

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

PROTOCOL ON DIPLOMA THESIS ASSESSMENT
(Supervisor)

Name of the student: **Shuo Yang**

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

Supervisor (external reviewers including the address and position): Mgr. Jan Váška, Ph.D.

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

Shuo Yang’s Master dissertation sets out to explore the impact of Brexit upon what has been termed, since 2015, the “Golden Era” in bilateral Sino-British relations. As at the time of submission of the thesis, the outcome of Brexit in terms of future UK-EU relations was still unknown, the author’s main focus was to examine the period between the June 2016 referendum and early 2019 to assess the impact of the enhanced uncertainty about future UK trade policy, and more broadly its international strategy, upon its bilateral trade, investment and diplomatic relation with China. The author’s conclusions about the prospects for Sino-British relations tend to be very optimistic, despite the increased degree of uncertainty about future trade and investment climate, and she argues that the main risks come from sources external to Brexit process, namely from changes in US trade policy and political differences which she largely attributes to close British alignment with US policies.

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

The author has chosen a most relevant and complex topic. To make the research project academically meaningful, the initial challenge was to turn what is essentially a polished label in political jargon (“Golden Era”) into an operationalised, measurable concept. I feel the author was only partly successful in this respect. The 2015 Joint declaration was a logical starting point as it documents the primacy of the economic (trade and investment) expectations in both partners’ conceptions of the “Golder Era”, yet it still leaves a long way before an academically sound (indicator-based or otherwise) framework is reached.

The second challenge is to distinguish, when observing the sources of dynamics in Sino-British relations in the 2016-19 period, between Brexit-related and other intervening factors. The author is not relying upon any explicit theoretical/methodological framework beyond the usual analysis of a commendably large body of both independent and government-provided statistics. Her assessment tends to be rather intuitive, with a lot of emphasis being put on the US factor.

I am aware that non-economic domains such as security, diplomatic co-operation, human rights, cultural exchange, co-operation in education etc. do not constitute a central component of the “Golden Era” in Sino-British relations for either of the partners. Still I tend to feel that the author underestimates the seriousness of dilemmas these issues pose especially for the UK, making the whole domain of relations with China politically and normatively contentious and tend to reduce the trust capital of the relationship (Huawei, Hong Kong, minorities..) The author should therefore paid more attention to these layers of the relationship, and should not have been afraid to work with sources, both academic and news portals, that are openly critical of the two governments.

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

The quality of language is a rather problematic aspects of the thesis, too, even allowing for the fact that the author is not a native English speaker. Many formulations leave a considerable degree of uncertainty as to what precisely the author intended to convey, and she also exhibits the unfortunate tendency to defer to rather than challenge the woolly official discourse of (sometimes not only) Chinese diplomatic sources. On the other hand, both the citations style (odd exceptions are incomplete references 26 and 27) and other formal aspects of the thesis do meet the required criteria.

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

Despite some serious flaws both in the design of the dissertation and its execution, meaning that the research objective was only partially achieved, Shuo Yang's work does meet the necessary criteria to pass as a Master diploma thesis.

5. CO-OPERATION WITH THE SUPERVISOR:

The author's approach was very enthusiastic, though, admittedly, our communication tended to be rather intermittent. She made a lot of effort to address all my suggestions. The one adverse circumstance I feel obliged to mention are long-term health issues on the part of author, which objectively slowed down the progress of the work and in the end unfortunately made it impossible to fully address all the issues, including conceptual ones, that had arisen in the first draft of the thesis.

6. QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS THAT SHOULD BE ADDRESSED DURING THE DEFENCE:

Assuming Brexit does eventually takes place and the UK regains the opportunity to conduct an independent trade policy, do you think this will weaken its bargaining position vis-à-vis China? What consequences of such a re-balanced relationship do you foresee?

To what extent are the two partner's visions and expectations from the Sino-British "Golden Era" (as touched upon but underdeveloped in part 1.1) really compatible, not only economically but also politically, including global governance and security, and normative commitments? What are the trade-offs in the relationship for the Chinese side?

Do you tend to think scholars having "more contact with the government" (p. 15) makes them ipso facto more authoritative on the subject of Sino-British relations?

What precisely do you mean by "the changes in Chinese domestic investment review" (p. 41)?

To what extent are, in your experience, statistics provided by the Chinese government a reliable source of data?

7. (NON-)RECOMMENDATION AND SUGGESTED GRADE:

YES – D (satisfactory) or E (sufficient), depending on the defence.

Date: 12 June 2019

Signature: