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Strategic Sea Lines of Communication

China's South China Sea policy and the Copenhagen School of Security Studies

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Abstract

The issue of Chinese assertiveness has become a big focus area for International Relations scholars in recent years due to China's growing global and regional impact in Asia, which is increasingly challenging USA's hard and soft power in the region. The purpose of this thesis is to nuance the realist interpretation of the Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea by applying a Copenhagen School theory of Security Studies theoretical framework to uncover underlying motives and incentives for China's actions. The study highlights how important the aspect of political security is for China's South China Sea-policy as the sea is a key factor in China's continued economic development. The study furthermore shows how cautious China is to not securitise the dispute, which partially can be explained by wariness toward audience costs created by future nationalist protests.

Keywords: *China, South China Sea, Securitisation, Security, Audience Costs*

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Content

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1. Introduction

The South China Sea has during the 21st century almost become synonymous with Chinese assertiveness in China's relationship with its peripheral Southeast Asian neighbours. Contestation about influence has also arisen with the USA, who has a lot of influence and military presence in the region. The South China Sea has become a flashpoint for disputes over sovereignty between bordering states in the region. Starting in the 1970s contestation about sovereignty over territory has been an increasing issue for Southeast Asian states, as it has become a protracted issue in an otherwise pragmatic and cooperative regional dynamic (Kaplan, 2016). China has shown great interest in forcefully asserting its claims to sovereignty in the region since the 1970s, when they first forced another state to leave an island in the South China Sea (Shirk, 2014). China has to a large extent been a common denominator for all the Southeast Asian states that have territory in the South China Sea as they have been forced to respond to and handle Chinese assertiveness in response to China's claim to sovereignty over almost the whole of the South China Sea – in reference to China's "Nine-dash line document" (FMPRC, 2016).

Furthermore, a great concern for the USA and Southeast Asian states regarding China's assertiveness in the South China Sea has been China's major land reclamation projects and the construction of military forward operating bases in contested areas on different locations in the South China Sea. These artificial islands have come under international scrutiny since the start of the construction due to their questionable legality in reference to international law and international security concerns (Shugart, 2016). The Permanent Arbitral Tribunal in The Hague (2016) recently concluded that these artificial islands that China is creating cannot be used as the baseline for a claim to an *Exclusive Economic Zone*, which might have been a partial explanation for China's decision to construct these islands. This verdict is however something that China should have

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foreseen, as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS, 1994) is very clear on what constitutes an island and not, perhaps indicating that China are not that concerned with abiding to international law in this issue. This aligns with the path that China started to walk in 2008 during the end of Hu Jintao's presidency (2002-12) when China's approach to foreign policy changed dramatically from a 'gentle giant' to a more assertive actor (Lam, 2016), which perhaps is best exemplified by the treatment of president Obama on his state visit to China 2008, which can be described as cold (Shirk, 2014). China's new approach to the foreign policy arena has had a big impact on the view of China internationally, with a great explosion in the use of the words *China* and *assertiveness* in the same sentence since then (Johnston, 2014; Nye, 2005). China's new firmer approach to foreign policy issues is a topic that scholars and commentators follow closely, as China have started to challenge some of the dynamics and structures in the international system that have been steadfast since the end of the Cold War.

The issue of Chinese assertiveness has become a big focus area for International Relations scholars in recent years due to China's growing global and regional impact in Asia, which is increasingly challenging USA's hard and soft power in the region (Glaser, 2011). Conceptualizations of the South China Sea dispute have often been concerned with the changing power dynamics in the region, due to China's emerging international footprint. Examples of this is John Mearsheimer's (2014) article called "Can China rise peacefully?", which situates the issue within a structural realist framework where the South China Sea dispute is used as proof for China's increasing challenge to US hegemony. Also liberal theorists like Joseph Nye are concerned with increased Chinese power projection in the region, where they increasingly are challenging and questioning existing norms and institutions that help govern the international system (Callahan, 2015). Challenging existing structures of power is therefore a theme that has become synonymous with the South China Sea dispute from the perspective of state-centric theories of international relations. Notions of a 'rising power' and

'anarchy' are terms that are inherently connected to the state-centric understanding of China's increasing assertiveness towards its neighbours. According to for example Mearsheimer's (2014) structural realist perspective China is acting in line with their growing power and influence, as the characteristics of the *international system* make this the rational action to take. Emphasis is here placed on how some structural variables affects a state's decisions, which to some extent takes these actions for granted with reference to rationality as a driving force. That is; the structure of the system affects the actions of the actors in it. This naturally also applies to the realm of security where threats are framed within the context of the anarchic international system. However, what does this perspective tell us about the motivations and, perhaps more importantly, the intentions of an actor?

This thesis aims to provide a competing understanding of China's assertiveness in the South China Sea to existing mainstream realist interpretations of the issue by employing Copenhagen School Theory (CST) and critical discourse analysis, and in this way provide agency to China's leadership for China's foreign policy. However, the thesis does not intend to question the validity of realist interpretations of China's assertiveness, rather the thesis intends to evaluate how well CST and a constructivist notion of security can provide a competing explanation, due to the difference in epistemological and ontological perspectives. What this thesis primarily intends to achieve through employing CST is therefore to situate Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea in a broader context and to uncover underlying motivations and intentions that may be neglected when assuming that an actors motivations and intentions are connected to structures.

1.1 Research question

- **To what extent can Copenhagen School securitisation theory and a broadened security perspective help explain Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea since 2010?**

2. Theory

In a realist understanding of international relations the foreign policy of a state is dictated by a countries national interest, known as the *raison d'État* ("reason of state") (see Mearsheimer, 1995: 9-13). The national interest of a sovereign state is inherently connected to the concept of *self-help* and of survival, as the foreign policy of a state is a result of its intent to continue to exist as an entity (Mearsheimer, 1995: 9-13). However, as mentioned above, realism takes the intentions and motivations regarding the foreign policy of states for granted, which can become very problematic when a state's actions need to be nuanced. Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea is a good example of this, which to a realist-eye is viewed in the context of self-help and survival. This creates a picture of china's actions as aggressive, as they are behaving in a manner which through a realist perspective is rational if you want to expand your power and influence, to ensure your own survival. An example of this is John Mearsheimer's view of Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea (2014). However, as Susan Shirk rightly points out, by viewing a state's objectives as static we can also fall in trap of preconditioning the behaviour of other states, by characterising other state's actions as a result of their inherit national character, even though we are aware of how many different factors influence the foreign policy of our own states (Shirk, 2014: 2).

The foundation that the thesis takes inspiration from and that the choice of theory builds upon is the idea of their existing more variables at play to China's assertiveness in the South China Sea than the wish to challenge existing power structures in the international system and to survive in the anarchic international system. Domestic issues, such as internal politics within the communist party, youth movements, economic reformation and other internal structural variables may also affect China's actions, which this thesis intends to explore further. Susan Shirk (2014) and Jessica Chen Weiss (2014) have both highlighted how domestic politics and other internal issues have historically have affected China's foreign policy and international footprint, which this thesis will take inspiration from.

Copenhagen School Theory (CST) is in this context valuable as a framework as it enables the researcher to move away from a rigid view of security issues to a more fluid understanding, where security issues exits in the eye of the beholder and where security dynamics are formed through social interaction. This will be valuable in this thesis as it will enable the possibility of contextualising the construction of security threats in a broader perspective. The theory section will start off with a short literature review over studies conducted on China that has used a CST-framework. After that *audience costs* will be brought in to the thesis as a concept through a short literature review over studies that have been conducted on relevant aspects of the connections between foreign policy and domestic politics in China and other countries, which will build a foundation for the rationality of using CST as a theoretical framework for this issue. The literature reviews will thereafter be followed by an outline of how CST will be used in the thesis.

2.1 Literature Review

A general point of critique that often is directed towards CST concerns the argument that it is euro-centric and built on assumptions concerning the social relations within a state which may not align with how the social structures in non-European states function (Ratuva, 2016). CST and securitisation in a Chinese context is therefore a field that is relatively sparse in studies conducted. However, lately studies have started to emerge that have looked at CST in the context of Chinese energy and climate politics. Studies conducted by Phillips (2013), Nyman (2014), Nyman and Jinghan (2016) and Leung, Cherp, Jewell and Yi-Ming (2014) have all looked at how China during the last 10 years have started to increasingly securitise the energy sector through various means. The study conducted by Leung, Cherp, Jewell and Yi-Ming (2014) is particularly interesting as it shows how policy makers perceive energy security in terms of the security of supply-chains and how they connect these supply-chains with national stability. According to the study oil imports represent one of China's major vulnerabilities concerning energy security as the continuous import of crude oil is dependent on

the navigability of strategic sea lanes of communication, off which the narrow straits of the entrances to the South China Sea are major bottleneck. Nyman and Jinghan's (2016) study furthermore show the increasing emphasis that Chinese politicians put on non-traditional security issues as emerging security threats to China as China faces complex issues connected to its rapid industrialisation. Phillip's (2013) in turn argues that the 'Asian energy consumption revolution' has the potential to destabilize regional order in East Asia as the energy area becomes increasingly securitised.

Few studies have been conducted on China's actions in the South China Sea in the context of securitisation, as interpretations through the lenses of regional power dynamics and realpolitik are prevalent theoretical outlooks on the dispute. However, Danner's (2014) study of China's and Japan's dispute concerning Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea is very valuable as it studies how the dispute has been securitised and de-securitised by China and Japan at different occasions in the long course of the dispute. Danner found that a securitisation of the dispute most often occurred in connection with strong nationalist sentiment and activity, while de-securitisation would occur before the dispute turned violent (Danner, 2014: 240). Danner's study of the connection between securitisation and nationalist sentiment connects well with the next section of the literature review that discusses audience costs and how the public can be used to show resolve during an international dispute. Another important study concerning South China Sea dispute is Odeyemi's (2015) study of why the dispute not has been settled through the use of the United Nations Conventions on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS), which provides guidelines for how maritime disputes should be settled. One of Odeyemi's main findings is that UNCLOS is not suitable to settle disputes that is framed within a security context by the disputants as the dispute has turned into a 'dilemma' for many of the actors through the increasing

'securitisation'[1] of the dispute (Odeyemi, 2015: 299). The following section will address the concept of audience costs.

2.1.1 Audience costs

Audience Costs will in this thesis be used in conjunction with CST to provide an explanation of Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea. The concept of audience costs has in academia been assumed to be only relevant for democratically governed states; however this short literature review brings forth studies arguing for audience costs being an important factor for autocratic regimes as well.

The *Democratic Peace Theory* asserts that states with democratically elected leaders are less inclined to engage in armed conflict with each other (Kant, 1795; Doyle, 1983), which there also is some tentative empirical evidence supporting (Bremer, 1992). The aspects of culpability and accountability are within democratic peace theory seen as something that sharply divides the democratic states in the world from the non-democratic, authoritarian states, whose leaders are not susceptible to the same extent to public pressure and outcry. What democratic peace theory therefore claim is that democratic institutions creates structures for how the public can affect the foreign policy of a state through the leader's fear of repercussions and blowbacks if they act irrationally and not according to norms – which can be understood as a form of cost that is derived from public sentiment concerning the government's actions. Democratic peace theory highlights an interesting aspect of governance, which is the linkage between the governed and the governors, the leaders and the public. However, is this linkage really unique for democracies?

James Fearon popularised the concept of audience costs in a paper that built on his previous research concerning *costly signals*. Fearon was mainly concerned with how state leaders could communicate resolve to opposing actors by "going

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[1] Odeyemi uses another definition of 'securitisation' compared to this thesis

public" in disputes in order for actions to have effect on the dynamics of the dispute. A way of doing this according to Fearon was to create costly signals, which is a threat that is directed towards another actor which the sender would be cautious about sending if she was not serious, as not following through on the threat would incur some form of costs on the leader (Fearon, 1997: 69). According to Fearon a way of creating so called costly signals is to create audience costs, which Fearon defined as: "costs [that] arise chiefly from the reaction of domestic political audiences interested in whether foreign policy is being successfully or unsuccessfully handled by the leadership" (Fearon, 1997: 69). By for example mobilizing troops or making political threats attention is given to the dispute by the relevant domestic audience, which ensures that the action will have costs if the leadership backs down (Fearon, 1994: 586). In order to create costly signals through audience cost Fearon theorized that leaders have two mechanisms through which they can affect the costs, either through (1)"tying their hands" and committing fully to an dispute which raises the costs, or (2) sinking costs through careful de-escalation of the dispute. The mechanisms create different kinds of audience costs that occur *ex-ante* or *ex-post* the dispute, which also sends different signals to opposing actors in the dispute (Fearon, 1997: 70).

Leaders sometimes want high audience costs because it increases the bargaining power in a dispute. The logic behind this argument is that states with high audience costs towards the leadership will have more incentive to be firm and show resolve towards the other actors in the dispute with lower audience costs, as they do not want to incur these costs (Fearon, 1997: 69). Fearon claimed that democracies are the states that are most capable of creating high audience costs as the mechanisms for accountability and culpability are higher than in an autocracy (1994: 587). One important aspect in the creation of audience costs is the existence of a free press, as a free press enables the public to gain information about an issue without the approval of the leadership. Baum and Potter (2010) go so far as to say that leaders can only credibly commit to audience costs when there is a free press. Another mechanism of audience costs that is connected to

democracy is the existence of a strong political opposition, which in the event of a dispute can play the role of a whistle-blower (Baum & Potter, 2014). Notwithstanding these findings, are these mechanisms exclusive to states with democratic governance?

This is a question that Chen Weiss asked when she decided to look at how China's leadership has interacted with the public. In a very valuable study of the interplay between leaders and the public Chen Weiss (2014) shows how Chinese leaders historically have used nationalist protests to bargain and show resolve in disputes with other states, especially in disputes with Japan and USA. According to Chen Weiss, nationalist protests are both useful and troublesome for an authoritarian state, due to the fact that the protests can be difficult to control and they can easily turn against the own government. When nationalist protests erupt the protesters are in the driver's seat through their quantity and power, as the sentiment they have against other states cannot be quelled by the government. However, the government can control, to some extent, the timing of the outbreaks of the protests, meaning that they can manage them to fit the government's agenda, which can become a useful instrument for the government (Chen Weiss, 2014: 3f). Antiforeigner and nationalist protests may have grave consequences, both domestically and internationally, as these kinds of protests can trigger incidents that create instability, or even a revolution, as was the case in Iran in 1979 when the security forces sided with the protesters (Chen Weiss, 2014: 21). Weiss findings aligns with Baum's (2004) findings regarding the instrumental way political leaders draws attention to issues to create bargaining power toward other disputants. Domestic politics and foreign policy is therefore inherently connected as audience costs is something the leaders always needs to take into consideration when conducting international relations (Baum, 2004: 628f)

Chen Weiss' study highlights the dilemma that authoritarian leaders face when managing nationalist sentiment – the double-edged sword - but it also shows that authoritarian leaders are vulnerable to public culpability in the light of foreign policy in a similar manner as democratically elected leaders are as well. Jessica

Weeks (2008) strengthens the claim that audience costs also exist in non-democracies in a study where she statistically correlate regime type with the bargaining strength of a state. The hypothesis that Weeks tested predicted that a government with higher audience cost, that is accountability and culpability, will be more successful in its foreign policy due to the fact that an unwanted outcome may result in repercussions for the leadership from the public, resulting in a more assertive foreign policy and a stronger bargaining position (Weeks, 2008: 36). Weeks found that notion of democracies being more effective in creating more audience costs than autocracies are false, as many autocracies, such as one-party systems, are susceptible to audience cost to a large extent. The reason for scholars' failure to predict this previously has, according to Weeks, to do with a too narrow definition of accountability, which may result in failure to identify autocratic audience costs (Weeks, 2008: 59f). Weeks finding aligns with the findings of Tomz (2007), who through the use of surveys came to the conclusions that audience costs arise from the concerns that the public have about the international reputation of their country. Tomz also found that audience costs exist in a wide range of conditions, and that audience costs increase together with escalation (2007: 836). Consequently, the claim that audience costs are less relevant for a an authoritarian regime are therefore to some extent invalid, even though the mechanisms for accountability are more blunt in a non-democratic state.

The purpose of this short literature review has been to theoretically situate where this study has taken its inspiration from by briefly discussing how domestic politics and public opinion influences foreign policy. Audience costs is a mechanism that in this literature review has been framed as the main mechanism through which domestic politics and public opinion influence foreign policy, even though there exist other ways through which it can influence. However, audience costs has been highlighted due to the fact that the mechanism is identifiable in both democracies and autocracies, which is a relevant finding for this study and the theoretical choices that are to be made in it. Furthermore, these theoretical

findings about audience costs in autocracies complement the more empirical observations from researchers such as Susan Shirk (2014) about the communist party in China and what motivations and incentives the communist party has for conducting the foreign policy they currently are carrying out. According to Shirk the Chinese political system features:

"A politically insecure leadership that places the highest priority on the survival of Chinese Communist Party rule and is intent on preventing large-scale unrest, avoiding public schisms in the leadership, and maintaining military loyalty"
(Shirk, 2014: 3)

Adding to this, Shirk (2014: 13f) posits that the Chinese leadership is highly responsive to nationalist public opinion, which ties into the findings of Chen Weiss' (2014) study of nationalist protests in China and the connection to the government. This sensitivity to nationalist sentiment and the political insecurity of the Chinese leadership are issues that will be analysed together with the results of this study in the analysis section of this thesis.

2.2 Copenhagen School of Security Studies

Here follows a brief presentation of Copenhagen School Theory (CST) and the most vital aspects of the school of thought's tenets. In this study the Buzan *et al* (1998) book will be used, as it outlines the theoretical framework of CST. Important developments and contributions to CST after 1998 will be discussed in the section 'Discussion'.

2.2.1 Ontology of security

Copenhagen School of Security Studies (CST) is inherently connected to a constructivist understanding of epistemology and ontology, which therefore naturally will guide the research conducted in this thesis as well. Constructivism's most famous axiom regarding international relations is the notion that "anarchy is what states makes of it", famously coined by Wendt (1992) in what is regarded as the first constructivist international relations publication. In his article Wendt

questioned the validity of how liberal and realist scholars were concerned with how an anarchical system affected the actions of the states in it. Research about human nature and agency was being neglected for the benefit of debates in international relations concerned with the influence of structures versus process on state's behaviour. Wendt on the other hand argued that even though liberalism and realism was seen as opposing theories, they both took the self-interested state as given and the starting points for their analysis – which concedes causal power to the anarchic structure of the international system (Wendt, 1992: 392). However, according to Wendt this causal power is not given, and liberalism and realism are both at fault for conceding this. Instead Wendt argues that self-help as a feature of anarchy arises not because it is a constitutive feature, but because self-help has been institutionalised[2] as a part of the international system through social interaction. Wendt describes the process of institutionalization as: "that the meanings in terms of which action is organized arise out of interaction" (Wendt, 1992: 403). Consequently, this also affects the constructivist understanding of security, which this thesis is intent on looking closer at, as security is a term that action is organized out of. Security dilemmas that arise in an anarchic system are not inherently given through the characteristics of the system. Instead Wendt insists that security dilemmas are social structures that are formed from intersubjective understandings of the world, or, put in another way, they are produced through continuous social interactions that have reproduced the intersubjectivity (Wendt, 1992: 402). Epistemologically constructivists concede that there is a world independent of the human mind, but that knowledge about this world is a result of human interaction and social construction (Wendt, 1992: 399).

2.2.2 Widening vs. Narrowing

The founders of CST took inspiration Wendt when they started to develop their new take on the concept of security studies, and the ontologies of CST and

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[2] Institutionalization is a term that will be further introduced later in this chapter

constructivism therefore align. CST challenges other theories about security through its conception of security, due to the fact that CST-scholars are not necessarily concerned with analysing security in the context of military power, but rather they focus on how the concept of security is created through social interaction between different actors and agents (Buzan *et al*, 1998). The concept of security is central to CST, and the school of academic thought also first emerged when it grew out of a debate about the concept of security. The debate about the 'wide' versus the 'narrow' conception of security developed during the end of the Cold War when the dissatisfaction about the explicit focus on military and nuclear power in security studies started to be questioned by several scholars (see Buzan, 1983). CST sides with the 'wideners' of the concept of security, even though CST-scholars acknowledge that widening the concept of security too much risks exposing security to intellectual incoherence, as extending the concept of security too much might undermine the concept altogether (Buzan *et al* 1998: 4). Furthermore, security is not always a favourable mode of analysis, as "[s]ecurity should not be thought of too easily as always a good thing" (Buzan *et al*, 1998: 4). Instead they argue that the agenda of security should be contained to the realm of existential threats, but to argue that the only relevant security issues are war and force, and issues that become relevant in the light of war and force, is a too narrow understanding of security which neglects the analytical benefits of a wider conceptualization (Buzan *et al* 1998: 4).

One of the scholars who pioneered the 'widening' of security studies was Barry Buzan, later one of the founders to CST, who wrote the very influential book "People, States and Fear" (1983), in which Buzan attempts to reconceptualise how we understand and apply the concept of security. Buzan's central theme in the book is that security is an extremely versatile concept through which we can understand how states and societies act in the light of threats and vulnerabilities. Instead of having a 'narrow' view of security, where military power is the only relevant factor, Buzan pioneered using a 'wider' concept of security where *sectors* are used to identify specific types of interactions regarding security. Buzan

showed how a sectorial analysis could be used as a framework for understanding how freedom from threat is pursued in the political, economic, military, societal and environmental sectors (Buzan, 1983). Sectorial analysis is an essential part of CST and will also play a big part in the analysis of Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea, as the sectorial analysis can help this thesis to add new insights to China's actions in the area.

2.2.3 Sectors

A broadened understanding of security is essential to CST as the school of thought is interested in looking at how security concerns are institutionalised and made into collective knowledge. However, why is the sectorial analysis relevant for this purpose? A broadened security perspective means that the same concept is applied to contexts that it usually not is applied too which may differ much in their attributes. The sectorial, or disaggregated, analysis in CST is therefore used to make it easier to identify and work with different agendas, values and discourses that are unique to the different sectors (Buzan *et al*, 1998: 27). For the disaggregated analysis to be analytically significant the different sectors need to be analytically independent from each other, or else the validity becomes questionable if for example all of the sectors only can be analysed in their relationship to military security. Buzan *et al* argues that this is not a problem as the different sectors analyse distinctive patterns of interaction, which neatly confines the scope of inquiry, drastically reducing the amount of variables at play (1998: 8). However, the ultimate goal of the disaggregated analysis is to create a *cross-sectoral* understanding of security dynamics as the pieces are put back together to create a bigger picture, which the sectorial analysis is a good tool for. The reason for this being that dissecting security through the lenses of different sectors the concept of security becomes more transparent and the instrumental part of its creation becomes more distinguishable (Buzan *et al*, 1998: 167).

CST acknowledges five different sectors where there exist different patterns of interaction concerning security. These are:

- Military
- Political
- Economic
- Societal
- Environmental

The military sector is the sector that best aligns with a narrow definition of security, as the dynamics in this sector mostly concerns issues about relative power and sovereignty. Issues about military security mostly arise out of the process of governance and questions about political legitimacy. Sovereignty is the principle that is the most important aspect for a government, and the military security agenda primarily concerns the government's ability to stay at power at the threat of both internal and external forces (Buzan *et al,* 1998: 49f). Securitization of external threats in the military sector can be seen as a two-level game, wherein there are two main attributes that are important. Firstly, the offensive and defensive capabilities are of interest, but perhaps more important are the perceptions of each other's capabilities and intentions (Buzan *et al¸*1998: 51).

The *political sector* aligns with the military sector in many regards, as both sectors concern the organisational stability of social orders. However, they differ in the fact that the political sector pays attention to non-military threats to sovereignty and social structures. The political sector also concerns other referent objects than large communalities, such as states, as human rights and international law can be securitized. Generally, political 'threats' are about giving or denying recognition, support or legitimacy to a political unit. These 'threats' can be both internal, within the unit, and external, outside of the unit, which may have different consequences (Buzan *et al,* 1998: 144).

In an increasingly globalised world economy where we are becoming more and more interconnected there exists both winners and losers, we are increasingly becoming more and more dependent on networks of economy and international trade for all levels of economy to function. There exists great vulnerabilities and

threats in the *economic sector*, which the 2008 economic crises showcased to the world. Furthermore, economic security ties into other sectors, as the liberal world order has created a great dependency on trade and money transactions for states to function (Buzan *et al*, 1998: 115f).

A communality that often is neglected as a unit of analysis in international relations is the nation, which of course has to do with the fact that nations and states align to a large extent. *Societal security* differs from *political security* because they are concerned with different aspects of society. Political security, as mentioned above, is concerned with the organisational stability of a government and the legitimacy that this implies. In the societal sector the organisational concept is identity instead of the state. What is threatened in the societal sector is therefore the identity or nation, which often turns into a discussion about the increased vulnerability of a identity's 'way of living', which can become threatened by for example migration or competition (Buzan *et al*, 1998: 121).

Finally, *environmental security* is concerned with the issue of environmental degradation and the impact that human activity has on the biosphere. The main referent object in this sector is the environment, even though it can be argued that environmental degradation affect other referent objects through the consequences of for example global warming (Buzan *et al*, 1998: 75-77)

2.2.4 Securitisation

The word security is in itself a word that has a wide range of uses and definitions. However, in the realm international relations the term *security threat* is most often used to describe a phenomenon that is a threat to a referent object, which entitles the use of *emergency measures* to protect the referent object (Buzan *et al*, 1998: 24-27). In the traditional military-political conception of security the term alludes to a state's intention of survival and the extraordinary methods that this entitles. The nuclear doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) is in this conception of security a measure which attempts to ensure the survival of the state through the destructive power of nuclear weapons (PNAPF, 2017). However, due

to CST using a wider conception of security than the traditional conception a different definition of a security threat is necessary. First of all, in CST the referent object does not necessarily have to be a state or a nation, it can instead be all types of entity - from a supranational organisation like the EU to an individual person. Thus, what makes a phenomenon a security threat is not the scale of it. Nor does there exist actual 'positivist' security threats in the world that you can go out in the world to observe and measure (Buzan *et al*, 1998: 21f). A tank is therefore not a security threat in itself; it only becomes a security threat when the intersubjective understanding of the reasons for its existence dictates it. Rather, what makes a phenomenon or an issue a 'security threat' "can only be understood in relation to the particular character of the referent object in question" (Buzan *et al*, 1998: 21). Consequently, what this means is that security threats should therefore always be understood in context of what it is threatening – the referent object – as this allows the researcher to look closer at the distinctive patterns of interaction that arises in this interplay (Buzan *et al,*1998: 22f).

At the heart of CST is the process of *securitisation,* which is a conceptualization of how security threats are constructed in the social interaction between different actors. Buzan *et al* writes that:

> *"'Security' is the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics"*
> *(1998: 23)*

To contextualise the act of securitisation it can be helpful to view the importance of an issue as a spectrum where securitisation can be placed at the end of a spectrum detailing the urgency and importance of an issue, meaning a securitized issue requires or justifies extraordinary measures. At the other end of the spectrum are the non-politicised issues, while politicised issues can be found in the middle of the spectrum. A politicised issue can to some extent be seen as a precursor to securitisation as politicisation is the process of bringing an issue into public attention or into the realm of policy (Buzan, 1998: 23f). The opposite action to

securitisation is the process of *de-securitisation,* which involves moving an issue away from the realm of security (Hansen, 2012).

For a phenomenon to become *securitised* an actor has to label and present an issue as an existential threat to another actor, entity or object, which in CST is known as the *referent object*. The traditional understanding of a referent object in security is the state, or other forms of entities that have the potential to entice collective feelings, such as nations, religions or 'civilisations'. Scale necessarily plays a part here as collectivities that can have a form of adversary have a greater chance of becoming a referent object, which disfavours both smaller and larger referent objects (Buzan *et al*, 1998: 36f). It is therefore more likely that a state or regime becomes a referent object than for example the 'Western world'. The actor who labels an issue an existential threat, and therefore performs a *securitising move,* is called the *securitising actor* and is most commonly an actor such as a political leader, a lobbyist or a government. The referent object and the securitizing actor are generally not the same actor, as it is uncommon for an actor to be able to legitimately speak about existential threats to its own survival (Buzan *et al*, 1998: 36-39). A problem of agency may arise in this context as identifying the actors of a securitisation move can become somewhat contradictory, which is due to the fact that actors can have different forms of agency. As have been mentioned in the examples above a government could securitise an issue concerning the state it is the government, which seems contradictory as the government and the state can be considered as the same actor. However, an actor can have different types of agency and can have different roles (Buzan *et al*, 1998: 40). What is needed to identify the correct securitizing actor is therefore a level-of-analysis perspective of agency. For example, a president can to some extent be representative of a state, a government, a political party, a bureaucracy, an interest group or herself as an individual. Notwithstanding, to not complicate this process of identifying the securitising actor is preferable. According to Buzan *et al* the best way of identifying the role of the securitizing actor is to focus on the organisational logic of a securitizing move through the process of trying to identify in what

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organisational context a speech act is conducted in (1998:41). The final actors of the process of securitisation are *functional actors,* who are actors that affect the dynamics of a sector, but whom are not the referent object nor the securitising actor (Buzan *et al*, 1998:36).

Securitisation is a speech act, meaning that different phenomena can be labelled as an existential threat to a referent object through the speech/writing - or rather the discourse - of a securitising actor (Buzan *et al*, 1998). For an issue to become securitised it furthermore needs to become institutionalised. Wendt describes this process as: "a process of internalizing new identities and interests, not something occurring outside them and affecting only behavior; socialization is a cognitive process, not just a behavioral one" (Wendt, 1992:399). Consequently, for a speech act to render a securitisation it needs to be socialised and accepted by an *audience.* The significant audience is the collectivity that the securitizing act attempts to persuade that extraordinary measures are needed to address an issue, due to it existentially threatening the referent object (Buzan *et al*, 1998: 41). In the CST-framework the process of acceptance is left relatively undefined and no 'mechanisms' of acceptance are discussed, giving the researcher a lot of leeway for interpretation. Juha Vouri's (2008) research on securitisation in non-democratic states here becomes valuable as it looks closer at how securitisation-studies can help us learn more about politics in a non-democratic state. Vouri argues that even though Chinese politics is very secretive and closed to the 'masses' the leaders still have the need and urge to appeal to the public for support. Security dynamics in this context becomes a powerful way of building and maintaining bonds with the public as the language of 'security' signifies order and control, which can be contrasted against the 'insecurity' and 'chaos' that China experienced during the first part of the 20th century (Vouri, 2008: 71). Thus, even though there are no democratic mechanisms in China there exists social interaction between leaders, the public and other actors such as elites, especially in the realm of security, which is very relevant for securitisation. The

methodological side of securitisation theory will be discussed further in the methods section.

2.3. Discussion

The ontology and the consequent definition of the concept of security that Copenhagen School of Security Studies advocates has large implications for how the researcher approaches the topics of international relations and security. Bill McSweeney, one of the starkest critics of CST, has long argued that the concept of having socially constructed entities as the referent object in a security analysis is fundamentally flawed. One of McSweeney's biggest points of critique is putting 'society' and the state as equally valid referent objects in the framework, making 'identity' and 'society' potential threats to the state (McSweeney, 1998). Furthermore, another valid critique towards CST concerns the fact that the researcher is forced to create her own definition of vital terms such as 'identity' and 'society' for the security analysis to be possible. This puts a lot of emphasis on the researchers' objectivity, calling into question the validity of collective identities as the basis for analysis (McSweeney, 1996: 90f). However, it is possible to avoid this potential pitfall of subjectivity through CST's application of constructivism, which in many ways is not as extreme as for example it is in *Critical Security Studies,* which sees the social structures of the world as constantly changing (Buzan *et al*, 1998: 204f). CST on the other hand has a constructivist outlook on the world, but it stresses the fact that the socially constituted reality becomes so sedimented as structures and practices that analysis must be conducted with the assumption that it will continue to exist. The social construction of security here plays a part as it enables the researcher to not only criticize these socially constituted facts, but it also enables the researcher to understand the dynamics of security in the context of these stable structures. This, according to Buzan *et al*, leads to a stronger emphasis on collectivities in their framework and on understanding what issues that trigger securitization in order to avoid changes to these structures and practices (1998: 34f). What this means for the researcher using CST is that too much emphasis should not be put on

analysing the actual agency of the referent object or other actors in the securitization analysis, as this should be inherently unproblematic.

Another point of critique directed towards CST concerns the issue of if it is possible to capture complicated security dynamics through the simple process of speaker-audience interaction. Salter and Piché have for example shown that CST fails to capture security dynamics that are produced at a grass root-level, as CST has a top-down approach to security the creation of security (Salter & Piché, 2011). This critique toward CST will be taken into account during the analysis of the results of this thesis. Furthermore, the literature review conducted on the issue of *audience costs* will in many ways help this thesis add another layer to the securitisation analysis that will be conducted on China. In CST the audience has a relatively passive role where its main function is to accept or decline the securitizing actors attempt to make a securitizing move. However, with the addition of the concept of audience cost to the analysis the audience becomes a much more important actor for the analysis. As was discussed in the literature review autocratic regimes are not necessarily immune to audience costs and there exist several mechanisms through which accountability for actions can be demanded, which also will be assumed in this thesis. What this concretely means is that the securitization analysis will also be analysed in the context of audience costs in autocratic regimes, giving the audience a more prudent role in the analysis.

The expansion to a wider security agenda should not be seen as an end goal in itself. The pursuit of a wider agenda is the result of the need to deepen the understanding of how security dynamics emerge and evolve. In many ways CST is concerned with finding and separating politicised from securitized issues, as this differentiation will help us understand how relations are structured and the dynamics of these structures. Security is when it all comes down to it a quality that an actor adds to an issue. In the context of China these theoretical assumptions might produce a very interesting study as the possible referent object are many and it is not given which collectivities are actors in the states politics.

Finally, an important development concerning CST that will be taken into account during this thesis is the work by Thierry Balzacq (2005) in which he challenges the CST-framework. Balzacq's main point of critique is that the discursive element in the framework is conceptualised in a very formal and rigid way. The result of this is that the speech act of the securitisation almost becomes codified and formalised, reducing security to a conventional procedure (Balzacq, 2005: 172). Balzacq instead proposes the approach of seeing securitisation as a more discursive practice that has a stark strategic aspect to it, in order to move away from a linguistically rule-based understanding of securitisation;

"securitization should be understood as a strategic (or a pragmatic) practice, as opposed to one of universal pragmatics (speech act), the aim of which is to determine the universal principles of an effective communicative action of security" (Balzacq, 2005: 191).

Further, Balzacq posits "(i) that an effective securitization is audience-centered; (ii) that securitization is context-dependent; (iii) that an effective securitization is power-laden" (Balzacq, 2005: 171). With reference to Balsacq's critique towards CST this thesis securitisation will not be seen as a self-contained process that occurs in a vacuum, but rather be viewed as a complex process with many moving parts that affect its effectiveness. This is also something that Curley and Herington (2011: 145) found is a better approach to securitisation studies in East Asia as this allows for different forms of relationships between the audience and the securitising actor.

3. Method

The thesis is theory-using case-study in its outset, as it will evaluate if securitization theory and a broadened security concept can give a robust explanation of Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea. However, the thesis will also have a theory-testing aspect as CST-studies of non-European states are relatively unusual. The aspect of audience costs will in this study not be seen as a competing explanation for the phenomenon that will be studied, rather the concept of audience costs will be seen as a complementing explanation that will help the study create a more robust explanation of the observations of China's more assertive foreign policy. The purpose of the study is not to develop theory, but to use it to explain how security dynamics are produced in the context of the South China Sea. The case has been chosen due to its specific nature, and it therefore not been chosen due to its properties in the context of the theory.

The study will be inherently qualitative in its method as the purpose of the thesis is to learn more about how the socially constituted is created and how social practices shapes the world. A qualitative approach is not the only valid approach, however a qualitative approach has been chosen as the thesis intends to explore how issues are given the quality of a 'security threat' through the act of speech or writing. To be able to identify the act of securitisation it is necessary to analyse the content and discourse of a speech act, as the meaning of the concept lies in the usage, and not what people 'think' the concept means (Buzan *et al*, 1998: 24). For this reason a quantitative approach is not suitable as a method for studying securitisation, even though a quantitative textual-analysis is an alternative method for this type of study. Instead a qualitative method will be used that will enable the study to observe the social interactions that create security dynamics. The thesis will consequently also be deductive in its approach as the thesis accepts CST's theory of how social interaction forms the world and how security dynamics are produced in this context which will guide the research.

3.1 Application of the Copenhagen School framework

Securitisation is a process that involves a set of actors and a predetermined timing for a set of events to occur, in order for an issue to become securitised. It therefore exists a certain logic to how a researcher can go about to study this process. The first and most important action of the securitisation of an issue is the actual *securitisation move* that the securitizing actor conducts. The securitization move is a speech act or a written text which imposes the quality of 'security threat' upon an issue. This securitization move is observable through textual analysis of for example speeches, documents and articles, where the researcher tries to find how an issue is elevated from the realm of 'normal politics' as it is presented as an existential threat to a referent object. However, for an issue to become securitised it also needs to become accepted by an audience within the unit that is regarded as the referent object for security. A securitisation move can never be imposed on the audience, instead the acceptance is dependent on the relationship between coercion and consent that exist within the unit of analysis. The social interaction between the securitising actor and the audience is important for the process of securitisation as it creates a platform from which it is possible to legitimize extraordinary measures in reference to the securitized issue (Buzan *et al*, 1998: 24f). The 'acceptance' of the audience of the securitising move is the second action where the researcher can observe the process of securitization. It is this process of securitisation that leads to the situation where it is legitimate for an actor to 'break the rules' (Buzan *et al,* 1998: 24f). It is also this apparent legitimization of China breaking international rules and norms in the South China Sea that this thesis wants to study in order to uncover underlying China's intentions and motivations for its actions.

In the case of China the aspect of an audience accepting a securitisation is interesting as the relationship between coercion and consent should lean towards more towards coercion, due to the fact that China is a one-party state. However, as was discussed in the literature review and in the theory section, audiences in autocracies can have greater agency in international relations than is often

assumed in literature, which can call into question this assumption. Vouri's (2008) research on securitization in China also supports the claim that audience costs are an important aspect of security dynamics in non-democratic states. Notwithstanding this insight about audience costs in autocracies - the acceptance of a securitisation move and audience costs are not necessarily the same phenomenon. This is due to the fact that the mechanisms for an audience to decline a securitisation move in an autocracy are fewer than they are in a democracy. The limitation on mechanisms such as free-speech and political freedom in autocracies should naturally make it harder for an audience to incite debate and question the actions of the securitising actor. The mechanisms through which audience costs can affect the actions of the government is on the other hand stronger, as was discussed in the literature review, due to the fact that audience costs in one-party states are mostly created in the context of nationalist protests or by elites (Chen Weiss, 2014). As Curley and Herington (2011) found in a study of securitisation in South East Asia CST is not easily applicable to non-democratic states, as it is modelled after a modern European, liberal and Westphalian understanding of a state, which to some extent gives the CST-framework conceptual restrictions. Thus, the audience in a non-democratic state does not necessarily have to be the public, as who is the relevant audience is dependent on the social structures of the society, meaning that the significant audience for an securitization can be for example political elites or military leadership (Vouri, 2008; Curley & Herington, 2011: 164f). Consequently, the relationship between the 'audience' and the securitising actor will be seen as negotiated stabile social structures that are not challenged by the public. Instead the relevant audience for a securitisation move in a Chinese context will in this study be political, military and economic elites within China. This conclusion is supported by studies of Chinese political structures where political and economic elites enjoy significant agency over state policy (see for example; Zhengxu & Jinghan, 2016; Dongya & Chuanmin, 2016; Cheng, 2006; Zhou, 2001) Instead emphasis will be put on the process of conducting a securitising move and the political effect/context of this act, which will enable the thesis to focus on analysing underlying intentions and

motivations for actions in the light of the dispute in the South China Sea. This limitation in the studies scope also has to do with the limitation in time and space for the execution of the thesis.

3.2 Technique

The main method used will be textual analysis, due to the importance of speech and discourse in the process of securitisation. The process that the textual analysis will be looking for is the speech act where an issue is elevated from a normal political issue to an issue of security. The exact definition and criteria of securitisation is "constituted by the intersubjective establishment of an existential threat with a saliency sufficient to have substantial political effects" (Buzan *et al*, 1998: 25). According to Buzan *et al* securitisation can therefore be studied directly, and therefore does not need indicators to be identified; rather the way to study securitisation is to study discourse and political constellations (1998: 25). The suitable textual analysis technique that suits this definition of securitisation is discourse analysis, as this technique allows the researcher to study how social practices and structures relate to the use of language (Bergström & Boréus, 2012:23).

3.2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

There exists a myriad of different renditions of discourse analysis techniques, much due to the increasing popularity of discourse analysis as a method for uncovering structures of power that underlie social interaction. There consequently also exists many different ways of analysing discourse, which often is dependent on the theory of science that the discourse analysis theory builds upon (Bergström & Boréus, 2012: 353-355). An example of differing directions within discourse analysis is the *Foucauldian* discourse analysis, which is influenced by post-structuralism. Foucauldian discourse analysis is primarily concerned with how power relations are formed in the interaction between people and how this creates limitations and possibilities for different actors. Foucauldian discourse analysis also puts a lot of emphasis on the relationship between and

within discourses, known as inter- and intradiscourse relationships, and how these relationships are subjected to change over the course of time (Bergström & Boréus, 2012: 361ff). With regard to securitisation and for the purpose of this thesis another form of discourse analysis will be applied that better aligns with how CST stipulates that security dynamics are constructed, which will be *Critical Discourse Analysis*.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a collection of approaches to discourse analysis that is concerned with exposing veiled power structures that exists in society which are reproduced through the use of discourse, which is what CDA is critical towards (Bergström & Boréus, 2012: 374). The CDA-approach that has been chosen for this study is Norman Fairclough's approach, which also is known as *Dialectical-Relational Approach*. The Dialectical-Relational Approach views semiosis, the act of meaning-making, as an essential irreducible part of all material social processes. According to Fairclough "[w]e can see social life as interconnected networks of social practices of diverse sorts (economic, political, cultural, and so on). And every practice has a semiotic element" (Fairclough, 2001: 122). CDA in Fairclough's approach mainly aims to analyse the relationship between semiosis and other elements of social practice (Fairclough, 2001: 123), which aligns very well with how CST views how the process of securitization produces social relations as securitization is a form of semiosis.

Fairclough's Dialectical-Relational Approach views discourse as having three distinct functions: a content dimension, a relational function and an identity creating function. This understanding of discourse enables the researcher to analyse a text with the help from a model that has three different levels of analysis. This model for analysing discourse has been adapted to align with the theoretical framework and purpose of this thesis:

- **Content dimension – The text:** The first level of analysis is the text itself. The focus of this level is generally on the linguistic features of the text, as the way language is written/spoken can say a lot about what is not said (Bergström & Boréus, 2012: 376). The first level in this study will primarily study the use of security language and the actual linguistic framing of an issue as an existential threat to a referent object, the so called securitization move. However, as securitisation can be done through more discrete wordings and meanings attention will be put on finding ways in which language is used to convey an issue as a matter of security. What is said explicitly and what is said implicitly?
  Questions:
  How is the South China Sea dispute described in the documents?
  How is language used to convey the importance of an issue?

- **Relational function - Discursive practice:** The second level of analysis is the discursive practice, which concerns the production, distribution and consumption of the text. At this level the framing and discourses concerning the China's description of their security and security concerns will be analyses, to see if there exist similarities in the discourses used in the different documents. An important factor at this level is the so called 'intertextuality' between different text, which is the extent to which discourses align through different texts (Bergström & Boréus, 2012: 376).
  Question:
  What discourses are prevalent in the analysed documents?

- **Identity creating function – Social practice:** The third level of analysis puts the discourse in a wider social context. It is at this level that the analysis studies how the text and the social practices that come with it fits into wider structures of power. At this level it is also necessary to study how the discourse relates to other discourses that are active in the same area (Bergström & Boréus, 2012: 377). The relationships between the different actors in a securitization process and their agency will be analysed.
  Questions:
  Which units are the referent objects of security in the analysed documents?
  Which social dynamics and relations are discernible in the analysed documents?

3.2.2 Example of Security discourse

The Critical Discourse Analysis will be employed for the purpose of finding the process of securitisation. With reference to clarity of how the process securitisation can look like an example of a securitization move will follow below. The quote that follows is a statement by the Vietnamese government in reference to the outbreak of the "Avian Flu" in 2005 and was used as an example of a securitisation move in a study by Curley and Herington (2011):

"The formulation and implementation of such urgent action plans (against bird flu) must be considered an unexpected and urgent task of Party committees and administrations of all levels and a duty of each citizen and, therefore, the strength of the whole political system should be mobilized for this task [. . .] To take initiative in making all necessary preparations and mobilizing every resource to prevent and combat the type-A (H5N1)influenza among humans [. . .] the Ministry of Health, concerned ministries and branches and localities shall guide all medical units and establishments (even the army and police forces) from the central to provincial, municipal, district and communal levels" (Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2005)

From the perspective of securitisation what can be understood by this statement is that the government is trying to gain acceptance from an audience to use extraordinary measures, in this case the mobilisation of army and police forces, in order to combat the avian flu. A discourse that is discernible from the almost war-like statement is the discourse of mobilisation, which is needed to combat at external threat to Vietnam as a society (Curley & Herington, 2011: 154). Consequently what is done through this statement is the reconstruction of the avian flu from the realm of political issues to the realm of security issues that poses a threat to the Vietnamese society. As health issues are not seen as 'traditional' security issues, this statement shows how security dynamics are created in social interaction.

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3.3 Material

The material that will be used in the critical discourse analysis is both official governmental publications and official statements by China. The main publications that are used are the defence white papers released by the Chinese government in 2011, 2013 and 2015. Other documents that are used are official statements and position papers from the last three years on the South China Sea issue. The data collected for the study will only be English-language documents, which to some extent is problematic as it becomes harder to identify domestic dynamics of social interaction. This aspect is discussed further later in this chapter.

3.3.1 White papers

White Papers are reports or guides from a government that aim to inform the audience about a complex issue and the position of the government regarding it. The purpose of White Papers is to create understanding for the reader, which for example can help the reader to make a decision or solve a problem (Zhang, 2012). China has since 1998 released defence related white papers every second year without exemption, which have addressed issues concerning the national defence of the Peoples Republic of China such as defence policies and nuclear disarmament. In academia Chinese white papers have been dismissed as lacking substance and having little tangible information about Chinese defence policies and strategies. However, Jiang Zhan (2012) has pointed out the role that the white papers play in China's communication with its neighbours, but also the role that they play domestically in shaping public opinions and generating public support for the Peoples Liberation Army. China's defence white paper released in 2011, 2013 and 2015 is therefore used to collect data on securitisation for the study. The defence white papers are in this study regarded as being a product of the Communist Party in China.

3.3.3 Language restrictions

The material that will be studied in this thesis will be English-language documents publicised by the Chinese government, due to the author's lack of proficiency in Mandarin. It is somewhat problematic to ensure validity and reliability of the research when the social interaction between agents cannot be studied in the relevant language. This is especially problematic as the research is qualitative and will use discourse analysis to study how security dynamics are formed through the creation of discourse. However, it is the position of this thesis that the English-language material can produce reliable and valid research due to several reasons. Firstly, the Chinese government has little incentive for their English-language documents to use different discourses and have different content than their domestic-language documents, it will however be acknowledged that the English-language documents will be more directed towards an international audience than their counterparts. Notwithstanding, if the government intends to securitise an issue concerning the South China Sea it most likely also wants to communicate this to other states active in the dispute, and these other states can be seen as *functional actors* in the securitisation. A functional actor is an actor that affects the security dynamics of a sector, but who is not part of the securitization move itself. Consequently, the English-language material will in this thesis be seen as a way to communicate with other actors affected by the securitization (Buzan *et al*, 1998: 56).
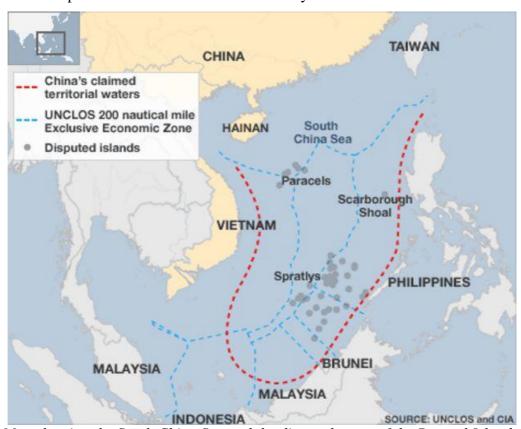
Secondly, as discussed above, the significant audience for the securitisation in China is not necessarily the general public. Instead the significant audience is most likely elites within the communist party and the economic elites, which to a high extent are proficient in English (Bolton & Botha, 2015). The English-language documents can therefore be seen as a way for the government and other actors to communicate with elites that speak English, a possible significant audience, and with international actors, which can be seen as functional actors.

4. Background

The South China Sea is a marginal sea to the Pacific Ocean that almost forms an internal lake between the South East Asian countries and China through its unique properties and geography. All of ASEAN's member states have a coastline towards the South China Sea, making the ocean both a possible source for conflict and cooperation for the regional organisation (Kaplan, 2016). The archipelagos of the Paracel Islands, Spratly Islands and Scarborough Shoal have during the 21st century become synonymous with territorial contestation as the small islands, atolls and reefs have become the arena for world politics thanks to their strategic location (Kaplan, 2016). Following the end of the Second World War and the retreat of Japanese forces in South East Asia China, Vietnam and the Philippines started to claim sovereignty over islands in the region which previously had not been of interest for any other state (CFR, 2017). This development was accelerated during the 1970s when large oil and gas deposits where located under the seabed of the relatively shallow ocean, which spurred minor outbreaks of violence between mostly China and Vietnam regarding control of strategically located islands (CFR, 2017). Following the introduction of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 1994 more states in the region has claimed sovereignty over islands and atolls in the South China Sea, resulting in many different overlapping lines of territorial claims in the region (BBC, 2016).

Since 2010 Chinese assertiveness towards other claimants in the region has risen markedly resulting in an increase in outbreaks of violence between actors in the region (CFR, 2017). China claims that they have sovereignty over a large portion of the South China Sea with reference to the map known as the "Nine-Dash Line"-map, which was first published in 1947 and outlines China's 'historic rights' in the region (FMPRC, 2016). China claims that they have sovereign rights over the South China Sea and the islands on the grounds that "[b]ased on the practice of the Chinese people and the Chinese government in the long course of history and the position consistently upheld by successive Chinese governments"

(FMPRC, 2016). China furthermore claim that the small islands, atolls and reefs in the South China Sea, that they claim sovereignty over, can be used as a baseline for deciding territorial waters and exclusive economic zones according to UNCLOS. However, this claim was overruled by the International Arbitral Tribunal in The Hague in July 2016 in the much anticipated case between China and the Philippines as the court ruled in the favour of the Philippines (PCA, 2016). Little has changed regarding the dynamics and positions of the actors in the aftermath of the court's award (see time-line below), which indicates the fact that the dispute will have to be solved bilaterally between the different claimants.

Map showing the South China Sea and the disputed areas of the Paracel Islands, Spratly Islands and Scarborough Shoal. Red: China's claimed "Nine-Dash Line". Blue: territory according to UNCLOS Exclusive Economic Zone (BBC, 2016).

The South China Sea dispute can in many regards be conceptualised as a low-intensity intrastate conflict that shares many properties with the dispute about sovereignty over the Arctic region. There have been few outbreaks of deadly violence between the claimants, even though it has occurred (CFR, 2017). Instead

the dispute has been characterised by military build-up, land-grabbing and what can be described as hybrid-war tactics (Kaplan, 2016). China has for example since 2010 started to employ the Chinese coast guard to deter fishermen from other states to access areas in the South China Sea (Torode, 2017). There has also been reports of China paying and arming their commercial fishing fleet in order to act as a proxy for the Chinese coast guard in the region, which is a similar strategy to that used by Russia in the Ukraine since 2014 (Erickson & Kennedy, 2015). Furthermore, China has also initiated large land-recovery projects on disputed reefs and atolls in the region in order to construct military bases and runways for aircraft, which is rapidly increasing China's force projection capacity in the surrounding area (Shugart, 2016). Other strong actors in the dispute that are not claimants are USA, Australia, Japan and India, who all regularly perform 'Freedom of navigation'- operations in the area to uphold international norms and law in the region – which China generally sees as provocation (Nguyen, 2016: 392ff). Tensions between China and USA regarding the dispute have been growing since China's increasing assertiveness in the region (Kaplan, 2016).

4.1   Time-line of dispute

Here follows a short time-line of the main events of the South China Sea dispute (time-line from: Dancel, 2016)

May, 2009: China submits the "Nine dash-line" document to the United Nations, claiming sovereignty over the South China Sea.

April, 2012: The Philippine Navy forcefully intercept eight Chinese fishing vessels in the vicinity of Scarborough Shoal which have been fishing in the area illegally, resulting in a two-month stand-off with the Chinese Coast Guard.

June, 2012: China takes control of Scarborough Shoal.

January, 2013: The Philippines ask the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague to make a ruling on how UNCLOS is supposed to be implemented.

August, 2013: China states that it will not accept the arbitration by the PCA.

February, 2015: China starts five major land-reclamation projects on atolls in the South China Sea.

June, 2015: China states that the land-reclamation projects are almost done.

October, 2015: The USA conducts a 'freedom of navigation-operation' very close to China's newly constructed islands.

January, 2016: USA conducts a new 'freedom of navigation-operation'.

February, 2016: China deploys fighter aircrafts and surface-to-air missiles on contested islands.

June, 2016: USA sails an aircraft-carrier group through the South China Sea.

July, 2016: China conducts a large military drill in contested area.

July, 2016: The PCA delivers the ruling in favour of the Philippines.

4.2 Strategic importance

The South China Sea's unique geographic properties make it important in many ways. Firstly, half of the world's merchant fleet's tonnage and a third of all ships passes through the areas annually and through the choke points of the Malacca, Sunda, Lombok, and Makassar straits, which connects the South China Sea with the Indian Ocean (BBC, 2016).The South China Sea also connects the rich oil field of the Middle East with the East Asian 'tiger economies' and is a vital part of the global economy. For example, it is estimated that 80% of China's crude oil imports is transported through the South China Sea. This means that this small ocean is an important transportation route for energy, unfinished goods and finished goods (Kaplan, 2016).

Secondly, it is proven that the South China Sea contains oil reserves numbering seven billion barrels and 900 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, however Chinese estimates suggests that the area can contain as much as 130 billion barrels of oil, making it second only to the Middle East in potential oil output (Kaplan, 2016). If these estimates are true then East Asia will relieve itself of the dependency of oil

imports from the Middle East, which represent a great vulnerability due to the relative ease that these shipments can be stopped.

Thirdly, the South China Sea's unique biodiversity is good breeding ground for a vast range of fish species as it is home to over 3000 different migratory and indigenous species of fish. Fishing in the South China Sea comprises some 12% of the global fish catch (Greer, 2016). The fish stocks in the region are however threatened by over-fishing and the death of the important coral reefs. It is estimated that the fish stocks have fallen with up to 95% since the levels of the 1950s, and may continue falling an additional 59% of 2015 levels if the unregulated fishing continues (Moss, 2015).

Lastly, the area is important from a military perspective, both due to its vastness and the many states that surround it, but also in the context of hurting other states shipments of energy and other goods. Southeast Asia is the region in the world with the greatest increase in arms spending which is fuelled by the economic growth that the region has been able to generate (SIPRI, 2016). The countries in Southeast Asia are generally caught in a situation where they either are in the Chinese or American sphere of influence concerning military relations, or they are trying to hedge between the two spheres of influence (Burgess, 2016).

4.3 Political developments in China

In April 2010 articles started to publish information regarding Chinese officials stating in a meeting with US political representatives that the South China Sea was a 'core interest, on par with Tibet and Taiwan' of China (Johnston, 2013: 17). The story was never fully corroborated nor confirmed by China, notwithstanding this came to affect the regional political dynamics of the South China Sea as this story and discourse through reproduction in global media came to be regarded as truth by other actors in the region, such as USA and other Southeast Asian countries (Johnston, 2013: 19). During this period China was at the end of president Hu Jintao's administration, which came to last from 2002 until 2012 (Buhi, 2014: 241). China under Hu's administration came to become an economic

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heavy-weight with the potential to challenge other major powers on the global scene. However, Hu throughout his presidency emphasised the doctrine of 'peaceful development' which came to be a catchword for his administration, as it was a reoccurring theme in communiqués from his administration along with his other policies of 'Scientific development outlook' and 'Socialist harmonious Society' (Buhi, 2014: 261f). Hu's presidency ended in 2012 when Hu's previous vice-president Xi Jinping was chosen as his successor, which resulted in a smooth power transition (Ding, 2015: 56).

In contrast to Hu's presidency, which was characterised by a collective leadership strategy, Xi's presidency has to an extent been characterised by a centralisation and concentration of power, which has made international media refer to Xi as the most powerful Chinese leader since Deng Xiaoping (Ding, 2015: 60). Xi's guiding principle through his presidency has been the "Four comprehensives", which are: "Comprehensively build a moderately prosperous society; comprehensively deepen reform; comprehensively govern the country according to law; and comprehensively tighten party discipline." (Lam, 2016: 409f). The policy of tightening the party discipline is perhaps the policy that has characterised Xi's administration the most as the Communist Party's authority has been strengthened and concentrated to the party elite. This concentration of power and authority has been called 'top-level design', and is by the Xi administration thought as necessary if China is to push its reforms to new heights (Lam, 2016: 411).

5. Findings

Below follows the critical discourse analysis that has been conducted on Chinese governmental white papers and position papers, and also analysis of opinion pieces published in Chinese newspapers that concerns the South China Sea. The discourse analysis is structured after Fairclough's three dimensional model of discourse which explores the content dimension, the discursive practice and the social practice of the text.

5.1 Defence white papers 2011 - 2015

Below is the critical discourse analysis conducted on defence white papers and position papers released by the government. At the end of the analysis a table is shown summarising the main findings.

5.1.1 Content dimension

What is immediately observable when analysing Chinese governmental publications addressing the South China Sea dispute is the way that security language is used separately from when China claims sovereignty over the contested areas. This is perhaps most obvious in China's official South China Sea-policy document released in connection with the arbitral tribunal's award where China's claims to sovereignty are outlined. In this document the word 'security' is only mentioned a few times, and neither of these occasions is in the context of China's own security, but instead in reference to regional security and stability (FMPRC, 2016a). China's claim to sovereignty is in the document based fully on arguments concerning historical rights. However, it is also clearly stated that China has a lot of agency in maintaining this regional stability as:

"China is an important force for maintaining peace and stability in the South China Sea […].China endeavors to achieve win-win outcomes through mutually beneficial cooperation, and is committed to making the South China Sea a sea of peace, cooperation and friendship" (FMPRC, 2016a).

China's commitment to making the South China Sea into 'a sea of peace, cooperation and friendship', signals that China does not perceive the area to have these traits at this moment. Even though the term 'security' is not mentioned in any of these quotes it is possible to interpret them as referring to security dynamics and China's option to quickly escalate the dispute if it chose to. The document effectively contrasts how 'peace, cooperation and friendship', which can be interpreted as the realm of politics, can be turned into conflict, which easily can be understood as the realm of security. In addition to this, China acknowledges that security dynamics are vessels through which cooperation and stability can be established as China "champions a new security vision featuring mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and coordination" (FMPRC, 2016a). Consequently, what China signals through this statement is that a future solution for this dispute only is viable through changes to security dynamics, which in many ways excludes a negotiated outcome. The policy document is interesting as it in many ways shadows China's military assertiveness towards the other claimants in how it outlines China's position. China will not waver on its claims to 'historical rights' over the area and there can be no political or multilateral solution to the dispute as the dispute concerns issues of sovereignty, which effectively situates the dispute within a security context.

The South China Sea dispute is not mentioned at any time in the defence white papers published in 2011 and 2013, although "[d]isputes over territorial and maritime rights" (FMPRC, 2011) are mentioned as issues that may threaten regional stability. The dispute is explicitly mentioned at one time in the 2015 white paper where it is described in terms such as "provocative action" and "maritime rights", and other actor's actions are described as "meddling in South China Sea affairs", while certain island disputes are referred to as still "smoldering" (FMPRC, 2015). Even though China is cautious with using security language when describing territorial disputes with other states it is noticeable that China perceive the South China Sea as Chinese sovereign territory, and that other actor's actions in the area is a threat to sovereignty.

The content analysis conducted on Chinese defence white papers since 2011 shows a progression in how security language is used. This is perhaps best exemplified by how China in its 2011 white paper is described as being in a:

"critical phase of the building of a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way. Therefore, it faces heavy demands in safeguarding national security" (FMPRC, 2011).

Development of the state is here to be ensured by upholding what can be considered traditional understanding of security. In the 2013 and 2015 white papers these formulations have changed in a way that indicate a progression in how China perceive security and development of the state, as it is stated that:

"However, China still faces multiple and complicated security threats and challenges. The issues of subsistence and development security and the traditional and non-traditional threats to security are interwoven. Therefore, China has an arduous task to safeguard its national unification, territorial integrity and development interests" (FMPRC, 2013; FMPRC, 2015)

What is interesting here is firstly that China's development is made equal and connected to traditional and non-traditional security threats indicating a doctrine-change in how essential continued development is for the Chinese government. Secondly, by using this language development is elevated from the political to the security realm as the term "development security" is used. Furthermore, the use of the word "subsistence", a synonym for 'provisions for survival'[3], is telling as this choice of word signals the importance of import and export for China's development. This emphasis on export and import, what can be understood as communications, is also shown later in the 2015 white paper when the security of overseas interests and strategic sea lines of communication (SLOCs) are made equal to terrorism, natural disasters, regional turmoil and epidemics as "imminent issue[s]" of vulnerability for China (FMPRC, 2015):

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[3] According to www.thesaurus.com

"With the growth of China's national interests, its national security is more vulnerable to international and regional turmoil, terrorism, piracy, serious natural disasters and epidemics, and the security of overseas interests concerning energy and resources, strategic sea lines of communication (SLOCs), as well as institutions, personnel and assets abroad"(FMPRC, 2015)

As mentioned above, China is careful and tentative in its use of security language to describe disputes with neighbours regarding territorial issues. Instead these disputes are described in terms such as "maritime rights and interests" (FMPRC, 2011; 2013; 2015; 2016) and "sovereignty" (FMPRC, 2011; 2013; 2015; 2016). However, even though China is cautious in using language that can 'securitise' an issue concerning active disputes, such as the South China Sea-dispute, there are also signs of the importance that is placed on outcomes that are connected to these disputes. The terms used by China, such as 'subsistence', 'development security' and 'strategic sea lines of communication', can be interpreted as ways in which China communicates with other actors in the dispute concerning the importance that is placed on gaining a favourable outcome of the dispute.

5.1.2 Discursive practice

In all Chinese defence white papers there exists a section that discusses "the security situation" for China and international issues that may affect China in the future. This reoccurring feature also gives the opportunity to look at how China's perception of the world has changed over time. One of the most striking differences is that there is a notable change in the language, structure and content between the white papers released 2011 and 2013. The 2011 white paper called simply "China's National Defense in 2010" is very formal document that follows a very rigid structure. China's security situation is in this document described as confronted by many "complex" security challenges, which is a reoccurring theme in the whole document (FMPRC, 2011). Even though the world is described as "peaceful and stable" it is acknowledged in reoccurring intervals that the international security situation is complex and that China needs to be vary of this (FMPRC, 2011). China's security situation is also favourable even though "Asia-

Pacific security is becoming more intricate and volatile", which can refer to many different factors (FMPRC, 2011). One of the factors that makes China's security situation increasingly complex is globalisation and competition about international order, as "[t]he international balance of power is changing, most notably through the economic strength and growing international status and influence of emerging powers and developing countries" (FMPRC, 2011). What is discernible from the white paper is a positive picture of the future of China whose international influence will continue to grow in the wake of the global economic crises. Societal change is a reoccurring theme in the document, which in many ways is an interesting feature of a defence white paper and perhaps indicates the perceived importance of adapting to social and technological changes that may affect the Chinese society in the future. Globalisation is one of these factors that contribute to the 'complexity' of China's security situation through its all-encompassing power to change the way societies interact with each other. This is captured in the following quote that discusses the future global order:

"The progress toward economic globalization and a multi-polar world is irreversible, as is the advance toward informationization of society. The current trend toward peace, development and cooperation is irresistible" (FMPRC, 2011)

Even though globalisation is deemed as complexity-increasing factor, it is also seen as force for good as it is a generator of peace, development and cooperation. China is in this document quite clear about how they perceive the changing power dynamics in the world in the future resulting in a multi-polar world where USA loses its hegemony in global affairs. Multi-polarity is in realist-theory a political situation that is seen as unstable, with reference to the political situation leading up to the two world wars (Mearsheimer, 1995: 13). However in this document it can be interpreted that China make the prediction that economic globalisation will have the effect of stabilising multi-polarity through development and cooperation, which is an interesting view (FMPRC, 2011). The positive outlook on globalisation is an interesting feature of a defence white paper and perhaps

indicates the impact that China at this point thought the global economic crises would have on world politics and the power dynamics in the Asia-Pacific region in its wake.

The white paper released in 2013 is in many ways different from the previous white paper. This view is reinforced by the title of the section outlining China's security environment which is titled "New situation, new challenges and new missions" and represents a new take on how China aim to employ the defence forces to ensure the interests and economic development of China (FMPRC, 2013). The positive anticipation of the future of the 2011 white paper is in the 2013 white paper replaced by a sober tone that worryingly describes a security situation significantly different compared to only two years before. What China refers to when describing a 'new security situation' most likely has to do with that "[t]here are signs of increasing hegemonism, power politics and neo-interventionism" (FMPRC, 2013), and perhaps more importantly that "[t]he Asia-Pacific region has become an increasingly significant stage for world economic development and strategic interaction between major powers" (FMPRC, 2013). Later in the document the defence forces are mentioned in the context of "historical missions for the new stage in the new century" (FMPRC, 2013), where 'the new century' can be seen as a reference to China's 'century of humiliation', which the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century is known in China as (Chen Weiss, 2014: 7-9). The notion of globalisation as a vessel for peace and development is in this document absent as more emphasis is placed on how China is to ensure the continued development of its economy. In the section "Supporting National Economic and Social Development", which is a section that is absent in the previous white paper, it is stipulated that the Chinese defence forces shall, in addition to upholding social stability and participation in disaster relief, "safeguard maritime rights and interest" and "protect overseas interests" (FMPRC, 2013). The issues of "maritime rights" and "overseas interests" are here placed within the context of national development and not within the realm of sovereignty, as issues concerning territorial rights and interests often are framed

within. In the quote below it is evident how strategic lines of communication (SLOCs) and overseas interests are seen as issues of national security, which highlights the gravity that the Chinese government places on development as crucial for stability in China.

"With the gradual integration of China's economy into the world economic system, overseas interests have become an integral component of China's national interests. Security issues are increasingly prominent, involving overseas energy and resources, strategic sea lines of communication (SLOCs) [...]" (FMPRC, 2013)

The description of the challenges and situation that faces China as 'new' signals a change in China's perception of the security situation in their proximity, especially considering that the defence forces are planned to be used in 'new' 'historical missions' in the 'new century'. This rhetoric coupled with a bleaker description of globalisation and the power dynamics in the Asia-Pacific region is indicative of a China that wants to be more in control of its own security situation in the light of an increasingly volatile international order and regional security environment. The emphasis on economic development in the white paper furthermore alludes to the position of the Chinese government that development is a matter of national security.

The defence white paper released in May 2015 continues on the path that was laid by the previous white paper in how China views the regional security situation and how it intends to employ its armed forces to ensure development. Even though there are big similarities between the 2013 and the 2015 white papers there also are key differences which indicate that the 2013 white paper was a departure point for future developments in Chinese policy and strategy. A key difference between the documents is the 2015 white paper's more explicit focus on military strategy rather than policy issues. The military strategy drawn up in the document is put in reference to the overall purpose of the strategy which is outlined under

the section "Missions and strategic tasks of China's armed forces" (FMPRC, 2015) it is stated that:

> *"China's national strategic goal is to complete the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects by 2021 when the CPC celebrates its centenary; and the building of a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious by 2049 when the People's Republic of China (PRC) marks its centenary. It is a Chinese Dream of achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation"* (FMPRC, 2015)

The armed forces role in the building of a 'moderately prosperous society' is here made clear as the development of China is framed in terms of 'national strategic goal'. The last sentence in the quote also references China's "century of humiliation" as it is stated that is the dream of the Chinese people to achieve 'rejuvenation'. This is further emphasised when it is stated that the armed forces shall in the "new historical period":

> *"[…]strive to provide a strong guarantee for completing the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects and achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation*" (FMPRC, 2015)

The development security-discourse in the document is in the document made explicit at several occasions as the armed force's role in the continued development of China is stated. The word 'development' is mentioned 42 times in the document, while the word 'sovereignty' is only used 8 times, which again is an interesting feature in a defence white paper, as 'sovereignty' is a word that can be regarded as a word that traditionally is more relevant for a policy paper regarding the armed forces. The word 'security' is for reference used 84 times in the same document, which indicates the high emphasis on development in the document. This is further affirmed by the new policy for the employment of the armed forces which is built on the notion of a more 'holistic' understanding of security issues:

"it is necessary to uphold a holistic view of national security, balance internal and external security, homeland and citizen security, traditional and non-traditional security, subsistence and development security, and China's own security and the common security of the world" (FMPRC, 2015)

What this seems to signal is China's ambition to align their 'traditional' security objectives with their developmental objectives – the establishment of a moderately prosperous society – through a more 'holistic' outlook on what constitutes a threat to the Communist Party, the communist system in China and to regional stability. By applying this security policy China in a way signals that the leadership of China gives itself the right to interpret developments and actions by other actors as a threat to China's security. The inclusion of 'subsistence' and 'development security' in this formulation is indicative of a China that will not let other actors threaten China's economic model and the success that it has brought with it. This quote can be put into the context of China's dependency on the continuous imports of raw materials and natural resources in order to supply its many factories and the energy need. China is also dependent on the open oceans so that the goods produced in the country can reach consumers all around the world. If China is to maintain its place in the global value chain it is therefore dependent on strategic sea lines of communication being open, which in turn is highly dependent on regional stability. It is clear that the piracy activity in the Gulf of Aden has had an impact on Chinese strategic reasoning as the piracy conducted in the area showed how vulnerable shipping, the backbone of the global economy, is to even a low-budget militia as the Somali pirates. China even has a naval task force deployed to the Gulf of Aden since 2008 to escort Chinese and international ships through the area, which is mentioned in all analysed white papers as one of China's most significant international contributions (FMPRC; 2011; 2013; 2015). It is clear that China sees a connection between development and the continued freedom of navigation of the seas and the strategic sea lines of communication that connects the continents, which is further confirmed by below quote which describes "force development in critical security domains":

"The seas and oceans bear on the enduring peace, lasting stability and sustainable development of China. The traditional mentality that land outweighs sea must be abandoned, and great importance has to be attached to managing the seas and oceans and protecting maritime rights and interests" (FMPRC, 2015)

However, even though there exists a clear discourse concerning development security and the importance of regional stability as a major key for China's 'rejuvenation' there also exists another prevalent discourse – which is the 'rights protection'- discourse. There seems to exist a form of tension and discrepancy between the 'development security'-discourse and the 'maritime rights'-discourse in China's strategic planning, which even manifests itself in the above quote where the first sentence emphasises the importance of regional stability while the following sentence stresses the importance of protecting China's rights and interests. This can be seen as an inconsistent form of reasoning, as upholding stability and at the same time pursuing 'maritime rights' to some extent are mutually excluding actions. However, this form of statement can also be indicative of a policy that implies a more assertive take on how regional stability is to be ensured. China wants to ensure that regional stability is guaranteed in their periphery, while they also are caught up in disputes over sovereignty issues in the same area. A possible solution to this, from a Chinese perspective, is to ensure stability through the presence of Chinese actors and armed forces, and in this way "managing the seas and oceans and protecting maritime rights and interests" (FMPRC, 2015). This approach to 'development security' and the protection of 'maritime rights and interests' also mean that these two objectives can be aligned, as is the purpose of the 'holistic' approach, so that China can reach the main purpose of the white paper - which is the 'great rejuvenation' of the Chinese people.

This more assertive approach to the maintenance of regional stability and the protection of rights is further supported by the way that China describes how its armed forces will be employed to reach its goals:

"A holistic approach will be taken to balance war preparation and war prevention, rights protection and stability maintenance, deterrence and warfighting, and operations in wartime and employment of military forces in peacetime" (FMPRC, 2015)

It is here made clear that China is aware of the tension that exist between upholding regional stability and rights protection as it will be important to 'balance' the two objectives. The 2015 white paper in many ways represents a new form of bluntness concerning how China is more upfront with how they plan to act in the future, which is a major departure from the careful language used in the 2010 white paper.

5.1.3 Social practice

As with the previous sections that analyse different aspects of the defence white papers released by the Chinese government there is an observable progression in which social dynamics that are discernible in the texts. The 2010 white paper, which in previous sections has been described as 'rigid' and 'formal', in many ways differs from the white papers that were released after it. The social relationship that is reproduced and emphasised throughout the whole document is the relationship between the armed forces and the Chinese people. There is a strong emphasis on China as a nation at several points in the document, as it is asserted that the armed forces has an obligation to protect what can be understood as a classic Westphalian interpretation of what constitutes a nation-state as emphasised here;

"In accordance with the Constitution of the People's Republic of China and other relevant laws, the armed forces of China undertake the sacred duty of resisting foreign aggression, defending the motherland, and safeguarding overall social stability and the peaceful labor of its people"(FMPRC, 2010),

further emphasised here;

"The Chinese armed forces loyally follow the tenet of serving the people wholeheartedly, actively participate in and support national economic and social development, and safeguard national security and social stability in accordance with the law" (FMPRC, 2010)

In the document it is primarily 'China' as a unit and the Chinese people that are made the referent objects of security, which further alludes to the conclusion that the 'nation' of China is a more important unit than for example the Communist Party, the socialist system or the state in itself. It is first under the section called "military legal system" that the Communist Party is mentioned as an actor and unit, as this section describes how the armed forces shall abide by the constitution and laws. Again, this section is very formal as it describes how the National People's Congress and the Central Military Committee of the Communist Party have created laws and guidelines that governs and steers how the armed forces shall fulfil its mission of protecting the Chinese nation (FMPRC, 2010). This very formal way of connecting the armed forces and the political leadership of the Communist Party implies that the government in China does not want to signal that there is strong political control over the armed forces, at least outward to international actors.

Even though the 2013 white paper in many regards is a departure from the formal structure and content of the 2011 white paper it shares similarities with the preceding white paper concerning the units and referent objects of security that are acknowledged. The formulations that are observable in the preceding white paper are in this document observable again:

"The fundamental tasks of China's armed forces are consolidating national defense, resisting foreign aggression and defending the motherland" (FMPRC, 2013)

"The Constitution and relevant laws entrust China's armed forces with the important tasks of safeguarding the peaceful labor of the Chinese people, taking part in national development and serving the people wholeheartedly" (FMPRC, 2013)

Throughout the document no other referent object of security is mentioned and other units than the Chinese nation is hardly mentioned. The Communist Party is again solely mentioned in the context of the legal framework for the armed forces, indicating that armed forces are governed through laws and guidelines, and not by the political leadership of the Communist Party (FMPRC, 2013). The similarities between the 2011 and 2013 white papers concerning the referent objects of security, in the light of the differences concerning many of the discourses in the two documents, are interesting as it illuminates how the policy has developed over time. This is shown in the 2015 white paper which challenges this previous structure of security dynamics.

As has been mentioned in the previous sections the 2015 white paper in many ways signals a new take on how the Chinese government view security and how security dynamics are structured. The 2015 white paper is markedly different compared to previous white papers in how the social relations between different units are described, signalling a further progression in the government's view of security dynamics. Throughout the document there are three distinct different referent objects for security that are mentioned, which are: China as a nation, the Communist Party and the socialist system in China. The guidelines outlining the strategic tasks of the armed forces are interesting in the document as the intertextuality of the previous white papers concerning this aspect is not discernible. Gone is any mention of the armed forces protecting the Chinese people as the strategic task of the armed forces is formulated in a much more sterile way than previously:

"To deal with a wide range of emergencies and military threats, and effectively safeguard the sovereignty and security of China's territorial land, air and sea" (FMPRC, 2015)

In general, the discourse of the 'Chinese people' and the Chinese nation are less prevalent in the 2015 white paper than previously, as there is less emphasis on the armed forces being the people's armed forces. Instead, what is very obvious is that there has occurred an elevation of importance concerning other referent objects of security in the Chinese military doctrine, which is exemplified in the below quote:

"China's armed forces will effectively perform their missions in the new historical period, resolutely uphold the leadership of the CPC and the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, safeguard China's sovereignty, security and development interests, safeguard the important period of strategic opportunities for China's development, maintain regional and world peace, and strive to provide a strong guarantee for completing the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects and achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" (FMPRC, 2015)

The strategic goal to 'resolutely uphold the leadership of the CPC' (Communist Party) and the 'socialist system' are new additions to China's defence white paper. This new goal is furthermore mentioned before the goal of safeguarding China's sovereignty, which can be interpreted as a clear statement of prioritisation. In addition to this, the long-term goal of the 'great rejuvenation' is conditioned by among other things the continued leadership of the Communist Party, which again is a clear statement. All in all, the Communist Party is mentioned explicitly 14 times throughout the document (FMPRC, 2015), which is a major change compared to previous white papers where the party only was mentioned at very few occasions and in the context of legislature (FMPRC, 2011; 2013). This new approach to the structuring of security relations is further emphasised in the following quote:

"At this new historical starting point, China's armed forces will adapt themselves to new changes in the national security environment, firmly follow the goal of the Communist Party of China (CPC) to build a strong military for the new situation, implement the military strategic guideline of active defense in the new situation"

(FMPRC, 2015)

In the quote it is acknowledged that China is at a 'starting point' for a new doctrine as the armed forces have to 'adapt', 'build-up' and 'implement' in order for China to reach to goal set by the Communist Party. It is through this statement acknowledged that there is a change in security dynamics in China, which in the light of the previous quote suggests that upholding the Communist Party's is at the moment ordered above the nation-state of China as the main referent object of security.

5.1.4 Summary

The analysis conducted on the 2011, 2013 and 2015 white papers released by the Chinese government show that there has been a continuous progression from a rigid and vague document, as the 2011 white papers is, to a more confident and explicit document by 2015. The content of the documents also show a large degree of progression as many of the prevalent discourses of the 2011 white paper are replaced by other strong discourses concerning development and national interests in the 2013 and 2015 white papers. However, perhaps most interestingly the emergence of new referent objects of security signals changes in security dynamics within China. Below follows a table (1) outlining the major similarities and differences discussed in the previous sections:

Document	Language	Discourse	Referent objects
White Paper, 2011	Traditional use of security	"Globalisation will ensure development and stability"	Nation
White Paper, 2013	New wider application in the use of the word	"Economic development is a national interest of	Nation

	'security' and 'national interest'	China" "Increasing hegemonism and neo-interventionism" "New challenges, new missions, new century" etc.	
White Paper, 2015	'Holistic Security'	"Balance between rights protection and stability maintenance" "Vulnerability to international turmoil" "National rejuvenation" "Active defence"	Nation Communist Party Socialist System

Table 1.

6. Analysis

The research design for this thesis was chosen due to the ambition to try to capture the process of securitisation in China's communication through defence white papers with an elite audience and other functional actors, such as other regional state actors and USA. The decision to analyse defence white papers instead of sampling other forms of statements from Chinese government officials, such as press conferences and interviews, can in retrospect be questioned, as the research only garnered tentative signals of securitisation concerning the South China Sea. However, the analysis of the defence white papers enabled this thesis to collect data concerning security dynamics and social relations within China that is still of relevance for answering the research question that this thesis posed. Considering China's actions in the South China Sea, which since 2010 has become more and more assertive, my expectations at the conception of this study was that a securitisation move could have occurred in Chinese governmental publications. This was due to the apparent urgency that China started to construct military bases on reefs and island-like features in the South China Sea during the 2010s, which is an action usually undertaken in response to an imminent security threat. To seek acceptance for this type of action from the public through a securitisation move is therefore something that according to the Copenhagen School of Security Studies is to be expected as a precursor to the actions.

Did the sampling and critical discourse analysis capture a securitisation move? The initial expectation of finding formulations concerning the South China Sea dispute that could be interpreted as securitisation in the material has not been met. The first level of the critical discourse analysis, the level of the text, shows that China has been very careful in how they have chosen to describe the South China Sea dispute in the analysed documents. The dispute is described in terms of 'maritime rights' and not in terms of threats to security or sovereignty, even though it can be interpreted as 'maritime rights' alludes to issues concerning sovereignty. Instead, China's careful wording and lack of security language concerning the dispute can be interpreted in two ways. Either China does not

perceive the South China Sea dispute as a security threat to China or the Communist Party, which the findings of this study contradict (discussed further later). Or, respectively, China is intent on keeping the South China Sea dispute outside of the realm of security by actively trying to de-securitise the dispute through its communications with the relevant audience and functional actors. This latter narrative is supported by Danner's (2014) study of China's dispute with Japan concerning territory in the East China Sea that was mentioned in the literature review, where Danner found that securitisation and de-securitisation occurred in a very strategic manner by the actors when nationalist support was needed to show resolve outward. China's attempt to keep the South China Sea dispute outside the realm of security is interesting, as it perhaps alludes to a caution concerning audience costs, but it also gives Chinese leaders to in the future forcefully securitise the area and the dispute. A future securitisation of the dispute may therefore occur at a time when China deem it appropriate to increase the audience costs that they create in order to show resolve to other actors in the dispute – signalling a future strategic approach to securitisation of the South China Sea.

Notwithstanding, Balzacq's (2005) development of securitization theory is helpful in this context as it enables us to look at wider sets of variables concerning China's actions. Balzacq's posits "(i) that an effective securitization is audience-centered; (ii) that securitization is context-dependent; (iii) that an effective securitization is power-laden" (Balzacq, 2005: 171). China's political structures, defence white papers and assertiveness in this light together becomes part of a bigger picture that can be interpreted as a securitisation. The following table illustrates this interpretation:

Audience-centered: If the relevant audience for a securitising move in China are elites within the Communist Party, as this thesis posits, then the defence white papers can be seen as a way of communicating to the elites that the government will not let other state-actors threaten China's rapid economic development or the

Communist Party's rule. However, since an explicit securitisation move has not been captured by the sampling this is a tentative conclusion. Furthermore, the point of defence white papers is not to solely communicate with actors within China, putting into question if this condition can be fully met.
Context-dependent: China is in a process of rapid economic growth at the same time as nationalist-sentiment has been growing in the country as China has become a global power. An escalation of tensions in the region between China, USA and other regional actors has been occurring since 2010. A securitisation of the South China Sea dispute by China in this light is something that almost can be regarded as expected. A securitisation of the dispute can therefore take the shape of many different forms of use of language, as the tensions in the region are already high.
Power-laden: The Communist Party in China is an autocratic regime in a country with rapid economic growth with no free press. In this light the government or the Communist Party are the only actors that have enough agency to initiate a securitisation move. Furthermore, in the 2015 white paper there emerged a new take on how security dynamics function within China, which furthermore strengthens the Communist Party's control over the armed forces and structures of social relations. These circumstances meet the condition of power.

Table 2.

In sum, with the help of Balzacq's development of securitisation theory it can be concluded that the material gathered show that China's white papers, coupled with its actions and political structures, meet two out of three conditions set out for a successful securitisation. However, since the sampling did not capture an explicit securitisation move it can be concluded that China has not securitised the South China Sea dispute. Notwithstanding, the findings consequently show that the surrounding circumstances for a securitisation move are favourable.

Even though the sampling and critical discourse analysis failed to capture an explicit securitisation move, the discursive analysis still gave some relevant findings concerning security dynamics in China in the context of the South China Sea, that are analysable with help of CST. The most interesting finding is perhaps China's increasing use of the 'development security'-discourse, which is very prevalent in the 2015 white paper. The findings can almost be interpreted as a securitisation move as some of the formulations concerning 'development security' are very explicit in how China perceives actions that can threaten the continued economic development of the state. This interpretation is further supported by the inclusion of development and economic narratives into a defence white paper, as these are issues not usually associated with armed forces. An interesting question that arises in this context is which unit that is the referent object of security in China's 'development security' discourse. Buzan *et al* (1998:41) states that it should not be complicated to identify the referent object of a securitisation move as there always exists an organisational logic in agency and to the process. However, in the 2015 white paper, where the 'development security'-discourse is most prevalent, there exists three different referent objects: China as a nation, the Communist Party and the socialist system in China. Notwithstanding, it should be understood that the defence white papers are products of the Chinese government, and in the end the Communist Party leadership. The inclusion and emphasis of the Communist Party, alongside China, as a referent object of security signals that political security is a sector that takes precedence in Chinese security dynamics.

Out of the five sectors of security that is mentioned in the theory section of this thesis (military, political, economic, societal and environmental) there are mainly two sectors that are implicitly and explicitly prioritised in the white papers, which are military and political security. According to Buzan *et al* (1998) these two sectors in large are connected to each other as the social interactions that signify these dynamics are very similar. Issues about military security mostly arise out of the process of governance and questions about political legitimacy, which in

many ways align with the narrow understanding of security. Political security in many ways is also concerned about issues of sovereignty, even though political 'threats' are about giving or denying recognition, support or legitimacy to a political unit. These 'threats' can be both internal, within the unit, and external, outside of the unit, which may have different consequences (Buzan *et al*, 1998: 144). The 'development security'-discourse, the emergence of several referent objects of security and China's assertiveness in many ways align with these forms of security dynamics as the emphasis on issues of 'maritime rights' (military security) and 'development security' (political security) both can be seen as responses to perceived threats to both the territorial sovereignty of China and the political sovereignty of the Communist Party. Possible threats to these sectors can be found in the context of the South China Sea dispute as the area is vital for China's economy through the strategic sea lines of communication, but also through the core issue of contestation about sovereignty concerning territory in the area. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, it can be argued that the political legitimacy of the Communist Party is in many ways tied to the continued economic development of China as there are elites within the country that have a lot to gain from China's rapid economic growth. The Chinese government therefore has a strong incentive to actively secure this economic development, of which the South China Sea is a key factor.

Lastly, the aspect of audience costs can help us to interpret the findings as well. Fearon (1997: 70) theorised that states can through either (i)"tying their hands" and commit fully to an dispute, which raises the costs, or (ii) sink costs, through careful de-escalation of the dispute, use audience costs in their foreign affairs. As was discussed above it seems clear that China is intent on having low audience costs in the South China Sea dispute, as no securitisation has been observed concerning the dispute. This is interesting as China have used audience costs in the East China Sea dispute with Japan (Danner, 2014) to communicate resolve. However, as Chen Weiss' (2014) study of nationalist protests in China show they also represent a double-edged sword as these protests also can threaten the

stability and order of the state and in this way threaten the political security of the Communist Party, which the Tiananmen Square student protests of 1989 clearly showed. China's caution toward audience costs in the South China Sea dispute can therefore be interpreted as China is uncertain about what outcomes that can be expected of a violent escalation of the dispute. By not 'tying their hands' and inciting nationalist sentiment to create bargaining power in the dispute China is playing it safe and keeping their options open concerning future political solutions to the dispute. If China would decide to securitise the dispute and incite nationalist sentiment China would have to commit to the successful outcome of an escalation of the dispute. However, since USA has showed a lot of engagement in the South China Sea dispute through its' so called 'freedom of navigation-operations' and commitment to its allies in the region this means China would have to successfully outmanoeuvre a militarily superior adversary. China therefore is caught in a situation where they do not want to appear weak to its population nor want to incite too much nationalist sentiment which would force them in to confrontation with USA. As Chen Weiss notes about Chinese nationalist protests, when they erupt the protesters are in the driver's seat through their quantity and power, as the sentiment they have against other states cannot be quelled by the government (Chen Weiss, 2014: 3f).The goal of the government is therefore to use the bargaining power which these protests create, while at the same time be careful to not incite protests when the timing is bad for the foreign policy.

7. Conclusions

The purpose of this thesis has been to challenge the realist conception of China's assertiveness in the South China Sea and in this way nuance the view of China's motivations and incentives for their actions in the area. The question this thesis asked was if CST and a broadened security perspective, coupled with the concept of audience costs, could provide a competing understanding to Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea dispute. The study has found that CST can provide a competing understanding of Chinese assertiveness, even though the process of securitisation was not captured by the sampling. The main findings of the study are, firstly, that China seems intent on keeping the South China Sea dispute outside the realm of security, due to their careful of words when describing and discussing the dispute. This intention of keeping the dispute within the political realm may have to do with the Communist Party's wariness towards audience costs and the potential issue of nationalist protests escalating out of control, which can threaten the government's legitimacy. Secondly, the Xi-administration's increasing emphasis on the discourses of 'development security' and 'maritime rights' in the light of China's increasing assertiveness in the South China Sea supports the conclusion that the strategic sea lines of communication that run through the South China Sea are a key factor in China's continued economic growth, and in the extension the continued political legitimacy of the Communist Party. China's actions in the area should therefore be interpreted in the light of the political security of the government, as economic growth keeps the government's legitimacy high. Thirdly, securitisation is not a process that occurs in a vacuum, but should instead as Balzacq (2005) states be seen as a strategic, context-dependent practice and not a self-contained universal practice. The thesis has found that China has the possibility to securitise the South China Sea if it chose to, which signifies the caution that the Chinese government shows toward the dispute.

On an ending note, this study has tried to shine an alternate light on the South China Sea dispute to try and understand what incentives and motivations that has

driven China's assertiveness. Important motivations and incentives that have been uncovered mostly have to do with the continued rule of the Communist Party in China and the socialist system, which are not revolutionary findings. However, the study has found that CST can be a valuable tool for uncovering security dynamics and social relations outside of a European context, which encourages further research along these lines. Important contributions that can be made in this area in the future concerns how securitisation is used strategically by other Asian actors to incite audience costs in international disputes. Another interesting issue is China's economic and developmental engagement in Africa, which can fit into an analysis concerning a broadened understanding of security.

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