



Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

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Title: *Chinese reaction to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine*

Programme/year: Bezpečnostní studia se specializací Globální a regionální bezpečnost / 3. ročník

Author of Evaluation (second reader): Mgr. Michal Šenk

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Research question, definition of objectives	10	8
	Theoretical/conceptual framework	30	25
	Methodology, analysis, argument	40	33
<i>Total</i>		80	66
Minor Criteria			
	Sources	10	5
	Style	5	5
	Formal requirements	5	5
<i>Total</i>		20	15
TOTAL		100	81



Evaluation

Major criteria:

Research question, research objectives

The student sets out to investigate the broad question of whether and how the War in Ukraine impacted the Sino-Russian relations. To that end, he defines a specific research question – namely: “Why did China not oppose Russia’s invasion of Ukraine despite its long-lasting tradition of non-interference policy?”. This is a valid and important question that relates to the wider puzzle and is worth pursuing. However, it seems that for the purposes of the thesis it proves almost too restrictive: throughout the thesis we learn that the student intends to study – and then actually studies – not just this one specific aspect of the Sino-Russian relations but a number of additional dynamics that make up the whole. This is not a problem per se but the student should take greater care to properly define his research objectives – and, following that, research questions, which could be more than one – because, failing that, the reader is at times at a loss to understand where the thesis is heading, why, and to what argument it is ultimately building up. This is not to say that the analytical directions presented later on are not worth pursuing or that the student did not have a clear vision in mind. A better specification at the onset would, however, give the thesis the kind of focus it sometimes lacks.

Theoretical / conceptual framework

To answer his research question, the student seeks to harness the potential of neoclassical realism (NCR). This is a laudable choice, as the theoretical framework, with its ability to focus on the interplay of systemic and domestic forces and constraints, does have the capacity to account for the apparent anomaly – that is, China’s ‘breach’ of its non-interference policy in the context of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. However, it seems that the student does not tap into the full potential of the NCR approach. This is apparent already at the theoretical/conceptual level: while the student nicely overviews the basic parameters, characteristics as well as shortcomings of neoclassical realism, he spends considerably less time actually conceptualizing and operationalizing the approach for the purposes of the thesis. The student defines his variables but does not specify their properties or the relationships between them; nor does he suggest concrete indicators that can be used for the deployment of the framework. With such intervening variables as, for instance, strategic culture, this is somewhat problematic, and a more thoroughgoing debate would be warranted. The same goes for the proper specification of the independent variable: the system level. What factors, forces, constraints are to be considered in this respect? This is not a major issue at the MA level but is worth mentioning, especially as it makes the student’s life much harder in the analytical part.



Methodology, analysis, argument

The analytical part – or rather parts – brings a number of interesting insights into the dynamics of the Sino-Russian relations, both in the context of the War in Ukraine and China's non-interference policy. However, the analysis suffers from the problems identified in the two above sections – that is, mainly the fact that the objective(s) of the thesis are not always clear and the under-specification of the neoclassical realist approach. As things stand, there are four separate analytical sections that do not communicate with one another somewhat fluently. While they are brought together to formulate a response to the research question in chapter 7 and partially the conclusion, the combination seems a little cumbersome, leaving the reader wondering whether a different structure would not be preferable. A fuller utilization of the neoclassical realist framework would be helpful in this respect, as it would help the student structure the analytical logic. The story could read as follows: *What has been the impact of the war on the relations?* (currently ch. 6), *Why has the impact been so minimal, especially given China's non-interference policy?* From there, the student would follow the neoclassical realist logic and move systematically from the system level to domestic factors, focusing on how the policy interacts with a variety of other variables. At this moment, the findings can be excavated from the analysis but they do not logically follow from it, diminishing their validity and reliability. Also, it seems that a lot of the explaining in the thesis is done through recourse to the historical overview and the converging and diverging factors found in part 1. This is a problem not least because certain segments of the part are based exclusively on a single author, at times making the 'description' one-sided or even biased. In the end, it seems a wasted opportunity not to make use of the actual potential of neoclassical realism, as it would not only make the analysis more cohesive but also make the results more robust (more on that below).

Minor criteria:

Stylistically and formally the thesis does not exhibit major issues. What needs to be highlighted, however, is the work's somewhat cavalier approach to referencing. At times, whole paragraphs go without a reference to an external source, primary or secondary. While this does not necessarily scream plagiarism, it certainly diminishes the robustness of whatever arguments are formulated based on the claims contained in the paragraphs. This is a consistent issue throughout the thesis and it is troublesome especially given the fact, as mentioned above, that the analysis does not easily lend itself to the results of the work. Consequently, some arguments or authoritative claims found in the thesis seem more like the result of 'deus ex machina' than conceptually-informed empirical analysis.



Assessment of plagiarism:

No signs of plagiarism were found.

Overall evaluation:

Overall, this is a fine MA thesis that attempts to shed light on a crucial and timely puzzle in today's international relations. The thesis demonstrates the student's command of the overarching issue at hand – the intricacies of the Sino-Russian relations – and the debates surrounding it. It also shows the student capable of solid empirical investigation. What the thesis suffers from is an unclear objective, under-specified and thus under-utilized theoretical framework, and a problematic referencing style, all of which commonly diminish the reliability and validity of the thesis' findings.

Suggested grade:

The grade suggested based on my reading is B.

Signature: