HÖGSKOLAN VÄST

School of Business, Economics and IT

International programme in Politics and Economics

Middle powers and the rise of China

- A case study of Swedish policy formulations with respect to China

Authors: Nadja Friborg & Patrik Carlsson

Abstract

The world is currently experiencing a power transition along with China's rise as a superpower. The decline of the United States as the unipolar world-leader is one of the great debates in international relations theory. However, this debate has focused on great powers and left out the role of the middle powers. In this thesis, the premise is that middle powers have an influential position in the world order. Among these, Sweden has had little scholarly attention. This thesis analysed Sweden's middle power role and policy formulations with respect to China, and how these two dimensions have changed over the period 2001-2019. By combining middle power theory with role theory, a content analysis of government documents is conducted in a longitudinal study. The results indicated that Sweden increasingly focuses on its role of supporting the liberal world order, compared to the emphasis on its role of good international citizenship in 2001. Sweden's tone on China also showed increasingly cautious expressions over time. This shift in Sweden's middle power role is of significance since middle powers mostly hedge as a response to China's rise. The study of middle powers contributes to the broader question of how we can understand China's rise.

Keywords: Middle Power | China | Sweden | Middle-Power Theory | Foreign Policy |

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List of abbreviations:

- CCT, Coxian critical theory
- CLWO, Current Liberal World Order
- CSR, Corporate social responsibility
- EU, European Union
- GDP, Gross domestic product
- GIC, Good international citizen
- HR, Human rights
- IR, International relations
- MP, Middle power
- NGO, Non-Governmental Organisation
- RWI, Raoul Wallenberg Institute
- SEK, Swedish Krona (the official currency of Sweden)
- SIDA, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
- WTO, World Trade Organisation
- UN, United Nations
- US, United States

1. Introduction

"…so long as others are warlike and energetic, the Chinese, now that they are no longer isolated, will be compelled to copy our vices to some degree if they are to preserve their national independence."

– Bertrand Russell, 1928, *Sceptical Essays* pp. 88-9

"Yes, I think the Western domination of the world economy will soon be over."

– Hans Rosling, 2017, *Factfulness*, p. 166

The world is currently experiencing a power transition with the rise of China and the decline of the United States (US) as a unipolar superpower. This phenomenon has undoubtedly led to an intense debate in international relations (IR) scholarship. With rapid economic expansion over the last 40 years, China's evolving role in global governance is now greatly apparent (Kai, 2017., Meyer, 2018, pp, 15-7). This development has, however, raised concerns regarding China's agenda in shaping the world order. Particularly, these concerns regard the major ideological changes that China's greater role might bring for global politics, economics and values (Yafei *et al*, 2018., Meyer, 2018, pp. 15-7). Problematically, great power politics has been the predominant theme in this power shift debate. Thus, the focus has been on the US-China relation (Large, 2008., Meyer, 2018., Olsson, 2016., Muggah & Tiberghien, 2018., World Economic Forum, 2018., Emmott, 2017 and Gilley & O'Neil, 2014b, pp. 237-8) and less scholarly attention has been brought to other powers. Since middle powers fit between great and small powers in the international hierarchy[1], they are influential actors in the world order. For this reason, they need greater attention in the study of the rise of China.

The existing literature on middle powers (MPs) has revealed how MPs historically have used their "middle" position to promote good international citizenship, multilateralism and a stable world order based on liberal values. The importance of MPs has thus mattered during previous important events; such as changes in the international system. The traditional "first-wave" of MPs (Australia, Canada, Sweden and Norway) filled an important function as mediators and stabilisers during World War II and the Cold War, with such characteristics (e.g. Jordaan, 2003). Given the importance of MPs historical role for global stability, the study of

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[1] According to Gilley and O'Neil, the hierarchy of states consists of the four categories: superpowers (The US and China), great powers, middle powers and weak powers (Gilley & O'Neil, 2014a, pp. 4-5).

them is especially important in the context of a rising China. However, there is a lack of scholarship on Sweden as an MP, despite Sweden's history of MP diplomacy, which is still active today. The scholarship on MP responses to the rise of China has instead focused on emerging MPs, which has shown that many MPs respond with a hedging strategy - which is a middle way of not choosing a side between the US and China. However, existing scholarship has not investigated the responses by Western MPs to the same extent. The gap in the literature regarding Sweden's MP role in the context of a rising China is thus both significant and surprising, given that Sweden's active MP diplomacy has for long been promoted abroad - also in China. Therefore, this thesis seeks to understand and describe Sweden's policy formulations during the time span of China's rising position.

Sweden's stance towards China's rise as a superpower is highly relevant for the scholarship on MP responses to this power shift. From this lens, it becomes possible to understand the full picture of the rise of China, unlike in realism, which only focuses on great power politics. This lens leads to the premise that Sweden as an MP has an influential role in world politics. Sweden thus possesses middle power capabilities, behaviour, and the ideational component of an MP self-image. Coxian Critical Theory has been used as a grand theory in order to understand middle powers as influential actors. MP theory has been combined with role theory, which focuses on the behavioural aspect of the MP role, in order to enable a policy analysis of Sweden in this study.

Thus, the overarching research problem that this thesis aims to answer is how Sweden, as a stabiliser and promoter of the current world order, copes with China's rise as a superpower. This leads to three specific research questions: how Sweden exerts its MP role with respect to China, how Sweden has formulated policies with respect to China over the period 2001-2019, and how this role and these formulations have changed during this time period.

This thesis will first review previous literature on the concept of MP in IR theory, Sweden's MP role and MPs responses towards China. Further, it will be discussed how research on Sweden is lacking in the scholarly debate. The theory chapter will then outline how MP theory has been used in the analysis. Afterwards, the aim of this study will be specified together with the research questions, followed by the methodology chapter. Then, the results from the analysis will be presented before the entire paper will be summarised in the conclusion.

2. Literature Review: Middle powers and the rise of China

This chapter will explore the scholarly debate regarding the middle power (MP) concept. The lines of research we seek to contribute to in this thesis are the relevance of MPs in IR, Sweden's role as an MP and MP responses towards the rise of China. This section will thus review the concept of MPs in IR theory, their previous significance, and their responses towards the rise of China. It is clear that Sweden so far has been left out from the research on MPs in the context of the ongoing power transition. Sweden's role as an MP should not be left out, and more attention should be brought to this issue.

2.1. Middle powers and the hierarchy of states in IR theory

The rise of China leads to the great discussion of "what will this mean for the world order?" in IR theory. The answer to this comes down to who the shapers of the world order are and, in turn, the very idea of power, where the three major IR theories realism, liberalism and critical theory differ. The dominant neo-realist paradigm keeps the focus on great power politics in the debate of the rise of China. The lion's share of research is thus concentrated on the US-China relationship, leaving most other states irrelevant to the subject (see: Large, 2008., Meyer., 2018., Olsson, 2016., Muggah & Tiberghien, 2018., World Economic Forum, 2018., Emmott, 2017-2018., Gilley & O'Neil, 2014b, pp. 237-8).

Mearsheimer (2001), the founder of offensive realism, argues that the world is dominated by great powers - where power predominantly refers to military power. These powers together shape the international system. Further, he argues that great powers aim to achieve hegemony, with the following definition: "a hegemony is so powerful that it dominates all the other states in the system. No other states have the military wherewithal to put up a serious fight against it" (2001, p. 105). When applying these ideas to the rise of China, he argues that "the time has come for the U.S. foreign policy establishment to recognise that the liberal international order was a failed enterprise with no future" (Mearsheimer, 2019, p. 50), where he, among several factors, specifically links this prospective fall to China's rise since "a liberal international order is possible only in unipolarity" (Ibid, p.1). In this way, it becomes clear how Mearsheimer links his view of hegemony with unipolarity since the decline of US leadership means the fall of the liberal world order (Ibid). This is, we argue, a simplified lens which should not be applied to the rise of China – this means that the world is predominantly shaped by great

powers. Instead, we argue in this thesis that MPs are worth studying in order to understand China's rise. The contrasting paradigm, liberal institutionalism, offers a different view of power and hegemony, which along with realism have been the most influential paradigms in IR theory.

Keohane (1985), one of the founding scholars of liberal institutionalism, argues against Mearsheimer's assumption that the distribution of wealth and military power determines hegemony. Instead, Keohane and Nye (1977, p. 44, cited in Keohane, 1985, pp. 34-5) define hegemony as: "one state is powerful enough to maintain essential governing inter-state relations, and willing to do so". This is illustrated by Britain's non-hegemonic position during the 19th century despite overwhelming material capabilities (Keohane, 1985). Keohane's (2012a, 2012b) concentration on complex interdependence among self-interested state actors leads to an emphasis on the processes of cooperation through international institutions - where hegemony is achieved through the will of leadership and consent by secondary states. From this view, this means that the will of becoming a hegemon is not linked to the superiority of power. The structure of the current world order is also idealistically presented as a core of this paradigm. This is apparent with the recent claim by Ikenberry (2005) in the context of a rising China: "Americans are less interested in ruling the world than they are in a world of rules". This assumption is linked to the belief in the current liberal world order which, he argues, is different from other previous world orders. The mutual benefits of this world order to China, the US, and others, means that the prospects of its maintenance are optimistic, and less circulated around power.

From the critical paradigm, Cox (1981) offers an explanation of hegemony that includes the interrelation between social forces of material resources, ideas and institutions. Hence, this view offers a middle way between the aforementioned two competing paradigms, that neither focuses solely on military power dominance nor hegemonic leadership through consent by others. From this view, Cox (1989) developed his idea of MPs, based on the work of middlepowermanship by John Holmes (1966, cited in Cox, 1989) which found Canada's role of diplomacy in the reconstruction of the World War II to be considered the work of an influential MP in the international hierarchy. Cox (1989), based on Holmes ideas, concludes that MPs through a bottom-up approach help to shape the world order, with their middle-range capabilities and certain traits of diplomacy. This view of social forces shaping the world order is thus different from Keohane's view of world order where power relations mostly refers to a complex interdependence rather than the outcome of social forces. According to Cox (1989), a world order with hegemony is based on ideas inscribed in the mind. What is different and relevant in the context of a rising China, thus, is that Cox define MPs as having a special place

in shaping the world order, and they pursue active MP diplomacy which takes place both in hegemonic and non-hegemonic world orders. This calls for the relevance for studying MPs in the context of the rise of China, as they are the co-shapers of the world in which China is entering. This interrelation is hence of importance, where the structure of the world order can be revealed by studying these social forces which are not restricted to great powers nor the cooperation through the mutual interest of rational state actors. Thus, Cox view of the world order offers an important lens for studying the current power transition.

2.2. Defining middle powers

There are several definitions of MPs and the purpose here is not to study the term in depth. Robertson's (2017) has outlined some of the most important definitional categories[2]. The early definitions regard MPs' status in terms of material capabilities. Later on, certain behavioural characteristics were recognised due to MPs' active diplomacy during World War II and the Cold War. In the post-Cold War era, the normative factor was introduced, claiming that MPs take a mediating role in world politics. With more scholarly attention of the concept since the early 2000s, some influential and revised definitions have been developed.

Based on earlier findings, Cooper, Higgott & Nossal, three leading scholars, define MPs with four characteristics: *positional, geographic, normative* and *behavioural* (1993, see Robertson, 2017). This refers to a hierarchical position, geographical location between a systems major powers, the role of "honest broker" and mediator, and the diplomacy of being a good international citizen. Chapnick's three characteristics of *functional, hierarchical,* and *behavioural* refer to the capability to influence and the self-recognition of a responsible actor, the rank between great and weak powers in terms of material resources, and the moral power and commitment to multilateralism (1999, see Robertson, 2017). Ungerer accepts the definition by Cooper *et al*, but use the geographic criteria instead of positional (2007, see Robertson, 2017).

These definitions of MPs have received critique for being too vague. Jordaan's (2003) model of distinguishing between traditional and emerging MPs is one example of such a critique. The emergence of new MPs has, he argues, shown significant different traits compared to the traditional MPs, which undermines the analytical capacity of a common framework.

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[2] A brief summary of some of the definitions mentioned in this section can be found in the Appendix

The latest definition by Carr (2014) outlines three categories: *position, behaviour* and *identity* - and thus exclude the functional approach. Importantly, the category *position* refers to a multifaceted view of power; including both economic, military, geographic etc. *Behaviour* refers to diplomatic behaviour and *identity* refers to how the state uses its status as an MP (Carr 2014, cited in Robertson, 2017). The definition by Carr has been applied to both traditional and emerging powers by other scholars - for instance in Gilley and O'Neil's analysis of eight MPs responses to the rise of China. The analysis, which includes both emerging MPs and the traditional MP Australia, is conducted with a common framework. Like Carr, they agree that MPs have the three characteristics of material capability, behaviour and the ideational component (Gilley & O'Neil, 2014a, p. 33). Thies and Sari (2018) have applied a role theory approach in their MP analysis of Indonesia. By emphasising the behavioural component in the analysis, the approach reveals the threefold MP role of (1) being a good international citizen (GIC), (2) supporter of multilateralism and (3) a supporter of the current liberal world order (CLWO).

As this section has shown, the actual definition of MP is still contested and under development. However, this thesis does not seek to challenge these definitions or categorisations. Instead, our focus has been to fill the gap regarding Sweden's role as a traditional MP in relation to the rise of China. Since the three characteristics of *position, behaviour,* and *identity* have been adopted by most scholars, we accept this definition in this thesis.

2.3. Sweden as a middle power

Sweden was one of the first (so-called "traditional") MPs which historically has played significant roles during changes in the international system. Already in 1969, Keohane identified Sweden as one of the "system-influencing" states "which cannot expect individually to dominate a system but may nevertheless be able significantly to influence its nature through unilateral as well as multilateral actions" (Keohane, 1969, pp. 295-6).

Australia and Canada were the first two states to be recognised as MPs after an active foreign policy agenda to distinguish themselves from weaker states during the final stages of World War II (Robertson, 2017, p. 357). With similar foreign policy behaviour by Sweden and Norway shortly after, there is a consensus in the literature that these four states possess an MP status (Jordaan, 2003, p. 166).

In Cooper's (1997, pp. 9-14) *Niche Diplomacy*, the author discuses a pattern of a common MP trait in the early 1990s. As a response to the new post-Cold War era, all the "traditional" MPs took on leadership roles in coalition-building and cooperation-building. By constructing their own niches, they pursued to acquire a special status in the hierarchy of states by distinguishing themselves from minor powers. This first wave of MPs were Canada, Australia, Norway and Sweden. In Sweden, an immediate policy switch went from neutral to niche-oriented. Comparable to the Canadian foreign policy of that time, Sweden's niche entailed widespread domains on the social, security and economic fields. Swedish and Australian diplomacy shared similar attributes in terms of a "mission-oriented" approach, in contrast to the Canadian "routine-based" form.

From the same edition, Black (1997, pp. 100-2) outlines the involvement of the traditional MPs during Apartheid in South Africa. Without emphasising their role in overcoming Apartheid, he rather points to the high priority that this issue had in both Sweden, Canada and Australia's foreign policy. By pointing out their active involvement despite their geographical remoteness, he argues that this kind of engagement is typical MP behaviour.

As shown, Sweden's diplomacy seems to have mattered in times of change in the international system. Also, Sweden's good international citizenship is still recognised in the literature. For example, Carlson-Rainer identifies Sweden as a world leader in peace, security and human rights and claims that her findings of Swedish diplomacy *"provides continued evidence that Sweden changes global human rights norms and wields enormous influence in international affairs"* (Carlson-Rainer, 2017, p. 79). Thus, Sweden has arguably continued its role of niche diplomacy. With reference to the research above, the reasonable premise of this thesis is that Sweden has, since its acquired recognition as a traditional MP, played an influential role in world affairs. Given this, Sweden is an interesting case with respect to the current power transition that comes with the rise of China.

2.4. Middle powers and the rise of China

As argued at the beginning of this chapter, the liberal and realist rejection of MPs' influence is problematic. As Gilley and O'Neil put it - "the homogenization of all secondary state foreign policy behaviour by IR theory /.../ leads to dangerous oversights" (Gilley & O'Neil, 2014a, p. 26). As Vidal & Pelegrín explain, Japan shows evidence of a hedging strategy towards China, which is inconsistent with both realist and liberal explanations. This hedging strategy is based

on the definition of hedging by Kuik: "a set of policies that simultaneously pursue counteractions aimed at maximising options and avoiding risks" (Kuik 2008, cited in Vidal & Pelegrín, 2018, p. 197). Since Japan neither show a response of bandwagoning, balancing or solely seeking to maximise economic interests in China, this is a typical MP behaviour of seeking the middle ground. This policy of both strengthening its alliance with the US, but at the same time seeking a cooperative approach with China, is thus argued to be a sign of "hedging". López i Vidal & Pelegrin thus argue that this hedging strategy is due to the uncertainty of China's rise entails, where MPs avoid choosing a side.

Similarly, Wilkins (2014) argues that Australia shows typical MP behaviour of a hedging strategy towards China's rise. Like Japan, Australia keeps China close as a trading partner, whilst still remaining a stalwart ally to the US. To prevent excessive Chinese influence, Australia is also active in building relations with other MPs in the region. These initiatives on coalition-building show signs of MP behaviour in terms of promoting multipolarity and the preservation of the world order (Wilkins, 2014, p. 150-159). Australia's hedging is also noted by Carr (2015), in how Australia encourages the socialisation of China into The International Monetary Fund and urges for larger Chinese authority in the Asian Development Bank. At the same time, Australia is "keen to stay close to the US" despite these actions for increased Chinese influence which are undesired by the US (Carr, 2015, p. 3).

Gilley and O'Neil's (2014b) investigation of the responses by eight MPs[3] to the rise of China offers an analytical framework based on these findings. These findings show that MP responses towards China can vary, but that it comes down to the dilemma of avoiding risks and maximising opportunities - in other words; hedging. However, how MPs use their role varies, depending on if they are fully fledged MPs or incomplete, and due to other factors - for example, geographical proximity to China.

Manicom and O'Neil (2012) have compared the reactions by Australia and Canada. Despite some similarities, the analysis shows that Australia keeps a lower profile towards China than Canada. According to the authors, this depends on three variables: geographical proximity, trade relations, and the degree to which China becomes a domestic partisan issue. Since Canada is geographically close to the US, it has more security against a Chinese attack than Australia. Secondly, China is not as important as a trading partner to Canada as to Australia. Thirdly, how China is a domestic partisan issue - this refers to human rights (HR) in Canada and potential

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[3] These middle powers are: Thailand, Malaysia, South Korea, Indonesia, Australia, Turkey, Brazil and South Africa.

military threats in Australia. The authors also remind the readers that there is no guarantee that MPs will continue following the current hegemon in a power transition. In fact, both Australia and Canada shifted their traditional patron to the US, when Great Britain declined as a great power.

Gilley's (2011) analysis of Canada's response shows that there is potential for Canada to exert its MP role towards China. Since Gilley points out the tendency of China to respond to liberal norms on which the world order is based, meaning that China will allow Canada to play the MP role, even in Asia. Because, "within China, Canada has a unique niche to fill, in part because it is seen as relatively inconsequential and can thus, like Nordic powers, fly below the radar of Beijing's obsession with national sovereignty and the threat represented by liberal values" (Gilley, 2011, p. 263). According to Gilley, this is also what Canada is currently doing, by using Canada's civil society programme CIDA in China, for example. In this way, Canada is responding according to MP behaviour by using its status as an MP by actively promoting a liberal order in China.

From prior research on MPs, we can learn that the responses towards the rise of China seem to vary to some extent. However, they all fit into the rationale of MP theory. Further, as Manicom and O'Neil (2012) mention, little research has been done of the reactions by Western liberal democracies, since much of the current research on MPs concentrates on emerging MPs - especially those situated in the Asia-Pacific. Research of Western MPs in response to China's rise is dominated by Australia and Canada, leaving out all the other Western MPs. We seek to fill this gap in this thesis by investigating Sweden.

Little is known about Sweden's MP response towards China. This is surprising, as Sweden share many attributes with other Western MPs such as Canada and Australia (Manicom & O'Neil, 2012 & Cooper, 1997). Only one recent report on Sweden's China policy has been found. Bohman and Michalski (2018, pp. 83-6) argue that Sweden is still active in conducting a normative "teaching" in its foreign policy towards China. As they point out, Sweden has for long branded itself as a country for democracy, rule of law and HR. However, Sweden's role in the promotion of these sensitive issues in China (HR in particular) has lead to the tendency of increased outsourcing of this activity to the EU since the early 2000s. They also note the growing demands that Sweden's stance against China should be sharper. However, they argue, it is very unlikely that Sweden will adopt a sharper tone (Ibid, pp. 84-5). Further research on MPs is necessary to understand the current power transition better. This case-study of Sweden will be one valuable contribution to the relevant topic of how MPs respond to the rise of China.

The case of Sweden is even more urgent as the Swedish Institute of International Affairs has requested a Swedish "China Strategy", due to what they consider is a moderate Swedish response in the form of a "wait-and-see" policy towards China's global expansion (Weissmann & Rappe 2017). From the MP perspective, this wait-and-see policy might be the response of a hedging strategy towards China, as MPs typically do not want to pick sides in times of power shift and uncertainty. Since the response of hedging has been seen from other MPs, we argue that Sweden's response is of scholarly relevance.

2.5. The Gap

Since MPs are important, influential actors in the world and have played significant roles in events such as World War II, the Cold War and Apartheid, the study of them are relevant in IR. Despite the vast literature on how states are reacting to China's economic expansion in the global arena, little research has been done of the reactions by MPs, Western liberal democracies in particular, to China's rise. Instead, Australia and emerging MPs in the Asia-Pacific are of higher scholarly interest. More importantly, no one has investigated Sweden's MP role in this context.

In order to contribute to the research on MPs, and to bridge the gap, this thesis will touch on the bigger question of how MPs respond to China's rise by investigating the case of Sweden. So far, Sweden-China relations are discussed very broadly in this phenomenon. This is worrying as scholars in Swedish Foreign Affairs argue that Sweden needs to pay more attention to China's rise. This thesis will, therefore, further investigate the question of Western MPs by analysing how Sweden formulates policies with regard to China. In this way, this thesis will contribute with knowledge to the broader question of how a Western, traditional MP reacts to the new geo-economic situation, as well as drawing more Swedish attention to China.

3. Theoretical Framework: Coxian Critical Theory and Middle Power Theory

This chapter begins with the theoretical concepts from Coxian Critical Theory (CCT) which will be used as the grand theory in this thesis. Thereafter, the chapter continues with the tenets of middle power theory that will be used in the analysis. Lastly, the analytical framework will be outlined. By describing these theoretical concepts, this chapter will provide an understanding of middle powers' (MP) position in the world order, which will be applied to the analysis of Sweden.

3.1. Grand Theory: Coxian Critical Theory

This is an interpretivist thesis, which refers to the ontological view that the social world is subjectively created and thus not value-free. Epistemologically, this means that we find knowledge for the social world through interpretations of it (Halperin & Heath, 2017, pp. 41-55). Two grand concepts from CCT have been used to describe MPs' positions in the world. These are Cox's (1989) concepts of *world order* and *hegemony,* which have been used to accommodate the best lens for answering the research questions that relate to Sweden's position in the world. In particular, critical theory is useful for explaining how social phenomena develop over time, which fits into the issue of Sweden and a rising China.

3.1.1. The Coxian View of World Order and Hegemony

According to Cox (1981), neo-realism and liberal institutionalism is an insufficient lens for analysing the world order, since these - as he calls it, problem-solving theories, are ahistorical and assumes a given structure of the world order. With this lens, the given structure is assumed to follow a continuing pattern. The problem, he argues, is that by assuming a given structure from which laws and regularities of the world can be found, it makes it difficult to reveal transformations of this structure. In contrast, Cox's view of a dynamic world order takes the historical context in consideration in empirical-historical studies of the world. Further, he argues that the world should be analysed by not underrate state power, and emphasise the social forces which develop changes of the structure in the world. This means that both domestic and

external forces should be taken into consideration since international relations are insufficient in analysing the world order.

The structure of the world order, according to Cox, consists of the three interrelated forces of material resources, ideas and institutions. Material resources refer to technological and organisational capabilities and wealth. Ideas consist of intersubjective ideas and collective images of social orders. For example, he refers to how we use diplomacy as the inter-subjective idea of how we solve conflicts among states in the contemporary world structure. The collective idea of social orders refers to legitimacy, justice and power relations in this structure. Both of these shared ideas can potentially lead to an alternative structure if a conflict would emerge around which shared ideas the structure should have. Institutions, he argues, reflect power relations and constitute stability of the world order. The concept of hegemony is closely related to these three interrelated forces since, unlike in realism and liberal institutionalism, hegemony can neither be reduced to material power nor the institutional dimension (Cox, 1981).

To Cox, hegemonic order is "intersubjective sharing of behavioural expectations" which are "inscribed in the mind" universally. Therefore, a hegemon must succeed in establishing norms that affect the world order to the degree that they become accepted and universal. In this way, hegemons are dependent on the consent of others - both small, middle, and great powers (Cox, 1989, p. 829). This means that other actors than great powers are taking part in the upholding of hegemony.

Cox (1989, p. 823-827) sees MPs as having a functional relationship to the world order, where international institutions play an important role for them to pursue structural change. MPs as influential actors hence engage in these forums to fulfil certain interests, especially in terms of global stability. As this activity will occur regardless of hegemony or not, this calls for the relevance of studying them. With Sweden's role as an MP, Sweden thus plays a role in upholding US hegemony in the pursuit of global stability.

Cox's concepts of world order and hegemony are useful for studying a rising China. The view of the world orders in a constant process of change is a necessary lens since China's new position in the existing world order is unique. Hence, we cannot predict outcomes by referring to how MPs behaved during the Cold War, as the circumstances differ. Instead, MP behaviour should constantly be investigated and the knowledge of it must likewise be updated. We adopt the view that the existing world order, in which China is entering, has been shaped by, and still is being shaped by different social forces, including MPs. This means that also Sweden is part of the construction and shaping of the existing world order, which justifies the

relevance for our case. Hence, the relationship with China and secondary states can best be studied from this theoretical stance.

3.2. Middle-range theory: Middle power theory

The MP theory has been developed in this thesis by combining MP theory from the criteria by Gilley and O'Neil (2014b) with Thies & Sari's (2018) role theory approach to MP foreign policy analysis. This has been considered the best way to analyse Swedish policy documents which regard China. This section explains the concepts from these two frameworks and how they have been combined to suit the descriptive analysis in this thesis.

3.2.1 The features of a middle power

This thesis is based on the definition of an MP by Gilley & O'Neil. This thesis also rests on the premise that Sweden fits into their criteria, as Sweden belongs to the "...liberal coalition of first-generation middle powers"[4] (Gilley & O'Neil 2014a, p. 33). Therefore, another premise is that Sweden is revisionist towards Chinese influence and it is likely that Sweden will use its MP role to constrain increased Chinese influence on the international arena and support the current US hegemony.

Gilley and O'Neil's identification of MPs is based on three features. Hence, "The archetypical middle power thus possesses three characteristics: the *material capability, the behavioural element,* and the *ideational component*" (Gilley & O'Neil 2014a, p. 33). Identifying an MP thus starts with the assumption that MPs in terms of capabilities are "in the middle" between great and weak powers. Without these criteria, the MP can neither act nor identify as one. In this way, the behavioural and ideational aspects is a function of the positional criteria (Ibid, pp. 4-5, 27-28).

Identifying MPs hence starts with measuring capabilities in terms of *material capacity* which refers to a basic level of power.[5] As already argued by a wide range of scholars, Sweden fulfils these criteria. The *behavioural component* refers to the role in mediation and initiatives to consensus-building in the global arena. Since MPs have the capacity to influence the international order, they behave differently than weak powers. Whilst weak powers lack

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[4] The first-generation of middle powers also includes Norway, Canada and Australia.
[5] Total GDP, national security, defence spending, national materials, integrated state power (Gilley & O'Neil, 2014, p. 6)

influential capacity, they are more concerned with internal and external threats in their relationship with other states. On the other hand, MPs possess enough power to act as independent actors. This means that they behave differently in terms of their strategies towards rising powers (Ibid, pp. 27-28). Traditional MPs are status quo powers of rules-based world order and revisionist towards the influence of a new rising great power who challenges the stable world order. This effort in maintaining multipolarity leads to diplomatic initiatives in preserving an international system of good governance through rules and institutions. MPs are thus positive to peace initiatives and taking a mediating role in conflicts. This MP agency depends on a greater incentive to resist rising powers, in contrast to the weak powers, who are less bothered with having a dependent relationship to great powers (Ibid, pp. 27-28). Thus, MP behaviour can be revealed in their responses toward the rise of China. The *ideational component* refers to the self-identification of its leadership role expressed in their foreign policy in terms of good international citizen and the emphasis on the importance of liberal values (Ibid, p. 38).

3.2.2 Middle power responses towards China

As Gilley and O'Neil point out, MP analyses should not make *a priori* assumptions on who is an MP only by analysing foreign policy behaviour. Their framework, which has been developed to measure how MPs behave during a power transition, is based on their findings of eight other MPs responses to the rise of China. Our analysis will thus in theory measure MP response. Although, formulations in policy behaviour restrict the validity of drawing conclusions that these policy formulations explicitly depends on the rise of China. However, we would argue that analysing formulations of policy in official documents over the time of China's rise is in practice a good way of finding such indications. In this way, this thesis will contribute with knowledge to how Sweden is responding to the rise of China, however without a sufficient answer to this broader question. The two following categories from Gilley and O'Neil's framework, which are most relevant for our research questions, have been borrowed[6]:

1. The way China has influenced the domestic, regional and international environment for the MPs.

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[6] The two categories that were excluded concerned (1) How capabilities and behaviour correlated to geographical location, international institutions and if they maximise capabilities or behaviour, and (2) the middle power effects inside of China.

The rise of China means that MPs want to remain as independent agents internationally. MPs want to avoid an asymmetric relationship with China since concerns of Chinese pressure in terms of economic, diplomatic or military threats raises anxiety about their own autonomy. They are therefore torn between awards and risks in Chinese engagement. Thus, restrained Chinese influence is desired (Gilley & O'Neil, 2014a, p. 239).

2.   The responses of MPs towards China's rise of power.

The rise of China causes uncertainty. Thus, most MPs choose a hedging strategy as a response. This middle strategy of neither balancing or bandwagoning with China is a way for MPs to minimise threats and maximise opportunities. Since the opportunities are mostly economic, including China in global governance is desired. Reforming international institutions is a tool to both constrain and include China in global governance. To minimise the political threat of excessive Chinese domination, MPs tend to sharpen their role in promoting multilateralism (Ibid, p. 239).

3.2.3 The middle power roles

Thies and Sari (2018) role theory approach to MP analysis involves the analysis of the three auxiliary roles of good international citizen (GIC), the support of multilateralism and for the current liberal world order (CLWO). Since GIC refers to the commitment to peacekeeping, mediation and regional-subsystem collaboration, and CLWO to the support for a US-led world order based on liberal values such as rule of law and democracy (Thies & Sari, 2018, pp 404-5, 409-10), this view of MPs is compatible with the definition of Gilley and O'Neil. By specifying how MPs behave from three auxiliary roles, Thies and Sari agree with Gilley and O'Neil that their foreign policies are also a merge of their own values and interests. Thies and Sari also argue that MPs will carry out these behaviours on a global scale if they have the capabilities to do so (Thies & Sari, 2018, pp. 403-4).

With the model of these three roles, it becomes possible to see if states have the capacity, have MP behaviour and if they can be recognised as MPs by others. As this recognised identity is an important part of the MP role, it becomes more important to investigate the behaviour, since the behavioural traits are what essentially makes others recognise a state as an MP. It is therefore redundant to analyse states by both material and ideational factors, as their behaviour,

based on the auxiliary roles, provide with all the necessary information (Thies & Sari, 2018, p. 414). For this reason, Thies and Sari's model will be useful in this analytical framework.

Thies and Sari (2018, p. 400) also point out that GIC can work as an umbrella term which covers the support for multilateralism and CLWO. It is, therefore, useful to think of the MP behaviour as not three different roles, but rather as one collective behaviour with three different focus areas within it.

3.3. Combined analytical framework

A combined analytical framework by Thies and Sari's and Gilley and O'Neil's models have been selected to best suit the analysis of Sweden's China policy. The model is also based on the CCT view of world order. Thies and Sari's model was selected due to its emphasis on the behavioural aspect, which is the most suitable base in the analytical framework for analysing policy documents, unlike the positional criteria. As already mentioned, the behavioural aspect is also of most analytical significance since it entails all the elements of an MP. In this way, we can more closely analyse how Sweden behaves like a GIC and bring more nuance to how Sweden supports multilateralism and CLWO, as these roles rest on values such as democracy, equal rights and rule of law. Gilley and O'Neil´s framework is suitable for analysing MPs in the context of a rising China. We, therefore, see the value in including their research for the structure of our analytical framework. Their findings will thus provide a source of inspiration for how Sweden will behave in the ongoing power transition.

The analytical framework is a matrix of the three auxiliary roles of an MP from three elements of the Coxian world order; material conditions, ideas and institutions. These elements will be narrowed down and more specified by using a combination of Thies and Sari's, O'Neil and Gilley's works, summarised in Table 3.1. By applying this analytical framework to the data and analyse the content from these different elements and categories, the codes will be interpreted and presented in a descriptive manner.

Table 3.1: Analytical framework

	Good international citizen (GIC)	**Supporter of multilateralism**	**A supporter of the current liberal world order (CLWO)**
Material conditions (for example technology and accumulated resources, i.e. financial resources)	Sweden uses formulations that emphasises Swedish material resources to be used to construct regional subsystems of communities in China, not only to maximise Swedish interests, but also China's interests.	Sweden uses formulations that emphasises material resources to be used in a way to encourage diplomatic multilateralism and/or relations with China.	Sweden uses formulations that emphasises material resources to be used to support the current liberal world order. Trying to maintain/push for liberal ideals, such as rule of law, human rights and democracy.
Ideas (for example: perceptions of Sweden's self-image and uniting/ dividing ideas)	Sweden uses formulations that emphasises Sweden's image of an important mediator and bridge-builder, in relation to China and other countries.	Sweden uses formulations that emphasises strategic policies with China that encourages multilateralism and a commitment to international rules and values.	Sweden uses formulations that emphasises itself as an important actor in the role of maintaining the liberal world order, and its values.
Institutions (National as well as international and intranational)	Sweden uses formulations that emphasises the role of its institutions to promote peace, stability and security and work in a collaborative way with Chinese institutions.	Sweden uses formulations emphasising that institutions are important tools for promoting and maintaining the importance of multilateralism.	Sweden uses formulations that emphasises work towards reforming international institutions in order to constrain China's influence and include China in global governance.

The three different categories to the left (rows) represent Cox's elements of the world order (Cox, 1981). The three top categories (columns) represent Thies & Sari's (2018, pp. 402-13) three auxiliaries in role theory. The cross-sectional boxes have been filled in, with Gilley & O'Neil's (2014b, p. 239) work as a support to explain Sweden's reactions to the rise of China.

4. Aim & Research Questions

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to the scholarship of how a Western middle power, in this case Sweden, respond to the rise of China as a superpower. This aim will be furthered by answering three specific research questions:

1. How do Swedish government officials formulate strategic cooperation policies and foreign policy statements with respect to China?
2. What signs of the three different auxiliary roles (good international citizen, a supporter of multilateralism and supporter of the liberal world order) can be found in Sweden's strategic cooperation policies and foreign policy statements with respect to China?
3. How has Swedish government officials' formulations of strategic cooperation policies and foreign policy statements with respect to China, and Sweden's middle power role, changed over time (2001-2019)?

5. Methodology: Textual analysis of government policies

This thesis will analyse Sweden's government officials' formulations of strategic cooperation policies and foreign policy statements with respect to China. In doing so, the research design section will first explain the decision to make a longitudinal single-case study. The following section will then discuss why the selected reports were the best choices of data. Lastly, it will be discussed how the data will be analysed by conducting a qualitative content analysis.

5.1. Single-case study of Sweden

This thesis is a single-case descriptive comparative study of Sweden's policy formulations with respect to China. The design is longitudinal and includes the comparative element of describing Sweden's behaviour over time. As Coxian Critical Theory (CCT) demands, analyses of the world order require a historical perspective (Cox, 1981). A longitudinal design allows for such an analysis.

The time period of the analysis was selected with the requirement to grasp the relevant time period in relation to China's rise. Also, this specific time period had to fit with relevant data. The time interval of the analysis, which stretches from 2001-2019, is of relevance due to the rapid economic growth that China has experienced during this period (see Hofman, 2018, pp. 53, 55). This time period also matches with suitable data. Two official reports regarding Sweden's "China Strategy" over the years 2001-2005 and 2009-2013 were found. Unfortunately, similar strategic reports over the years 2014-2019 were missing. As a complement, foreign policy statements and the government report *Human rights, democracy and rule of law in China 2015/2016* were used to provide insight into how Sweden formulates its policies with respect to China over the later time period.

An in-depth analysis of this data will with a longitudinal design make it possible to describe changes over time. Unlike cross-sectional designs, a longitudinal study also allows for drawing inferences in terms of changes over time (Halperin & Heath, 2017, p. 151). Thus, this design is most suitable for our research questions.

In selecting a case for this study, there were several Western middle powers (MP) to choose between. Sweden was primarily chosen due to the gap in the literature. Another reason was the limitation of reading documents written in other languages. Governmental documents are often written it its own national language and are not always available in English. Since the

authors of this thesis are Swedish, the choice of Sweden was partly to avoid the potential bias of translating a document from a third language into English.

Case study as a research method has both advantages and disadvantages. An in-depth analysis of only one case has the potential of high internal validity. However, low external validity is a trade-off since a case study makes it hard to generalise the findings to other cases (Halperin & Heath, 2017, p. 154., Creswell, 2014, pp. 203-5). External validity is not the intention of this study since the aim is to apply the MP theory on how *Sweden* is reacting to China. Since both internal and external factors matter for each MP in the context of China's rise, the MP theory restricts the ability to generalise the findings of one MP to another.

Although the findings do not contribute to external validity, the findings might be useful for Sino-Swedish relations in the broader context. Swedish MP behaviour that affects its strategy in terms of cooperation and development might be useful for other policy areas, such as trade for example.

Using a single-case study means that the selection of data will be on a smaller scale. To make a quantitative analysis, there needs to be a larger pool of data to collect, as well as large-N design (Creswell, 2014, p. 221). The research design of this thesis will be qualitative.

5.2. Data collection of policy documents on China

To answer the research questions in the most suitable way, three different types of policy documents will be analysed. First, two public country strategy documents from *Regeringskansliet* (Regeringen.se)[7] were found. These two reports, by Utrikesdepartementet (Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs), which explicitly focus on China, are: *Country strategy for development cooperation with The People's Republic of China* (2001) and *Strategy for selective cooperation with China: July 2009 - December 2013* (2010). These were found using the search words "Kina" (China), "Sverige Kina strategi" (Sweden China Strategy), and "Strategi för Kina" (Strategy for China)[8] with the filter "Land- och regionsstrategi" (Country and region strategy).

The second type of document is a report from Utrikesdepartementet. With the search word "Kina" and by filtering the search results to reports from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

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[7] The official website of the Government Offices of Sweden
[8] Note: Regeringen.se is a Swedish website that is also available in English. However, Swedish search words increases the number of search engine results, as not all reports are translated into English.

the report *Human rights, democracy and rule of law in China: 2015-2016*[9] (2015) was found. This report includes a brief description of Sweden's work in China and ideas of continued work, thus provides with a historical comparison.

The third type of documents used were statements of government policies from 2004[10], 2013, 2017 and 2019. The statement from 2018 was first considered to be included in the analysis. However, that statement has been excluded from this research due to lack of content concerning China in the document. These four statements are meant to give more in-depth data of how Sweden was formulating itself towards China for the later time period of this study. These do not solely focus on China, but they do include formulations about China. As all these statements were found from the same source, by searching for "utrikesdeklaration" (declaration of foreign policy) on *Regeringen.se*, the benefits in terms of internal validity and use of primary sources apply to these documents. As they are not solely focused on China, only the introduction and the sections[11] where China is mentioned will be analysed. The introduction will be used to provide a general context that can help to understand Sweden's stand towards China. By focusing on the sections where China is mentioned will be to keep the data relevant, and not analyse contents that do not contain policies, ideas or suggestions about China. Among these documents, they were all available in English, except for the report from 2015 and the statements from 2004 and 2013. They have therefore been translated into English by the authors.

Government publications were considered the most suitable source of data. This source is reasonably the most accurate one to capture change over time in Swedish policies. Further, the use of primary sources entails three advantages in particular. Firstly, the researcher can be in control of the collected data and hence be sure of its quality. Secondly, it excludes the problem of double interpretation - as secondary sources already have been interpreted once. The third reason is that using primary sources also improves the reliability of the findings (Halperin & Heath, 2017, p. 177). Also, by using available and recent data, timely relevant information will be provided for the research (Gerard, 2010, p. 106). Hence, documents from the chosen source were selected to provide valid answers to the questions addressed.

We are aware of the implications of the chosen data in terms of internal validity, concerning the three most recent governmental statements, since they only discuss China

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[9] Original title in Swedish: Mänskliga rättigheter, demokrati och rättsstatens principer i Kina: 2015-2016
[10] For the period 2001-2006, only the governmental statement from 2004 was available.
[11] Each section is characterised by all the content that is found under each time it was said "Mr/Madam Speaker" until the next time it is ushered, or the speech ends.

generally. However, by using the previous documents as a complement, we believe we can make valid conclusions about the changes of Swedish policy formulations with respect to China over time.

The strategic policy areas were considered secondary to the choice of data, as the most important aspect was their potential in being comparable. However, the research area is still of high importance, as they concern Swedish cooperation and investment into China and the situation concerning human rights, democracy and other liberal values. They, therefore, concern Swedish direct involvement with China, and concern finances, actors, ideals and material resources Sweden have invested in China. How these elements have been used, are used, the consequences they have had for China and the consequences China has had for these elements are important as they are important connectors between Sweden and rising China.

By using public documents and being transparent with the method of gathering the data and how it will be analysed, this thesis aims to have increased reliability. By using public, accessible data and describing the method of analysis in a clear way, it will be possible for other researchers to replicate this study and come to similar conclusions. The only issue for reliability in this thesis is that since it will conduct a textual analysis, the findings could differ due to the subjectivity that personal interpretations of the texts entail.

To further ensure validity and reliability, Gerard (2010) highlights that three steps are important to make with this kind of data. The first step is to ensure that the information is complete. The second step is to be aware that the data might be biased, and the last step is intentional incompleteness (Gerard, 2010, pp. 100-1). The first step is solved as all documents were quickly skimmed through of content as they were found, thus ensuring that they are all complete. That the data would be biased is very unlikely. Of course, it is the issue that it was the Swedish government that issued the reports and that it was the Ministry for Foreign Affairs that compiled the three reports. According to Transparency International (2018), Sweden is one of the least corrupt countries in the world. We, therefore, consider the risk for bias minimal in these reports. The staff at the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs are also hired and did not achieve their positions due to supporting a certain political party. This also results in low risk for intentional incompleteness, because their careers were not on the line as they compiled the reports. Except for the report from 2015 which explicitly states that it is incomplete. However, that only concerns the Swedish work and situation, not the strategic ideas that they recommend and that will be analysed in this thesis. There are also minor issues with the statements, as they were made by the Swedish foreign ministers, as they might be biased towards their parties. But

arguably, since they were parts of the incumbent government that will conduct the strategic policies, the political bias becomes more of a political method.

In light of the above mentioned, the most suitable option is to analyse policy documents issued by the Swedish government. This provides with the best insight into the interaction between Sweden and China. Alternative methods would have been bilateral agreements, news articles or interviews. These are less suitable. Bilateral agreements would only present actual government decisions, where Chinese opinions have been involved in the decision-making process. Hence, such documents may not accurately represent Sweden's stance. Articles are written to keep the attention of an audience, and interviews are unlikely to provide any unique data other than what is already available in the documents.

5.3. Qualitative content analysis

The analysis will take the form of qualitative content analysis. This method allows for discovering attitudes, perceptions and intentions of textual information (Halperin & Heath, 2017, pp. 160-1 & Gerard, 2010, p. 157). The qualitative form means that the analysis will focus on the latent content of the data. Instead of quantitatively measure the frequency of words, the analysis of whole texts has the benefit of revealing underlying meanings (Halperin & Heath, 2017, p. 354). The research questions deal with a complex, threefold definition of Sweden's role as an MP which this analysis endeavours to reveal. Therefore, it is more suitable to investigate the whole texts in depth instead of segments. In this way, a qualitative content analysis of formulations will reveal changes in attitudes and perceptions that are expressed in the documents.

The analyses of the documents will also be compared with each other to better understand Sweden's formulations on China and how we can interpret changes of them. By applying the analytical framework to the reports we will be able to find out how Sweden has acted as a GIC, supported multilateralism, and how its attitude to the global order has been and Sweden's perceptions of how the world should be. The comparison will not only provide insight into how Sweden is dealing with China today, but also reveal how different questions have evolved, and what new concerns have been raised. Also, it will be possible to make inferences of what is said about China by interpreting this in relation to how Sweden is expressing its role, priorities and values in general terms.

As this research is interested in analysing the content of the reports in themselves and not the context of it being written, the analysis will be a qualitative content analysis. This thesis will thus try to achieve an accurate measure of MP behaviour in Sweden's policy towards China (Halperin & Heath, 2018, pp. 178, 336, 345). This will be done by analysing the documents qualitatively of what they say the necessary strategic steps are, and how well developed these steps are worded in the reports. This means that the analysis will be done by looking at the whole texts in their entirety, and not to divide it up and look at it in smaller segments, and then the content will be themed and sorted accordingly to the a priori codes listed in the analytical framework (Halperin & Heath, 2017, pp. 348, 350).

Some practical steps will be taken during the coding process in order to improve the quality of this study. Although case studies have the potential for high internal validity, excessive subjectivity is a threat to the validity of conclusions (Halperin and Heath, 2017, p. 154). Creswell's three precautionary steps will be taken to prevent excessive subjectivity and thus increase internal validity. The first one is to clarify self-bias - the awareness of how subjective interpretations affect the results of the analysis. The second step is to have peer debriefings with the supervisor of this thesis to ensure that our findings make sense to people outside of this research. This will be enhanced by using the third step: external auditors, to ensure that our findings make sense to others who are not familiar with this research and can provide their interpretation. Further, Creswell's step to ensure intra-coder reliability has been taken. This refers to the method by the researches of communicating with each other during the coding process to ensure that they both have reached the same interpretation of the texts. The texts will also be carefully compared with the coding in the analytical framework, to ensure that the right elements enter. If there are elements in the texts that are unclear, there will be an explanation of them, so it becomes easy to understand why the text was interpreted and categorised in the way it did (Creswell, 2014, pp. 202-4).

6. Analysis: Sweden's policy formulations with respect to China

This chapter has analysed policy documents regarding Sweden's formulations of strategic cooperation policies and foreign policy statements with respect to China. The analysis also includes how these formulations and Sweden's middle power (MP) role have changed over time. The analysis of Sweden's MP role includes three elements; good international citizen (GIC), the support for multilateralism, and the support for the current liberal world order (CLWO). These elements have been analysed from the three forces of material conditions, ideas, and institutions which constitute the Coxian world order. The analysis, based on a combined analytical framework of role theory and MP theory, has been interpreted by also taking Sweden's internal factors, as well as external factors from the global community into consideration. This is to include the importance of the historical context that the Coxian Critical Theory (CCT) rests on. The chapter begins with presenting the analysis of the two strategy reports. Then, the report from 2015 will be analysed before the foreign policy statements will be presented in chronological order[12]. The analysis shows that Sweden formulates its policies vis-á-vis China in a way that emphasises Sweden's role as a GIC in the early time period, with an increased emphasis on the support for the CLWO along with China's increased economic development over time. Further, the analysis shows that the policy formulations have become softer towards China over time.

6.1. Country strategy for development cooperation with The People's Republic of China: January 1 2001 - December 31 2005

In this report, it becomes evident that Sweden focused more on being a GIC than being a supporter of multilateralism and the liberal world order. This is not too surprising, as China at the time still was a small economy and underdeveloped, compared to today (Hofman, 2018, pp. 54-5). The Cold War had also ended some years before and Francis Fukuyama announced his famous "the end of history" in 1992. At the time, the liberal world order of ideals such as

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[12] As this chapter will analyse all documents respectively, and use quotes from each documents, only the page number from the quotes will be used. In case another source will be used to provide context, it will be fully referenced to.

capitalism, liberalism and democracy were not threatened. It is therefore not surprising that Sweden wanted to exert its role as a GIC to help China develop:

> The Swedish embassy in [Beijing][13] has received special funds from Sida[14] to enable it to support the local networks and organisations that are now beginning to emerge, particularly those that are connected with human rights and gender equality. (p. 8)

This indicates that Sweden was willing to help China develop by assisting them with financial resources. It also shows that Sweden portrays its behaviour as being a GIC by using resources to help China develop, as the funds are to improve local networks, organisations and promote human rights. Sweden was also willing to help China develop sustainable thinking:

> Several regional projects of research collaboration are being prepared in Asia in the fields of environmental economics, conflict research and environmental technology /…/ Chinese research institutions will be able to join these projects, thereby promoting regional research contacts. (p. 10).

By helping China to develop environmental solutions, Sweden can enjoy stronger connections with China. It is again expressed how the use of Sweden's technological resources serves both Sweden's and China's interests. Another way of improving Swedish-Chinese relations and connections, and also tackling environmental issues, was through cooperative education:

> Support for education through established contacts between Swedish university and college departments and educational institutions in China has the potential for broadening, for example, Swedish-Chinese environmental cooperation. (p. 10)

Through cooperation with institutions for education, such as universities, to improve the environment we see the emphasis of using institutions to improve China's stability and security. In this case, environmental security and stability. At the time, Sweden was in a very good position to be an important actor to help China, not only because of the funds and cooperation but also the interest that China had shown in Swedish solutions:

> China has shown great interest in Swedish solutions on the right of the individual to economic and social security. Sweden's long experience can form the basis of support for policy development and institution-building with respect to social safety nets and security systems. There is also great interests in China in learning from a Swedish experience with respect to the health situation of women and children. (p. 8)

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[13] "Peking" is the official name for Beijing in Swedish
[14] Sida (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) is working on behalf of the Swedish parliament and government, with the primary mission to reduce poverty in the world (Sida, 2017).

China's interest in Swedish solutions for political problems shows how Sweden emphasises the importance of institutions to help China tackle their internal problems. Also, Sweden's willingness to cooperate with Chinese institutions, as support, to help them develop is shown in this statement. With these institutions, economic and social security will be improved. By emphasising constructive help to China, Sweden is showing a GIC behaviour.

Although Sweden expresses a self-image of being an important actor in China, the limits of this role are also acknowledged. In this context, the important role that international institutions have in the process of helping China develop is emphasised:

Development cooperation is an integral part of Swedish and EU policy to engage China more in the international community and support development towards making China a more open society with respects for human rights. /…/ The EU:s development cooperation with China, which amounted to 70 million Euros in 1999, is aimed at supporting the reform process and China's integration into the world trade and an investment system. Promoting civil society and the rule of law, and supporting sustainable development and environmentally sound energy sources (p. 7)

This does not only put emphasis on helping China to develop through material means, such as trade, investments and development aid. It is also mentioned how cooperation with the EU will make China more integrated into the liberal world order, by the promotion of liberal ideals and engagement with liberal countries. By taking on liberal values and engaging with the EU, as well as Sweden and other institutions mentioned above, there is also a focus on supporting the importance of multilateralism, in Sweden's strategy. The role of multilateralism and its benefits for China is further expressed:

The broadened contact with other countries has contributed to vital reforms in China and increased freedom for its people. The expansion of ties and economic exchange with the outside world is not only resulting in mutual economic benefit but is also contributing to an increased interchange of knowledge with other countries. (p. 7)

It is apparent in this quote that Sweden sees multilateralism as an important factor for the improved living standards of the Chinese people. Multilateralism has been a valuable tool to develop China and in turn its contacts with other countries. It has also made China more compatible with the rest of the world, as the following quote emphasises:

Broadened interaction with the outside world has been and remains a key factor in promoting China's modernisation and adaption to the values and ground rules of the international community. The presence of foreign companies, including Swedish firms, has been a key feature of the modernisation process. (p. 4)

This highlights Sweden's recognition of itself as an important actor to help influence China through contacts and investments. How China is "adapting" to the "ground rules" of the

international community also clearly reveals Sweden's support for the liberal world order. The Swedish institution Sida plays an important role in this process:

> China's interest in Sida's international courses has been significant. China has expressed the wish to develop cooperation further in terms of skills, development in environmental agencies and administrative departments. There is also, as before, scope for developing customised bilateral courses based on the international courses given in Sweden. Their courses should, where applicable, conform to a perspective of democracy and human rights, and their implementation should be feasible both in Sweden and in China. (p. 10)

Sweden is portraying itself as an important actor in pushing for liberal values since China has shown great interest in the Swedish institution Sida. Through Sida, Sweden can, therefore, push for liberal ideals such as democracy and human rights, thus supporting the liberal world order. Sweden is also willing to put more resources into Sida to improve diplomatic relations and multilateralism alongside development:

> The procedure adopted by Sida in development cooperation with China has been based on a pronounced demand /.../ experience shows that an increase in capacity on the ground can help to broaden and deepen contacts which may intern result in interesting projects and enhance the quality of cooperation. This has also meant improved Swedish capacity in conducting the dialogue with various Chinese partners and has enabled Sida to enter the Chinese process of preparing new projects at an earlier stage. With this kind of procedure, there are better prospects of in-depth relations and improved results in future cooperation, but it also calls for an increase in resources on the part of Sida. (p. 9)

Here, the vital role of institutions for Swedish strategic cooperation with China is expressed. By listening to Chinese demands for help and have Swedish institutions to work collaboratively with Chinese actors makes it more possible for Sweden to enter projects earlier. This also enables Sweden to improve the quality of cooperation and, with reference to the previous quotes above, be in a better position to promote liberal values and work towards more peace, security and stability. As Sweden expresses the positive effects of demand-based cooperation, it becomes clear that the increasing need for resources to conduct this is something the Swedish government is willing to meet. Thus, Sweden's role as a GIC and the importance of institutions, domestic as well as international, are again highlighted.

      To conclude, the content in this report focuses mainly on Sweden's role as a GIC. When this report was written, China did not have the same position in the global order as it has today. Therefore, it makes sense that Sweden's support for the liberal order was not a high priority in the report. However, the latent content shows support for such an order, given the frequently mentioned emphasis on institutions, democracy and human rights. The limited focus on multilateralism, in terms of arguing for multilateral solutions on Chinese development, might

depend on the explicit focus on the Sweden-China bilateral cooperation. The underlying meaning of the whole report although promotes multilateralism in its latent meaning.

The fact that Sweden expresses that "China is not a democratic country, and the respect for human rights in China unsatisfactory" (p. 3), in the context of China's political and economic development, indicates that Sweden promotes a liberal world order. It also indicates that Sweden wishes that China develops in a liberal direction. Since the report regards Swedish resources on Chinese development, this means that Sweden aims China to develop in the "liberal way".

6.2. Strategy for selective cooperation with China: July 2009 - December 2013

In contrast to the great focus on Sweden as a GIC in the previous report, this strategy for selective cooperation with China has a greater focus on upholding the liberal world order. This is interesting, given that China's position in the world order experienced significant changes during the period between 2001-2009, in terms of its increased economic expansion. In this sense, it was more apparent that China might become a serious challenger of the liberal world order in 2009 than in 2001. In this context, it is reasonable to assume that Sweden had greater incentives to use its MP role to defend a world order based on liberal values in its relation with China.

Partner-driven cooperation is a means of stimulating the development of sustainable mutual relations between partners in Sweden and China, with an aim of helping to create conditions that enable poor people to improve their lives. (p. 4)

Swedish good international citizenship is expressed in terms of how Swedish resources are used to improve China's internal conditions. Swedish good international citizenship is shown by the initiative on giving aid to China on an annual basis. The report reveals that Swedish resources on development in China will be around 50 million SEK per year during 2009-2013 (p. 6). The contributions will be prioritised to the "two sectors democratic governance/human rights and environment/climate" (p. 2). This means that Sweden uses its economic resources in the pursuits of the overall aim to improve China-Sweden relations in a GIC manner, to help develop democracy, human rights, and sustainable development in China. Hence, both Swedish and Chinese interests are satisfied, since Sweden helps to determine the direction in how China's development will solve its internal issues.

The latent meaning indicates that Sweden is aware that it is a small actor and its resources alone cannot help China fully. But, what Sweden is doing to help China in improving the environment, human rights, health and judicial practice have positive effects as the relations between the two countries have strengthened. This shows the belief in international cooperation on broad world issues, such as human rights and the environment, where Sweden formulates itself as a contributing actor that matters on these issues. Hence, the latent meaning indicates the belief in multilateralism.

These two quotes together also indicate that Sweden emphasises material resources to support the liberal global order. Since Swedish strategic development in China has the priority of democracy and human rights, this expresses strong support for the liberal world order. Even though poverty in China has been expressed as an important issue, democracy and human rights still have the highest priority in terms of Swedish resources on developmental aid in China.

The strategy Sweden uses to help China develop is also used as a means for Sweden to promote multilateralism and international values. In this case, to enforce the values and standards of the UN:

Sweden's emphasis on multilateralism is expressed by referring to the importance of the UN Convention. Also, the formulation in "the HR perspective is to guide all initiatives" indicates the belief in cooperation based on universal values and frameworks. Even though this refers to disability issues in particular, it indicates the belief in using a universal UN framework in general. Hence, Sweden expresses the idea of the UN's important role in how multilateral cooperation to improve human conditions should be conducted. The underlying meaning is a Swedish desire for Chinese commitment to this approach. However, the UN is not the only institution that Sweden sees as possessing an important role in China. Sweden sees namely itself as having a very important role as well:

Via the Raoul Wallenberg Institute, Sweden has been implementing a cooperation programme in the HR sphere since 1996, and this has contributed to the position of trust Sweden now enjoys in China regarding cooperation on democracy/human rights (p. 13).

Sweden's idea of itself as an important actor to promote democracy and human rights, in other words, liberal values, in China is apparent in this quote. Sweden, therefore, has the idea of itself through its institutions as an important actor to maintain and support the CLWO. The important role Sweden plays in upholding liberal values are also expressed on repeated occasions:

The situation regarding human rights, judicial system reforms and other reform processes associated with HR and democracy remains an important priority for Sweden in its contacts with China. Through long-established ties and partnerships, and also as a result of its social models, in which China is displaying an interest, Sweden continues to play an important role in this area (p. 15).

Based on this, it seems that to promote liberal ideas, and thus supporting the liberal world order, is also something Sweden is very keen on promoting. Sweden's position and its willingness are therefore seen as a key role for maintaining the world order. Its abilities to influence China is mentioned here as well:

Since launching its reform process thirty years ago, China has been testing and applying many different models and social solutions in a pragmatic way, and is showing considerable interest in foreign results in this area. Swedish solutions in a wide range of areas have been subject to close attention. Numerous Swedish actors are engaging in advanced cooperation projects with China, and in some areas Sweden is in a position to help influence developments in China on the basis of Swedish democratic values. It is vital that Sweden remains in a position to influence Chinese society in this way (p. 14).

Sweden expresses its role in relation to China's development, and its ability to influence China's direction. However, in this context, Sweden's limited role is also expressed, as Swedish actors only are able to promote democratic values in some areas, not all. It is also not clearly specified of how many these positions are. But, as the last sentence points out, Sweden expresses the importance of pushing for liberal values in China and maintain this role and position to do so. As Sweden sees itself as an important actor to promote liberal values, this shows Sweden's self-image of its role in supporting the liberal order. The report emphasises that Institutions such as Sida and the RWI have significant roles in collaborating with China:

Since 1996, Sida has been supporting an HR programme implemented by the Raoul Wallenberg Institute at Lund University. The programme has been externally evaluated and was found to be an effective means of helping to build up HR capacity in China, both in the academic sphere and in the justice sphere. This cooperation also represents an important resource in Sweden's HR relations with China, not least with regard to the HR consultations between the two countries (p. 11).

Through institutional cooperation between Sida, the RWI and Chinese actors, areas such as human rights and the justice sphere in China have been improved. By improving human rights in China security has been improved, and stability with the improvement with the justice sphere. Sweden expresses how these efforts have been effective means, which indicates the role of Swedish resources in China's development in a direction that Sweden wants. It is also expressed that Sweden aims to continue development on other areas as well, for example in CSR (p. 4), which indicates the belief in Sweden's GIC role through the means of institutional initiatives in China.

The institutions are also formulated as important parts for the continuing cooperation with China. To give some context, the 50 million SEK per year that will be used for development is planned to be phased out during the two first years from previous agreements and then focused on the selective areas of human rights/democracy and environment/climate (p. 6). Institutions are seen as important parts of this plan:

> Since most cooperation will be partner-driven by the end of the strategy period, and be characterised by broad areas of contact, the dialogue will be conducted both with ministries and government agencies and with other partners in the two countries. Thus, the dialogue will be conducted continuously with, for instance, the Chinese government and the ministries at a national and provincial level, with NGOs and individuals, and with other partners and the EU (p. 5).

Sweden emphasises that the role institutions and organisation have are important in the continuing cooperation between Sweden and China. This indicates the importance of multilateralism since the roles of NGOs and the EU are expressed in the context of Sweden-China strategic cooperation. Hence, the strategy is to include institutions, which indicates that Sweden believes in multilateral solutions.

Sweden has also recognised that reforms are necessary for institutions to constrain China's influence and make it more compatible with liberal global governance:

> To realise this goal [of stronger respect for human, civil and political rights in China], cooperation efforts are to focus on strengthening reform processes that have a bearing on the objective for the selective programme cooperation. Possible areas of cooperation are continued support for institution-building and human rights education via the Raoul Wallenberg Institute, freedom of expression, and the development of both judicial practice and the rule of law, with particular emphasis on vulnerable groups. (p. 3)

Institutions clearly play an important role in Sweden regarding liberal values, such as human rights. Based on the data, it seems that by using international and domestic institutions, Sweden wants to direct Chinese HR development in accordance with liberal values both in terms of civil and political human rights. Such values, and institutions that uphold and promote them, are a

central component of the liberal world order. Through institution-building, and with the support from other upholders of the liberal order, such as the EU, there is a better possibility to influence China and direct the country towards more liberal values.

> The human rights situation and reform of the judicial system will remain high on both Sweden's and the EU's agenda in relation to China. Sweden has established a solid basis on which to develop its cooperation efforts. China has shown interest in the Swedish social model (p. 13)

Sweden is therefore not working alone, but also the EU is keen to make China more compatible with the CLWO by reforming Chinese systems. Sweden seeks opportunities to promote the human rights situation and reform judicial systems in China whenever it is possible. For instance, the Chinese interest in the Swedish social model is mentioned in this context of democratising China, even though it is not clear if China has an interest in democracy. This quote also shows that Sweden sees itself as an important actor that works along with the EU for these policies. Also, as Sweden share its agenda with the EU, Chinese changes towards reforms that are according to the Swedish ideal also change towards the EU's ideal. The changes and reforms will, therefore, make China more compatible with the current liberal order.

In conclusion, the analysis shows that there was no mentioning of Sweden's bridge-building/mediating role. The absence of how Sweden mediates between countries might depend on the fact that the report regards Sweden's bilateral relation with China. Hence, it might be misleading to assume that Sweden does not have a mediating role in the global political economy. The report shows a stronger focus on multilateralism and the liberal world order, and less focus on good international citizenship, compared to the previous report.

6.3. Human rights, democracy and rule of law in China 2015/2016

In this report, Sweden has changed its formulation of China's political system. The formulation "China is a one-party state without free, public elections" is a significantly different expression, in comparison to in 2001, where China was referred to as "not a democratic country". The latent meaning indicates that Sweden has become more cautious to express its own role as an important agent in the defence of liberal values in the world order. The way of formulating Sweden's cooperation with China also shows a new trend:

> Sida supports the Raoul Wallenberg institute (RWI) which since the 1990s undertake work in China on for example youth care, disability rights and academic exchanges. RWI, which has an office in Beijing, played an important role in initiating the master's programme in human rights at the University of Beijing. Sida also funds

the Dui Hua Foundation, which works to raise awareness regarding political prisoners' rights in China. Some civic society organisations based in, and with the support from, Sweden are operating in China. Cooperation and projects with China concern issues such as CSR, women's and children's rights and environmental policy. (p. 19)

Interestingly, the purpose of the RWI was in 2009 described as "helping to build up HR capacity in China". In this report, it is very slightly expressed that this institution has anything to do with HR. This is only mentioned in terms of a university programme on HR, which points to educational cooperation rather than an attempt to build up HR capacity in China. Even though this report includes less text than the report from 2009, the description of the RWI differs. Thus, it does not become apparent that HR is a priority for Sweden's operation in China, even in a report that deals with human rights and democracy. The latent content thus indicates a decline of Sweden's idea of itself - both as a GIC and a defender of the CLWO.

6.4. Sweden's statement of foreign policy 2004-2019

Statements of Sweden's foreign policy were used as a complement to the reports that specifically regard China. In this way, it was possible to analyse Sweden's policy formulations as well as self-image and view of the global arena to a greater extent. After reading through these four statements it became apparent that "ideas" was the most found category. This is logical, as the statements of government policy express Sweden's general foreign policy. Hence, these documents do not only concern China, unlike the other two reports that have been analysed. Therefore, Sweden's self-image could be analysed to a greater extent than how the resources are specifically used with respect to China. Regarding formulations about institutions, this was found to a varied extent in the reports.

6.4.1. Statement of foreign policy 2004[15]

The statement from 2004 shows Sweden's support for the multilateral liberal world order, which is expressed in relation to the Swedish preference for a US-led world. Sweden's self-image of its own role in promoting such an order is also expressed. This is stated by expressing Sweden's stance on the role of multilateral cooperation through institutions in a liberal world order:

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[15] In 2004, Laila Freivald (Social Democratic Party) was the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden

Equal rights for all people is essential. The solidarity and cooperation is in turn preconditions for our own safety. This is also the United Nations idea and this is the European Union's idea. But values do not become reality in discourse and thoughts. Values get its meaning when they are transferred into action (p. 1).

The underlying meaning in the formulation that values get its meaning when they are transferred into action indicates Sweden's idea of its own role in maintaining liberal values. It is also expressed on the same page that "at the moment, Sweden is active on many fields to increase safety in our neighbourhood, in Europe and globally", which shows Sweden's idea of itself as an important actor globally. Sweden's preferential world order is clearly expressed in the following quote:

The fact that the Swedish and American government at present have different opinions in some issues must not eclipse the fact that an active engagement from the United States is a precondition for that all the challenges that the world community faces will be met. No country can deal with these challenges alone. The United States needs the world and the world needs the United States. The relationship with the United States, the so called Transatlantic link, is central for Europe's security and development. Even if we sometimes have different opinions, essential basic values of democracy and human rights are shared (p. 3).

This quote formulates what kind of world order that Sweden prefers and defends. The expression that "the world needs" the US signals Sweden's support for US hegemony, which is based on the US-shared view of the importance of liberal values. Our interpretation is that the world needs the US, because of the US commitment to liberal values, as these are mentioned the context of how the world needs the US. The formulations of how a single country cannot face global challenges alone, together with the mentioning of US-Europe cooperation in this context, reveals support for multilateralism. Moreover, the underlying meaning refers to Sweden's own role in the multilateral world order, as Sweden cooperates with the US even when they disagree on other values. Thus, Sweden's idea is that shared values of the liberal world order is crucial, and thus, Sweden has a self-image as being an important upholder of such an order. Sweden's role in this is also expressed regarding China:

Another important question is the issue of how we shall deal with the slow development of the respect for human rights in countries such as China. The question is if it is enough that the rapid economic development lifts a large part of the population out of poverty, and increases the contacts with the surrounding world. The government's opinion is clear: We shall not fold in the critique of the violation against the human rights that occurs in China. Not the least, this is why we need dialogue and collaboration within the fields where we actually can affect this big country, for example within legislative development and the environment (p. 3).

The formulation of "we shall not fold" in the context of the human rights situation in China indicates both a strong dissatisfaction towards illiberal China and a strong willingness to act on this issue. The formulation of this dissatisfaction indicates that Sweden has a role in pushing China towards the implementation of liberal values. Since it is also expressed that dialogue and

collaboration with China are needed "within the fields where we actually can affect this big country" expresses Sweden's idea of itself - an influential actor of upholding the liberal world order. Interestingly, it is expressed that Sweden will bring up the question of HR, even in the context of environmental cooperation. The latent meaning indicates that Sweden will be an active promoter of liberal values as soon as there is an opportunity for that.

6.4.2. Statement of foreign policy 2013

The statement from 2013[16] was characterised with how Sweden was and should cooperate more with other nations, institutions and organisations across the world. Sweden's cooperation with China and China's role globally is mentioned in one paragraph:

> Our relations with China continue to develop at a rapid pace. China's increasingly prominent role as a global actor also increases our expectations of a greater Chinese responsibility in global issues. This responsibility also includes the respect for human, civil and political rights and freedoms of its own citizens. (p. 6)

The Chinese disrespect for human rights is brought up again. However, Sweden's dissatisfaction is not expressed, unlike in the previous statement. Compared to the statement from 2004, where "Sweden shall not fold" on this issue, the formulation this year only expresses China's responsibility. This is interesting, as Sweden still expects China to embrace liberal values along with its stronger position in global governance. However, this is not formulated as clear as in 2004, as Sweden does not mention its own role on this issue this year. Hence, Sweden's role as a GIC is not expressed, and hence not evident compared to the previous statement.

6.4.3. Statement of foreign policy 2017[17]

In 2017, the concern for the future of the world was a significant theme. The opening statement "Sweden and the world are experiencing a paradoxical time of rapid and significant change" (p. 1) indicates that the focus of the speech was more on the current world order, and how it might change. China is barely mentioned in this speech and has very little focus on its own. However, when China is mentioned, it is in the context of multilateralism and common coordination in the changing world:

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[16] In 2013, Carl Bildt (Moderate Party) was the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden

[17] In 2017-2019, Margot Wallström (Social Democratic Party) was the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden

In the view of the serious international situation, the government is urging global actors such as the United States, China, India and Russia to take greater responsibility, both towards each other and towards the rest of the world. (p. 4)

The way Sweden formulates this sentence indicates the belief that influential powers in the world has a certain responsibility; namely that the bigger nations need to come together and cooperate. The emphasis of cooperation and responsibility indicates the belief in multilateralism. In this multilateral collaboration, there are Swedish plans for engagement with Asia and China:

Asia is a growth engine of the global economy, and major investment is being made there in the technologies of the future. Our engagement in Asia aims to contribute both to sustainable development and to democracy and to respect for human rights. Relations with China are developing, but the regional security policy tensions and democratic and human rights situation are a cause for concern. (p. 5)

This indicates that Sweden aimed to use its resources to maximise both Swedish and Chinese interests in China. There is a sense of good international citizenship from Sweden's part here, as investments are made to help China, with a focus on regional security. To improve Chinese regional systems was a Swedish concern, thus portraying Swedish GIC-behaviour. There is also a sense of supporting the CLWO, as its values are being increasingly promoted in Asia, and with worries of the poor development of democracy and human rights in China.

6.4.4. Statement of foreign policy 2019

China is mentioned five times in total in two different paragraphs, which is more in quantity compared to the statement from 2017. There is little focus on Sweden's role as a GIC. Instead, the focus concentrates on the support for multilateralism and the liberal world order. Sweden's support for the liberal world order is also mentioned on several occasions which might depend on China's increasingly strong position in the global order.

It is not mentioned in this statement how Sweden utilised its MP role as a GIC in terms of its resources or as a bridge-builder in China. This might depend on the type of document that has been analysed - namely Sweden's overall foreign policy, which logically excludes detailed information of bilateral relations. In the same vein, Sweden's institutional efforts in its collaboration with China is also not included. What is mentioned about China is rather its newly prominent global position:

China's stronger international position brings both opportunities and challenges. Trade with China creates both jobs and growth in Sweden. The democracy and human rights situation in China is very serious. The government is working on developing a new China strategy (p. 10).

The way in which Sweden formulates the implications of China's international position shows that Sweden supports a liberal world order. This, as the issues of democracy and HR situation in China is formulated as "very serious" - in other words troublesome. Since Sweden mentioned that a new China strategy is on the way, it is reasonable to assume that this strategy will have a high priority on these issues, given the way in which these issues are formulated in this sentence. Furthermore, democracy and human rights were also given the highest priority in its development strategy with China between 2009-2013. Therefore, this indicates that Swedish resources most likely will continue to be spent on projects that aim to maintain and defend liberal values, given Sweden's hitherto ambitious initiatives on such cooperation with China. The idea of Sweden's role in maintaining the liberal order is also expressed in the following sentence:

In a changing world, our task is to pursue a foreign policy that creates security in Sweden and around us. To do this, foreign policy during this electoral period will have three priorities: the promotion of democracy, shared responsibility for peace and security, and active diplomacy. (p. 1)

Sweden formulated itself as having the "task" to have a foreign policy that defends liberal values - not only in Sweden but also "around us". This means that Sweden expresses the idea of itself as an important contributor to world peace and democracy and that its active diplomacy with other countries matters with regards to liberal values. The "shared" responsibility also reveals the belief in multilateral cooperation.

The role of multilateralism is also expressed clearly in the sentence: "we defend the multilateral trade system, of which the WTO is a central part" (p. 10). This statement includes the view of the important role of institutions to maintain the multilateral world order. This also includes the important role of institutions in the way in which multilateral governance works. That Sweden sides with WTO is also of importance, due to China's violations against the organisation's agreements, where the WTO has complained about the challenges that China brings for world trade. Even though China has been surprisingly compilable to these complaints (Bacchus, Lester & Zhu, 2018, pp. 6-9), our interpretation is that Sweden expresses its defence of WTO due to the perception of the WTO as a vital organisation for a multilateral order. The underlying meaning of this expression can thus be linked to these recent violations, which leads to expressions of Sweden's support for the multilateral, liberal world order.

The role of Swedish diplomacy is expressed as: "diplomacy is also promotion of our trade". Furthermore, it is said that "the trade conflict between the United States and China is a threat to the multilateral order" (p. 10). Hence, Sweden perceives diplomacy and trade as interrelated. This means that by promoting liberal values through diplomacy in trade relations, Sweden wanted to spread its values, for example, the support of multilateralism, in this way. Hence, the political dimension is not separated from the economic. This expresses Sweden's idea of how the world order should work - where trade and the shared values that constitute the liberal world order go hand in hand. Swedish GIC is hence expressed in its form of diplomacy, that is based on liberal values such as democracy and human rights.

6.5 Results

The analysis resulted in two major findings which enable us to answer the research questions. The primary finding of Sweden's increased defence of the liberal world order became more apparent over time, as China kept growing and gained more economic power. The signs of the three auxiliary roles, although always apparent, made a shift in emphasis from being a GIC to the support of the liberal world order. In the early 2000s, the formulations concentrated mostly on how to help China develop. Later, the formulations became more focused on how to constrain China's threat to the liberal world order. This was seen on all the three elements; resources, ideas and institutions - since Sweden recognises itself as an influential actor who is willing to use its resources on implementing China in the liberal world order, with the help of institutions.

The other finding was that Sweden's tone on China has changed since the early 2000s. In 2001, it was expressed that China was "not a democratic country" with "unsatisfactory respect for human rights". In 2015, China was called a "one-party state", which is not the same as undemocratic. This indicates that China's flaws are expressed more delicately today, without mentioning Sweden's opposition to the same extent. The formulations have gone from a stern tone, by directly addressing China's flaws, to express the concerns about its rising position in the world with a softer tone. This trend was found both in the foreign policy statements and in the reports that more explicitly addressed China.

These two findings answer our second and third research questions and together provides an answer for our first question, how Sweden formulates itself politically towards China. The answer, based on our findings, is that Sweden is formulating its policies in a way that it sees itself capable and willing to make China more fitting in liberal world order. At the

same time, the formulations become less critical against the rising superpower, than at the beginning of the time period. Arguably, this change in formulations indicates hedging behaviour.

7. Conclusions

Middle powers are influential actors and matter in power shifts - also now with China's rise. The aim of this thesis was to contribute to the broader question of how middle powers react to this power shift. More specifically, the research questions were how Sweden's governmental policies with respect to China has been formulated, how these formulations correspond to the middle power (MP) role of being a good international citizen, a supporter of multilateralism, and a promoter of the liberal world order, and lastly, how Sweden's MP role and policy formulations have changed over time.

The answers to these questions are that Sweden seems to exert its role as a typical MP, both in its foreign policy statements and in strategic cooperation policies with China. However, both Sweden's MP role and the policy formulations have changed since 2001. These answers are based on the two results from the analysis. First, Sweden has toned down its expressions of its role as a good international citizen, with an increased emphasis on its role as a promoter of the liberal world order over the time period. Second, the tone on China in Sweden's formulations has changed. Interestingly, this coincides the external factor of China's rise. This does not mean that Sweden's *activities* of good international citizenship have been conducted on a smaller scale. However, it is interesting that the formulations with respect to China increasingly concentrates on the defence of the liberal world order.

MP theory was in this thesis combined with role theory. Gilley and O'Neil's MP framework was useful since it was based on recent responses by MPs towards China. Role theory contributed with the important element of highlighting the behavioural attribute of the MP role. This made an in-depth policy analysis of Swedish formulations possible. Thus, we argue that this combination has been a suitable way of analysing MPs in relation to China. From this lens, it can be described how MPs matter in this power transition, unlike in realism and liberalism. For this reason, Coxian Critical Theory was used as a grand theory in order to offer the lens of MPs' influential role in shaping the structure of the world order. More of the research concerning China's rise should, therefore, involve MP theory.

This thesis has filled a gap by showing that Sweden increasingly has used its MP role to promote the liberal order, however with more careful expressions about China than in 2001. This is an important finding since Sweden has not previously been studied from the MP perspective. Sweden has (like Norway, Australia, and Canada) been an important actor during important international events. As the literature on Canada and Australia as MPs are more

developed - it is already known, at least to some extent, how they are responding towards China's rise. This study contributes to the debate by showing how Sweden as an MP is reacting towards the current power shift. Since the method and design of this thesis restrict us from answering the question of Sweden's response towards China, we have arguably contributed with some knowledge to this broader question.

The shift in tone by Sweden was characterised by increasingly cautious policy formulations. Maybe is it so that Sweden has adopted a hedging strategy. As previous literature has shown, this has already been the response by Japan and Australia. Despite the trend of hedging among them, how they more in detail are dealing with China's rise and its implications varies. This is shown in how Australia and Japan seek cooperation both with China and the US, while Canada possesses a niche role to promote liberal values. How Sweden hedges in this phenomenon can be indicated in our result of how Sweden works more with the EU to promote the liberal world order, while at the same time work closely with China but with less criticism. The results thus correspond to Bohman and Michalski's findings that Sweden does not want to adopt a sterner tone to China, while also like Canada possess a unique niche role towards China to promote liberal values, like Gilley's findings. The trend of hedging raises the broader question of the role of MPs in maintaining the liberal world order. Will all MPs exert a hedging strategy towards China? Is that the pattern among MPs response during this phenomenon, as the shared pattern of niche diplomacy was after the Cold War? Or, will MPs show different responses? As also expressed in the literature review, there is no guarantee that MPs remain with the old hegemon in power transitions.

The knowledge that has been gained in this thesis contains how Sweden as an MP has dealt with China's rise as a superpower. This is of importance as Sweden's role has been addressed in MP scholarship, as well as through the claimed effects Sweden has had in cooperating with China. China's rise is currently one of the most important topics in IR. Leaving out the important aspect of how MPs exert its influence to constrain China's influence is problematic and needs to be further investigated.

7.1. Limitations

As the MP theory is still in development, it is possible that this thesis has overlooked important elements of the theory that will be developed in the future by further research. For example, a continuation of the ongoing debate of traditional and emerging MPs might bring new light to how Sweden is categorised and expected to react. This thesis hopes that by using theories and

findings which are generally agreed upon by MP scholars, the findings of this thesis will still be relevant for future research.

A methodological limitation of this study refers to the lack of generalisability. The single-case design sets the limits of drawing inferences on MPs in general from our findings of Sweden. Therefore, we cannot apply our findings of Sweden's behaviour to other cases. With the lack of comparable data from different MP countries, the choice of good internal validity on a single case was prioritised in order to provide valid findings.

The descriptive character of this thesis also means that we can only *describe* Sweden's strategic policies towards China, and how these have changed. Hence, it sets the limitation of drawing causal conclusions regarding whether these policy formulations can be explained with China's economic expansion. A design that allows the investigation of the underlying reasons for why it is that Sweden exerts its MP role towards China differently today compared to in the early 2000s could have revealed such explanations. However, we cannot conclude that this depends on China's economic expansion, as there might be other explanatory factors that have affected these policy formulations.

7.2. Recommendations

As Sweden currently is developing a new China strategy, the very first recommendation would be to analyse the new report when it is released. We would also recommend further research on how other countries are reacting to China's rise, and not only focus on the US, great powers and the nearby nations. Comparative research on several MPs would also contribute with external validity, and thus contribute to generalisable information on this topic. In this way, it would be possible to draw valid inferences of MP behaviour and provide valuable information to the subject of China's rise. Especially interesting would be a comparison of the response by the traditional MPs.

The changes in Sweden's MP role which our thesis found also raises new questions of the underlying reasons for this change. Whether this is a response towards China's increased economic expansion is an interesting question which would reveal insightful information, and contribute to other research on the response to the rise of China.

China's increased global influence means a different relationship between China and MPs compared to when China was a developing country. These new circumstances in the international system also raise many new questions. For instance, how will this interaction work

in the liberal rule-based international order that was designed by the West? The MP perspective as the theoretical lens will, as argued throughout this thesis, give insightful information of the impact MPs have on China.

When looking at Sweden's most recent report on regional development cooperation in Asia, Sweden expresses the aim of improving human rights and democracy in Asia, and its "potential influence" as "one of the few donors in the region who focuses on strengthening regional actors and regional cooperation" (Utrikesdepartementet, 2019, p. 5). Interestingly, in a similar document from 2010, China was mentioned as one of the countries that Sweden is planning to "adapt to and consider closer collaboration with" (Utrikesdepartementet, 2010a). However, this was not mentioned at all in Sweden's most recent report from 2019. This raises the question of how MP collaboration with China on global issues will take form in the future. Will MP coalition-building be characterised by the avoidance of collaboration with China in order to constrain China's global influence? If so, what will this mean for global governance?

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Appendix:

Middle power definition matrix

	Size	Location	Capabilities	Behaviour	Ideology	Identity	Emerging	Regional
Carr	✖	✔	✔	✔	-	✔	-	-
Thies and Sari	✖	-	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Jordaan	✖	-	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✖
Gilley and O'Neil	✖	✖	✔	✔	✔	-	-	-
Cox	✖	✔	✔	✔	✔	-	-	-

This table is a summary and includes all the different variables the authors include in their definitions of middle powers. How they argue that these variables look like varies. The (✔) symbol means that they agree that the variable is of importance to the middle power definition. The (✖) means that they disagree and (-) means that they do not mention the variable at all in their definition.