

Charles University

Faculty of Social
Sciences

Institute of Political Studies

Department of Security Studies

Master's Thesis Proposal

Chinese reaction to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine



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Motivation

Briefly describe your motivation for writing the thesis on a specific topic, this section should include the following (1-2 paragraphs):

- The research problem you identified, and you would like to address;
- Why you intend to write about this specific problem, including what research gap you seek to fill or what addition you intend to make to the existing research (e.g. adopting a new perspective);
- The formulation of research question(s) and/or hypotheses you would like to answer and/or examine in your research.

The 2022 invasion of Ukraine by the Russian forces marked an important milestone on the international arena, likely starting chain of events that will influence geopolitics of the entire decade. Vladimir Putin has demonstrated to the world community that an aggressive war of expansion on the European continent is not something unimaginable even for the 21st century. The war has ever since been closely monitored by virtually all the global powers, knowing that Russia's potential victory, or a weak Western response would set a very dangerous precedent. China for one, has quickly reacted to the smokescreen created by the war in Europe, rapidly increasing their activities in the South China Sea. In August 2022, China has launched a military exercise that has, for all intents and purposes, surrounded the island of Taiwan just one day after the speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, has concluded its official visit of the country.

On one hand, prior to the February 24th invasion, Beijing has embarked on a fairly friendly course towards Moscow, maintaining such attitude even shortly after the war has started. However, over time and with rising number of local Russia military failures, the situation has started to change considerably. Given the truly global consequences of the conflict, the external factors were increasingly pressuring China to pick a side, resulting in a significant change in Beijing's overall attitude towards Russia. Building up on this, the aim of this paper is to study, describe, and interpret Beijing's wavering level of support for Vladimir Putin. It stands on a hypothesis that China tends to support the anti-status quo and anti-western powers, in this case represented by the Russian Federation. Second hypothesis contemplate on reasons why China's support for Moscow

was so fragile by combining both the neo-liberal (Beijing's unwillingness to risk an international political and economic isolation) and realist (potentially dangerous precedent for their own aims with Taiwan) approach. Study will be conducted for a timeframe of the first nine months of the war, given the continuity and unpredictability of the conflict. The research question will thus be: "Why was Chinese reaction to the first nine months of the war in Ukraine changing over time and what why did Beijing rhetoric eventually became increasingly condemning towards the Russia operations in Ukraine?".

Literature Review

Here, please list 10 pieces of the existing scholarly literature (books or academic articles) related to your topic. In 1-2 sentences, say what the book/article is about and *why* it is important to refer to it in your literature review.

- J deLisle 2022 – China's Russia/Ukraine problem, and why it's bad for almost everyone else too

Author tries to underline the ever-growing importance of China in the global diplomatic arena, as the by far most important power of the anti-western camp as Russia faces increasing recession and diplomatic isolation. Similarly, the article covers impacts of the current turmoil on the Eastern border of Europe and its direct impact on Chinese approach toward the Indo-Pacific theatre.

- B Lo 2022 – Turning point? Putin, Xi, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine

Author is focusing on the limits of Sino-Russian relations, describing their alliance as pure strategic calculus, which is clearly displaying symptoms of disunity. Potential new course of actions from the Chinese side is likely to occur.

- J Mankoff 2022 – The war in Ukraine and Eurasia's New Imperial Movement

Article studies the aggressive stance of Russia projected toward its neighbours, contemplating to what degree such course of action can/will be adopted by other

countries, including China.

- Korolev & Portyakov, 2019 – Reluctant allies: System-unit dynamics and China-Russia relations

The article applies neorealist theories to describe the systemic and historical issues the recent Sino-Russia alliance has to face before any serious rapprochement can occur.

- Korolev, 2019 – On the verge of an alliance: Contemporary China-Russia military cooperation

The author argues that the warm mutual Sino-Russia relations have reached a stage resembling elements of a political and possibly even military alliance. Article tries to uncover necessary steps for this scenario to fully materialize, yet at the same time focuses on limits of such cooperation.

- Holland, 2017 – Ukraine and Taiwan: Small powers in the shadow of great power rivalries

The articles suggests that there is a parallel that can be drawn between the 2014 occupation of Crimea and a threat of possible occupation of Taiwan by the Chinese forces. Despite some obvious differences in both cases, author attempts to capture several shared characteristics of their unique scenarios and analyse the risks of a possible future Chinese aggression towards the island.

- Walt, 2010 - Realism and Security

Author summarizes basic concept of the realist approach in international relations, especially concerning security topics.

- Stein, 2008 – Neoliberal Institutionalism

Description of basic aspects of Neoliberal Institutionalism and its impacts on international order, as well as peace promoting tendencies

- Cabestan, 2007 – The Taiwan issue in Europe-China relations: An irritation more than leverage

The article describes the complex network of Asian-European diplomatic and historical

binds, the issue of moral standings against economic gains, all on the background of a overlapping issue of sovereignty and national determination.

- Valeriano, 2009 – The Tragedy of Offensive Realism: Testing Aggressive Power Politics models

The study addresses the complexity of the “Offensive realism” theory and put it to the test on various historical examples. Author instead offers two different theories which, according to the article, show better descriptive results than the Offensive Realism theory.

- Keohane & Martin, 1995 – The promise of institutionalist theory

The article describes the institutionalist theory and compares it with the Mearsheimer’s interpretation of realism.

Theoretical Framework

Please, briefly describe the theoretical approach you adopt to analysing your empirical data. Sometimes, you may need to outline your theoretical position through grand or middle-range theories (often, but not always, the case of researching IR phenomena), sometimes framing your research in theoretical concepts ‘only’ is mor-e pertinent (often, but not always, the case of researching certain Security Studies phenomena). At a more advanced level, you may also want to include a reference to your meta-theoretical perspective, ontological and epistemological assumptions (not required). Please, always discuss with your advisor what type of theoretical framework is sufficient and suitable for your type of research. Write in 1-2 paragraphs while saying *what* theoretical perspective you intend to apply and *why*.

The theoretical framework of the Master Thesis will consist of two main principles. Firstly, the realist framework which portray China as the traditional rival of the west. The actor in the international relations, who tries to change the status quo. The emerging power who wishes to challenge and eventually dethrone the current global leader – the United States. As such, the realist approach often naturally expects China to adopt any “anti-western” position, as long as

Beijing's own national interests are not too severely damaged by such decision. Such perception has a potential to lead us to a set of various conclusions. On one hand, we have the already mentioned anti-western solidarity of China towards Russia, which would very well describe the pre-war mutual sentiment, as well as the relatively conciliatory initial reaction of Beijing towards the Russian invasion in February. On the other hand, there is the ever-present realist imperative to follow one's national interest, and if supporting Russia would turn out to be significantly more damaging than beneficial to what China sees as its national interest, then it would be in allegiance with the realist principle to let Russia on its own (as could turn out to be the potential explanation for Beijing's later hesitance towards Russia or straight-forward support for Ukraine, as we see by the end of summer and over the autumn of 2022).

Secondly, there is the neoliberal institutionalist, a principle possibly explaining China's diminishing support for Russia, as she has chosen to uphold some norms of the international order. Whenever it was willingly or forced by the constraints of the international system, China is showing some hints of displeasure with the Russian way of conducting war and despite its relatively recently declared "friendship without limits", the reality already seems to have confronted them with quite a few.

Methodology

In the Methodology section, you are asked to say *what* methodological approach you adopt and *why* it is suitable for your analysis, it should include the following (1-2 paragraphs):

- Methodology Type: say whether you apply a qualitative, quantitative or mixed-methods methodological approach;
- Data Type/Data Collection Method: Say what kind of empirical data you are going to use in your research and where/how you are going to gather the data;
- Data Analysis: Say how you intend to analyse the empirical data, what method(s) or approaches to data analysis you want to apply;
- Outline preliminary conceptualization (primarily qualitative research designs) or operationalization (primarily quantitative research designs) you intend to apply to your

data analysis.

The methodology of the Thesis will be mostly consistent of qualitative nature of research, focusing on secondary sources and their analysis. The study will consist of a combination of various observation sources, medias, analytical institutions, non-profit organisations, reports, political statements, and expert assessments.

Suggested Thesis Structure

The suggested structure of your Master's Thesis could be based on the structure outlined below. However, it always depends on the type of research you aim to conduct and the final structure of your text depends on the kind of research design you decide to implement. Therefore, the structure of your Master's research should always be consulted with your academic advisor.

- Introduction
- Literature Review
- Theoretical Framework
- Methodology
- Empirical Findings
- Discussion of Empirical Findings
- Conclusions

References

List of references to the works referred to in the project, using the standard European citation format ISO 690 or other major citation standards, e.g. Chicago Manual of Style, Harvard referencing style, etc. Students should definitely consider using a citation manager (such as Mendeley, Zotero, etc.). For more on referencing, see our library website <https://knihovna.fsv.cuni.cz/rady-navody/jak-proc-citovat> (this version of the website is in Czech) or you can reach out to the Jinonice Library staff at citace@fsv.cuni.cz for further advice or personal consultation.

- Gerasymchuk, S., & Poita, Y. (2018). Ukraine-China after 2014: a new chapter in the relationship. *Kyiv: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. Gerasymchuk S. Poita Y.*
- Korolev, A., & Portyakov, V. (2019). Reluctant allies: System-unit dynamics and China-Russia relations. *International Relations, 33(1), 40-66.*
- Korolev, A. (2019). On the verge of an alliance: Contemporary China-Russia military cooperation. *Asian Security, 15(3), 233-252.*
- Holland, E. (2017). Ukraine and Taiwan: Small Powers in the Shadow of Great Power Rivalries. *World Policy Journal, 3(1), 107-118.*
- deLisle, J. (2022). China's Russia/Ukraine Problem, and Why It's Bad for Almost Everyone Else Too. *Orbis, 66(3), 402-423.*
- Lo, B. (2022). Turning point? Putin, Xi, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
- Mankoff, J. (2022). The War in Ukraine and Eurasia's New Imperial Moment. *The Washington Quarterly, 45(2), 127-147.*
- Walt, S. M. (2010). Realism and security. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies.*
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- Cabestan, J. P. (2007). The Taiwan issue in Europe–China relations: An irritant more than leverage. In *China-Europe Relations* (pp. 98-116). Routledge.
- Valeriano, B. (2009). The tragedy of offensive realism: testing aggressive power politics models. *International Interactions, 35(2), 179-206.*
- Keohane, R. O., & Martin, L. L. (1995). The promise of institutionalist theory. *International security, 20(1), 39-51.*