swedish state entities?*, the analysis has shown that the image is indeed pluralist and differs between entities. Frames that are commonly used by one entity are non-existent in texts by another. There are also differences in emphasis within frames and within entities. As such, the somewhat contradictory image of China as presented in the government strategy can be understood as, at least in part, connected to this discrepancy. While it is to be expected that the Armed Forces focus on geopolitics and Business Sweden on Swedish export, their respective views of China do not overlap in any significant way. The Armed Forces mainly frame China as a security risk of the future, not immediate but worthy of continuous attention; Business Sweden instead frames China as little more than a high-tech source of possible profit. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, meanwhile, is concerned with and tries to balance their interest in both human rights and economic development. This study thus shows that national images are pluralistic and more complex than what might have been previously expected. There is no singular image of China which unites the three analysed entities; there are even diverging frames being utilised within the same entity. Note in particular the tensions found when relating the image of *China as Improvable?*. Both Business Sweden and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs could be interpreted as expressing images that were almost reverse images of their most common frames.

Understanding how China is framed and imagined in different ends of the Swedish state can be useful in itself. It helps us understand that the relationship between Sweden and China is complicated. This is not to say that such a pluralistic image is negative or misconstrued. Illuminating it does, however, aid in the understanding of the Swedish China strategy and its somewhat contradictive perception of China. Awareness of the multitude of framings of China is therefore important, as it allows for greater understanding of Swedish government actions taken in relation to China.

Regarding the second question, *How do the paradigms of “China threat” and “China opportunity” relate to the Swedish context?*, the study has shown that while the paradigms can be a useful outset-point, one cannot understand the Swedish image of China without also looking beyond them. Perhaps the most notable difference is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ heterogenous image of China and concern for the Chinese population which were perceived as oppressed and unjustly governed. Pan’s theory does not cover this type of dynamic image. He

instead expects the Western China watchers to be unable, or unwilling, to view China as anything but homogenous. Another key take-away comes from the perception of threat and risk and how the Swedish state generally frames China more in terms of the latter. This could be connected to Sweden's positionality as a small state not affected by Chinese military spending or regional power-growth in the same way as the liberal hegemon USA. This does not mean that Sweden is not concerned about China. On the contrary, both the Armed Forces and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs express disapproval and unease regarding the illiberal values held by the Chinese government, and how that might affect global politics in the future. Furthermore, interests and capabilities are seemingly more entwined in the Swedish context than expected by the theory.

Regarding "China opportunity", there is clear relation between the theory and the frame *China as Profit* as expressed by both Business Sweden and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The tension regarding China's possible democratisation and liberal development, found in texts by these entities, can also be understood in the light of Pan's theory. Where the theory and the frames differ significantly is the frame *China as Future*. This frame illuminates an image of China as futuristic and modern in a way that was not anticipated based on the theory. Additionally, the admiration of China's rapid development points to a more dynamic image of "China opportunity" than simply that of a market to exploit. The temporal placement of China in the future is also present in the frame *China as Risk*, but then in a negative sense. This study thus aids in the understanding of how the two paradigms "China threat" and "China opportunity" share a temporal relation.

6.1 Discussion and Further Research

This study has provided a greater understanding of the Swedish China image and contributed to the contextualisation of Pan's theory of paradigms. As the study's focus was to illuminate the frames, there remains much room to investigate how these frames function in practice. While we have seen different frames and images of China expressed within the same government strategy, it would be interesting to understand the more practical effects of the different frames. How does the plurality of frames affect the government's actions regarding China? Can government entities act as a united government when they are not in agreement regarding what they are acting upon? These are only examples of the questions left to be understood by future researchers. Additionally, this study does not take into consideration how the Swedish population is affected by the pluralistic state framing of China. Is one frame clearly

more prominent than another, or is the Swedish population's China image just as diverse as the government's?

Generalising the conclusions of this study to apply also to other small states without carefully examining the context and positionality of those states is not advised. Instead, future researchers might take what has been learned regarding the contextuality and plurality of national images and examine a different context with that in mind. I find the underlying tensions regarding the possible democratisation and liberalisation of China to be particularly noteworthy. Understanding if and how this is expressed by other states and in other contexts would be of interest. These tensions and how they relate to the work of the different Swedish agencies could also be a topic for further research. One argument is that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is only expressing the image of *China as Improvable* to further the possibilities of economic interaction and profit. As China is clearly framed as an oppressor by the Ministry, expressing an image of an improvable China and the efforts undertaken to aid in that cause could serve to justify the continued strengthening of financial ties. This has, however, not been studied in this thesis. As such, no direct connection can yet be made. Nevertheless, looking closer into it could bring further understanding about the political use of images and frames.

Over the course of this study of the Swedish China image, China and Sweden have of course continued to interact. The Swedish relationship with China has made headlines regarding topics as diverse as Covid-19, the development of 5G, climate change, the treatment of Uighurs in Xinjiang, and international trade, just to give a few examples. While these are news' headlines which I have come across in my daily life, not studied government communication, they nevertheless serve as reminders that studying the image of China is not "one and done" but a continuous process. Since the image is continuously shaped and re-shaped, the study of the image must also continue. In this study I have aimed to illuminate a few aspects of the image of China through the lenses of a few Swedish state agencies. In doing so I have uncovered complexities and tension which I hope can serve as starting points for future researchers; similarly to how Chengxin Pan and his theory of paradigms served as the theoretical starting point for my study.

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