



## Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: Yiyi Du

Title: Priorities of China's Climate Policy: An Analysis of the Policy Formulation

Programme/year: International Relations, 2021

Author of Evaluation (external assessor): Jakub Tesař

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
<b>Major Criteria</b>			
	Research question, definition of objectives	<b>10</b>	9
	Theoretical/conceptual framework	<b>30</b>	25
	Methodology, analysis, argument	<b>40</b>	24
<i>Total</i>		<b>80</b>	58
<b>Minor Criteria</b>			
	Sources	<b>10</b>	8
	Style	<b>5</b>	3
	Formal requirements	<b>5</b>	3
<i>Total</i>		<b>20</b>	14
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>100</b>	72



## Evaluation

Major criteria:

The thesis seeks to determine particular factors which have influenced China's changing climate regime policy. By focusing on the world's biggest GHGs emitter, the thesis poses a highly relevant and actual question. It chooses process-tracing to expose concrete causal mechanisms that may be behind the recent move to a more stringent climate change policy of the country.

The thesis identifies a substantial gap in the literature and proposes a viable method to address the research question. In chapter 4 author describes the evolution of China's climate policy from 1988 to 2019. Chapter 5 analyses the impact of 5 factors: vulnerability to climate change, abatement costs, socialisation to international norms, domestic institutional design, and epistemic community/public opinion. These reflect appropriate theoretical options of interest-based theory, literature on international norms, epistemic communities, or bureaucratic models of foreign policy formation.

Even though the methodology is well-formed and explained in chapter 3 (p 19-23), it sets an ambitious task that is not performed well in the later parts of the thesis. The author works with valid hypotheses and operationalises the variables, but the evidence is somewhat anecdotal. Instead of concrete causal mechanisms, the conclusions of individual sections often build on a simple correlation between the observed result (more stringent policy) and possible drivers of this trend. The possible reason for this is the reliance on the secondary literature and statistical data, which does not allow more details than discussion general trends. The conclusions, where the author confirms specific hypotheses and declines others, are not well supported and seem arbitrary.

In respect to individual researched dimensions

- H1 – it is unclear whether the hypothesis is really about country's vulnerability or rather perception of vulnerability (which is a title of section 5.1); it is realistic to expect that vulnerability change so quickly in observed period?; author reaches an unsupported conclusion that even though the vulnerability is high, the "priority is lower than domestic economic development" (p 51)
- H2 – it is unclear why the author takes 2,5 kg of CO<sub>2</sub>/\$ for a significant threshold; why are not the abatement costs seen on a scale instead of too simplifying dichotomy; the conclusions are based rather on correlation than any specific causal mechanism



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- H3 – discussion of Common but Differentiated Responsibility principle seems to somewhat blur the argument; if China accepts international norm of fairness between developing and developed countries (CBDR), according to which developing countries should not bear the costs, this will not lead to more stringent policies on their part; discussion of the logic of appropriateness would be apt here (with connection to the self-perception and ambition of China to be(come) a responsible power)
- H4 – hypothesis is very general; it is unclear in what way should the changes in institutional design impact police formation; it is unclear why all the institutional reforms should “contribute [to] a more efficient policy formulation system” (p 60), why it does undermine the functioning of the system instead; simple involvement of NDRC in the system does not prove that “China perceives climate change more than an environmental issue, but essentially a national development issue” (p 62)
- H5/6 - discussing mistrust in IPCC influence as promoting Western interest, but is not part of the hypothesis; it seems to contradict the epistemic communities’ argument

In many respects, the thesis offers very insightful insights into the formation of climate change policy in China, but, probably mainly because of missing sources that would provide more material to trace the process, fail to deliver this ambitious goal. The thesis highlights the institutional changes, focusing on the various transformation of responsible actors, but without more details and critical discussion of what the changes mean for the policy itself. The whole thesis entirely omits to include the high-level negotiations between US and Chinese officials (2014-15), which seems to have influenced the Chinese stance in the wake of the climate conference in Paris.

There seem to be numerous argumentation flaws, mainly in the results section:

- in places, the thesis confuses carbon intensity of production and overall level of carbon emission (p 10 it is the first time China has accepted the “emission reduction targets”, p 24 “reducing its total CO2 emission”)
- “China has increased its GDP significantly with quadrupling it, it has doubled the energy consumption between 1980 and 2000. As a matter of fact, the energy demand growth rate was higher than that of GDP (L. Liu 2011)” (p 33) – the numbers do not add here
- “Policy makers and experts also agreed to reduce the coal consumption, since coal is perceived as the most reliable energy source by China and energy security remains a dominate factor” (p 41)
- “China has managed to change its image from a passive participant to a proactive actor in global change effort” (p 44) – according to what criteria?
- “policy stringency [of China] has shifted ... from low to high” (p 44) – it is growing, but all countries follow the same trend; in 2011, according to OECD, China was behind all OECD countries, in 2015, only Turkey scored lower



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- “renewable energy sources like solar power are not commercially profitable” (p 54) – outdated information, citing comparison of coal-produced and wind-produced energy from 2004
- “other countries also tend to perceive China as responsible power in regards to climate change” (p 58) – what countries? According to what criteria?
- “Chinese IPCC experts have double identity ... they have to pursue China’s national interests ... [as well as] provide the latest scientific knowledge to decision-makers” (p 66) – why we expect scientists should pursue the national interest? it is contradicting the idea of an epistemic community
- “we can confirm the China’s climate change policy has experienced a positive transition” (p 69) – in what sense? in the given period, China has become the biggest polluter in the world, and its emissions increased drastically

Minor criteria:

The thesis is lengthy and repetitive in places. Some edits would make it more readable, less reliant on secondary literature and focusing more on elaborating own conclusions. There are numerous language issues throughout the whole thesis.

The thesis is well-sourced, but the author still has not avoided some shortcomings

- two Heggelunds are cited in the text, but it only results from two different transcriptions of a first name
- some direct citations do not specify the page (e.g., p 18, Haas)
- some references to particular sources are without an in-text reference (p 13, “defined by IPCC”)
- P. T. Jackson’s book is missing in the bibliography
- references are mentioned only after the whole paragraph (e.g., p 39); therefore, it is unclear what they exactly refer to
- some parts depend heavily on Liguang Liu’s dissertation (Liu 2011)

Figures are welcomed in the thesis as they help to clarify the argument. However, minor issues are connected to their presentation (figure 4 (p 49) – missing axis scale and exact source; figure 5 (p 53) – wrong scale in the title)



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Overall evaluation:

The thesis deal with a highly relevant topic of climate change policy formation in China. It chooses an appropriate process-tracing method and provides a good overview and important insights regarding how a country's vulnerability, abatement costs, socialisation to international norms, domestic institutional design, and epistemic community/public opinion may influence the dependent variable. However, the processes are not traced in detail, and the respective conclusions instead build on general trends. The thesis builds on rich bibliography but could reflect it more critically and be more precise in the argumentation.

Suggested grade: C

Signature: