

## REPORT ON THE MASTER THESIS

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

<b>Title of the thesis:</b>	<i>Arguing against the universality of Liberal-Democracy: The case of Singapore</i>
<b>Author of the thesis:</b>	<b>Ploy-Pailine Devillers</b>
<b>Referee (incl. titles):</b>	<b>Dr. Janusz Salamon, Ph.D.</b>

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

**1) Theoretical background:** The subject matter of the thesis called for a complex theoretical framework, largely due to the overlap of the political and economic, as well as broader philosophical questions. Ms. Devillers has been aware of the need for such framework and some parts of it (e.g., the analysis of the possible classifications of democratic political systems) prove this point. But bringing together the political and economic considerations called for more subtle theoretical distinctions (for example, the question – that is being asked also in the current Chinese context - to what extent positive economic consequences justify the coercive polices has been left largely unexplored)

**2) Contribution:**

The thesis has a length of a longer scholarly paper (ca. 13000 words), therefore given the ambitious scope of the research plan, one could not expect a detailed and an in-depth exploration of the subject matter. What we get instead is something like an elaborate outline of the research “landscape” that might be explored in greater depth. Having said that, I believe that the arguments in favour of the main claim of the work that are at least sketched, if not always fully explored, are interesting and certainly prove the familiarity of the author with the current debate on this very important topic (of the future direction – towards political pluralism or political uniformity – of the global political development. For this Ms. Devillers deserves a credit (which largely justifies this rather high grade I recommend to award for this thesis). However, the actualisation of the fuller potential of this research project required more time and energy, and arguably more writing space, than proved to be possible to devote by our otherwise busy author.

**3) Methods:**

The author is aware that the work he curved out for himself requires a combination of (a) methodology typical of political philosophy (involving conceptual analysis, attention to the coherence of the defended philosophical position and to the cogency of the argument brought about to bear on the matter) and (b) the methods of qualitative and quantitative analysis typical of political science interacting with economics. These methods could be put into a better use, if the work would be properly expanded.

**4) Literature:** While the Bibliography includes some of the key recent publications in the field, the content of the Literature Review and the analysis of the references in the text suggest that the actual reading was rather restricted and not necessarily optimally selected The Literature Review focuses on just few authors, none of whom devotes much attention to the Singapore model. Moreover, some of the publications referred to are rather old. (Incidentally, M. Nussbaum’s and J. Rawls’ work that featured in the Thesis Proposal might indeed be helpful in expanding the politological exploration of the main hypotheses of the work. Niether Nussbaum nor Rawls appear in the final version of the work and bringing H. Arendt instead does appear somewhat arbitrary).

**5) Manuscript form:**

The work does contain all the essential ingredients of a good Master’s thesis and is fairly carefully and logically organised, with relatively few typos and with consistent referencing style.

Ploy-Pailine Devillers worked on her thesis for over 2 years. She has been remarkably independent in the realisation of her research plan which has been consulted with me and also with my colleague Prof. Graham Parkes who specialises in the field and lectures at the National
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University of Singapore. As is evident from the comparison of her Thesis Proposal and the Table of Contents of the final version of the thesis, the focus of her work has shifted significantly to include the economic considerations to a far greater degree than initially expected. This shift had, in my opinion, its benefits (it provided a basis for the utilitarian argument that a political system that delivers widespread welfare of the citizens gains in this way legitimacy), but also disadvantages (resulted in a less extensive political exploration of the the subject matter).

**Suggested questions for the defence are:**

- (1) Given that you argue that the political system of Singapore has many virtues and lacks many vices of the Western liberal democracy, how would you argue against the Singapore model being actually superior to the Western liberal democracy? Why not to argue that the Singapore model is indeed superior and therefore this model deserves to be applied in other parts of the world (and perhaps the current model of government adopted by China is in fact a result of such application of the Singapore model – or is it NOT?).
- (2) How would you respond to the following line of argument put forward by the defender of the universal superiority of liberal democracy (as opposed to illiberal democracy of the Singapore type: If the Singapore model has certain virtues which the mainstream Western liberal democracies lack (which virtues exactly?), it only proves that the Western liberal democracies are in need of reform to accommodate the virtues found in the Singapore model (and to eliminate the vices that are present in the Western liberal democracies). Such reformed Western liberal democratic model will then be superior to the illiberal democratic models, because it will possess all the virtues of the Singapore model without the shortcomings of the Singapore model (or do you argue that the Singapore model has no shortcomings?).
- (3) In your Thesis Proposal you mentioned Martha Nussbaum and John Rawls as two influential contemporary political philosophers on whose work you intended to rely to defend the main hypothesis of your work. Would you be able to elaborate what in your opinion would Nussbaum and Rawls have to say about the political system of Singapore. How would they qualify the political system of Singapore given their own political assumptions?

**I recommend the thesis for final defence. I recommend the following grade: “B”.**

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

CATEGORY	POINTS
<i>Theoretical background (max. 20 points)</i>	15
<i>Contribution (max. 20 points)</i>	15
<i>Methods (max. 20 points)</i>	18
<i>Literature (max. 20 points)</i>	15
<i>Manuscript form (max. 20 points)</i>	18
<b>TOTAL POINTS (max. 100 points)</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>The proposed grade (A-B-C-D-E-F)</b>	<b>B</b>

*Janusz Salamon*

**DATE OF EVALUATION: 17.1.2019**

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**Referee Signature**