

REPORT ON THE MASTER THESIS

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

Title of the thesis:	Arguing against the universality of Liberal-Democracy: The case of Singapore
Author of the thesis:	Ploy-Pailine Devillers
Referee (incl. titles):	Mgr.Martin Riegl, PhD.

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

1) Theoretical background:

The author has chosen an interesting and topical issue which is an analysis of the political regime of Singapore and its economic/security performance/output. Ploy ask herself a question, whether non-liberal-democracy (I would rather recommend to use the term illiberal, see F.Zakaria's seminal monograph, which is btw missing in the list of sources) can be successful in economics, institutions, and politically, and subsequently defines 3 hypotheses (although she explicitly talks about 2 only – p.5. The last hypothesis is very normative, when she asks the “Singaporean Model” is as good as the Western model (see p. 5), but it's not a hypothesis per se.

The paper is framed within the concept of liberal democracy (normative theories of democracy) and theories linking economic performance with the liberal-democratic style of government. However, the author has decided to reduce the scope of paper to criteria of efficiency only, while a normative aspect (mostly issues related to constitutional liberalism are widely ignored).

2) Contribution:

The contribution of the paper is rather dubious. Asking whether Singapore is full-fledged liberal democracy is relative trivial as it's deficiencies are obvious. Secondly, there are problems regarding the conceptualization. The author completely ignores the term of illiberal democracy which could nicely described Singaporean realities. Also the notion of governmental legitimacy should be widely discussed, without it making any recommendations is a bit uncomplete and flat. Besides that I would recommend to ask what the Singaporean political system is rather it's not, there is a great variety of authoritarian regimes with very different qualities (such as dictablanda, democratura etc.). As I said earlier, it's deviation from liberal democratic norms is clear, but the range of such entities is really wide – stretching from Latin to Middle America, North to South Africa, Central Asia etc. And all of them have really variable outputs economically and politically wise, some are close to tyrannical regimes, others are relative open. Also some partial conclusions are misleading, I would strongly argue with theoretical assumption about liberal democratic countries trading only among each other (p.44) – so where are they buying crude oil and natural gas from?

Lastly, I am much in favor of normative papers, but narrowing outputs (success of the regime) to function economy and institutions is too much for me. When we look at the fastest growing economies last year, most of them are not liberal democracies, maybe even relatively stable (btw it was Mogadisho 2000's that was called the capital of capitalism). So avoiding issues such a freedom of media (freedom in general), political participation, civic rights etc. is barely acceptable. To sum it up, the reader ends up knowing that Singapore is not a liberal democracy but what it really is remains to be hidden. Conclusions based on 3 hypotheses (Singapore does not need a liberal democracy to economically flourish, to have stable institutions and thus it's the same good as liberal democracies. No it's not really, because it is exactly what the liberal democracy is not about, but you would have to read F.Zakaria first!

3) Methods:

The author claims to use the comparative approach in order to compare particular features of Singaporean internal system and its subsystems such as politics, economics, media, social etc.

4) Literature:

First of all it would be helpful to divide sources into monographs, articles and other sources such as internet, primary sources etc. Regarding the core of the thesis, it's pretty striking the author has not worked with Zakaria's monographs, also using additional authors dealing with types of authoritarian regime would be helpful.

5) Manuscript form:

The thesis meets of all formal criteria required by the Faculty of Social Sciences, it has clear (logical) structure comprising five chapters, defined goal of the thesis, hypotheses, methods, theories etc. From the formal point of view, typos appear relatively often throughout the texts.

Box for the thesis supervisor only. Please characterize the progress in the working out of thesis (e.g., steady and gradual versus discontinuous and abrupt) and the level (intensity) of communication/cooperation with the author:

...

Suggested questions for the defence are:

Using a variety of authoritarian regimes, how would you describe the Singaporean?

I recommend the thesis for final defence.

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

CATEGORY	POINTS
<i>Theoretical background (max. 20 points)</i>	12
<i>Contribution (max. 20 points)</i>	7
<i>Methods (max. 20 points)</i>	18
<i>Literature (max. 20 points)</i>	15
<i>Manuscript form (max. 20 points)</i>	18
TOTAL POINTS (max. 100 points)	70
The proposed grade (A-B-C-D-E-F)	D

DATE OF EVALUATION: 2.1.2019

Referee Signature

Overall grading scheme at FSV UK:

TOTAL POINTS	GRADE	Quality standard
91 – 100	A	= outstanding (high honour)
81 – 90	B	= superior (honour)
71 – 80	C	= good
61 – 70	D	= satisfactory
51 – 60	E	= low pass at a margin of failure

0 – 50	F	= failing. The thesis is not recommended for defence.
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The referee should give comments to the following requirements:

1) THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: Can you recognize that the thesis was guided by some **theoretical fundamentals** relevant to this thesis topic? Were some important theoretical concepts **omitted**? Was the theory used in the thesis consistently **incorporated with the topic** and hypotheses tested? Has the author demonstrated a genuine **understanding** of the theories addressed?

Strong	Average	Weak	
20	15	< 10	points

2) CONTRIBUTION: Evaluate if the author presents **original ideas** on the topic and aims at demonstrating **critical thinking** and the ability to draw **conclusions** based on the knowledge of relevant theory and relevant empirical material. Is there a distinct **value added** of the thesis (relative to knowledge of a university-educated person interested in given topic)? Did the author explain **why** the observed phenomena occurred? Were the **policy implications** well founded?

Strong	Average	Weak	
20	15	< 10	points

3) METHODS: Are the **hypotheses** for this study clearly stated, allowing their further **verification and testing**? Are the theoretical explanations, empirical material and **analytical tools** used in the thesis relevant to the research question being investigated, and adequate to the aspiration level of the study? Is the thesis **topic comprehensively analyzed** and does the thesis not make trivial or **irrelevant detours** off the main body stated in the thesis proposal? More than 12 points signal an exceptional work, **which requires your explanation "why" it is so**.

Strong	Average	Weak	
20	15	< 10	points

4) LITERATURE REVIEW: The thesis demonstrates the author's full understanding and **command of recent literature**. The author **quotes** relevant literature in a **proper way** and works with a **representative bibliography**. (Remarks: references to Wikipedia, websites and newspaper articles are a sign of **poor research**. If they dominate, you cannot give more than 8 points. References to books published by prestigious publishers and articles in renowned journals give a much better impression. Any sort of **plagiarism** disqualifies the thesis from admission to defence.)

Strong	Average	Weak	
20	15	< 10	points

5) MANUSCRIPT FORM: The thesis is **clear and well structured**. The author uses appropriate **language and style**, including the academic **format for quotations**, graphs and tables. The text effectively refers to graphs and tables, is easily readable and **stimulates thinking**. The text is free from typos and easy to comprehend.

Strong	Average	Weak	
20	15	< 10	points

Remarks for the referees:

- 1) Download the thesis from the SIS. If you have no access to SIS, please ask the secretary of IPS (jana.krejcikova@fsv.cuni.cz, tel. 251 080 214) for sending you the thesis by e-mail.
- 2) Use the IEPS Thesis Report form only for your comments. **It is a standard at the FSV UK that the Referee's Report is at least 400 words.** In case you assess the thesis as "non-defendable", please explain the concrete reasons for that in detail.
- 3) Retain your critical stance. You cannot confer more than 80 points upon a thesis that does not satisfy research standards in top European universities.
- 4) Upload the Report as PDF/A file into the SIS. Instructions on how to convert .DOCx to PDF/A): „Save as“ – select „PDF“ – check-in „Options or Možnosti“ that „PDF options“ tick „ISO 19005-1 compliant /kompatibilní s/ (PDF/A)“ – „Save“. If you have no access to SIS, please send the unsigned PDF file to the secretary of IPS (jana.krejcikova@fsv.cuni.cz).
- 5) Please deliver to the IPS Secretariat, U Kříže 8, 15800 Praha 5 Jinonice, **two hand-signed** originals. Unfortunately, a photocopied report with signature does not suffice. Sorry.
- 6) Your Report will be remunerated, so we need also your account information (separate from this form).