



Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: Susann Wilson

Title: An analysis of the new importers of plastic waste after
China's ban on imports in 2017

Programme/year: International Relations, 2022/2023

Author of Evaluation (second reader): Jan Karlas

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Research question, definition of objectives	10	8
	Theoretical/conceptual framework	30	20
	Methodology, analysis, argument	40	20
<i>Total</i>		80	48
Minor Criteria			
	Sources	10	10
	Style	5	5
	Formal requirements	5	5
<i>Total</i>		20	20
TOTAL		100	68



Evaluation

Major criteria:

The thesis addresses a clear and interesting research question: how has the change in China's policy on the import of plastic waste influenced the imports to the other developing countries?

Concerning the strong aspects of the thesis, I appreciate that the author formulated a concrete, important, and partly original research problem. She also works with a relevant literature to formulate the explanations for the variation in the rise of imports in the post-ban period. The thesis also contains an original data analysis regarding the distribution of imports. It is good that the author constructed several possible measures of this dependent variable and discusses their pros and cons. Last but not least, the author made an attempt to apply statistical methods (regression analysis).

That said, I also suppose that the thesis involves several problems or shortcomings. Above all, the results of the regression analysis cannot be very much trusted. The problem is that the individual regression models include several predictors, but they simultaneously use a too limited number of observations, most of the time they are based only on 10 observations. However, one of the most basic assumptions of the multiple regression requires to employ at least 10 (or even 15 or 20) observations per one predictor. Otherwise, the analysis cannot be valid. The results of the models presented in the thesis confirm this. They lead to odd results: even though some of the models reach a very high R^2 , their individual predictors have no or very limited significance. Therefore, it is very likely that the high R^2 s do not stem from the true effect of the variables, but from the wrong work with the models.

Looking just at the data on the GDP per capita – the variable that the thesis stresses as an important explanatory factor – one can indeed see that there can be a relationship between the rise of the imports and the level of economic development; however, this is not proved by a valid empirical analysis.

In addition, I would like to mention the following objections to the analysis presented in the thesis:



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- the logic of the whole thesis stands on the assumption that the changes in the imports to the analyzed countries after 2016 have a clear connection to the ban policy by China. Obviously, the connection is to some degree likely to exist, but it does not mean that the changes in the imports to the given countries do not/cannot also have other causes.
- the formulation of the theoretical explanations is not very well structured. Some of the explanations are stated in the literature review, others in the theoretical section.
- the case selection is a little bit unclear: the author says that she preselects some of the cases on the basis of the existing literature, and then adds other cases. Yet, the criteria for case selection are not very clear to me, and it is also not clear what exactly the division of the analyzed countries into two groups implies. At first, the author suggests that the two groups differ by the presence and absence of the rise in imports (on the basis of the findings from the existing literature). Nevertheless, the data that she presents later indicate that this division of the countries into two groups is not completely supported by the data, in particular if we pay attention to the relative difference in the imports in the cases of the individual countries over time. For example, Laos is placed in the group of countries that did not experience a big change in imports, but their relative rise is in this case still very high (see Figure 9 in the thesis).
- the author puts a strong emphasis on the use of the Mill's comparative methods. Yet, I do not find a place in the thesis very these methods would be truly used.
- data on the independent variables: the thesis relies very much on the data coming from OurWorldInData, but for most of the independent variables used in the thesis we standardly use other authoritative sources (e.g. Polity for democracy, etc.)
- the analysis does not systematically and transparently checks multicollinearity between the independent variables. As a result, variables that highly correlate are often included in one model (e.g. GDP and GDP per capita). This further decreases the validity of the models.



Minor criteria:

Assessment of plagiarism:

The Turnitin check indicates a 28% correspondence to the other sources, but according to my reading of this result the thesis does not engage in plagiarism.

Overall evaluation:

The thesis addresses a concrete, important, and partly original research problem. The author carried out a good work with the data on the imports of plastic waste to the selected countries. The thesis is also well anchored in the existing literature. Still, the empirical analysis is characterized with several important shortcomings.

Suggested grade:

D

Signature: