Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: **Zhayra Geraldine Garcia Escalona**

Title: **"Make it last forever, friendship never ends?": Impact and Implications of China's Foreign Policy on China-LAC Relations in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Programme/year: **International Security Studies, 2022**

Author of Evaluation (supervisor/second reader):

Mgr. Kateřina Březinová, Ph.D.

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Research question, definition of objectives	**10**	9
	Theoretical/conceptual framework	**30**	28
	Methodology, analysis, argument	**40**	35
Total		*80*	72
Minor Criteria			
	Sources	**10**	10
	Style	**5**	5
	Formal requirements	**5**	4
Total		*20*	19
TOTAL		*100*	91

Evaluation

Major criteria:

The Master's Thesis of Zhayra Geraldine Garcia Escalona inquires into normative power of People's Republic of China (PLC) to gain a better understanding of Chinese foreign policy during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing primarily on PLC's health diplomacy in Latin America.

In order to assess the impact of China's mask and vaccine diplomacy in the region and its main components at work, the author poses the following research question: To what extent did the COVID-19 pandemic further the cause of Chinese influence in Latin America?

In a robust literature overview, the author discuses different views on PLC's rising profile globally and in Latin America in particular. Among others, she recognizes considerable limitation to the understanding of China's foreign policy objectives if viewed through a Western lens. She argues that - contrary to common knowledge - ideational components prevail in the foreign policy-making of PLC, while the economic aims are important, yet secondary. The thesis thus points out to the growing importance of accounting for different expressions of power such as normative and narrative power.

Seeking the answers and to test her hypotheses, the candidate focuses on public opinion about mask and vaccine diplomacy efforts of PLC in Latin America between 2020-2022 under the assumption that media in recipient countries will be reflective of it. The case selection is carried out through Most Different Systems design; therefore, the author compares the selected newspaper titles in Argentina (La Nación) and Chile (El Mercurio), two Latin American countries that experienced the most and least democratic backsliding, respectively.

Otherwise very sound analytical discussion is rather silent on the exact method in which the comparative content analysis is performed. The author discusses the framing of certain issues in the newspaper items, their neutral, negative and/or positive tone in the main text and in the Appendix, however the content analysis shall be revealed in a bigger detail and perhaps complemented with a certain quantitative element (frequency, relevance, word pairs, word clouds) and/or with sentiment analysis to make author's observations and conclusions more transparent.

Minor criteria:

The author amassed a wide range of relevant secondary sources of recent date of publication. She aptly works with them throughout the Thesis. The primary sources – a selection of articles from La Nación y El Mercurio published between 2020-2022 – are listed in the Appendix by their title and the date of their publication, followed by the summary of the main points. I wish there was a link leading to the fulltext in case anyone is interested in reading the whole piece under the scrutiny.

The writing process of this thesis was rather paused, affected by the pandemic outbreak and periods without communication with the supervisor. It was finished in the course of final weeks prior to the submission. Some of the last-minute acceleration is visible in the otherwise finely written final text. The example is the absence of numbering of chapters and subchapters which makes the orientation in the text more difficult than necessary.

Assessment of plagiarism:

The plagiarism scan reported 108 matching expressions throughout the text, however, when checked in detail, this is mostly due to the fact that the author referred to the exact titles of secondary sources she worked with.

Overall evaluation:

Diploma thesis of Zhayra Geraldine Garcia Escalona reflects the emerging global role of PLC and its normative power. As specified in detail above, this is a welcome and intellectually stimulating contribution which stresses the need for regional sub-system level assessment. Based on the analysis of public opinion in Chile and Argentina, the author observes that authoritarian / democratic dichotomy does not explain more positive tendencies towards China in Chile. As the case of Argentinian disdain for China proves, she concludes, "neither economic clout not exacerbated narratives evoking commonalities played a significant role in informing opinions on China."

In my view, the author has proven sound academic capabilities in this thesis. I can fully recommend it for a defence.

Suggested grade:

Excellent lower (2) = 91

Signature:

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