

SECOND READER THESIS REVIEW FORM

Name of the Student	Aleksandr Pachkov
Date of Submission	16 June 2023
Title of the Thesis	The effect of education on nationalism and ethnic exclusionism in modern Russia
Reviewer Name / Affiliation	Dr Maxine David / Leiden University

PLAGIARISM STATEMENT

Is the thesis in your assessment free of plagiarism?

Yes. None was detected in reading. I defer to first reader/supervisor for Turnitin or equivalent check.

KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

(relevance of the research question, research objective, literature review)

The student asks about the embedding of narratives of nationalism and ethnic exclusionism through history education in Russian schools and asks two sub-questions in relation to that, the first about indoctrination, the second about the function of textbooks in exclusionism. The second sub-question clearly serves the overarching RQ, such that it is difficult to understand why this would be asked as a sub-question – the textbooks surely just serve as a case through which the RQ is answered. The first sub-question is also rather curious since it rather contradicts the RQ, which, by asking “how” rather than “whether” Russian schools embed the narratives etc etc suggests schools do this., Yet the first sub-question enquires of government vs school agency. It would therefore have been good to see more thought given to the framing of the overarching RQ, perhaps even to remove any necessity for the sub-questions. Nevertheless, viewed with less regard for the detail, the question essentially being asked is a highly timely one given Russia’s war on Ukraine and the longer trajectory of the creation of historical memory as a battleground in Russia’s relations with Europe and the West more generally. The student is right to hone in on national identity issues and (post)colonialism. The thesis is therefore topical and of great significance to our understanding of Russia today and therefore the possible future relations of others with Russia.

The student evinces a deep level of understanding of all related issues. The decision to focus on legislation at first is a wise one for reasons the student identifies well in the literature. Equally, education and textbooks are an increasing focus for scholars of Russia; as are constitutional issues given all they say about power structures and adherence to proper democratic processes. It would have been good to see something said not just about education but *who* gets educated, i.e. to draw on some literature related to youth as the target of an authoritarian regime. There is a little

said about this in the introduction but it is not pursued to a more comprehensive and deeper degree than that.

There are some problems with the contextualisation and then literature review in that the student assumes quite a lot of knowledge on the reader's part. Take the differentiation between *ruskii* and *rossiiskii*, for instance: given how much the differentiation between these two terms underpins the later analysis, the early decision to relegate the explanation to a footnote looks like an unwise one because it suggests it is peripheral rather than central to understanding what comes later. The focus on ethnicity and colonialism gives this lie to this. The same can be said for the discussion of Russian national identity on p. 12 where this all works for the expert reader but will be very confusing for someone coming new to the subject.

This all said, I do also feel that the word constraints imposed by writing a thesis at UPF make it difficult for the student to do full justice to the literature they touch on. Had they written the same thesis at one of the other partners, they would have had a full 8,000 more words to play with. One might fairly argue in response to this, however, that the scope of the thesis should have been reduced.

ANALYSIS

(methodology, argument, theoretical backing, appropriate work with sources)

The method employed is appropriate for answering the research question and well-aligned with similar research.

In terms of the final question said to be pursued in the longitudinal comparative legal analysis, it is rather difficult to see how that can be answered without some form of ethnographic research – which is not undertaken. I would also question the decision to focus on such a long timeframe. I take the argument put forward on p. 19 about this but the fact is that we end up (understandably) with a more cursory than comprehensive examination of the legal framework.

The analytical framework is spoken of in a more reader-friendly manner in the final conclusion, it is a shame some similar summary did not appear in chapter 3.

The thesis is served by excellent foundations in terms of theory and primary sources. The engagement with those sources is sometimes not articulated as deep enough, such that a good deal of pre-existing knowledge on the part of the reader is required in order to understand the students' interim and final conclusions. That very long set of appendices means quite a lot of footwork for the reader, I sometimes felt that I was doing the analysis myself. On a charitable explanation for this, I would say that word count again got in the student's way but ultimately this does rather count against the consistency of quality of the student's analysis because it feels as if they leant too heavily on the appendices.

CONCLUSIONS

(persuasiveness, link between data and conclusions, achievement of research objectives)

It is a problem that in the conclusion, the student states that the "objective of the research was to discover Russian government has indoctrinated textbooks of national history with narratives of ethnic exclusionism". Apart from the grammatical error, in the introduction, we were told that the primary RQ is, "How have Russian schools embedded the narratives of nationalism and ethnic exclusionism through history education?". Thus, some confusion of research objectives is evident.

Nevertheless, again, making some effort to read between the lines, there is much to congratulate the student on. The student sometimes delivers very good critical analysis with some lovely articulations of the argument, e.g. p. 27 about the transformation of the history teacher into little more than a government mouthpiece. The first of the sub-questions is therefore clearly answered. The second sub-question is also answered, although the language around this changes somewhat so I am not sure why colonization could not have featured in the sub-question itself. Nevertheless, it is true that we get some important insights into how colonialism is simultaneously sidestepped and legitimised in the history teaching content and the student uses good evidence to link this very convincingly to the Ukrainian territory and the point is persuasively made too that this impacts on the identify and treatment of others – though a return to this in the conclusion would have been worthwhile.

The student speaks in the final conclusions of a three step analysis – however, we do not really get the insights into the effects and impact and the student ends by giving us excellent reasons for why that might be. There are other frustrations, which the student acknowledges in terms of having to refer some important lines of enquiry as for future research, while a longer thesis would have allowed them to do this work, e.g. p. 28 and the discourse change in relation to Kievan Rus.

FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

(appropriate language, adherence to academic standards, citation style, layout)

The writing would have benefited from more crafting, there are places where it's rather difficult to understand what is to be conveyed and the thrust of the analysis is lost, this is true of p. 31, for example, but that is not the only place.

I have a strong aversion to the use of the first person plural unless work is co-authored. As a way of avoiding the first person usage it makes no sense and thus has no understandable rationale.

Some more work on presentation would have been good, e.g. the tables on pp 23-24 and 30-31 would have been better moved on to the next page (this was within the pdf so is not a function of a change within Word only). All tables needed to be names and numbered, as is standard practice in academic work. I do not think the table at the top of p. 29 was helpful as presented. The original picture could have been placed there, named and numbered and then the analysis would have appeared below – again, that is more consistent with academic work.

Referencing is performed well.

SUMMARY ASSESSMENT


(strong and weak points of the thesis, other issues)

The thesis is very strong in terms of research focus and objectives and the student shows good mastery of the literature, issues and primary source material. The thesis is compromised somewhat by the need to squeeze a good deal of analysis into too few words and by some writing problems. Nevertheless, the very good, and sometimes excellent research and analysis must be acknowledged and the student commended for it.

FORMAL REQUIREMENTS

(for example, word count)

These are met.

Grade (1 – 10)	7.7 (B)
Final grade agreed with the second reader	7.9 (B)
Date	Reviewer Signature
3.7.2023	

2 – 3 SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR THESIS DEFENCE

1.	Please expand more on what is invoked by the use of the word “ruskii” versus “rossiiskii”. What conclusions do you draw into how different ethnic groups within Russia are viewed by the ruling elites?
2.	Related to question 1, you talk at one point about the possibility of Russian national identity being better explained as hybrid (ethnic and civic) in nature. What is your evidence for this?
3.	Ideology and identity are presented as the two parts of a binary argument. Is it not possible (preferable) to see them rather as entwined?