

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 South China Sea Hegemony: Does China have the capacity to dominate the South China Sea amidst U.S. presence in the region?
Name of Student:	Lanyu Xiu
Referee (incl. titles):	Martin Riegl
Report Due Date:	June 13, 2021

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

1) Contribution and argument:

First of all, the thesis topic is relevant, topical, original, and also ambitious. To fully exploit its potential, it would be helpful to at least briefly describe both projects which lie at the center of the author's research. Author's aim to empirically „test“ whether BRI (or its components) are viewed by experts as an innocent economic initiative (as presented by president Xi) of China designed to improve connectivity, increase economic cooperation among nations, etc., or a geopolitical operation aiming to increase China's position on the world stage deserves an appreciation. I also like the author does not simply buy an official narrative and offers finding which contradicts with the story presented by Beijing. On the other side, there are several, especially methodological weaknesses reducing its value-added.

2) Theoretical and methodological framework:

The authors applied the case study method and quantitative approach based on surveying experts in order to answer two clearly defined research questions. *1) What is the opinion of the experts working on the Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR and Ankar a-Istanbul HSR about China's development of soft power? 2. Is the opinion of the experts working on the Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR and Ankara-Istanbul HSR similar to the official Chinese point of view?*

While I do appreciate the ambitious approach, the paper has several problematic aspects. The author does not explain the way the sample of experts was gathered, questionnaires (or just a sample) is not presented so the reader does not know of how data were processed. As for the conceptualization, I am not fully sure the author fully understand a difference between soft-power (applied in the paper), which is mostly about the state's ability (rooted in society) to attract and appeal the others, and public diplomacy which is an intentional state-driven effort.

3) Sources and literature:

The author gathered a sufficient amount of sources, especially given a quantitative nature a significant amount of data was gathered which I appreciate. The author has also shown the ability to conduct independent research and critically analyze data.

4) Manuscript form and structure:

The submitted paper meets the formal criteria required by the Faculty of Social Sciences. The paper is logically structured, the presented text is coherent, but there is a lot of room for improvement. There are several tables (chapters 4.2, 4.3) included in the text which is a bit disturbing and does not allow a fluent reading. Including them in the thesis's appendices would be better. Also, the alignment of the text is very unusual, as words at the end of lines are regularly and illogically split. Also, the list of the bibliography contains few items differing in font size.

5) Quality of presentation

The quality of language and style is appropriate, typos do appear in the text but not too often.

CATEGORY	POINTS
<i>Contribution (research quality, analysis, and conclusions) (max. 40 points)</i>	24
<i>Theoretical and methodological framework (max. 25 points)</i>	11
<i>Sources and literature (max. 10 points)</i>	8
<i>Manuscript form and structure (max. 15 points)</i>	7
<i>Quality of presentation (grammar, style, coherence) (max. 10 points)</i>	8
TOTAL POINTS (max. 100 points)	58
The proposed grade (A-B-C-D-E-F)	E

Suggested questions for the defence are:

I (do not) recommend the thesis for final defence.

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.