

REPORT ON THE MASTER THESIS

IEPS – International Economic and Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Title of the thesis:	The significance of the “One Belt and One Road” Policy for China’s Geopolitical and Economic Strategy
Author of the thesis:	Xingdong Ma
Referee (incl. titles):	Mgr. Bohumil Doboš, Ph.D.

Comments of the referee on the thesis highlights and shortcomings (following the 5 numbered aspects of your assessment indicated below).

1) Theoretical background: Implicitly, the work is based in realist thinking. The work, nonetheless, does not present any theoretical bases for the author’s understanding of the international system, the Chinese geopolitical strategy, or the role, functions and goals of OBOR. The author does not present any theoretical background to base the work upon.

2) Contribution: The thesis is aiming to cover the topic of significance of OBOR for Chinese strategy in geopolitical and economic realm. To this end, it sets up three research questions: 1) How does the OBOR policy affect China's geopolitical and economic strategy? 2) What’s the significance of the OBOR policy to expand China’s influence in the countries along the OBOR? 3) What difficulties will it encounter in this process?

The text of the thesis itself, however, covers only the last one. The last two paragraphs of the conclusion somehow related to the first two questions are not based on a research conducted in the thesis. None of the RQs is explicitly answered (the third is to a degree answered implicitly) and the topic of presenting the significance of OBOR on China’s geopolitical and economic strategy is not tackled.

Further issues connected to the contribution of the work include:

Chapter 3.1 – The US influence in the Asia-Pacific is presented in very vague terms. There is no discussion over the history of the Chinese presence in the region and its historical relations with different countries. Sri Lanka is discussed as being negatively affected by India in its relation to OBOR without mentioning the development of the port of Hambantota.

Chapter 3.2 – Author mentions “concerns about territorial sovereignty“ (p. 16) in the context of the post-Soviet space. It is unclear what that actually means. Discussion over the influence of Russia in Central Asia and relation of the region to the EU/USA is superficial. There is no explanation why the EEU and OBOR are mutually exclusive.

Chapter 3.3 – Chapter should deal with MENA as well as the sub-Saharan Africa. The case selected for this region is Saudi Arabia, but the discussion included in this chapter is a very general description of the situation in the sub-Saharan Africa only. The topic of the Middle East is not mentioned even once.

Chapter 3.4 – It is unclear that the thesis works with a proper understanding of the European institutional setting as not all the countries of the 16+1 are the EU members. The non-EU members relevant for the OBOR in Europe (e.g., Serbia) are omitted.

Chapter 4.1.1. – Last paragraph does not make sense

Chapter 4.1.2. – The ending seems to argue that India is being paranoid that China will build military bases in ports in the Indian Ocean and that this is not taking place, while Chinese navy is clearly present in at least some of the mentioned locations.

Chapter 4.1.3. – The author claims that India is dependent on the import of electricity from China without citing any data. According to available data, India only imported energy from Bhutan and is generally self-sufficient. Statement claiming that India seeks cooperation with China is not rooted in any analysis.

Chapter 4.2 - “...Russia strongly hoped that Ukraine will join the Eurasian Economic Union...” “Russia hopes that Ukraine will not sign an agreement...” (23) are somehow strange statements regarding the introduction of the Russian armed forces on the Ukrainian territory. The whole chapter is written very chaotically and most of the parts cannot be understood.

Chapter 4.2.1. – The chapter is very general. There are no data on the state of Russian economy, etc.

Chapter 4.2.2. - “Many Russian experts believe that the OBOR policy is a Eurasia regional integration project proposed by China that is different from the EEU” (27) – this is a fact – OBOR is different than EEU.

Chapter 4.3.2. – It is unclear which initiatives tackled are part of OBOR, as the relation of China to the Saudi Arabia is older than OBOR.

“Saudi Arabia and Iran, both of which are regional powers, are important energy importing countries...”(31) – not true

“In the economic field, China's challenge in promoting the construction of the OBOR policy...” (31) - unclear what that means. In no part it is mentioned what concrete projects inside the OBOR framework are to be built in the KSA.

Chapter 4.4.2. – Hungary has not been an ancient entrance for the eastern tribes to Europe, Northern European Plain as an extension of flatlands in Russia was.

Chapter 4.5. – written confusingly

As the chapter 4 does not bring any clear conclusions regarding the obstacles faced by OBOR, chapter 5 cannot bring any proper solution and constitutes a mix of random ideas.

3) Methods: Methodological part is rather confusing. The division between 2.1 (comparative study) and 2.3 (case study) makes no sense. Case selection would deserve better explanation (Saudi Arabia as African, India as SE Asian – despite the selection of wider regions according to the selected literature, it would be beneficial to point out why these particular cases were chosen). There is a division among active/limited participation/opposition countries established by the author, but it is unclear according to what source. It is unclear, how will the methodology that was chosen for the thesis help answer the RQs? P. 10 mentions “methodology qualitative and quantitative,” but it is unclear what part of the thesis is quantitative? There are not quantitative methods used and the work lacks important data.

4) Literature: The thesis is based on a large number of sources mainly by Chinese authors. On the other hand, the thesis lacks an inclusion of some of the seminal works on the topic written in important journals like *Geopolitics*. There is also no monograph (either theoretical or dealing with the topic) listed in the bibliography.

5) Manuscript form: The name of the thesis is written incorrectly in the submitted pdf. There are some mistakes in abbreviations (IMB x IMF p. 6). New chapters should be starting on a new page. There is large number of spelling mistakes – e.g. Hungry, Philippine, etc. Some sources, like in parts “(a)ccording to the “One Belt, One Road” network” (13), or „According to the viewpoint of Enrico Cau, (...)“(14), are missing, but in most cases the citations are correctly used. Many parts are written in a language that is hardly understandable and most of the thesis is hard to read – e.g., “In the near future, China’s position in international affairs may will become even foremost in the East Asian region and the Middle East. This may be a problem for Russia, but fortunately, the cooperation between Russia and China does not have any kind of dependence. The Russian side does not have to unilaterally please China like a small partner. Moscow has a chance to choose. Therefore, the closer Russia-China relations seem to be more important Russia is for Beijing's competitors in East Asia (first Japan, Vietnam and South Korea).“ (26) “But the key question is how do the two projects achieve docking? Therefore, the author believes that with the continuous advancement of the OBOR policy, serious questions about how the EEU and OBOR policy will achieve docking will finally surface“ (27).

Box for the thesis supervisor only. *The author consulted the thesis on a regular basis but the progress was rather slow. Nevertheless, the largest issue at hand is the abrupt changes in the contents of the work in a month before the submission. After several months of slow improvements, the student suddenly handed over completely re-worked thesis (after several months of little to no changes, suddenly two weeks were enough for a complete revision and large improvement). The submitted version of the thesis then presents yet another (much less improved) version of the text. The final version thus presents a different text from the one that was consulted throughout the year.*

Suggested questions for the defence are:

Name some concrete projects inside the OBOR framework being set up in the selected countries.

How is the geopolitical and economic strategy of the PRC affected by OBOR? How does the PRC utilize OBOR as a tool of its foreign policy?

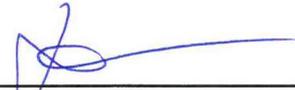
What’s the significance of the OBOR in expanding the Chinese influence in the countries participating on the project?

I do not recommend the thesis for final defence. I recommend the following grade: F

SUMMARY OF POINTS AWARDED (for details, see below):

CATEGORY	POINTS
<i>Theoretical background (max. 20 points)</i>	0
<i>Contribution (max. 20 points)</i>	5
<i>Methods (max. 20 points)</i>	5
<i>Literature (max. 20 points)</i>	5
<i>Manuscript form (max. 20 points)</i>	10
TOTAL POINTS (max. 100 points)	25
The proposed grade (A-B-C-D-E-F)	F

DATE OF EVALUATION: 22. 8. 2019



Referee Signature