Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: Andrew Porter

Title: The Dragon's Pearls: Decoding the Chinese Strategy for the Indian Ocean

Programme/year: International Relations, 2020

Author of Evaluation (supervisor/external assessor): Aleš Karmazin, Ph.D.

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Research question, definition of objectives	10	6
	Theoretical/conceptual framework	30	18
	Methodology, analysis, argument	40	28
Total		80	52
Minor Criteria			
	Sources	10	10
	Style	5	5
	Formal requirements	5	5
Total		20	20
TOTAL		100	72

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Evaluation

Major criteria:

As I mention below, the thesis certainly has some merit, especially when it comes to the empirical part. The student has also engaged with a wide range of academic works (although the literature review would benefit from better and more logical organization). However, I have a few key critical remarks.

- The research objectives look interesting but are too broad (pp. 12-13). I am not convinced that the thesis properly analyses all of them. The goal regarding which narrative best reflects empirics/findings would be a very interesting one, but it does not seem to be rigorously elaborated.
- Criteria derived from Alfred Mahan's theory, which are intended to be crucial for testing the author's hypotheses, are directly suited for assessing the importance of ports (strategic, geopolitical etc. value of a given port) but much less for assessing intentions and strategies in Chinese foreign policy. However, the problem is that all the three hypotheses are focused on Chinese strategic aims and intentions. Hence, there does not seem to be a good match.
    - According to the author, two of the three hypotheses should be examined with the help of Mahan's theory while the third one on the basis of different criteria. It may be possible to do so but is seems too complicated.
- The three theories – geopolitics, A. Mahan's theory (why to separate it from geopolitics?) and neoclassical realism – that are introduced in the thesis are reflected in the methodological part (Chapter III). However, a closer and clearer interconnection between the theoretical and methodological part would be desirable. Moreover, other theoretical perspectives (grand strategy, strategic culture) are discussed later on. Simply said, there is too much going on, and I feel some of these aspects could have been left out without negatively impacting on the actual analysis.
- Also, I am not sure how the discussion of domestic factors related to Chinese politics (e.g. perception of its own history) influences the assessment of the main hypotheses.
- I do not object the author's case selection. Nevertheless, it could be possible to ask why six case studies, which is quite a lot, and why these six. These questions are not completely answered in the thesis.

Minor criteria: -

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Overall evaluation: Andrew Porter has written a very interesting and complex Master's thesis whose main strength lies in the empirical part, which rather carefully examines specific case studies/ports (Chapter VI). I believe this part of the thesis makes some (limited) contribution to the existing literature by carefully introducing and comparing the set of case studies (which can be regarded as a good achievement). However, it seems to me that the thesis is almost too long and complex, lacking a well-articulated aim and an unambiguous path how to achieve the aim.

Suggested grade: C

Signature:

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