



Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: Nima Cheraghi

Title: Liberalism in a Post-hegemonic World?; Russia's and India's Narratives of Multipolarity and Liberalism

Programme/year: MAIN 2024

Author of Evaluation (supervisor): Michal Parizek

| Criteria | Definition | Maximum | Points |
|-----------------------|---|------------|--------|
| Major Criteria | | | |
| | Research question, definition of objectives | 10 | 8 |
| | Theoretical/conceptual framework | 30 | 25 |
| | Methodology, analysis, argument | 40 | 33 |
| <i>Total</i> | | 80 | 66 |
| Minor Criteria | | | |
| | Sources | 10 | 8 |
| | Style | 5 | 4 |
| | Formal requirements | 5 | 5 |
| <i>Total</i> | | 20 | 18 |
| TOTAL | | 100 | 84 |



Evaluation

Major criteria:

This is a fairly strong thesis that maps the strategic narratives of Russia and India (their representatives) towards the international order from the perspective of the question of their support for “liberal” components of the order. The thesis is theoretically rooted, it communicates with sizable relevant literature, and it is empirically rich.

I see three principal weaknesses. First, my reading is that much of what the thesis discussed under the label of the “liberal order” is in fact about the “rules-based order”. This does not apply fully, as there are distinctly liberal elements the thesis maps (e.g. free trade), but the core and the driver of the empirical results appears to be in the declared support of the two states for international institutions (IOs, law). Obviously other “liberal” elements are distinctly missing from the narratives especially of Russia (human/individual/political rights, etc). The overly reliance on various sorts of realist thinking here may obfuscate these points, as for realist scholars these “nuances” may seem uninteresting. This is most directly visible in the obvious preference especially of Russia for spheres-of-influence principle, which is very far from the notion of “openness” of the order, which in turn is a principal element of LIO (but the author does discuss this).

Second, I think a closer communication with the actual liberal (theoretical) literature on the liberal international order (Ikenberry; Lake et al 2021) would have been beneficial. In fact I think the core argument that the thesis promotes, that it is in Russia’s and India’s interest to preserve the features of the LIO/rules-based order, is what Ikenberry has been writing about for 10 years at least. It is also a pity the thesis misses the very prominent literature on emerging powers in the LIO’s institutions and their contestation of IOs. Given how prominent IOs are in the empirical findings, connecting to the literature would have been natural.

Third, I could see the empirical analysis being stronger. I appreciate the richness of the textual material picked to illustrate the claims made by the author. In my view for a more thorough analysis perhaps a larger volume of data would lead to stronger results. Most importantly, given that the thesis conducts content analysis, I miss a robust debate on the application of the method, comprehensive descriptive statistics, a discussion of measurement validity and reliability. In this vein, the codebook supplied in the appendix is very minimalist. In other words, the method is applied rather intuitively, not particularly systematically. Once the data is collected in the content analysis, so much more can be done than a couple of barplots.



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I should mention that I appreciate that the author has made it much clearer in the final version, compared to earlier versions, that there is a critical difference between narratives of states and their deeds. Of course, in particular in the case of Russia the alleged support for international law and sovereignty is problematic in the face of its repeated actions. The author relates this to illegal actions of the US in the past. While many will not like that sort of argument, I deem it a valid point to the extent to which one stay within the realist perspective which sees law as an instrument in the hands of great powers at best. My sense is that the limits of this approach are largely acknowledged in the thesis.

Minor criteria:

The thesis is clearly written, with a consistently high quality of presentation. The empirical analytical section of the thesis is not structured very effectively, though – it is a long section with a flow of specific points and sub-analyses. A more structured text would have been better.

Assessment of plagiarism: No signs of plagiarism.

Overall evaluation: This is a strong thesis that traces empirically the strategic narratives of the “liberal” international order of Russia and India. It has some conceptual/theoretical weak spots, it misses some of the directly relevant literature (but generally relies on a large volume of literature anyway), and the analysis should be methodologically more robust. But overall the thesis is still high quality, empirically rich, and situated in a highly relevant scholarly debate.

Suggested grade: B

Signature: