

# How to Manage Nation Branding?

*- With China as Case*



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## Abstract

The aim of this master's thesis is to analyze how the relationship between nation reputation and nation image influence on nation branding.

From a literature review on nation branding, it became clear that scholars within the academic field had contradicting and blurred definitions on basis concepts of nation branding, such as national identity and nation image, and even on how to manage nation branding. Furthermore, scholars had, opposite scholars in other branches of branding, payed a little attention to how to use the concept of nation reputation and how this can influence on nation branding. This lack of research on nation branding, is therefore the focus of this master's thesis, with China as case. China has been chosen as unique case, due to my clear impression that the Danish people hold contradicting perceptions of China, which can indicate that China are having trouble managing their nation branding, regardless of the fact that China have many long-term strategies concerning nation branding worldwide. And exactly this long-term perspective, is where nation reputation can contribute to existing research, as nation reputation is the long-term nation image.

The theoretically framework of this master's thesis is the concepts of nation branding, national identity, nation image and nation reputation. A combination of all the four concepts, constitute a new model created, this is: "Stages on how to manage nation branding".

As primary data for this analysis, an online survey has been conducted on the Danish people's perception of China, with a total of 179 respondents. The focus of this survey was to examine the Danish people's perception of China, both in terms of nation image and nation reputation, and hereof to analyze whether there exist differences and similarities among the two concepts and further how both concepts influence on nation branding.

The results of the analyses show that both nation reputation and nation image influence on nation branding. Nation reputation is a very useful concept in nation branding, as a mean to gain a deeper insight into how a nation is perceived over time, as it adds the factor of time into nation branding. And by a foundation of time, brand strategists are able to analyze how thematics and core values change and thereby able to have a better and more profound foundation for deciding how to manage nation branding in the future, in order to assure the long-term relevancy of the nation branding.

However, nation image must not be neglected in nation branding. Nation image is the foundation of nation reputation and the current reality of how the nation is perceived. Moreover, nation image must be considered when brand strategists decide which thematics are the most common and favorable for the nation, since not every thematic nature is aligned with previous or future thinking, and that can be the reason that the thematic does not act as nation reputation.

The two external concepts of how the nation is perceived, together with the internal concept, national identity, will according to this master's thesis' analysis give the better and more solid foundation for managing nation branding in the future.

**Keywords:** *nation branding, national identity, nation image, nation reputation, China, case study.*

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## 1. Introduction

Over the last three decades, China have had an annual growth rate averaged on 9,55% (Trading Economics, 2019). In comparison, Denmark's annual growth rate during the last three decades has constantly averaged on 2-3% (Danmarks National bank, 2017, p. 6).

With this speed of China's economic growth, it is estimated that China by 2030 will catch up on US as the largest economy in the world (Financial Post, 2018). In consequence, the level of interest from other nations, medias and individuals on China as nation grows as well.

Today everybody has a perception of China. During my years engaged in the field, I have discovered that many contradicting perceptions about China exist among the Danish people. Loo and Davies have discovered a similar tendency, that China's *nation image* is full of contradictions. They argue that China as nation is plagued by negative nation images, such as pollution, rural unrest, a deplorable human right track record and infringement of intellectual property rights. On the other hand, China's nation image on economic growth is often reported as dazzling and amazing and a rich cultural heritage (Loo and Davies, 2006, p. 199-204).

These contradicting perceptions or nation images, I believe, are quite similar to the perceptions that exist among Danish people. China is very different from Denmark as nation in almost every aspect, and this might result in a degree of ignorance on China as nation, which can be one answer to the contradicting perceptions. Yet I find, that a nation like Japan is not nearly perceive as contradicting as China. And it draws my curiosity *of what influence these contradicting perceptions/images of China?* Naturally to answer this, I have to conduct research on whether China in reality is perceived as contradicting, according the Danish people. Since a perception is not created as a conscious act, it is impossible to find answer to my curiosity by simply asking the Danish people, if they hold contradicting perceptions of China. Instead, in order to find answer to my curiosity, I must turn to literature to explain these contradicting perceptions in an academic context.

A perception of a nation can be similar to the theoretical concept of nation image. Nation image originates from the umbrella concept of nation branding, and nation image can as well be a result

of nation branding, hence is the academic concept of nation branding essential, when wishing to conduct research on these contradicting images. I will therefore take a step back and conduct a literature review of nation branding in order to begin my search for answers on what influence these contradicting nation images of China, and to answer the more general question of *what influence on nation branding*.

By conducting a literature review of nation branding, I gain insight into where to look within the larger concept of nation branding and insight into the concept of nation image, in order to see whether nation image is the ideal concept that can grasp all the different aspects of investigating what influence on nation branding.

## 2. Literature review

In literature, many branches of branding exist, this is product branding, personal branding, corporate branding, place/destination branding, country branding, nation branding etc. (Aaker, 1996; Lair et al., 2005; Kapferer, 1997; Ren and Blichfeldt, 2011; Anholt 2003).

Yet the concept of nation branding is relatively new. The origin can be traced back to four different concepts, namely country of origin (Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2002), place/destination branding (Kotler et al., 2003; Kotler and Gertner, 2002; Morgan et al., 2002), and more recently, public diplomacy (Van Ham, 2001) and national identity (Jones and Smith, 1991; Bond et al., 2010).

The concept of nation branding is relevant in today's intensely globalized and competitive society to differentiate itself as nation, otherwise the capability to compete with other nations becomes extremely difficult. And that is why, according to Anholt, it is important to have a powerful nation brand and nation image (Anholt, 2003, p. 214).

Anholt, who was one of the first scholars to coin the concept of nation branding in the 1990s, and still is one of, if not the most, prominent scholar of nation branding, defines nation branding as: *"the sum of people's perceptions of a country across the following six areas of national competence: exports, governance, tourism, investment and immigration, culture and heritage, and people"* (Anholt, 2006, p. 297).

Scholars within nation branding agree on the following. One, brands have become fundamental tools that can differentiate nations from another (Kotler and Gertner, 2002; Fan, 2006; Pike, 2007; Skinner and Kubacki, 2007; Loo and Davies, 2006). Two, the main purpose of nation branding is to increase awareness and recognition of the nation, and to create a positive nation image and a strong brand that can create an important competitive advantage globally (Fan, 2006; Anholt, 2006; Loo and Davies, 2006, Kotler and Gertner, 2004). Most scholars acknowledge that nation branding occurs with or without the nation's attention, thus the importance of nations to pay attention to nation branding, in an attempt to have influence on creating their own nation brand (Kaneva, 2011, p. 123, Loo and Davies, 2006; Wang, 2008; Anholt, 2008; Olins, 2002).

Many scholars of nation branding also agree that the foundation of nation branding is national identity and the outcome is nation image, quite similar to what scholars of corporate branding believe (Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 1997), yet scholars defines the concepts very differently (Fan, 2006; Anholt 2007; Skinner and Kubacki, 2007, Olins, 2002). Among the most prominent scholars of nation branding are Fan, who has created a model, that among other components include this equation: National identity → Nation branding → Nation image (Fan, 2010, p. 100). And exactly this, is how many scholars perceive nation branding (Fan, 2010; Pike, 2007; Blichfeldt, 2005; Olins, 2002; Fan, 2006). However, it is various which concepts scholars emphasize in their research and perceive as most important.

Despite the practical and theoretical importance of nation branding, the existing literature on the concept is dominated by its descriptive methodology in terms of examining nation branding and advancing existing theory. Scholars typically present very limited evidence on the effectiveness of nation branding, beyond a few "success stories" (Kaneva, 2011, Yan, 2003; Gertner 2007; Fan, 2010; Olins, 2002). Anholt, is one of the only scholars who presents a pragmatic tool, this is "The Nation Brand Hexagon" which according to Anholt is the first analytical ranking system on the world's nation brands. This is a suitable tool for examining current nation images in contrast to other nation's nation images. However, the tool gives no solution for how to manage nation brands and nation image, and it is more or less only a tool that is set out to examine the outcome of having managed a nation brand (Anholt, 2006, p. 263-264). The hexagon is a good tool to examine current

nation images, however it can't be the only tool that a nation uses, when examining how to manage their nation branding.

It is a very widespread tendency in the academic field of nation branding, that scholars have paid a little attention to how a nation brand actually can be managed in a systematic and holistic manner, and as a result a small amount of concrete results and tools are presented. There are several reasons for this. One is that nation branding is a long-term project that does not create instant results. Another is that the outcome of nation branding can be very difficult to measure. Both reasons make research more difficult (Kaneva, 2011, p. 123). With literature being dominated by almost no concrete results and guidelines, scholars within the field disagree on, what constitutes a nation brand, how to manage a nation brand, whether it can be managed and the definitions of basic concepts (Blichfeldt, 2005; Fan, 2010; Anholt, 2006; Loo and Davies, 2006; Olins, 2002). As a result, Anholt who coined the concept nation branding has more recently claimed that nation branding is irrelevant, as he has never seen evidence to suggest that nation branding is possible, not even a single case study, no research and no persuasive arguments (Anholt, 2010).

Another area within nation branding that has not been studied as widely as the concept of national identity and nation image is the concept nation reputation.

In corporate branding, image and reputation are both widely acknowledge and used concepts (Holt, 2004; Balmer 2010; Bickerton, 2000).

However, what strikes me in literature on nation branding is that almost every scholar discusses the importance of nation image, yet only a very few mentions the concept of nation reputation. Not even one scholar who mention the concept of nation reputation, includes nation reputation in how to manage nation branding (Anholt, 2013; Fan, 2010; Loo and Davies, 2006; Van Ham, 2001).

Furthermore, a general trend among scholars using nation reputation is that all of them, including Anholt and Fan, consistently are confusing to two concepts of nation image and nation reputation, and they never bother to provide the reader with a decent definition of nation reputation, that distinct itself from nation image.

I will now explain why, this in my opinion, is an area that needs more research, especially when it comes to explaining what influence on nation branding.



One viewpoint that seems very dominant in literature on nation branding, is that it is brand strategists' responsibility to manage a nation brand and hereof nation image with foundation in national identity (Blichfeldt, 2005; Olins, 2002; Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2002; Fan, 2010). National identity is often defined in different ways, yet many scholars emphasize the importance of nation image being true to national identity (Dinnie, 2007; Olins, 1999; Fan, 2006; Fan, 2010). However, many scholars fail to focus on receivers' role in managing nation branding, this receiver can be tourists, citizens of the nation, investors, consumers etc. Anholt has also raised similar critique toward nation branding and his own research and claims that it is a failure not to acknowledge the nation image or nation reputation that a nation already has (Anholt, 2010). However, he has never conducted research in order to find solutions to his critique.

According to Blichfeldt, nation brands resides in receivers' minds. A nation brand will never merely be a reflection of brand strategists' attempt to form a nation brand, though will also be a reflection of personal experiences, word-of-mouth, media etc. (Blichfeldt, 2005, p. 398).

I therefore argue that receivers' role in managing nation branding have been neglected in existing literature on nation branding. I find that it is necessary for brand strategists also to include receivers' long-term perception of a nation, nation reputation, into the equation of nation branding. This is also substantiated with the heart of marketing. Here lies the responsibility for brand strategists to be consumers' ambassador, and more importantly the responsibility to adapt to the "voice of the consumer" more than try to change the knowledge, structures and associations (Blichfeldt, 2005, p. 398).

Brand strategists could instead ask, what is the nation reputation of the nation? And how can we incorporate the most favorable and most common nation reputation into managing our nation branding in a combination with national identity and nation image? To do this, I argue that the nation brand thereby has a better chance of being recognized by the receivers, and thereby not rejected as a result of the receivers being completely unfamiliar with the "painted picture" of the nation. This might also enhance the chance of a more consistent nation branding, and thereby lessen the contradicting nation images, since less people might reject the created nation image. I will therefore conduct research on nation reputation together with nation image in this master's thesis. As a combination of the two concepts, and especially the less researched concept of nation

reputation, can contribute to expanding existing research on nation branding.

**The problem formulation of this master's thesis' is therefore:** *How does the relationship between nation reputation and nation image influence on nation branding?*

### 3. Structure of the master's thesis

- 1. Introduction** – here I have presented the curiosity and the starting point for conducting research within the academic field of nation branding and with China as case.
- 2. Literature review** – this is an account of what have been studied and published by accredited scholars within the overall academic field of nation branding, and not at least what have not been studied.
- 3. Structure of the master's thesis** – this is a short overview of the structure of the master's thesis.
- 4. Theoretical framework** – it presents and reflects on the existing academic research on nation branding, national identity, nation image and nation reputation.
- 5. Stages on how to manage nation branding** – a new model “Stages on how to manage nation branding” is presented. This model is an extension of the theoretical framework and will function as a mean to close the gap of missing research that has been found in the existing academic research on nation branding.
- 6. Philosophy of Science** – the ontological and epistemological stances are presented and discussed.
- 7. Research design** – case study is here presented and reflected upon.
- 8. Methods** – it present and discuss the different methods used for this master's thesis, this includes choices of how to collect and analyze data.
- 9. Analysis** – this section aims to analyze on how the relationship between nation reputation and nation image influence on nation branding. The analysis contains several different analyses, most of them use data from the conducted survey. The analyses are: an analysis of the general findings from the conducted survey, an analysis on China's national identity, with data from a conducted document analysis, an analysis of China's nation image, an analysis of China's nation reputation and finally an analysis of differences and similarities between China's nation image and nation reputation.
- 10. Discussion** – is a discussion of the results of the analyses, as well as discussion of what this master's thesis can bring to existing research on nation branding and whether it makes sense to expand the existing understanding of nation branding.
- 11. Conclusion** – it will conclude on the problem formulation of this master's thesis.

## 4. Theoretical framework

The following section seeks to build the theoretical framework for this master's thesis. In the theoretical framework, I will begin by presenting existing relevant theories on nation branding. Furthermore, I will introduce the theoretical concepts of national identity, nation image and nation reputation. All together for the sake of expanding the theoretical knowledge, which will be the foundation of answering this thesis problem formulation.

In the end of this theoretical framework, I will based on the chosen theoretical concepts, as well as on the findings from existing literature, present an extended model that can support me answering the problem formulation on *how does the relationship between nation reputation and nation image influence on nation branding*.

The foundation of this theoretical framework will be books and academic journals.

As a result of existing literatures' lack of concrete results and tools nation branding, national identity, nation image and nation reputation, this theoretical framework has limited models that can operationalize the concepts and the analytical process of the concepts in the chosen case.

### 4.1. What is a nation?

Before advancing the discussion on nation branding, the definition of nation has to be clarified, especially as there have been opposing views on such definition (Skinner and Kubacki, 2007, p. 306). Nation is often used interchangeably with country, yet a difference exists among the two (Fan, 2006, p. 5).

A nation can be defined as a political entity (Cobban, 1969), a cultural entity (Gellner, 1938) or as both a political and a cultural entity (Earley and Singh, 1995). Gellner, who defines a nation as a cultural entity, holds the view that: *"two men are of the same nation if and only if they share the same culture, where culture in turn means a system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communicating"* (Gellner, 1983, p. 6). Another definition is: *"A nation generally refers to a large group of people of the same race and language, while the country is an area of land occupied by a nation"* (Fan, 2006, p. 5). Other scholars are not agreeing on whether a nation is established by internal recognition, external recognition or both (Skinner and Kubacki, 2007, p. 308).

As countries and nations varies both in size and characteristics, I believe in a broad definition of the concept nation. So, to sum up all of these definitions, this master's thesis the definition of nation is considered as: *"a large group of people who share the same history, culture and political system and both internal and external is recognized as nation"* (own attribution).

## 4.2. Nation branding

I have chosen to alter my focus on nation branding, as the interest of my case, China, can be characterized as a nation. However, China can also be characterized as a country or as a place. I have chosen to focus on the concept, nation branding, due to the broadness of nation branding as concept. According Fan *"nation branding concerns a country's whole image, covering political, economic, historical and cultural dimensions* (Fan, 2006, p. 8). On the contrary, place branding limits its focus on promoting specific economic interests such as tourism or export (Fan, 2010, p. 98). And this does not cover the complexity of the case chosen for this research. Furthermore, Fan argues that several concepts are a part of the umbrella concept nation branding including place branding etc. (Fan, 2010, p. 99), and therefore it is natural to choose the most comprehensive concept to cover all aspects of a nation.

I will begin this section by shortly defining the concept branding in order to understand the concept of nation branding and what constitutes it.

Branding as concept appeared for the first time in marketing literature over 50 years ago (Pike, 2007). The classic definition, provided by the American Marketing Association in 1990 is:

*"A name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them, which is intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors. A brand is more than just a name; it is a complex bundle of images, meanings, associations and experiences in the minds of people"*  
(Fan, 2010 p. 98).

Now that I have clarified my understanding of both *nation* and *branding*. I will progress to nation branding.

As mentioned in the literature review, scholars have different definitions of nation branding. I will present just a few in order to understand the difference.

Anholt's classic definition is: *"the sum of people's perceptions of a country across the following six areas of national competence: exports, governance, tourism, investment and immigration, culture and heritage, and people"* (Anholt, 2006, p. 297).

Jaworski and Foshers' definition of nation branding is: *"Like any brand, nations have their own DNA, which gives them their uniqueness. Therefore, no two nations are real alike. Starting with language, culture, skin color to the art style and music, countries are diverse by nature"* (Jaworski and Foshers, 2003, p. 100). And Loo and Davies' definition: *"To manage all individual images into a coherent whole and project a clear and attractive image that meets the needs of most of the nation's different outputs"* (Loo & Davies, 2006, p. 204).

From the above definitions it is evident, that scholars have different perceptions and focusses on nation branding. Whereas Anholt focus on different aspects of the nation brand, Jaworski and Foshers are more focused on the distinctiveness of the people and do not focus on exports, governance etc. On the other hand, Loo and Davies have a more functional approach to nation branding and see nation branding as an action, yet they also enhance the concept of nation image as what constitutes nation branding. Furthermore, both Loo and Davies and Anholt's definitions are emphasizing the nation image aspect of nation branding, contrary Jaworski and Foshers focus more on the national identity aspect of nation branding. These three definitions are an excellent showcase of the difference of the basic understanding of what constitutes nation branding that exist within the academic field nation branding

#### 4.2.1. The Nation Brand Hexagon

I will now present one of the most used tools within nation branding. This is "The Nation Brand Hexagon" which according to Anholt is the first analytical ranking system of the world's nation brands. Each quarter, a worldwide panel of over 25,000 consumers is being polled on their perceptions to the six different categories on 35 different nations (Anholt, 2006, p. 263). These six categories are: *exports, governance, tourism, investment and immigration, culture and heritage, and people*, and these six categories are what, according to Anholt, constitute a nation brand.

The purpose of this analytic tool is to analyze a nation brand, and essentially what Anholt categorize as nation image. Nonetheless Anholt is not presenting this as a tool to analyze nation image, instead he presents it as a tool to analyze the whole nation brand, and therefore I present it as a general tool for nation branding as well (Anholt, 2006, p. 297).



Figure 2: "The Nation Brand Hexagon". Source: Anholt, 2006, p. 264.

**Tourism** is often the most visibly branded aspect of a nation brand, as many tourist boards spend money on selling the nation as a tourist destination, and this branding often has an effect on people's perception of the nation as whole.

**Export.** In this category, participants are asked about their tendency to actively buy or actively avoid buying products from each country. This is what marketers name as the country of origin effect, or as the power of the "Made In" label. Participants are also asked what kind of products they would expect to be produced in each country.

**Governance.** Participants are asked to rank nations according to how fair and competent they believe the nations are being governed and how much they would trust the nation's government to make responsible decisions which uphold international security and peace. Participants are also asked about their perceptions of each governments' sense of responsibility towards poverty and global environment. Further, an adjective which best describes the government in each nation is also requested.

**Investment and immigration.** This is concerned with the business-to-business aspect of the nation. Here participants are asked about their personal willingness to live and work in each nation for a period of time. They are also asked about their perception of each nation's education system and asked for an adjective which best describes each nation's current economic and social condition.

**Culture and Heritage.** In this category, participants' perception of each nation's cultural heritage is asked to. Participants are asked to name each nation's sporting excellence and name what kind of cultural activity they expect to find in each nation.

**People.** The purpose here is to understand how human capital of each nation is viewed. Examples of questions here are *"Imagine you are a manager and need to make an important hiring. Please rank the following nations in order of your preference for the nationality of your candidate"* and *"How much would you like to have a close friend from the following nations"*. Participants are also asked to add an adjective that best describes the people in each nation (Anholt, 2006, p. 263-264)

#### 4.2.2. Concept of nation branding: Origins and interpretations

In the next sections, I will present the theoretical concepts of national identity, nation image and nation reputation. However, to understand the connection between all of these concepts, I will begin presenting Fan's model "Concept of Nation Branding: Origins and Interpretations".

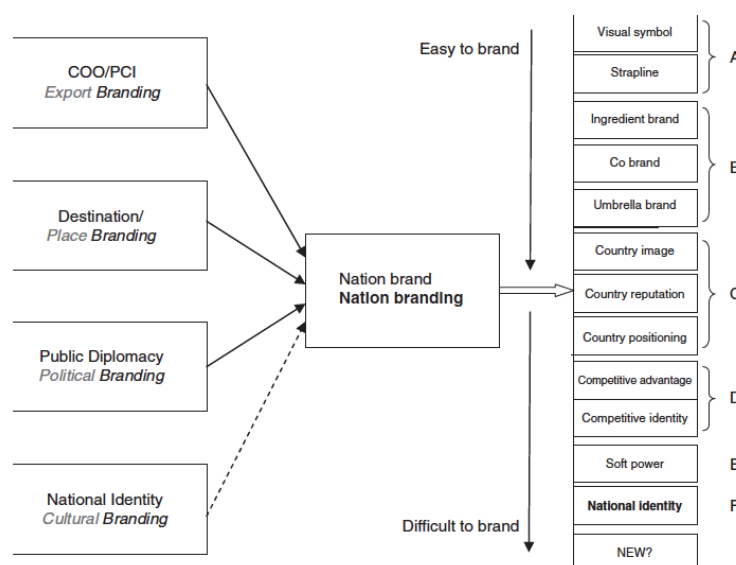


Figure 2: "The Concept of Nation Branding: Origins and Interpretations". Source: Fan, 2010, p. 99.



From the figure it is clear that several concepts constitute a nation branding. This is country of origin, destination/place branding, public diplomacy and national identity. Further, the figure divides the interpretations of nation branding into several levels. A is visual symbol and straplines. B is an umbrella brand that encompasses various sector brand, e.g. in tourism or exports. C is the country image, reputation and position. D is the intent to build and sustain a nation's competitiveness. E is the tool for developing and maintaining the soft power of a nation by creating a more favorable nation image among international audience. F is linked to national identity, since a nation brand should be rooted in the essence and reality of the nation (Fan, 2010, p. 99-100)

As this master's thesis aim is to conduct research on nation image and nation reputation, my focus will therefore be centered around C. In his research, Fan calls the same concepts country image, country reputation and country positioning. Regardless of this, I will refer to the same concepts as nation instead of country, due to the fact that I alter my focus on nation, as discussed in the beginning of this section, however this does not change meaning of the figure.

Discarding the concepts of the model, that are not the main focus of this master's thesis, a simplified version of the model can be presented as follows: national identity → nation branding → nation image/nation reputation.

In order to follow this thinking of nation branding, the next section introduce national identity as concept. Later, I will present nation image and finally nation reputation (Fan, 2010, p. 99-100).

### 4.3. National identity

I will now introduce the concept of national identity, as a prerequisite for nation branding. Firstly, it is important to distinguish national identity from nation brand identity, which both are very common concepts within nation branding. These two concepts are related, hence very different concepts.

*“National identity is the collective understanding by a nation's people of the features presumed to be central and relatively permanent, and that distinguish the nation from*

*other nations. National identity embodies the characteristics of a nation, which its people perceive to be central, enduring and distinctive in a nation when past, present and future is taken into account” (Fan, 2010, p. 100).*

On the other hand, nation brand identity refers to the identity of a specific nation brand, and therefore not to the whole nation (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2002, p. 43).

Olins suggested in 1999 that nation branding not is about building or remolding national identity. Instead, nation branding is about modifying the nation image that foreign people hold about the nation, and the essence of nation branding is to align the nation image to the reality, the national identity (Olins, 1999). If not succeeding to align the nation image to the reality, then nation branding will have no purpose and fail (Fan, 2006, p. 11-12). According to Fan, national identity is not defined by brand strategists as nation brand imafe is, yet national identity is defined by the people of the nation, and any changes in a national identity is a result of changes in the nation's political, social and economic system.

Another scholar, Dinnie, who examines national identity, defines national identity and the link between nation branding and national identity as follows:

*“National identity plays a key role in nation branding. An awareness and understanding of the core features of national identity are a prerequisite for developing nation-branding campaigns, as the essence of any nation-brand derives not only from the country's companies and brands but also for its culture in the widest sense-language, literature, music, sport, architecture, and so on all embody the soul of a nation... A deep and authentic nation brand must include the many elements and expressions of a nation's culture” (Dinnie, 2007, p. 111-112).*

However, both Fan and Dinnie fail to recognize that, if a nation chooses to bring awareness to nation branding and to developing nation image, brand strategists and the government unavoidable is involved in the process. In all probability, they will develop nation image based on national identity and the reality, yet in some cases they might fail to do this by solely developing a

nation image based on the decision-makers wishes to how the nation image should be in the minds of the receivers. Also, Olins acknowledge that nation branding can be viewed as a form of “social engineering” that allow decision-makers to manipulate both national identity and nation image (Olins, 2002, p. 247-248). However, as Dinnie states, nation branding needs to be rooted in the essence and in the reality of the nation rather than being a creation of brand strategists (Dinnie, 2007, p. 127). And this is the same viewpoint I will hold throughout my thesis.

To truly be able to understand nation branding, the next section will introduce the concept of nation image, which is the result of nation branding, regardless if a nation chooses to bring awareness to nation branding or not.

#### 4.4. Nation image

In literature on nation branding, the most used concept is by far nation image (Anholt, 2010; Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2002; Loo and Davies, 2006; Kotler and Gertner, 2002; Highhouse et al. 2009; Fan, 2006; Skinner and Kubacki, 2007).

Fan who has done extensive research on nation image, defines the concept in the following way:

*“A nation’s image is defined by the people outside the country; their perceptions are influenced by stereotyping, media coverage as well as personal experience. Similar to commercial brands, a nation’s image can be repackaged, repositioned and communicated in a professional manner”* (Fan, 2010, p. 100).

According to Papadopoulos and Heslop, all nations have their own nation image, this can be positive or negative, focused or diffused and can be formed from education, media, product purchases, travel etc. What distinguish nation image from product image, is that nation image does not fall directly under brand strategists’ control. Hence, nation image also exists, without any intended actions from the nation in developing a certain nation image (Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2002, p. 295-296).

Nation image is often powerful stereotypes, carrying cognitive, affective and normative dimensions. Nation image might in some cases not even be a true picture of the objective reality of the nation, nonetheless they are pervasive, and they can influence all kinds of buying decisions, from consumer

purchase to foreign investments. Exactly this, is one of the reasons why a nation itself needs to pay attention to developing an nation image, otherwise the existing nation image might be based on misconceptions (Loo and Davies, 2006, p. 198) or be outdated (Anholt, 2003, p. 219) and this can potentially have negative short-term and long-term consequences (Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2002, p, 309).

According to Loo and Davies, each nation must take control of its own nation image by managing its nation brand to create a truly representative nation image, otherwise it will leave other nations and competitors free to create whatever stereotypes they wish (Loo and Davies, 2006, p. 198).

However, managing nation image is complex and unglamorous. For it to succeed, a high degree of consistency is needed. This can easily be done in a company, where management can decide the best interest of the company and the overall strategy. Yet in a nation with democracy, the same actions by a leader would be called tyranny. However, Anholt argue that an overall strategy and commander in chief in fact are needed to assure that the nation speaks with a single-minded voice and purpose, without this, nation branding is guaranteed to fail (Anholt, 2003, p. 219-222). Fan and Loo and Davies all agree with Anholt, that the biggest challenge is to develop and communicate a simple nation image, that represents the core message of the nation.

Both Fan and Loo and Davies also shed light on the many different groups of receivers for nation image. This is both different nations and different industry sectors, nonetheless every nation or industry is different, and whereas one nation image might be relevant for one group of receivers, it will be irrelevant for others (Fan, 2006, p. 10; Loo and Davies, 2006, p. 201-202). As I see it, this challenge having one clear nation image further, as every group of receivers have different interest, and what core values the nation image should be centered around will unavoidable also be different according to who you target. Regardless of this, a nation must not create different nation images for each nation, but needs to have on single-minded voice (Anholt, 2003, p. 219-222).

To enhance the complexity further, Fan argues that also the own citizens of the nation is important to focus on as a group of receivers for nation image. Because if a nation is branded in a wrongful way it might seem foreign to their own citizens, and in some cases, the citizens may even perceive the nation image as insulting or offensive (Fan, 2006, p. 11).

I agree with Fan. Today people are traveling more, and as a result people can function as

ambassadors for the nation brand and the nation image. However, if they don't recognize themselves in the nation image portrayed, they will most likely intentional or unintentional give foreigners a different nation image, and this might destroy foreign people's existing nation image of the nation or create contradicting nation images.

Branding is undeniable an extremely powerful tool. Though it is equally important to realize that branding is just one part of an overall marketing strategy, which itself is a part of the whole nation strategy. Branding will not succeed if other components of the strategy fail to deliver the expectation of the receivers. And nation branding is no exception. Said in another way, the nation image has to reflect the reality, and every word claimed must be substantiated (Fan, 2006, p. 11). In the next section, I will introduce the concept of nation reputation and corporate reputation. All for the sake of examine the difference between nation image and nation reputation.

#### 4.5. Nation reputation

I will now present the concept of nation reputation and the definition of reputation in general. Due to the lack of literature on nation reputation, in a nation branding context, it has been necessary for me to extent my research to other branches of branding. Nevertheless, I will begin this section by introducing the limited amount of literature on nation reputation. In order to answer my problem formulation on *how the relationship between nation reputation and nation image influence on nation branding*, it is crucial for this thesis to truly understand the concept of reputation, and moreover to understand the difference between nation image and nation reputation.

Through an extensive review on existing literature on nation branding, it is evident that only a very few scholars have provided a definition on nation reputation. One of scholars who have is Fan: "*A nation's reputation is a particular type of feedback received by the nation from the outside world, concerning the credibility of the nation's identity claims*" (Fan, 2010, p. 100). Fan acknowledge that nation image and nation reputation are often used interchangeably, but in fact they are different constructs (Fan, 2010, p. 100). However, this short definition does not reduce the confusion on the difference between the two concepts. Contrary to nation reputation, nation image is defined by Fan the following way: "*Image refers to what is projected to the other, whereas reputation is the*

*feedback received from the other*" (Fan, 2010, p. 100). From this distinction of the two concepts, the difference seems to be that nation image is the active act, whereas reputation is the feedback from the act. However, going deeper into Fan's research the difference is not that simple. Fan shortly after claims that nation image also is defined by people outside the nation (Fan, 2010, p. 100). And here the clear differences again become more unclear and blurred.

Another scholar who has defined nation reputation is Mercer: "*National reputation is all about having a good name in the world of nations. It refers to collective judgments of a foreign country's image and character that are then used to predict or explain its future behavior*" (Mercer, 1996, p. 6). According to Mercer nation reputation is bigger than nation image. The nation reputation is the total of all nation images in the future.

Except from Fan and Mercer, no other scholars within nation branding define the differences between nation image and nation reputation, and most scholars who use both concepts are not capable of separating the two, including Anholt, who uses both concepts as different names for one concept, and never bother to elaborate his understanding of the difference between the two (Anholt, 2007).

Based on the lack of research within nation branding, it is necessary for me to extend my research into other branches of branding, in sake of finding the difference and to obtain a clear understanding of the concept nation reputation as foundation for this research.

It makes sense to draw of other branches of branding, since nation branding origins from the understanding and previous research on branding in general, and the two branches of branding are therefore comparable. Furthermore, many scholars with a technical-economic approach within nation branding acknowledge that nation branding does not varies much from corporate branding or product branding (Kaneva, 2011, p. 119-121). As a result, I therefore draw on literature from corporate branding, and this branch of branding's understanding of the concept of reputation. A reason for choosing corporate branding and not product branding, is that corporate branding involves branding the whole company, the same as nation branding involves branding the whole nation.

Fombrun and Shanley, argue that as opposed to image, reputation is a strategic concept, that focus on the long-term impressions of the organization built around numerous corporate images and actions (Fombrun and Shanley, 1990, p. 235).

In Fombrun's later research, he states the following: *"A reputation develops from a company's uniqueness and from identity-shaping practices — maintained over time — that lead constituents to perceive the company as credible, reliable, trustworthy and responsible"* (Fombrun, 1996, p. 28).

According to Nquyen, another scholar in corporate reputation, a company can have various reputations and various images. A company can have a reputation for each attribute such a price, product quality, management or a global reputation. A company can also have various images according to who you ask and what previous experiences they have had with the company (Nquyen, 2001, p. 228-229).

Many scholars who have conducted research on corporate reputation agree that the concept reputation is associated with the credibility of the company (Nqueyen, 2001; Formbrun 2016; Swoboda et al., 2016; Herbig and Milewicz, 1994). The consequence is that to create a good reputation is takes many good transactions over times, while destructing the reputation can easily be caused by a bad action or mixed signals to the market (Nquyen, 2001, p. 229).

From the above literature both on nation reputation and reputation, my definition of nation reputation is:

*"Nation reputation is all about having a good name in the world of nations. Nation reputation is the total of all nation images. Nation reputation depends on the receivers' long-term perception of the nation's actions, characteristics, credibility and trustworthiness" (Own attribution).*

Based on the presented theoretical concepts of nation branding, national identity, nation image and nation reputation, I will in the next section create a new model for how to manage nation

branding and how I argue nation reputation should be included in nation branding in the future.

## 5. Stages of how to manage nation branding

With foundation in the previous theoretical framework, including the understandings of all concepts on nation branding, national identity, nation image and nation reputation, I will now present several stages of how to manage nation branding. What differentiate these stages from other scholars' research on nation branding, is that the stages of how to manage nation branding include the concept of nation reputation. Nation reputation has been neglected by most scholars within nation branding, nonetheless, I argue that this concept is crucial in managing nation branding, especially in term of creating a more well-founded, long-term nation branding, that will be received in a more consistent way both internally and externally, and thereby minimize the potential contradicting nation images that are created. These stages will be a refinement of Fan's stages: national identity → nation branding → nation image/nation reputation (Fan, 2010, p. 99-100).

Scholars within nation branding and corporate branding have been disagreeing on reputation's role in branding, an example is the two following scholars' stances. Porter, who in 1985 suggested that a good reputation may help build an innovative nation image. Opposing, Franklin who in 1984 proposed that corporate reputation is a global and final outcome of building a corporate image (Nquyen, 2001, p. 229). And exactly this is foundation for the new model, that nation reputation indeed can help build an innovative nation image, however nation reputation can indeed also be the outcome of nation image.



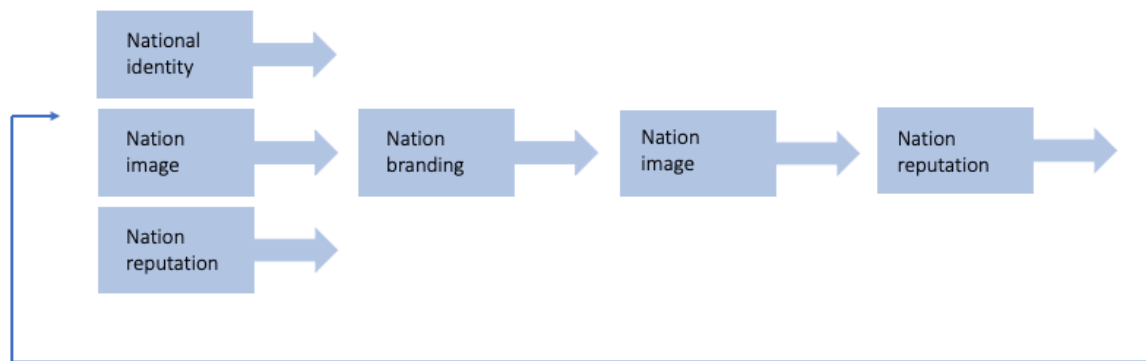


Figure 3: Own attribution.

With these stages, I argue that national reputation should be a preexisting concept of nation branding, together with national identity and nation image.

Before elaborating on the stages, let's settle on the fact that, every nation in the world do already have nation image and a long-time nation reputation, either positive, negative or contradicting. Nation branding is nevertheless still relevant, since most nation's very likely, in various degrees, wishes to improve their nation image and nation reputation or change it from negative to positive. Moreover, a brand can be destroyed from one single bad action or mixed signals to the market (Nquyen, 2001, p. 229), and it is therefore necessary for a nation continuously to manage their nation branding.

If starting from the beginning, I argue that in order to manage a nation brand successfully a nation must begin by diagnosing the current state of the nation. This includes an analysis of the national identity. This is: *"identity is the collective understanding by a nation's people of the features presumed to be central and relatively permanent, and that distinguish the nation from other nation"* (Fan, 2010, p. 100). Furthermore, the nation must conduct an analysis of foreign people's perception of the nation image, this is *"...defined by the people outside the country; their perceptions are influence by stereotyping, media coverage as well as personal experience"* (Fan, 2010, p. 100). And finally, the nation must conduct an analysis of foreign people's perception of the

nation reputation, which is *“the long-term impressions on the nation’s actions, characteristics, credibility and trustworthiness”* (Own attribution, p. 25).

When all analyzes have been conducted, it is necessary for the nation to conduct a coherent analysis, in order to compare the internal and external perceptions of the nations with the aim of establishing which thematics and values are most common both internal and externally. The nation should then choose the most common and favorable thematics and values as foundation for all their nation branding (Fan, 2010, p. 99-100). Example of actions, can be international campaigns and strategies, what people from a government say in speeches, acts of soft power and public diplomacy etc. And by trying or having created a new nation image, based on the internal and external perceptions of the nation’s core values, I argue that the chance of either the nation’s own citizens and foreign people rejecting the created nation image will be reduced, as the nation image in some degree is created based on perceptions from the society surrounding them.

From all the actions of nation branding and from the nation image that the nation has tried to create and communicate, a new nation image will be created, in combination with external and avoidable factors such as medias, word-of-mouth, previous nation image and personal experiences (Blichfeldt, 2005, p. 398).

Finally, from years of a consistent nation branding strategy, together with actions from the nation that substantiate the nation image and thereby prove that the nation image reflects on the reality (Fan, 2006, p. 11), the nation image will reside in the minds of the foreign people, and thereby turn into nation reputation, the long-term image.

These stages of how to manage nation branding must be considered a circle of continuous work with nation branding, and constantly updating the nation branding to reflect the reality and the internal and external perception, otherwise the nation branding will yet again fail and create contradicting images. However, the need for consistent nation branding (Loo & Davies, 2006, p. 204) must still not be neglected, and this clarify the importance of why nation reputation must be incorporated in nation branding as a mean to assure the long-term relevance.

However, I would like to emphasize that creating nation image does not fall directly under brand strategists’, decision-makers’ and the nation’s control (Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2002, p. 295-296). Consequently, bad actions can instantly change the nation image. Furthermore, it is not only

the nation who wishes to create successful nation branding, thus also other stakeholders, e.g. tourist industry etc. wishes to create a positive nation image in order to attract more tourist to the nation. And maybe their strategy of branding the nation can be completely different, with different nation images, and this might also create contradicting images.

## 6. Philosophy of Science

### 6.1. Paradigm

The fundament of all research and understanding hereof, is a paradigm. Paradigm is an assemblage of beliefs, and a paradigm dictates what is to be studied, the method of how research should be conducted and how results should be interpreted (Bryman, 2016, p. 637). Paradigm can be separated into systems of beliefs, and each system is based on three central fundamentals, ontology, epistemology and methodology (Gubi, 1990, p. 18). Each fundamental has different characteristics, beliefs and methods. Researchers can use different paradigms as guiding principles, that can assist the researcher construct a better structure for the research (Bryman, 2016, p. 637). The decisions regarding philosophy of science will affect the research, both implicitly and explicitly. These decisions are intellectual contact lenses that enable the researcher to perceive certain aspects of the reality (Pedersen, 2011, p. 138, 146).

### 6.2. Ontological considerations

Ontology is interested in questions concerning the nature of social entities. A central question hereof is whether social entities can and should be considered as objective entities, which is external to social actors, or whether social entities can and should be considered as social constructed created from perceptions and actions of social actors. This is referred to as objectivism and constructivism (Bryman, 2016, p. 28).

This master's thesis rest on constructivism. In a constructivism believe the mind is an active part of constructing knowledge, and humans do not construct interpretations in isolation, thus in connection with shared understandings, languages and practices (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 305). Further, in a constructivism believe a social phenomenon is only constructed, though is in a constantly state of construction and reconstruction (Becker, 1982, p. 521).

This master's thesis rests on constructivism, since nation branding, and the construction of national identity, nation image and nation reputation all are in a constant state of construction and reconstruction. Further, nation branding, national identity, nation image and nation reputation are all not construction and reconstruction in isolation, yet in connection with each other, and with shared understandings, practices and languages.

Taking a constructivist stance, I also believe that the findings and interpretations of my research, and all research in general, is not constructed in isolation, thus in connections to the world which is surrounding me and other researchers.

### 6.3. Epistemological considerations

Epistemology is concerned with what should or what shouldn't be considered acceptable knowledge in a given discipline (Bryman, 2016, p. 24). This master's thesis rest on interpretivism. Interpretivism hold the believe that the world is socially constructed, and multiple realities exist as a result of subjective perspectives and believes. From an interpretivistic stance, no one true reality exists, but countless, and these are continuously changing. According to interpretivism, individuals create theories, categories and devices all for the purpose of making sense of the world (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988, p. 509). The aim of research with an interpretivistic stance is to understand and interpret meanings, however, not to predict them. Concurrently, it is also important for the researcher to understand motives and reasons in human behavior (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988, p. 510; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 295-297). As for this master's thesis, the aim is to understand reasons, meanings, and motives that influence nation reputation and nation image influence on nation branding, and this will be done by examining the case of China's nation image and nation reputation.

## 7. Research design

Research design refers to the overall strategy the researcher chooses to

All research is grounded in the choices you take as a researcher, this is the choices of ontology and epistemology, choices of literature and theories, choices of research design choices of collecting

and analyzing data etc. And all of these choices influence the validity of the researched conducted. I will present all of these choices and use them throughout this research in a transparent way, in order to make the research reliable.

In the previous section, I have elaborated on my choices of paradigm. In this section, I will elaborate on my choice of research design, this is qualitative case study, the overall strategy that I have chosen to conduct my research in (Bryman, 2016, p. 60).

## 7.1. Case study

The chosen research design for this master's thesis is a qualitative case study of a single case, China. I have chosen a single case study with the aim of conducting an in-depth examination of the chosen case for the sake of getting a more detailed and intensive analysis (Bryman, 2016, p. 60-61).

Much critique has been directed towards case studies, and especially single case studies. Critics claim that you cannot generalize from a single case, and that the core of social science is about generalization (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 219). According to Flyvbjerg, a single case study creates concrete, context-dependent knowledge, and this is more valuable than the vain search for predictive theories (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 224). The strength of a single case study is that by using this method of inquiry one can zoom in on real-life situations and test views directly connected to the problem or phenomena as it unfolds in practice (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 335).

Flyvbjerg also argues, that it is incorrect to conclude that one cannot generalize from a single case. It instead depends on the nature of the chosen case (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 225).

Eckstein (1975) argues that case studies are better for testing hypotheses than for producing them, and testing a hypothesis relates directly to the question of generalization, and this relates directly to the question of case selection, since the generalization from case studies can be increased by a strategic case selection (Eckstein, 1975, p. 80).

I have chosen the unique case of China, with the aim of conducting research on how the relationship between nation image and nation reputation on nation branding. China is a unique case, since China, opposite many other nations, has strategies that reach far into the future, both in terms of internal and external ambitions. One example of this is China's strategy "The Chinese Dream". Some call this "China's Hundred-Year strategy" or "Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese

Nation". The strategy dates back to 1949 with the beginning of "The People's Republic of China" led by Mao Zedong, and continuous far into the future. More exactly to year 2049 where China's ambition is to be the leading global superpower (Miller, 2016). As part of this strategy, China have many long-term strategies on how to brand China worldwide. This includes China's long-term "Soft power strategy" that aims to spread Chinese culture, history and values worldwide. In 2014 Xi Jinping said: *"We should increase China's soft power, give a good Chinese narrative, and better communicate China's message to the world"* (Albert, 2018). As part of the strategy "The Chinese Dream" China has more recently proclaimed the "Made in China 2025 strategy", that aims to rejuvenate China from being "Made in China" to "Made by China" (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019). All strategies reach far into the future.

China is a very interesting case, since China in my experience have many contracting images among the Danish people. Yet simultaneously, China put a lot of effort into changing the characteristic of the nation as well as nation branding. But if China haven't succeeded in creating a good and consistent nation brand, by using long-term strategies and putting a lot of effort into their nation branding, then other nation comparable to China as nation, most likely also have similar problems with nation branding? And exactly because of China's long-term strategy on branding and their maybe contradicting images in Denmark, this conflict is the lense that I use to examine nation branding through. As Flyvbjerg argues *"if it is valid for this case, then it applies to all cases"* (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 230).

## 8. Methods

Methods concern how the research collects and analyzes data. In this section, I will present all my chosen methods for collecting and analyzing data, and reflectively discuss each choice.

In social research, it is important to consider the research's relationship between theory and data. This thesis research is iterative, this means that the research is moving back and forth between data and theory, in order to establish if the conditions will or will not hold. Moving back and forth between data and theory, result in that I as a researcher repeatedly will collect further data to establish if the conditions of the research hold or not (Bryman, 2016, p. 23, 379-381).

## 8.1. Triangulation of methods

In order to get the best and richest empirical material, this master's thesis triangulates methods. Triangulation entails using more than one method to conduct research on the chosen problem or phenomena. I will therefore operate across the two research strategies, document analysis and survey, which I now will elaborate on (Bryman, 2016, p. 386).

## 8.2. Document analysis

The first part of my empirical data is a document analysis of other researchers' data. I have therefore not collected the data myself, yet the data has been collected by other researchers. As a result, it will function as secondary data for my research. I have chosen to conduct a document analysis of China's national identity, since it is not possible for me to travel to China and conduct the survey or interviews myself, due to money, time and language limitations. Moreover, an advantage by conducting a document analysis of other researchers' data is, that it will allow me to spend more time on the collecting other data more important for my research and analysis hereof. Which is suitable for this research, since this document analysis on China's national identity will account for a small part of my overall analysis and conclusion (Bowen, 2009, p. 31).

## 8.3. Survey

The second part of my empirical data is a survey of Danish citizens' perception of China's nation image, nation reputation and nation branding.

Bryman's definition of survey is: *"a sample of cases drawn from a wider population and at a single point in time in order to collect a body of quantitative or qualitative data in connection with a number of variables..."* (Bryman, 2016, p. 54).

A survey is in particular useful when one wishes to acquire knowledge about a large population's feelings or actions in terms of a specific subject or phenomenon without going in too much detail. Before conducting a survey, it is crucial that one decide what the objectives of the survey are, since the objectives will determine who the survey's audience is going to be and what they will be surveyed about. In addition, objectives also should be specific and measurable (Sue and Ritter, 2007, p. 18-19).

The main objectives of this survey are to investigate what China's nation image and China's nation reputation in accordance with the Danish citizens, in order to conduct research on the relationship between nation reputation and nation image influence on nation branding.

#### 8.4. Sampling frame

Methods of sampling can be categorized into either non-probability sampling or probability sampling. In probability sampling, the research calculates the respondents' probability of being included in the survey. Here the respondents are chosen from a random selection from the defined sampling frame which represents the whole population (Sue and Ritter, 2007, p. 28). Since I do not have access to a sampling frame such as civil registration system, this method is not suitable for this research. Thus, nonprobability sampling provides a better alternative for this research (Bryman, 2016, p. 187-188). Non-probability is suitable for an exploratory research, and qua my choice of qualitative research and case study, this research is indeed explorative. In order to get the largest group of respondents and a larger sampling frame, I use a combination of two non-probability methods convenience sampling and snowball sampling. In a convenient sample, potential respondents are allowed to self-select their participation in the survey (Sue and Ritter, 2007, p. 32). The drawback of convenience sampling includes that there will be no restrictions to who can participate and no control over numbers of submission by each person. On the other hand, a great advantage of convenience sampling is the potential to reach a large number of respondents, which otherwise can be a challenge for research with no access to official databases of the population (Sue and Ritter, 2007, p. 32). The other non-probability method used is snowball sampling. By using this method, I ask the respondents to invite other people to participate in the survey, thus spreading the survey to other potential respondents out of my own network (Sue and Ritter, 2007, p. 33). Using the two methods in combination has resulted in a relatively large number of respondents, that would have been difficult to obtain otherwise.

#### 8.5. Choice of survey method

This survey is conducted as an online webpage survey. The advantages of conducting a survey online are the quick responses, low cost, access to a large audience, ease of data entry and preservation of anonymity. On the other hand, the disadvantages are: limitation in population as



not everybody uses the internet, especially the older generation, ease of quitting the survey before ending it, dependence of software (Sue and Ritter, 2007, p. 12-13).

To make up for one of the disadvantages, I will selectively send the survey to the older people in my network that does not use Facebook or LinkedIn. In constructing the survey, I have been very aware of not ask questions that seem too difficult to answer, and further let some of the most difficult answers be voluntary to answer, in order to minimize the rate of people quitting the survey.

## 8.6. Construction of survey questions and response categories

Besides the demographic questions, are all other questions in the conducted survey for this research founded on the theoretical concepts of nation branding, national identity, nation image and nation reputation. One question is simultaneously based on the results of the conducted document analysis of national identity (Appendix 1, in Danish).

I have used three different types of questions for my survey, this is closed questions, open questions and semi-open questions. Closed questions are easy to analyze, highly reliable, but has a relatively low validity, since the answer categories not are decided by the respondents, but by the researcher. Open questions are highly valid, has a relatively low reliability, but very time consuming for the researcher to categorize and analyze. Last, semi-open questions combine the two previous, the researcher provides the answer categories, yet also adds an extra open category for the respondents to fill in themselves, if they do not agree with the existing categories (Boolsen, 2008, p. 68-69). According to Sue and Ritter, open questions are useful if the aim of the research is to explore new topics, and if the questions can be answered by a short sentence or word. In the analysis of the collected data from open question, the researcher can create coding categories based on the answers from the respondents (Sue and Ritter, 2007, p. 44-45). As part of the survey, it is also necessary to operate with at least a couple of demographic variables, such as gender and age, in terms of being able to identify connections between the answers (Boolsen, 2008, p. 48). Further, it is important to let the respondents have the option of being neutral or the option of answer "don't know" in order to make the survey valid, otherwise the respondents can be forced to give an answer to something which the respondent may not have an opinion about (Boolsen, 2008, p. 72) and exactly this result in the survey not being valid (Sue and Ritter, 2007, p. 39). This is naturally also used in the conducted survey for this master's thesis.

I have chosen to conduct my survey in Danish, as I cannot be assured that all respondents understand English at a sufficiently level to answer the survey. Nonetheless, to ensure the flow and language of the thesis the questions are translated into English when dealt with during the thesis, but the appendixes are in Danish.

### 8.7. Pilot study and results

According to Sue and Ritter, it is important to conduct a pilot study prior conducting the actual survey, since it is impossible to know if the respondents will misunderstand the questions and whether there are technical problems that should be fixed.

In the pilot study, a small sample of the target population have to be selected to respond the survey and provide feedback before the survey is distributed (Sue and Ritter, 2007, p. 58). For my pilot study, I asked ten respondents from my network to respond to the survey and provide feedback. From the pilot study, it became evident that respondents who did not have great knowledge about China had difficulties providing four words that according to them describes China now, historically and in the future. As a result, in order to try to minimize the number of respondents quitting the survey if not an answer having, I changed the three questions from being required to answer to being optional to answer in order to move to next question. The three questions are very crucial for the research, so it was a difficult decision, that had advantages and disadvantages. However, I came to the conclusion that it was better to have answers to the other question, instead of respondents quitting the survey, which I estimated could be a very likely alternative. I also chose not to provide the respondents with the opportunity of answering "don't know", as the three questions can be difficult to answer and due to lack of involvement this could be the easy and quick answer for respondents.

### 8.8. Method of distribution and survey host

The survey was conducted as an online survey using the survey host SurveyXact. After having created the survey, I distributed the link and a short message to my Facebook network (527), LinkedIn network (292) and by email and text to a few other in my network that does not have a Facebook or LinkedIn account. This was especially to the older generation, in order to get as many different people in different age groups to participate as possible. Further, I sent the link to a group

on Facebook (559) which only purpose is to let people share and answer surveys. Moreover, people in my network were encouraged to share the link to the survey with others, thereby using the snowball sampling method, in order to achieve more responses.

According to Sue and Ritter, posting a survey on a website is a good way of gaining data from the general public. Facebook was chosen due to its ease of access to a large number of potential respondents. However, in order to get access to an even larger number of potential respondents, I also choose to use LinkedIn to distribute the survey. An advantage of using LinkedIn is that my LinkedIn network contain a group of older people, and I could thereby enhance my chance of gaining data from different people in different age groups.

The survey was posted on Facebook and LinkedIn on Friday 29<sup>th</sup> Marts 2019 and closed down on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> marts. It was posted Friday 1 o'clock, as this should be one of the best times to post something on Facebook (Cicousz, 2017). During the two weeks the survey was open the survey gained the total of 179 respondents who completed the survey and 64 respondents who provide some answers but did not complete the survey. The survey was shared 15 times on Facebook, and one time on LinkedIn.

Since all questions are important for the research, I will only use the 179 respondents who completed the survey.

## 8.9. Thematic analysis

One of the most common approaches in qualitative analysis is often referred to as thematic analysis. Thematic analysis and coding are used as an approach to examine and structure the primary data that originates from the survey as well as the data from the document analysis (Bryman, 2012, p. 584). By using this approach to code data, it is possible to identify, analyze and report particular patterns from the data in a detailed way (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). By coding and analyzing categories and patterns in my data, it is possible for me as researcher to identify patterns that relate to the theoretical concepts of national identity, nation image and nation reputation, all for the sake of identify and analyze patterns that is linked to the problem formulation, and consequently to produce, in some degree, certain patterns within the overall data (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 82).

## 8.10. Ethical considerations

Prior conducting a survey, some ethical issues must be considered. These ethical issues include the respondents' agreement to participate in the survey, questions of anonymity and how the results will be used, for what purpose and where they will appear (Lindermann, 2008, p. 22). Sue and Ritter emphasize that respondents to online surveys practically always participate voluntarily. However, in order to give their informed consent, they need to have some information in regard to the survey before participating (Sue and Ritter, 2007, p. 22). Thus, in the beginning of the survey, the respondents were informed of the purpose, the use of the questionnaire, the anonymity and length. In the survey I wrote:

"Dear participant,

Thank you for taking your time to participate in this survey.

The survey is a part of my master's thesis, which concerns the Danish people's perception on China.

All the answers will be 100% anonymous, both in the thesis and for me.

The survey is estimated to last 2-5 minutes.

In advance, thank you very much.

Cecilie Mosholm Iversen

Culture, Communication and Globalization, Aalborg university" (Appendix 1, in Danish)

The anonymity of the survey is ensured by use of the online software, surveyXact, and as a result, I as a researcher cannot know who actually responded to the survey and giving what answers.

Another ethical consideration has been whether to ask respondents under the age of 18. I have chosen to include minors into the survey, due to the fact, that I do not ask for any personal information such as email, phone number or address, and since the survey is voluntarily, this is not a problem law wise (Bryman, 2016, p. 139).

## 9. Analysis

The aim of this analysis is to answer the problem formulation: *how does the relationship between nation reputation and nation image influence on nation branding* and further to examine whether there exists a difference between the concepts of nation image and nation reputation, and if both concepts even are relevant in managing nation branding.

To do this, I will begin by analyzing some of the general findings from the conducted survey, as a fundament for understanding who the respondents are and who's perceptions are part of shaping this analysis and creating the results.

Next, I will analyze China's national identity, China's nation image and nation reputation. Based on the results of these analyses, I will analyze what differences and similarities there exist between China's national identity, nation image and nation reputation.

The data used for this analysis is foremost primary data, that originates from the conducted survey on Danish people's perception on China. I have also used secondary data from document analysis of existing academic literature on China's national identity, in order to be able to analyze and gain knowledge about China's national identity.

The theoretical concepts of nation branding, national identity, nation image and nation reputation are all dominating the structure of this analysis, as well as dominating the interpretations and results of the analysis.

In the next section I will analyze the general findings from the conducted survey on Danish people's perception on China.

### 9.1. General findings from survey

From the conducted survey, I have collected a total of 179 completed respondents. 64% of which is women and 36% of which is men (Appendix 2, p. 1).

The largest group of respondents, 44%, is in the age group 20-29 years. The groups 40-49 years and 50-59 years both account for 16% each, 30-39 years account for 13% and 60-69 years for 7%, underneath 20 years account for 3% and over 70 account for 2% (Appendix 2, p. 1).

I have asked the respondents *"How do you consider your knowledge of China"* here a total of 59% consider their knowledge of China to be "limited", whereas 9% answer "really good", 24% answer "good" and 7% answer "poor" (Appendix 2, p. 1). I consider a number of 59% answering "limited" knowledge of China to be a high percentage, due to the size and importance of China as nation. There can be several reasons for this. One is, that the respondents don't have an interest in China. However, this is not the case, as 69% of the people who answered "limited" or "poor" to their knowledge of China, also answered that they wish to have more knowledge about China (Appendix 2, p. 1). Another answer could be, that they have not been exposed to such knowledge. Nation branding also concerns sharing knowledge about the nation that is being branded (Widler, 2007, p. 148), this could also indicate that China has experienced trouble managing their nation brand in Denmark. This can be substantiated with another question from the survey, where only 7 out of total of 379 answer that their knowledge about China is created through "Chinese marketing activities", whereas 137 answer "from news media" and 99 answer "from other Danish people's knowledge and perception of China" (Appendix 2, p. 1). However, 23% of the respondents say "yes" when asked if they feel China is branding themselves in Denmark. So, 23% of the respondents feel that China doing nation branding in Denmark, yet a very few get knowledge about China from Chinese marketing activities in Denmark.

Concludingly, it can be established that 66% of the respondents have "limited" or "poor" knowledge about China and 69% of those wishes to increase their knowledge of China, and this could indicate a need for knowledge sharing on China, for instance from nation branding. Finally, I would argue that an even higher number of Danish people might feel that their "limited" or "poor" knowledge about China. This is due to the fact, that a large number of people have not completed the survey, and many of those have ended the survey, when they independently had to write their perception of China, which can be a very difficult task if having "limited" or "poor" knowledge about China.

In the next section, I will analyze China's national identity.

## 9.2. Analysis of China's national identity

This section is a document analysis of China's national identity. The aim of this analysis is to gain an insight into China's national identity, which I argue (Figure 3, p. 25), is an important factor to examine as a preliminary analysis in managing nation branding.

The first part of this analysis is a thematic analysis conducted as a document analysis of existing literature on China's national identity. Afterwards, I will compare the findings of the analysis with the findings of the conducted survey, in order to analyze the differences and similarities between the internal perception (national identity) and the external perception (nation image and nation reputation) of China.

In the survey, I have presented a closed question to the respondents on *"Which of the following thematics do you associate with China as nation"* (Appendix 1, p. 2). In the question, I have presented the thematics, I have found from the document analysis on China's national identity, in order to cross-check whether the external perception on China is similar to the internal perception. Furthermore, I have asked the respondents, in an open question, to their perception of China's national identity. I have naturally not asked the respondents how they define China's national identity. Instead I have asked *"What are the first four words that come to your mind thinking about China"* this question is asked three times, historically, now and in the future (Appendix 1, p. 2-3). If any thematics appears in all three timeframes: *"past, present and future"* (Fan, 2010, p. 100), then it can be defined theoretically as national identity, however, it is national identity perceived from an external perspective, and therefore it can also be defined as nation reputation, which is the long-term perception (Fombrun, 1990 p. 235).

Before beginning the actual analysis, I wish to frame this master's thesis definition of national identity:

*"National identity is the collective understanding by a nation's people of the features presumed to be central and relatively permanent, and that distinguish the nation from other nations. National identity embodies the characteristics of a nation, which its people perceive to be central, enduring and distinctive in a nation when past, present and future is taken into account"* (Fan, 2010, p. 100).

The most suitable data for a study, with the aim of studying China's national identity, when considering this theoretical definition by Fan, is inevitable primary data from China, as national identity is a collective understanding by a nation's people. Such data could be interviews, focus group or surveys asking a large number of Chinese citizens with different gender, age, background and geography about their national identity. However, this analysis of China's national identity is set out to be the backbone of my analysis, which overall aim is to conduct research on how the relationship between nation reputation and nation image influence on nation branding. I have therefore not chosen to travel to China to conduct such data. However, I strongly suggest, that if a nation wishes to manage their nation branding, they should naturally conduct an analysis with primary data with a large population in order to get the best results, in accordance to figure 3, p. 25.

Another method in gaining insight into China's national identity, is to conduct a document analysis of secondary literature on China's national identity. Western scholars have conducted a surprisingly limited amount of research on China's national identity, and as a result all the research for this analysis originates from Chinese scholars. Due to the fact that most research originates from China, it influences the amount of research with English or Danish as written language. The outcome is, that the amount of research on China's national identity has shown to be relatively limited, however it has been possible to establish the most widely used thematics and core values on China's national identity from literature.

From the document analysis of China's national identity, it is evident that scholars more or less have the same thematics of what constitute China's national identity. I have chosen the six most used thematics, that they use to describe China's national identity, all of which is central, enduring and distinctive thematics for China, that take the past, present and future into account (Fan, 2010, p. 100).

One of the most dominating thematic of China's national identity is *Confucianism* (Lu, 2018; Men, 2017; Tao et al., 2017; Shuqin, 2018; Men, 2014, Law, 2013). Tracing back more than 2500 years into history, Confucian thinking has encapsulated the core values of the Chinese civilization (Men,



2017, p. 41). Today Confucianism still is regarded as a fundamental component of Chinese national identity and have recently experienced a rapid revival at among citizens. Also, the Communist Party of China has promoted the renaissance of Confucianism and associate Confucian thinking and values to the Chinese national essence and core values (Lu, 2018, p. 322).

*Traditional Chinese culture* is after Confucianism, the most dominating thematic on China's national identity (Men, 2017; Tao et al., 2017; Shuqin, 2018; Men, 2014, Law, 2013). Traditional Chinese culture is the product of China's millennia-long history and has been developed throughout times by absorbing the cultures of different countries, religions, ethnic minorities and regions (Men, 2017, p. 48). China is an enormous nation with many different ethnic minorities, regions, languages etc. This have shaped people's thoughts and behaviors, as a result tradition Chinese culture is not homogenous, though has thousands of different aspects (Shuqin, 2018, p. 616). Among significant traditional Chinese culture, one could mention Chinese characters, Chinese calligraphy, ancient buildings, Confucian thoughts, historic figures, traditional Chinese dance and music etc. which all in various degrees influence the life of the Chinese people both in the past, today and in the future (Shuqin, 2018, p. 619). Constructing national identity with a collective memory based on traditional Chinese culture has for a long time been a policy for the Communist Party of China, both internally and externally in China. An example of this, is the concept soft power (Nye, 2009; Melissen, 2005). Soft power is a widely used approach for the Communist Party of China to promote China worldwide, and this is often rooted in traditional Chinese culture, in a soft way (Men, 2017, p. 48). Examples of cultural soft power, in a Danish context, could be the Confucius institutes, which is placed both Aalborg University, Copenhagen Business School and Royal Danish Academy of Music (Thøgersen) or Copenhagen Zoo's two new pandas (Reyes, 2019), which is a loan from China, this is theoretically defined as panda diplomacy, a special type of Chinese soft power (Buckingham, 2003), and both types of soft power is widespread worldwide by China.

What both Confucianism and traditional Chinese culture have in common is a very long history. Exactly this, is one thing that differentiates China from most other nations in the world. Men, argue that China's national identity rest on the 5000 years long history of the civilization (Men, 2017, p. 41). I therefore argue, that the third thematic, that is a part of China's national identity is *the long history of the Chinese civilization*, which in many ways imbues China's national identity in the past,

in the present and in the future (Men, 2017; Tao et al., 2017; Men, 2014). As part of the tale of this long history, is also the fact that China for a significant period was positioned as one of the most developed nation in the world. However, with a century of humiliation from foreign countries e.g. during the Opium Wars and Sino-Japanese Wars and the loss of China's leading position in the world, the long-lasting traces of this humiliation is still an active part of China's national identity, and has been for many years (Men, 2017, p. 41). This is especially evident in terms of what drives the current modernization process in China and the determination and effort put into regaining the lost central position (Tao et al., 2017, p. 62). Therefore, I argue that *humiliation* also is a thematic of China's national identity, particularly in regard to Chinese people's collective understanding of national identity and the feeling of what constitute them as a nation.

Many scholars argue that *Socialism* also is a part of China's national identity (Men, 2017; Men, 2014; Tao et al., 2017; Shuqin, 2018, Law, 2013). Socialism has dominated China since the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949 (Tao et al., 2017, p. xv). China, however, is not a socialistic nation in the traditional sense. Instead China has enriched the basic meaning of socialism with Chinese characteristics. China has made it clear that its distinctiveness is a new type of socialistic nation that grasps world trends, carrying on own traditions, reflecting upon history of other socialist nations and thereby pursuing national development, and on the strength of socialism, China has changed from a closed nation into an active nation on the global market (Men, 2017, p. 42).

Another national identity that is very characteristic for China is *collectivism* (Ying, 2013, Tao et al., 2017, Law, 2013, Hofstede).

China is collectivistic culture. Achievements of the nation and its people are more important than the individual and private success (Ying, 2013, p. 9). This claim can be substantiated by Hofstede's six dimensions of country comparison, where China scores 80 out of 100 on Hofstede's Individualism/Collectivism dimension, and thereby is a very collectivistic nation (Hofstede). Also, Tao et al. agrees on this, and argues that whereas most western countries are characterized by an individualistic society, Chinese history and culture distinguish itself with collectivism (Tao et al., 2017, p. 83).

All of these six thematics: *Confucianism, Traditional Chinese Culture, The long history of the Chinese civilization, Humiliation, Socialism and Collectivism* are the most widely used thematics in literature on China's national identity.

I argue, that it is necessary to be aware, that some of the thematics are not suitable for nation branding, due to their negative associations. This is humiliation and in some degree socialism, due to its key features which is very different for many others nations' political and economic systems, can thereby by many be associated in a negative way (Fan, 2010, p. 100).

In the survey conducted for this master's thesis, I have also asked the respondents "*Which of the following thematics, do you associate with China as nation*". The respondents were allowed to answer more than one of the thematics (Appendix 1, p. 2). The largest share of respondents (115) answered "Traditional Chinese Culture". This is not a surprise as traditional Chinese culture is an umbrella concept covering many different things. Comparing this to how many of the respondents' answered "Culture" when asking in the survey "*What are the first four words that come to your mind thinking about China*", the thematic "Culture" was only mentioned 24 times over the three timeframes historically, now and in the future. These timeframes had a total of 1870 different thematics, written by the respondents. However, due to fact that "Culture" is an umbrally concept, many answers can be connected to this, for instance, "Traditions", "Family" or "The Great Wall of China" etc.

The second largest share of respondents (86) answered "Socialism", but only one chose to write it when the respondents were allowed to write words independently. In my opinion, a number of 86 answers are surprisingly high, as I would expect Danish people to consider the Chinese form of government to be Communism, which is also much higher, mentioned 48 times in total, when the respondents were allowed to write words independently.

69 respondents answered "The long history of the Chinese civilization" compared to two when asked to write independently.

Very surprisingly, only 44 respondents answered "Confucianism", compared to one writing it independently. This is a surprise, as Confucianism is a part of China's nation branding in Denmark, as mentioned earlier.

40 respondents answered "Humiliation" and 40 respondents answered "Collectivism", compared to one mentioning "Collective" when asked independently, and zero mentioning "Humiliation" (Appendix 2, p. 15-25).

This shows that many of the respondents recognize the provided thematics on China's national identity and in various degrees associate them with China. However, when comparing it to when the respondents had the chance to write the same words independently, the thematics were almost non-existing, except "Culture". This shows that there is a difference between how the China's national identity is perceived internally, and how China is perceived externally by the respondents. This can emphasize the importance of the concept nation image, and maybe nation reputation, as the Danish people are not in a place where they can conclude on China's national identity, however, by using the concept nation reputation it allows room for an external perception of China.

### 9.3. Analysis of China's nation image and nation reputation

This section is an analysis of both China's nation image, and afterwards China's nation reputation. The data used for this analysis are the findings of the survey conducted on Danish people's perception on China. The aim of this analysis is to present and analyze the findings of the survey. These findings will function as fundament for the later analysis on the differences and similarities between nation image and nation reputation, that aims to analyze how the relationship between nation reputation and nation image influence on nation branding.

I will divide the analyses into two sections of nation image and nation reputation.

From the findings of the survey, it is clear that the respondents have used many different thematics to describe their perception of China. This evidently have an influence on the frequency of the chosen words. The most written thematic, to one question, is "Superpower" this is written 64 times out of a total of 582, when asked "*What are the first four words that come to your mind thinking about China 10 years from now*" (Appendix 2, p. 25-35). The thematic with the highest frequency in the survey, is thereby written 11% out of all the of the 582 different thematics. This sounds low, however, considering the fact that all respondents are supposed to write four words to this

question. 64 times is equal to 44% of all the respondents who choose to answer this exact question, wrote superpower as one of their four words, which actually is very high.

I have naturally clustered the thematics, so that identical words, spelled in different ways or being part of a sentences also have been included in my analyses. Yet, due to the many different perceptions of China among the respondents, I have been forced to choose thematics with smaller frequencies than originally intended. Nevertheless, these differences in perception are interesting as well, as they show a clear picture of the respondents having very different and contradicting perceptions of China (Appendix 2, p. 2).

In regard to the sometimes-small frequencies of thematics used for this analysis, I suggest, for future analyses on a nation image and nation reputation, to assure that the number of respondents is very high, in order to increase the validity further. Moreover, I suggest that conducting such analyses, one should, based on the thematics from the first survey, conduct another survey to cross-check most common and favorable thematics (Fan, 2010, p. 99-100) in order to see if the respondents, in a closed question, agree with the presented thematics being identical to their own perception of the nation.

### 9.3.1. Analysis of China's nation image

The aim of this section is to analyze China's nation image. Before doing this, I wish to frame this master's thesis' understanding of nation image:

*"A nation's image is defined by the people outside the country; their perceptions are influenced by stereotyping, media coverage as well as personal experience. Similar to commercial brands, a nation's image can be repackaged, repositioned and communicated in a professional manner" (Fan, 2010, p. 100).*

In contrast to nation reputation, a nation image is the short-term perception of a nation, this being the most important difference between nation image and nation reputation.

In the survey, several different questions are asked, in order to be able to analyze and cross-check the Danish people's perception on China's nation image. This is "What is your overall perception of

*China as nation*" (Appendix 2, p. 2). By asking this question, the aim is to obtain knowledge in regard to the respondents' overall perception of China. Further, is asked "*What are the first four words that come to your mind thinking about China now*" (Appendix 2, p. 4-15). This is asked to gain insight into what thematics the respondents independently use to describe their perception of China. Finally, is asked "*Could you be interested in travelling to China*" (Appendix 2, p. 2). This is another way of asking to the respondents' overall perception of China, since having a purely negative perception of China, you would most likely not be interested in going to China.

You could argue, that the questions "*What is your overall perception of China as nation*" and "*Could you be interested in travelling to China*" also can be a reflection of the respondents' perception of China's nation reputation. With other choices of words in the questions, this could be the case, yes. However, as no timeframe is clarified in the questions, the answers from the respondents are a glimpse of their current overall perception of China's nation image, as the question is asked now. The reason that I have chosen not to ask questions that can be related to nation reputation as well, is that it is very difficult for the respondents to give an answer to what their overall perception of China have been throughout the last decades, without it changing, as current perceptions tend to overcloud the old ones, in every sense. And exactly this, might result in the answers not being valid, as it is rather a reflection of nation image instead of nation reputation, without either I or the respondents can separate the two.

From the survey, it is clear that the respondents are having contradicting perceptions of China. When asked "*What is your overall perception of China*", 71% of the respondents answered, "Both good and bad". Before conducting the survey, I had an assumption that many of the respondents would give this answer. However, forcing the respondents to choose between either "good" or "bad" would result in the answers losing their validity, as the answer to this question often is much more complex than either one or another. To the overall perception of China, 13% of the respondents answered "bad" and 3% answered "really bad". Contrary, 7% of the respondents answered "good" and only "3%" answered "really good". Finally, 3% answered didn't know, and this confirms my assumption (introduction, p. 5-6), that, almost, everybody has an opinion about China. From the answers to this question, I can conclude that most respondents have a different or

contradicting overall perception of China. Yet, 6% more of the respondents have a negative perception of China compared to a positive perception (Appendix 2, p. 2).

In terms of the question *“Could you be interested in going to China”*, 63% of the respondents answered “yes”, 24% answered “no” and 13% answered “don’t know”.

This is interesting, as I would assume, that if you have a completely negative perception of China, you would in most cases not have an interest in going to China. If this assumption is correct, it could indicate that among the 71% of the respondents answering “Both good and bad” to their overall perception of China, the share of good overrules the share of bad, resulting in despite the answer, them being interested in travelling to China.

This analysis will now focus on what thematics the respondents used to describe their perception of China’s nation image. The data used for this analysis originates from the open question *“What are the first four words that come to your mind thinking about China now”*. Altogether, from the survey, the respondents wrote 691 thematics to this question (Appendix 2, p. 4-15).

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, one tool for examining nation image is Anholt’s Nation Brand Hexagon. In “the Nation Brand Hexagon”, Anholt divides nation image into six different categories: *Export, Governance, Investment and integration, Culture and heritage, People* and finally *Tourism* (Anholt, 2006, p. 264). I will use Anholt’s Nation Brand Hexagon, as an underlying guideline to analyze if any thematics directly can be related to one of the categories, and thereby show some underlying tendencies of what thematics are the most prominent in China’s nation image according to the respondents. However, if a thematic is not directly and clearly connected one of Anholt’s categories, I will not connect the thematic to a category, in order to avoid overanalyzing and avoid creating irrelevant connections.

I will now present the most frequent thematics from the question *“What are the first four words that come to your mind thinking about China now”*, beginning with the most frequent thematic (Appendix 2, p. 4-15).

“Many people” (49), “Pollution” (44), the thematic “Large” (44) in different contexts e.g. large nation, large population etc. Afterwards, is the thematic “Food” (37) mentioned in different context, this is e.g. good food, Chinese food or names of specific Chinese dishes. Food can be

categorized as *Culture and Heritage* according to Anholt, and the same can “The Great Wall of China” (20). Superpower (19) can be categorized as *Governance*, and the same can “Dictatorship” (18) and “Communism” (16). The thematics “Cheap/Cheap production/Cheap labor force” (15), “Technology” (15) and “Copy” (12) are all connected to *export*, yet the thematic “Technology” can also be connected to the category *Investment and integration*. Growth (14). The thematic “Culture” (14) is mentioned in several different contexts, e.g. rich culture, beautiful culture and different culture, and this is connected to the category *Culture and Heritage*. “Culture” is, as earlier established, also a central part of China’s national identity. “One-child policy” (11) is connected to both *Governance* and *Culture and Heritage*. “Poor/big, big difference between rich and poor” (11). “Efficient/hard working” (11) is connected to *People*. “Human rights” (11) and “Totalitarian” (10) is *Governance*. “Panda” (9) is part of the category *Culture and Heritage*. “Repression” (8), “Surveillance” (8), “Censorship” (8), “Xi Jinping (7), “Power” (5) and “Mao Zedong” (5) can all be categorized as *Governance*. Whereas “Friendliness” (6) is *People* (Appendix 2, p. 4-15).

By using Anholt’s “Nation Brand Hexagon”, it is clear that the most prominent category among all the thematics is *Governance*, since 13 out of 27 thematics can be connected to this category. The second most prominent category is *Culture and Heritage* which can be connected to four different thematics.

With these thematics in mind, a very obvious and interesting question is then, is China’s current nation image among the Danish respondents, then positive or negative? Unfortunately, it is impossible for me to distinguish each thematic between either positive or negative, as this depends on the respondents’ perception of the nature of the thematic. An example of this could be communism. It is impossible for me to know if communism is mentioned in a negative or a positive sense. So, in order to avoid overanalyzing, I will, unfortunately, leave this interesting matter undisclosed.

However, based on the results of the analysis, I can conclude that China have one great problem. This is the contradicting perception of China’s nation image. In the survey, 71% of all 179 respondents answered that they both have a good and bad nation image of China (Appendix 2, p.



2). I would argue that, this makes it more difficult to manage the nation brand of China. As for any brands, it is easier to create a good brand, if the foundation and existing perception is positive. However, in the case of China, where the fundament is more ambiguously with contradicting nation images of both good and bad, this makes it more difficult to create a positive and good nation brand of China. So, if China wishes to create a more positive and less contradicting nation brand, the greatest challenge is to create a more positive preunderstanding of nation. This itself, is also nation branding, yet a part of nation branding which is more important for China compared to other nations with already existing positive nation brands.

From the survey, many of the mentioned thematics can be categorized as *Governmental* (Anholt, 2006, p. 264). In my opinion, many of these thematics have negative associations (Appendix 2, p. 4-25). Therefore, I argue that in the case of China, if wishing to change the preunderstanding of China as nation, a great share of governmental activities has to be carried out, since creating positive nation image and nation reputation, will take many good transactions over time. On the other hand, destructing the nation image and nation reputation can easily be caused by a bad action or mixed signal to the market (Nquyen, 2001, p. 229).

Considering this, and the nature of China as nation, I estimate that China always will have a great challenge with creating a completely positive nation brand. Due to the fact that the fundament of China, in many ways, are different that western nations. The real problem arises when we in our part of the world, very naturally, appreciate our own values, and therefore in many ways think other form of governments or view of life not as necessarily being a good thing. And the fact is that China just have a very different form of government and different value of life than western nation does. And this makes it difficult to create a completely positive nation brand.

### 9.3.2. Analysis of China's nation reputation

I will now present the findings from the survey, in regard to China's nation reputation. Before doing this, I wish to the frame this master's thesis' understanding of nation reputation. In literature, I found no definition that both grasps knowledge from nation branding and corporate branding in one complete definition on nation reputation. As a result, I have based on literature from both branches, created a new definition, this is:

*“Nation reputation is all about having a good name in the world of nations. Nation reputation is the total of all nation images. Nation reputation depends on the receivers’ long-term perception of the nation’s actions, characteristics, credibility and trustworthiness”* (Own attribution, p. 25).

Due to the fact, that asking directly, what is your perception of China’s nation reputation, most likely will create misunderstandings and destroy the validity of this master’s thesis’ conclusion, I will combine three questions from the survey. These are *“What are the first four words that come to your mind thinking about China now”* (Appendix 2, p. 4-15), *“What are the first four words that come to your mind thinking about China historically”* (Appendix 2, p. 15-25) and *“What are the first four words that come to your mind thinking about China 10 years from now”* (Appendix 2, p. 25-35). By combining at least two out of the three questions, I will gain insight into the respondents’ perception of China’s nation reputation. By asking this question, in three different timeframes, it allows me to gain insight into the respondents’ long-term perception of China. Consequently, if the respondents’ independently written thematics appear in more than one timeframe, I can conclude that the thematic is a long-term perception, and thereby a part of China’s nation reputation. From the three questions, I have a total of 1870 thematics (Appendix 2, p. 4-35). I will only focus on the most frequently mentioned thematics, as the thematics written only a few times is not relevant to the overall nation reputation of China.

For this section of the analysis, I will also use Anholt’s *“Nation Brand Hexagon”* to categorize the different thematics on nation reputation. The categories are, as mentioned earlier *Export, Governance, Investment and integration, Culture and heritage, People* and finally *Tourism* (Anholt, 2006, p. 264).

I will begin this analysis with the strongest thematics on nation reputation. This is the thematics that the respondent has mentioned most frequently in the survey, both now, historically and 10 years from now. 10 years from now, I will refer to as in the future, in order to create a simpler structure and sentences.

“Superpower” is the most frequently mentioned thematic (90) in the survey. Superpower is mentioned 7 times historically, 19 times now and 64 times in the future. Superpower can be categorized as *Governance* according to Anholt. By looking at the numbers, it is evident that the thematic superpower is just getting much more frequent and dominant in the minds of the respondents over time. Next is “Dictatorship”. This thematic is mentioned 15 times historically, 18 times now and 14 times in the future, and is also connected to the category *Governance*. This number is very stable over time. “Communism” is mentioned 27 times historically, 16 times now and only 5 times in the future. This thematic is also *Governance*. This thematic is, in contrary to superpower, becoming less active in the minds of the respondents. Yet it is still a part of China’s nation reputation according the respondents. “Growth” is mentioned 9 times historically, 19 times now and 24 times in the future. This thematic is evidently also becoming more important in terms of China’s nation reputation according the respondents. “Repression” is mentioned 13 times historically, 8 times now and 8 times in the future. The thematic can be categorized as *Governance*. Repression is getting less active in the minds in the minds of the respondents. “Culture” is mentioned 12 times historically, 11 times now and only 1 time in the future. This can be categorized as *Culture and Heritage*. This thematic is also a part of China’s national identity, and even though it is nearly non-existing in the future, it is still a part of China’s nation reputation, being present both now and historically.

Now all the thematics that appear both historically, now and 10 years from now have been presented. This are the thematics, that are strongest in the minds of the respondent over the longest time. However, the thematics that appear only in two of the timeframes can also be categorized as nation reputation.

The most frequent mentioned here is “Many people”, this thematic is mentioned 49 times now and 40 times in the future. “Pollution” is mentioned 44 times now and 33 times in the future. “The Great Wall of China” is mentioned 51 historically and 20 times now. This thematic can be categorized as *Culture and Heritage*. “Technology” is mentioned 15 times now and 45 times in the future. This thematic is multiplied by three, which is a very large increase in frequency compared to most of the other thematics. This increase is very interesting and shows an interesting development

in nation reputation. Technology can both be categorized as *Export* and as *Investment and integration*. "Mao Zedong" is mentioned 62 times historically, but only 5 times now. The explanation of this is very simple, as Mao Zedong is dead and now a historical person. Mao Zedong can be categorized as *Governance*, yet also *Culture and Heritage*. "Large" is mentioned 44 times now and is replaced with "larger" in the future, mentioned 11 times. Although the frequency has decreased, it is an interesting development going from large to larger. "War" is mentioned 29 times historically and only four times in the future. "One-child policy" is mentioned 11 times historically and 11 times now and can be categorized as *Governance*. "Surveillance" is mentioned 8 times now and 14 times in the future and can also be categorized as *Governance*. "Power" is mentioned 5 times now and 14 times in the future. Power can also be categorized as *Governance*. The thematic "Poor" is mentioned 15 times historically and 11 times now. The thematic is not mentioned in the future, yet here the thematic "Rich" is mentioned 7 times, which also is a sign of a very interesting development of nation reputation.

Finally, "Closed" is mentioned 8 times historically and 8 times in the future (Appendix 2, p. 4-35).

From the above, it is clear that the thematics that can be categorized as *Governance* according to Anholt, again are the most dominating in the minds of the respondents. From the 14 thematics on nation reputation mentioned in this analysis, six of the thematics can be categorized as *Governance*, compared to the second largest category *Culture and Heritage*, which is only consistent with three thematics.

Throughout both analyses of China's nation image and China's nation reputation, the surveys most frequent thematics on nation image and nation reputation has been presented, categorized and analyzed. In the next section, I will compare the findings from both analyses, with the aim of analyzing differences and similarities between China's nation image and nation reputation. Afterwards, I will discuss the findings of the analyses in order to answer the problem formulation on how the relationship between nation reputation and nation image influence on nation branding.

### 9.3.3. Differences and similarities between China's nation image and nation reputation

This section will be an analysis of the findings from the two previous sections of analyses: an analysis of China's nation image and an analysis of China's nation reputation. The aim is to analyze whether there exists a difference between China's nation image and China's nation reputation.

From the survey it is evident that many of the thematic both are present in the China's nation image and China's nation reputation. However, some thematic are only present in nation image, thus not in nation reputation. This is 8 out of 27 thematic. These thematic are: "Food" (37), "Cheap/Cheap production/Cheap labor force" (15), "Copy" (12), "Efficient/hard working" (11), "Totalitarian" (10), "Panda" (9), "Xi Jinping (7) and Friendliness (6).

It is a surprise to me, that some of these thematic are not a part of China's nation reputation according to the respondents. From experience, I have learned that many Danish people think of China as being cheap and full of copy goods distributed worldwide. This is identical with the results from the survey in regard to nation image, despite the surprisingly low frequency in both thematic. Yet these thematic "Cheap/Cheap production/Cheap labor force" and "Copy" are not a part of China's nation reputation. Contrary, a new thematic is gaining ground, this is "Technology" which is mentioned 15 times now and triples to 45 times in the future (Appendix 2, p. 4-35). I would argue that technology can be the opposite of cheap/cheap production and copy, and you could therefore argue, that the thematic are moving from "made in" to "made by", which actually is a part of China's current "Made in China 2025 Strategy" (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019). So, in this case, the nation image is centered around "made in china" whereas, the nation reputation is centered around "made by China". From this it is evident, that if the brand strategists in the preliminary research of how to manage their nation branding chose only to focus on the concept of nation image, they would only see a glimpse of the current reality, yet not in which direction the receivers' minds are moving in terms of nation reputation. In this case, it could resolve in the brand strategists choosing to use thematic which maybe are becoming more outdate, instead of using thematic that are more long-term and a thematic that are consistent with the receivers' perception on the nation now in combination with the expectations to the future of the nation.

Furthermore, it surprises me that both "Panda" and Xi Jinping" are not a part of China's nation reputation according the respondents, when taking recent events into account. This is both in

terms of Denmark recently receiving the two new pandas, which has created a great debate on panda diplomacy and the current relationship between Denmark and China (Reyes, 2019). And further, that China approved that Xi Jinping can remain in power for life, decreasing the little sign of democracy even more (BBC, 2018). This further emphasizes the fact, being that the respondents' knowledge of China is "limited", which 59% of the respondents also answered in the survey (Appendix 2, p. 1).

Finally, the thematic "Food" is not part of nation reputation, which as well is a surprise, as the frequency of 37 in nation image is very high. There can be many reasons for food only being a part of China's nation image. But, due to the common and favorable nature of food, this could as well be a suitable thematic for nation branding, not only for China, but for most nations in the world.

From the result of the survey, it is also evident that only 2 out of the total 14 thematics on nation reputation is not a part of nation image. This is not a surprise, since nation reputation is founded on a minimum of two out of three timeframes, including now, consistent to the concept of nation image. The two thematics are "War" which is mentioned 29 times historically and 4 times in the future. And "Closed" which is mentioned 8 times historically and 8 times in the future. Regardless of the low frequency in some of the timeframes, I consider it very interesting that such a low frequency of the respondents' think of war, when thinking about China in the future. I would have predicted the frequency to be higher. Moreover, it is interesting that no respondents write closed, thinking of China now, and that more people predict that China will be more closed to the rest of the world in the future than now (Appendix 2, p. 4-35).

I will now move on to thematics that both are mentioned in nation image and nation reputation. My focus here is on the frequency, as I see some very interesting movements in the thematics, that can't be neglected when managing nation branding. In order to even be able to analyze these thematics and see the movement based on changes in frequency in the different timeframes, further proves the importance of using the concept of nation reputation. Due to the fact that by using nation reputation and thereby gaining an insight into these movements, by incorporate the factor of time, allow brand strategists to gain a deeper and more long-term picture of the receivers' perception of the nation. This will make brand strategists in a better position to manage nation branding on a more solid foundation of knowledge.

I have chosen to cluster the thematics in this analysis, not based on frequency, but based on overall topic.

The first thematics are all concerning China's development and new role in the global agenda. As mentioned earlier, the most written thematic is "Superpower". Considering the fact that China has been a superpower historically, I think that this thematic is only mentioned 7 times historically is a rather small number. The same is the case for now, where superpower is only mentioned 19 times, considering the fact that China currently have the world's second largest economy in the world and that China becoming more dominating in the global arena (Worldbank, 2019). 64 times in the future is not a surprising number, due to the actual expectations of China role as superpower in the future.

A similar thematic is "Growth", this thematic is mentioned 9 times historically, 19 times now and 24 times in the future. Another thematics is "Large" which is mentioned 44 times now. Comparing this thematic to the future, the thematic large is replaced with "larger" mentioned 11. And even though the frequency is lower, the development from large to larger shows an interesting direction of the respondents' perception of China. Another thematic that have increased is "Power", this is mentioned 5 times now, but almost tripled to 14 in the future (Appendix 2, p. 4-35).

Moving on to what Anholt would categorize as *Governance* (Anholt, 2006, p. 264). From the two earlier analyses it is evident, based on frequency of thematics, that the category of *Governance* is very dominant in the respondents' perception of China, both in nation image and nation reputation. Comparing the thematics, that can be categorized as *Governance*, between nation image and nation reputation, show a very interesting tendency. This is, that many of the thematics, that can be categorized as *Governance* are becoming less mentioned in frequency the future. One is "Communism", this thematic is mentioned 27 times historically, 16 times now, and only 5 times in the future (Appendix 2, p. 4-25). This itself is very interesting. Further, it is interesting if respondents then are writing other types of governance that replaces communism? To the question "What are the first four words that come to your mind thinking about China 10 years from now" (Appendix 1, p. 3), the respondents wrote "Democracy" 8 times and "More Westerly" 3 times. Comparing this to both historically and now, no respondents wrote democracy or more westerly. However, 3 respondents wrote "Undemocratic" and 2 wrote "Challenges with democracy" now (Appendix 2, p. 4-35). Based on this, it can give us an indication that the respondents do not see

communism as much as part of China's future compared to now, and some respondents instead are believing that democracy can become a new type of governance. Moreover, these numbers give an indication of how the respondents perceive China in the future compared to how they perceive China now and historically, and thereby the direction of how they perceive China as nation. Other thematics, that can be categorized as *Governance* also have a lower frequency in the future or is not present in the future. The thematic "Totalitarian" is mentioned 10 times now and is thereby part of China's nation image, according to the respondents. However, "Totalitarian" is not mentioned in the future and is thereby not a part of China's nation reputation, according to the respondents. "Dictatorship" is mentioned 15 times historically, 18 times now, and 14 times in the future. "Human rights" is mentioned 1 time historically, 11 times now and 4 times future. "Repression" is mentioned 13 times historically, 8 times now and 8 times in the future. "Censorship" is mentioned 8 times now and 5 times in the future. From the above findings, it is evident that these thematics are becoming less dominant over time in various degrees, and this gives a great insight into what direction China's nation reputation is moving, according to the respondents is developing, an insight which had not been clear if not using the concept of nation reputation. Another thematic that can be categorized as *Governance* in the case of China, is "Surveillance". This thematic is increased from being mentioned 8 times now to 14 times in the future. From all the news on China's increase in surveillance on their citizens, this is no surprise (Doffman, 2018).

Another two thematics, that both can be categorized as *Culture and Heritage* (Anholt, 2006, p. 264), show an interesting decrease in frequency. This is "Culture" which is mentioned 12 times historically, 11 times now and only 1 time in the future. This thematic, which also is a part of China's national identity, has disappeared as a future thematic according to the respondents. However, I would argue that culture still can be a relevant thematic to consider when managing China's nation branding, or nation branding in general. As I would argue, that culture is always relevant for a nation, especially as a mean to connect the future with the past. However, I think the respondents is not mentioning culture as a thematic in the future, since culture in some ways refers back to history and since no one can know what the culture is like in the future. Another thematics that can be categorized as *Culture and Heritage* is "The Great Wall of China" which has been mentioned 51 times historically, 20 times now and zero times in the future (Appendix 2, p. 4-35). The Great Wall



of China, I would argue, is still relevant for the future and worth considering in managing China's nation branding, since it is very likely that it will still be standing in the future, and still be one of "New seven wonders of the world" which tourist is willing to travel far to see (Shastri et al., 2017).

The two last thematics in this analysis which both are a part of nation image and nation reputation, and which both show an interesting development in frequency are "Pollution" and "Poor". For one, the thematic "Poor" is mentioned 15 times historically and 11 times now. However, what is interesting is, that poor is not mentioned in the future, but the complete opposite thematic "Rich" is mentioned 7 times. This could indicate that, according to some of the respondents, their perception of China is shifting from poor to rich. Another thematic is "Pollution", this is mentioned 44 now and only 33 times in the future. This is also very interesting, and a bit surprising, due to the constant debate on pollution in large cities worldwide.

From the survey, some new and interesting thematics concerning the future are also rising. These are "Green/Sustainable" (8), "Better" (8), "Nuclear weapons" (3) and "Aggressive" (2) (Appendix 2, p. 25-35). And even though the frequency is low, I would argue that it in some cases can show the direction of the respondents' perception of the nation in the future. A direction which would not be found or known, if the respondents only had been asked to their perception of the nation's nation image.

In the next section I will discuss the findings from this master's thesis' analysis and answer the problem formulation on how the relationship between nation reputation and nation image influence on nation branding.

## 10. Discussion

I will now discuss the findings from the above analyses on China's national identity, nation image and nation reputation. I will use the findings from the case of China as a mean to generalize the findings to the general concept of nation branding, nation image, nation reputation and nation identity, in order to answer the problem formulation on how the relationship between nation reputation and nation image influence on nation branding.

## 10.1. Discussion of how nation image influence on nation branding

This section is a discussion of how nation image influence on nation branding. I will use the findings of the analyses, in order to discuss the findings on nation image influence on nation branding and what should be considered when using nation image in managing nation branding in general terms.

From the survey and the analyses hereof, it is evident that a large share of the thematics that have the highest frequency, act both as China's nation image and China's nation reputation. However, 8 out of 27 thematics, that I presented in the analysis of China's nation image, only act as nation image and not as nation reputation. The reason being that nation reputation is the long-term nation image, and as a result the respondents have to repeat the thematics in several timeframes, in order for it to be nation reputation, and this eliminates some of the less dominant thematics. I argue, that this is a good thing for a nation when managing its nation branding, since this can help brand strategists sharpen the focus to the thematics and core values that are the most important in the minds of the receivers. Yet, I also argue, that brand strategists can not only focus on the thematics that act as nation reputation, since this might result in important thematics and values of the nation being eliminated from the nation branding. Choices and elimination of thematics has to be managed with extreme reflectively, and with a constant consideration of the nature of the thematics and the reason for the thematics not being a part of nation reputation or part of the previous or future perception of the nation. And therefore, it is important not only to use nation reputation in nation branding, but also use nation image, as it can show thematics that are disappearing or loosing frequency, but the thematics can still be very relevant for the nation branding.

From the survey, I have two examples of thematics that have disappeared or lost frequency. One is "Food", which is mentioned 37 times now (p. 54) and "Culture" (p. 56), which is mentioned 12 times historically, 11 times now and only 1 time in the future. Food only acts as China's nation image. The thematic food is a common and favorable thematic, and therefore very suitable for nation branding (Fan, 2010, p. 99-100). The same goes for "Culture". Culture is not present in the respondents' perception of China in the future. Yet I would argue, that in the case of China and every other nation, culture have a great impact on many tourist attractions and the core values of

the nation, and culture is therefore important in terms of nation branding that also aims to attract tourists. Furthermore, culture is also often a favorable thematic (Fan, 2010, p. 99-100).

With foundation in both thematics, I argue that it is very important for brand strategists to consider the nature of a thematic and consider why the thematic do not act as nation reputation or as a part of the respondents' previous or future perception of the nation. Brand strategists further need to consider, could the reason be, that the thematic is not aligned with future thinking, yet still an inevitable part of the future of nation? If yes, and if the thematic is common and favorable, it might still be relevant for nation branding.

In the case of China, the only thematic that acts both as national identity, nation image and nation reputation is "Culture". I therefore argue that culture should be used in nation branding, as it is both internally and externally recognizable and thereby consistent with the reality of the nation. This is the ultimate goal and rule for all nation branding. It has to be consistent with the reality. If nation branding is not consistent with the reality, it will fail to deliver the expectations of the receiver, and consequently the nation will lose its reliability. Several scholars have the same orientation: "*Nation branding needs to be rooted in the essence and in the reality of the nation rather than being a creation of brand strategists*" (Dinnie, 2007, p. 127) and "*Branding will not succeed if other components of the strategy fail to deliver the expectation of the customers. And nation branding is no exception. Said in another way, the image has to reflect the reality, and every word claimed by the nation's government must be substantiated*" (Fan, 2006, p. 11).

I therefore argue, that this is the most important goal and rule for brand strategists when managing nation branding. If not following this, all resources spend will be in vain, as the nation branding will be fake, since it is not consistent to the reality of the nation's character and core, and as a result the nation branding will be rejected by the receivers and create contradicting images.

Another advantages of assuring that the branding is consistent with the reality, is that the citizens of the nation then can act as "ambassadors" for the nation brand. And as Fan argues, the citizens of the nation are also the receivers of nation branding, among many other, and if not considering this, it will create contradicting nation images or the branding will be rejected (Fan, 2006, p. 11)

Finally, I would like to summarize the discussion by emphasizing the importance for the brand strategists to consider nation image when deciding the most favorable and common thematic of the nation, in order to avoid eliminating thematic that are important for the nation, such as "Food" and "Culture" in the case of China.

Nation image is extremely important for nation branding, as this is the current reality of the nation, which naturally is the most important factor for managing nation branding in order to align it with the reality, so it is not rejected, and contradicting images are created. Moreover, nation image is the foundation of nation reputation and an avoidable core of the external perception of the nation. I will now move on to a discussion of the concept of nation reputation.

## 10.2. Discussion of how nation reputation influence on nation branding

This section is a discussion of how nation reputation influence on nation branding. I will use the findings from the analysis, in order to discuss the findings on nation reputation and what should be considered when using nation reputation in managing nation branding in general terms.

As mentioned previous, many of the most written thematic both act as China's nation image and China's nation reputation. However, from the analysis it is evident that when using both the concept of nation image and nation reputation, it gives brand strategists an insight into the direction of the respondents' perception of the nation, over time. And exactly this, has shown several very interesting movements in the different thematic on China's nation image and China's nation reputation, that brand strategists need to consider, prior managing the nation branding. Without taking a stance on the relevance of the thematic, both in terms of the consistency to national identity or the favorability of the thematic, I will now present some interesting thematic. The analyses on nation image and nation reputation have shown that some thematic are no longer relevant for nation branding, if only wishing to use thematic both present in nation image and nation reputation. Examples of such thematic are "Copy", "Poor", "Totalitarian", "Food", "Culture" etc.

On the other hand, thematic as "Superpower", "Growth", "Technology" all have increasing in frequency over time (Appendix 2, p. 4-35). By adding the variable of time, and thereby comparing the frequency over time, it shows some very interesting movements in thematic. Movement that

would not have been found not incorporation the concept of nation reputation into nation branding, and movements that must be considered when managing China's nation branding. This exactly, being number one reason for nations to start using the concept of nation reputation in nation branding, as a mean to help brand strategists gain a deeper and more long-term picture of the receivers' perception of the nation. And exactly this, make brand strategists in a better place to manage nation branding on a more solid foundation of knowledge. Yet as discusses in the previous section, the thematics that only act as nation image or not in the future must not be eliminated for nation branding, before considering the nature of the thematic and why it does not act as nation reputation or in the future.

From this I therefore argue, that nations should not be considered static, that can be managed one time based on the current perception of the nation. Instead, nations should be considered as dynamic, that can and will change throughout times or even from day-to-day depending on current actions and events by the nation. As a result, managing nation branding should not only be founded on nation image, hence it should also be founded on the long-term perception on the nation, the nation reputation. By using the concept of nation reputation and hereby the factor of time, brand strategists are able to incorporate the dynamic nature of the nation brands into the process of manage nation branding, and exactly this process should be considered as a mean to create nation branding that have a long-term relevance of the nation and the receivers. By assuring the long-term relevance, this will further help the nation create a consistent nation brand over time (Loo & Davies, 2006, p. 204), as the nation brand does not need to be constantly reinvented to assure the relevancy. This might also lessen the contradicting perception of the nation brand, as the nation brand speaks with a single-minded voice, that represent the core message of the nation (Anholt, 2003, p. 219-222), the core message that also have to be consistent with the national identity, the internal perception of the nation. Naturally, I would like to emphasize that a nation brand should be managed again or adjusted if it does not reflect on the reality, and once again the same method of using the nation identity, nation image and nation reputation as concept for analyzing the new current state of the nation should be used (Figure 3, p. 25).

### 10.3. Discussion of how the relationship between nation reputation and nation image influence on nation branding

The aim of this section is to discuss the most important findings of this master's thesis in order to answer the problem formulation on how the relationship between nation reputation and nation image influence on nation branding. I will further discuss, if it based on the findings of the analyses, make sense to expand the existing understanding of nation branding, by incorporating the concept of nation reputation. I will also discuss why nation reputation is not already a widely used concept in nation branding. Finally, I will discuss if there in reality exists an issue managing nation branding or whether this is merely an academic issue?

I argue that both nation reputation and nation image have an influence on nation branding. I further argue that both concepts are equally important for managing nation branding. Both arguments are substantiated with the findings of this master's thesis. This is, that using both nation image and nation reputation provide brand strategists with an insight into the long-term movements of the discovered thematics and thereby an insight into the receivers' long-term perception of the nation.

The most important difference between nation image and nation reputation, is that nation reputation is founded on the long-term nation image. So, in order to examine nation reputation, brand strategists have to examine nation image in different timeframes. And by using these timeframes, it is possible to include a dynamic aspect into nation branding. This must not be neglected, due to the fact that nations will change over time or even from day-to-day, and so will nation brands. By using the concept of nation reputation and thereby including the factor of time in nation branding, this further gives the opportunity for brand strategists to gain an insight into the receivers' long-term perception of the nation. If instead only focusing on nation image, as is the case in nation branding today, brand strategists will not gain this insight, and instead brand strategists will only get glimpse of the current perception of the nation, according to the receivers. As a result, brand strategists are not able to see which thematics and values are steady and relevant, and which are becoming less dominant or even disappearing over time. And this can result in wrong choice of thematics used and wrong message on the core values of the nation branded to the receivers, which will result in the nation brand not having long-term relevance.

So I argue, based on the findings of this master's thesis, that on the foundation of both nation image and nation reputation, and thereby including a broader timeframe, brand strategists are then able to take a more solid choice of which thematics are common and favorable to use in managing the nation branding, based on knowledge of the future and the past rather than assumptions. And using this, together with the absolute need for the nation branding being true to the reality and to the national identity, it might result in less rejection from the receivers, and thereby fewer contracting images of the nation, now and in the future, as the receiver is not creating their own nation image, based on stereotypes and misconceptions (Loo and Davis, 2006, p. 198).

Based on my findings, I therefore argue, that a nation should use the concepts of national identity, nation image and nation reputation as preliminary concepts of research to manage the nation brand or re-manage the nation brand (figure 3, p. 25).

I will now move on to a different matter, that I also find important to discuss in regard to this master's thesis.

In my literature review of nation branding, I found that scholars on nation branding had many contradicting and blurred definitions on national identity, nation image and nation reputation and for that sake on how to actually manage nation branding.

My aim of this master's thesis was therefore to explain and clarify the meaning of national identity and especially nation image and nation reputation, as a means to conduct research on how the concepts influence on nation branding, and how they can be used in managing nation branding more successfully.

I can't help but think, why scholars of nation branding not already have included this concept of nation reputation in their research on nation branding? One answer to this question might be that, brand strategists as well as other decision-makers, in nation branding or politics for that matter, tend to focus on the short-term goals rather than the long-term goals. This makes quick-fixes and other short-term solutions very attractive, as it can create good results fast. Thus, when brand strategists and the decisions-makers have moved on and are no longer measured on this matter, the strategy will fail and no longer be relevant, and the process will begin once again. This demand for quick-fixes, also result in a demand for easy digestible solutions. In the context of nation

branding, this can be that brand strategists only focusses on conducting research on nation image, maybe national identity if the brand strategists are doing a good job. Yet, to incorporate nation reputation into the research, and thereby expanding the preliminary research of nation branding, will make it more advanced and time-consuming which is not attractive, as it requires more time spend on the matter, and thereby more money spend. In my opinion, this results in nation branding being centered around easy solutions and short-term goal. This further influence that scholars tend to focus on concepts and ideas that are easy to understand and easy to use, and it is thereby easier to sell the idea of this strategy of nation branding, compared to the more advanced edition, that will result in more time and money spend, nevertheless a better long-term result.

If brand strategists and decision-makers instead begin to have a more long-term goal for nation branding, and thereby use all the concepts of national identity, nation image and nation reputation, as argued is necessary in this master's thesis, the nation can then incorporate the factor of time into managing their brand. And by using the factor of time, it is possible for brand strategists to analyze how the nation brand is perceived historically, how the nation brand is perceived now and in which direction the perception of nation brand is moving in the future. This combined with an internal analysis on the core of the nation brand, the national identity, will make up a more solid foundation of knowledge for brand strategists and will function as a better foundation for all decisions in regard to nation branding.

Finally, I will discuss if there in reality exists an issue with managing nation branding or if this is solely an academic issue? This naturally have to be answered by taking each nation into consideration, as some nations might think long-term and other more short-term.

One thing is a fact, China is not thinking short-term in terms of strategies that concerns both internal development and external development. As earlier mentioned, China have, what some call "Chinas Hundred-Year Strategy" that spans over a hundred-year period from 1949-2049 (Miller, 2016). Underneath this strategy several "smaller" strategies are created, all in order to reach the long-term goals. The goals of changing China as nation, as well as managing China's nation brand worldwide. Examples of "smaller" strategies are "The Soft Power strategy", that wishes to spread Chinese culture, history and values worldwide or "Made in China 2025 strategy" that both aims to reach the internal and external receivers (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019). All of this could



indicate that China has no problem having long-term goal, yet evidently (Appendix 2) China still has issues with different and contradicting images, according the respondents of the survey in this master's thesis. We can't possible know if this is due to the long-term strategies of China not yet have won an impact, or whether it is brand strategists of China and the Communist Party of China that have neglected the preliminary research in order to manage nation branding that both includes national identity, nation image and the long-term nation reputation. However, the current state of China's nation image and nation reputation in Denmark call for some attention.

## 11. Conclusion

From a curiosity of what influences the contradicting perceptions of China, that I believe exist among the Danish people, I have chosen to alter the focus of this master's thesis to nation branding and what influence on nation branding. Consequently, the problem formulation of this master's thesis came to be: *how does the relationship between nation reputation and nation image influence on nation branding?*

In order to answer this, I have conducted a survey on the Danish people's perception on China. The findings of the survey confirmed that the respondents have many different and contradicting perceptions of China (Appendix 2, p. 2).

The result of this master's thesis is that both nation reputation and nation image in different ways influence on nation branding, and that both concepts are crucial for nation branding.

From the master's thesis, it is evident that nation reputation is a very useful concept, as a mean to gain a better and more profound insight into how a nation is perceived over time, since nation reputation includes a wider time-frequency, than nation image does. By incorporating nation reputation into nation branding, it provides the nation and brand strategists with the ability to gain insight into which thematics that are the strongest, and which thematics are getting less important over time. This creates a better foundation for managing nation branding, as it enhances the dynamic nature of nations and assures that the thematics used have a long-term relevancy for the nation and the receivers.

This master's thesis also shows, that it is important not only to use nation reputation in nation

branding, yet also to use the concept of nation image and national identity. This master's thesis shows that brand strategists must not neglect nation image influence on nation branding, as nation image is the current external perception of the nation, that function as the core of managing nation branding and that ensures the nation branding is relevant to the current reality of the nation.

Further, nation image is important in order to assure that relevant thematics and values are not eliminated in nation branding, as the brand strategist must also consider thematics that does not act as nation reputation or loose frequency in the future, since they still can be very important thematics and values for the nation. This is due to the fact, that even though some thematics are disappearing or losing frequency in the future, this is not align with the fact that these are not important for the nation. It can solely be a sign of the nature of the thematics are not consistent with previous or future thinking.

Finally, national identity is also important for nation branding, since all branding has to be consistent with the reality and the citizens of nation own perception of the nation, otherwise the nation branding will fail to deliver, and ultimately create contradicting nation images and over time contradicting nation reputation.

From all of this, I therefore argue that nations must conduct preliminary and continuous research on the nation's national identity, nation image and nation reputation as a mean to gain a deeper and better foundation for manage or re-manage the nation brand more successfully and thereby avoid creating contradicting images. And even though brand strategists and decision-makers might wish to get quick-fixes for how to manage nation branding, in order to save time and money. I argue that using time and money on an extensive preliminary research, both internally and externally, will create nation branding that have a better chance of being relevant to the receivers over a longer time, compared to if the nation just conducting research on how the nation image is currently, since the brand strategists will not gain insight into frequency and directions of the thematics over time.

In my research I have tried to explain and clarify the definitions of nation identity, nation image and nation reputation, since existing literature on nation branding have contracting and blurred definitions on the concepts. And if the issue of managing nation brand in fact turns out to solely be academic problem (see discussion, p. 64), then this research as a minimum has contributed to a

more clarified understanding of the concepts of national identity, nation image and nation reputation.

For further research, it would be ideal to test this extended research on how to manage nation branding and the understanding of the concepts on real-world cases, in order to test if this, over time, create less contradictions and better nation branding.

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## 13. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Survey questions.

Appendix 2 - Results from survey.

Appendix 3 - Results from crossed survey answers.