



Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: Roman Leuchter

Title: Perception of Chinese and Russian Influence in Central Asia: A Case Study of Kazakhstan's Perspective

Programme/year: Masters of International Relations/2024

Author of Evaluation (supervisor/second reader): Aliaksei Kazharski

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Research question, definition of objectives	10	2
	Theoretical/conceptual framework	30	13
	Methodology, analysis, argument	40	29
<i>Total</i>		80	44
Minor Criteria			
	Sources	10	10
	Style	5	5
	Formal requirements	5	5
<i>Total</i>		20	20
TOTAL		100	64



Evaluation

Major criteria:

Minor criteria:

Assessment of plagiarism:

Overall similarity at 3% according to the SIS protocol. No indications of plagiarism.

Overall evaluation:

The thesis focuses on an important and underresearch topic of the perceptions of China and Russia in the Central Asian states. The text is generally well-written and well-structured. The policy-oriented background discussion of relations between Kazakhstan and China/Russia is a solid one but it is not fully sufficient for the purposes of the thesis. Given the choice of theoretical paradigm, it is logical to expect a much more thorough discussion of things like history, collective, memory, and identity as key factors that inform the process of social construction of mutual perceptions. Also, the theoretical/conceptual discussion is nearly absent from the thesis. The empirical part of the thesis is also somewhat disappointing. The root of the problem here seems to be that, although the author seems to have picked a suitable methodology there is no clear research question identified in the thesis, which results in a (very superficial) description of the official discourse. To be honest, I am not sure, in the first place, that the word “perceptions” is applicable to what the author is dealing with here. As he himself admits towards the end of the text (p. 71) there is much more to it than just the carefully weighted official statements, and the analyzed sample is “obviously not a representative picture of how China and Russia are viewed in Kazakhstan more generally.”



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Taking this one step further, I would ask whether the dry and largely ceremonial official public statements that the author is working with can even tell us that much about the “perceptions” of the Kazakhstani elites. And overall, I think, conflating “perceptions” and “discourse” (which can both reveal and conceal certain things) is a serious conceptual mistake. Perceptions and

discursive framing are indeed two different issues to consider. And when it comes to the official framing specifically it is unclear what the actual contribution of the thesis is. I am afraid it might have fallen victim to a purely methodology-driven research design when the coding exercise somehow became a substitute for a genuine research problem or argument.

Suggested grade:

64 (“D”)

Signature:

Alku