



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: Masters of International Relations/2024

Author of Evaluation (second reader): Aliaksei Kazharski

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Research question, definition of objectives	10	10
	Theoretical/conceptual framework	30	25
	Methodology, analysis, argument	40	35
<i>Total</i>		80	
Minor Criteria			
	Sources	10	5
	Style	5	5
	Formal requirements	5	5
<i>Total</i>		20	15
TOTAL		100	85



Evaluation

Major criteria:

Minor criteria:

Assessment of plagiarism:

Overall similarity 30%, no indications of plagiarism.

Overall evaluation:

The thesis is an interesting comparison of Indian and Russian strategic narratives on the international liberal order. It is well-written, well-structured, and intellectually provocative. The content analysis is done well and the data gathering process is duly reflected on by the author. The findings are also non-trivial. They demonstrate significant differences in how Indian and Russian authorities try to position their countries, and the author contextualizes this convincingly by situating the findings vis-a-vis the perceived national interests as seen by the respective ruling establishments. Here are a couple of critical points, however.

The author should be credited with a good understanding of IR theories, which he links convincingly to the subject of analysis. His discussion here is conceptually rich and inherently logical. Nevertheless, he does not seem to identify his theoretical position clearly and this is probably where the problem of a partial mismatch between the methodology and the stated research ambition emerges from. As the only methodology that has been used is that of content analysis we must 1) naturally rule out frameworks like realism, including neo-classical realism which has a somewhat bigger appreciation for non-material factors of power; and 2) assume that the author adopts some form of (moderate?) constructivism. Here, I think the thesis would benefit from engaging with the work of those Russian IR scholars who studied the role of discourse in Russian foreign policy (such as Andrey Makarychev or Viacheslav Morozov but also others). The problem here is not simply that, as the author insightfully remarks, “what an actor says is not always in accordance with what an actor does” (p. 9). On the factual level, the Russian regime has repeatedly lied about its deeds and intentions - that goes without saying. The problem is that there is much more to discourse than (in)accurately portraying the facts “out there” because: 1) different actors can attach different meanings to the same terms; 2) actors can engage in strategic redefinition (“resignification”) of the established terms, as in accordance with (more radical versions of) constructivism all political meanings are inherently unstable and serve as sites of discursive struggles. Take “sovereignty” for example, which the author refers to in his study. It is well established that Putin’s understanding of “sovereignty,” which he has preached publicly, differs from the conventional, liberal rule-based understanding, namely: “only big countries” (great powers) can have true sovereignty.”



FACULTY
OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
Charles University

As Andrey Makaryhev put it at some point, the Kremlin's understanding of "international democracy," which it has been promoting contra the perceived "Western hegemony," is actually closer to the model of an "international oligarchy", where big players would be given exceptional privilege to subdue the smaller ones at their pleasure. Now compare that to a rule-based democratic order institutionalized in the EU which significantly empowers small states – sometimes even to its own detriment (cf. Hungary).

So, with respect to the argument that the author seems to be making about Russia reproducing the liberal world order vocabulary, here subversion could be as likely an intent as (partial) reaffirmation. There is a whole literature out there on how Russia hijacks various Western vocabularies – including those that pertain to norms and practices it seemingly opposes (e.g., R2P) – in order to subvert them. Some of it speaks from the poststructuralist position (e.g., Morozov) showing how these discursive practices are, in effect, a relativizing exercise that is instrumental to the global power struggles. Some of the conceptual insights that the author seems to be drawing on clearly approach the social constructivist understanding of IR but since there is no overarching statement on the theoretical premises of the analysis, this part ultimately remains unclear.

Also, I must add that I was not fully convinced by the discussion on "liberal" vs. non-liberal powers provided in the first section of the thesis. The author seems to believe that we can do away with this distinction by not taking into account domestic politics – but why wouldn't we in the end? After all, as far as I can judge from the methodology, this is not a neorealist analysis which would (in)famously black-box the regime type. Authors like Ikenberry, writing in the liberal institutionalist tradition, argue that the hegemon's domestic political culture has a formative impact on the international order it crafts. Maybe, they are exaggerating it but I find it hard to image a sound analysis that would emphasize the importance of narratives and norms on the one hand and negate the role of domestic politics on the other. And here, though I do not dispute the fact that the US professes its own forms of exceptionalism, violating the rules of the international order from time to time together with its allies, I am not convinced by all examples that the author cites. For instance, references to the Monroe Doctrine are clearly anachronistic. If you want to compare what was happening in the heyday of European colonialism, which has been long denounced by the Western powers themselves, then you need to compare it to the 19th century Russia with its own dark record of colonial conquest - not to how Russia behaves in the 21st century. This kind of anachronistic relativism brings the argument closer to the strategic (and disinformation) narratives that Moscow promotes but does not reinforce it in academic terms.

Suggested grade:

85 ('B')

Signature:



**FACULTY
OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**
Charles University