

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY IN PRAGUE**  
**Faculty of Social Sciences**  
**Institute of International Studies**

**PROTOCOL ON DIPLOMA THESIS ASSESSMENT**  
**(Reviewer)**

Name of the student: Shuo Yang

Title: The Impact of the Brexit Process on the “Golden Era” of UK-China Relations

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Reviewer (external reviewers including the address and position): Tomáš Weiss

*1. TOPIC AND OBJECTIVE (short information on the thesis, research objective):*

The thesis analyses the relations between China and the United Kingdom in the spheres of “commercial interactions”, trade, and diplomatic ties. It asks how the relationship has been and will be affected by Brexit. This is a relevant and important question, even if it is slightly vague and very difficult to answer given the fact that no Brexit has materialised so far, and we have no idea if there will be one in near future.

*2. CONTENT (complexity, original approach, argument, structure, theoretical and methodological backing, work with sources, appropriateness of annexes etc.):*

Generally, the thesis aims high and struggles to deliver as a result. It tries to capture a very complex topic, which would have probably deserved to be broken down into more detailed issues and questions. It also lacks on conceptual clarity and more prudent methodological approach.

First and foremost, the whole thesis operates with the concept of “Golden Era”. It is, however, unclear what that is supposed to be. Is it just a label for the period of time after the state visit in 2015? Does it have any substance in terms of different relations and frameworks in the relations between the UK and China? How can we evaluate a “success” of this Golden Era against which the potential impact of Brexit should be measured?

Second, the thesis focuses on three areas that are incomparable and very difficult to separate. Diplomatic relations will be affected by Brexit only secondary as there is nothing that would hamper British diplomatic ties through the EU membership. There is also a very unclear delimitation between commercial interactions and trade. I understand trade surely as one form of commercial interactions. Moreover, some parts of trade, namely investment, is dealt with in the part on commercial interactions. There is very little distinction between the trade in goods and in services. Brexit is most probably going to affect the two types of trade differently, however, not least because of the Irish border issue. The part on commercial relations is further divided into subchapters, but it is unclear what is the relationship among them. What is the relation between the subchapter 1.1.1 on “investment” and 1.1.3 on “real estate investment”? Is the latter a subset of the former? If not, how do they differ? What is “financing cooperation” and how does it differ from the other areas?

In addition, there is a point in asking about the changes in diplomatic relations and investment as a result of the Brexit referendum. Both areas depend on expectations and as such, the result of the referendum could have an impact. Trade, however, depends to a large extent on the

existing conditions for import and export of goods and services. In that respect, the referendum has not changed anything in itself. It will only be an actual Brexit that may change conditions under which trade between China and the UK occurs. There is no reason to expect any impact as a result.

Thirdly, there is a problem with the data. To what extent do the numbers on FDI and their yearly variation tell us anything significant about the impact of the looming Brexit? Don't they rather show the current business decisions by individual companies? It seems to me that the thesis covers too short a time span to really tell anything about trends and impacts. Further, how much of the "investment" is really investment and how much is acquisition caused just by the weak sterling? Can we conclude anything from this data? In addition, the thesis works with independent statistics, which is commendable, but seems to be relying heavily on Chinese official sources not as a way to analyse the official discourse, but to collect "facts". A more critical stance would have been more useful. The result is that the thesis often seems to be repeating official propaganda as a given fact and tends to ignore other problematic issues of commercial relations with China and some Chinese investment abroad that we have witnessed in Africa as well as in parts of Europe.

*3. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE (quality of language, citation style, graphics, formal aspects etc.):*

The thesis provides relevant graphics to illustrate the argument made, with the caveat to the data handling mentioned above. It is logically structured and cites properly. The list of annexes (p. 85) is, in fact, the list of graphs in the text.

The quality of language is, on the other hand, very poor. While I understand that the author is not a native speaker, the text has deserved extensive editing. In the current form, it is bordering incomprehensible. It also features inconsistencies, such as duplications (p. 36, last paragraph) and various forms of single concepts (cf. "Golden Age" on p. 2).

*4. SHORT COMMENTS BY THE REVIEWER (overall impression, strengths and weaknesses, originality of ideas, achievement of the research objective etc.):*

This is a thesis that set the objective too high and as a result, failed to reach it. It focuses on an important topic but has not been able to grasp it in a persuasive and conclusive way. The low quality of language makes the argument and contribution of the thesis even weaker.

*5. QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS THAT SHOULD BE ADDRESSED DURING THE DEFENCE (one to three):*

The author should reflect on the criticism and questions listed above.

*6. (NON-)RECOMMENDATION AND SUGGESTED GRADE (A,B,C,D,E,F):*

I recommend the thesis for defence and suggest the **grade D or E**, depending on the defence.

Date: 6<sup>th</sup> June 2019

Signature: