



## Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: Doan, Phu Nguyen

Title: Asia-Pacific Rebalance: New Realities in Traditional U.S. Alliances in the Region

Programme/year: MAIN/2017

Author of Evaluation (external assessor): Dr. Ondrej Ditrych

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
<b>Major Criteria</b>			
	Research question, definition of objectives	10	<b>5</b>
	Theoretical/conceptual framework	30	<b>27</b>
	Methodology, analysis, argument	40	<b>35</b>
<i>Total</i>		80	<b>67</b>
<b>Minor Criteria</b>			
	Sources	10	<b>10</b>
	Style	5	<b>5</b>
	Formal requirements	5	<b>5</b>
<i>Total</i>		20	<b>20</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>		100	<b>87</b>



## Evaluation

### Major criteria:

The thesis' objective is to examine the development of three alliances between the U.S. and its partners in the Asia-Pacific region – Japan, South Korea and Australia – effected by the rebalance, or 'pivot' initiative under President Obama's administration (2010-2016). Comparing these cases against each other, the author seeks to test three hypotheses derived from defensive realism, trade liberalism and constructivism. The thesis successfully employs causal analysis by means of a combination of thoughtfully crafted research design and robust empirical analysis (controlled comparison), which is executed in a systematic manner. The conclusion that the differences across cases may be explained by the hypotheses derived both from the defensive realist and liberal theory can therefore be considered to be presented convincingly and to carry sufficient validity.

That said, the thesis suffers from several shortcomings. In the literature review, which otherwise provides a balanced introduction to the subject matter, the linkage between diminished global standing of the U.S. – and the recognition thereof by the Obama administration – and the rebalancing initiative (i.e. redirection of limited resources from elsewhere) appears missing. More significantly, the liberal hypothesis assumes a relationship between trade interdependence (measured as relative amount of trade with the partner in the dyad) and more extensive *economic* cooperation which seems *donnée*; rather than *political* relationship (co-)determined by the economic base. It is also not clear why shared adherence to the norm of global trade liberalisation ought to be included as an indicator of intensity of trade cooperation. Perhaps most seriously, the objective of the thesis (explaining variations in 'development') does not seem to be entirely congruent with the RQ and the actual analysis which seeks only to explain variation in the state of the alliance(s) statically. In other words, no attempt is made to account for possible change in either alliance as a result of the initiative, which would have necessitated a comparison with the previous state of these alliances; and perhaps also a better separation of security concerns related to (*rising*) China and (*rogue*) North Korea, with the rebalancing initiative arguably only being related to the former.



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**Minor criteria:**

The thesis draws on an impressive array of sources and the author competently draws upon them to produce a rich empirical narrative. The thesis is also executed very well in terms of form and style, and is clearly and logically structured.

**Overall evaluation:**

The thesis successfully employs a comparative causal analysis to test hypotheses derived from three different theories to explain variations across the selected cases. The analysis is based on a sound and generally thoughtfully developed research design, and is empirically robust. Therefore, while it departs somewhat from its stated objective, the thesis may be considered a very satisfying example of qualitative causal research.

**Suggested grade:**

Excellent / Very Good

**Signature:**