MASTER´S EXAMINER REPORT

GPS – Geopolitical Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Thesis title:	China's High-Speed Railway Diplomacy (HSRD) as a Tool for Improving Soft Power
Name of Student:	**Lanyu Xiu**
Referee *(incl. titles)*:	**Bohumil Doboš, Ph.D.**
Report Due Date:	**18.6.2021**

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

1) Contribution and argument:
The research idea based on presenting domestic perceptions of Chinese foreign policy through a HSRD case study is valid and interesting. Given the methodological approach (see below) it should have been possible to come up with important contribution, especially given the author´s language skills and access to local experts. Nonetheless, the thesis has major shortcomings. While the methodological issues will be discussed below, the work is not developed in a way that would make a data-driven argument. The second research question is not based on any in-depth analysis of the official perceptions Chinese foreign policy makers. Also, the two projects themselves are not presented in the text. On p. 52 Bombay-Ahmadabad railway is mentioned as Japanese and not Chinese. Given the methodological shortcomings, the work does not make a large contribution to the field. The final analysis does not connect any coherent theoretical or conceptual framework to the data available. The analytical part should also be deeper.

2) Theoretical and methodological framework:
The thesis is theoretically rooted in critical approaches to geopolitics which is appropriate. Methodology of survey is in general also well picked. Nonetheless, the surveys themselves are showing major weaknesses. It is unclear how was the groups of 100 experts selected. No questionnaires are available. The questions are often unclear – e.g., it is not clear for whom the financial, political social impacts are measured. On the other hand, the number of answers is very high. Also, the thesis promises to connect the answers with Ramo´s work on perceptions of China but that is not done. The second RQ is not developed at all but for one paragraph which is insufficient.

3) Sources and literature:
Citations and bibliography are correct. The high number of sources is used mainly for literature review section. The methodological part is mainly uncited, which might be one of the causes for the flaws in methodological design. Given the fact that the work is mainly based on questionnaires, the lower number of sources is not an issue per se.

4) Manuscript form and structure:
Manuscript form is OK, structure of the text is logical.

5) Quality of presentation
The quality of language is good. The text, however, has two formal issues. First is the fact that the words are often cut into two parts by the end of the line without any logic. Second, the spacing is making the text harder to read.

CATEGORY		POINTS
Contribution (research quality, analysis, and conclusions)	*(max. 40 points)*	15
Theoretical and methodological framework	*(max. 25 points)*	10
Sources and literature	*(max. 10 points)*	5
Manuscript form and structure	*(max. 15 points)*	15
Quality of presentation (grammar, style, coherence)	*(max. 10 points)*	7

TOTAL POINTS	*(max. 100 points)*	52
The proposed grade (A-B-C-D-E-F)		E

Suggested questions for the defence are:

I recommend the thesis for final defence.

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Referee Signature

Overall grading scheme at FSV UK:

TOTAL POINTS	**GRADE**	Quality standard
91 – 100	**A**	= outstanding (high honor)
81 – 90	**B**	= superior (honor)
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.