

EXAMINER'S REPORT ON THE PH.D. THESIS

Study programme: Ph.D. Programme of International Relations

Institution: Departments of International Relations and Security Studies
Institute of Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University in Prague

Thesis Topic: Between Power and Perception: Analysing China's Influence in International Relations

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Relevance of the topic, contribution of the Ph.D. thesis:

First of all, I would like to stress, that the **quality of Mrs. Ivana Karásková's Ph.D. thesis is very high, obviously better-than-average**. Her careful examination of the topic has provided many useful insights into the problem of China's power, influence and its perception in selected countries, with a special focus on Europe and the Czech Republic.

The thesis' topic is **very relevant and important** as wide-ranging discussions about Chinese political and economic influence both in the European Union and Czech Republic have intensified radically during the last years. Today, China is the EU's second-biggest trading partner (according to the total volume of trade in goods in 2018) and one of the major investors in the EU. With the country's growing economic power and influence, Chinese foreign policy and its actors have become very active, self-confident and assertive. Conflicting and non-transparent goals, methods and tools of the Chinese foreign policy in Asia, Africa and other regions; strengthening power of the Communist Party of China (especially after Mr. Xi Jinping's assumption of power) or growing Chinese military power – these and some other factors naturally and understandably raise many concerns about the future role of China in international relations.

Research design and empirics of the Ph.D. thesis:

The thesis' research design includes **appropriate theoretical framing; selected research methods are consistent** with the thesis' overall goals ("to more firmly establish the concept of influence and distinguish it from power"; "to explain the methods the actor (i.e. China) uses to impose its will, interests or preferences on the others, and the receiver's (i.e. the Czech Republic's) reactions to such efforts" – as stated in the thesis' introduction, pp. 4-5). **The research design is innovative and original**; structure of the thesis is **logical, compact** and well arranged. The first chapter includes adequate theoretical framework and an **adequate literature review**. The thesis provides different viewpoints on the complex and difficult issues

such as “influence”, “power” and “perception” in international relations. The second chapter covers manifestations of China’s growing power in the international system, including the necessary polemic about China’s soft power, public diplomacy and propaganda as well. The last chapter offers **appropriate and very useful case study** of the perception of China’s economic and political rise in the Czech Republic.

The **empirical, in-depth case study on China’s image in the Czech Republic** during the period of 2010-mid-2017 (Chapter 3.3) is innovative, original and inspiring as well. The data is based on both quantitative and qualitative analysis of 1,257 Czech media outputs. The **methods used in the case study are well and clearly explained** (Chapter 3.3.2), including some limitations of the study. Coding of the sentiment (on a three-point Likert-type scale) in the second-level agenda setting research of China’s image in Czech media may be disputable (the difference between “positive” and “negative” tone of the article might be tiny; three values of sentiment per one article might be not enough etc.). On the other hand, the author is aware of the above-mentioned and other questionable points. The media analysis has been properly supplemented by very **good graphs and visualisation**. I also appreciate basic comparisons of the Czech media discourse on China with the media discourse in Slovak, Hungarian and Polish media (in spite of different period covered in these analyses etc.). Conclusions of the thesis are well considered.

The final version of the thesis has been lengthened (from 254,395 to 329,024 characters!; it contains brand new chapters – 3.3.2 and 3.3.5) and modified substantially but still functionally – the author has reflected the reviewers’ comments carefully. I highly appreciate these changes and Ms. Karásková’s comments on the reviews as well. The final thesis is more complex, more coherent and better arranged.

In my first review I especially suggested more detailed analysis of China’s economic and military power (chapter 2.1.1). Mr. Karásková has elaborated on this point adequately; she has added important macroeconomic figures and tables (note: in Figure 8, the measure of the y-axis seems to be inadequate – there are “billions” instead of % (?), providing long-term data as well. I also suggested adding public opinion polls and surveys on China in the Czech Republic – now, this is appropriately reflected in chapter 3.3.5.

Style, language and other comments:

The **thesis’ language is well readable and style is both refined and very advanced**. There are no major typing errors and formal/technical errors.

Last but not least, I also would like to highly **appreciate Mrs. Karásková’s academic and public activities** both in the Czech Republic and other countries, her **systematic and constructive interactions with China scholars** and observers (including well-known researchers, for example Mr. David Shambaugh). Mrs. Karásková has been presenting her academic findings on China’s image and influence in the Czech Republic through different channels on a long-term basis. I think, her **projects are praiseworthy and have a very good potential to counterbalance some extreme and one-sided public discussions about China** in the Czech Republic.

Conclusion of the evaluation:

The submitted Ph.D thesis is recommended for the final defence at the Charles University. From my point of view, Mr. Ivana Karásková has done an admirable job; has demonstrated a deep theoretical knowledge of the topic and great analytical skills. Her doctoral dissertation thesis meets the accepted standards and fulfils the criteria and requirements for a Ph.D thesis.

Questions/topics to be raised during the defence:

1. What do you think about the general direction, methods, tools and scope of China's **soft power in the V4 countries**? In which countries is China more successful? Why?
2. Have you **directly asked Czech managers/representatives of the questionable media** (Týden, TV Barrandov) about the change in the reporting and coverage of China after the Chinese co-owner (CEFC) entered these media (as mentioned at pp. 117-119)? What do you think about interviews and discussions about your analysis' conclusions with the selected media or agenda setters (at least some of them)? Maybe this could be another topic for the future research (not to be included in this thesis).
3. The Czech media discourse on China is questionable from many points of view. What do you think about the Czech media **discourse on other strong east, south and south-eastern Asian countries**? In my opinion, the coverage of e.g. Japan or South Korea is much weaker than the coverage of China (the same could be true for Indonesia, Thailand etc.), which might be unusual or strange considering the importance of Japan and South Korea among foreign direct investors in the Czech Republic. The comparison of the media discourse on these countries with the media coverage on China could be interesting. What do you think about this issue?
4. **Do you plan (you or your colleagues from AMO) to continue** with the analysis of media discourse on China and other countries in the future (in the thesis, you mention expansion and replication of your research on Russia and other powers)?

Doc. Ing. Zuzana Stuchlíková, Ph.D.

In Prague, September 15st 2019