

CHARLES UNIVERSITY
Faculty of Social Sciences
Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism

MA THESIS REVIEW

NOTE: Only the grey fields should be filled out!

Review type (choose one):

Review by thesis supervisor Review by opponent

Thesis author:

Surname and given name: Solheim Malene

Thesis title: Navigating Narratives: Framing the Sino-Norwegian Relationship in Norwegian News Media since 2016

Reviewer:

Surname and given name: Dimitrov Michal

Affiliation: Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism, external lecturer

1. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND THESIS (mark one box for each row)

		Conforms to approved research proposal	Changes are well explained and appropriate	Changes are explained but are inappropriate	Changes are not explained and are inappropriate	Does not conform to approved research proposal
1.1	Research objective(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.2	Methodology	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.3	Thesis structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

COMMENTARY (description of the relationship between the research proposal and the thesis. If there are problems, please be specific): Research objectives and thesis structure are in line with the approved research proposal. There was a significant change in the size of the sample: whereas the proposal suggests conducting framing analysis based on the sample of 50 to 70 articles, the thesis works with just 14 articles from 3 media outlets covering 3 events of Sino-Norwegian relations since 2016, not having a balanced sample after not having found appropriate/representative sample material for each of the analyzed digital media outlets. Despite the fact that the author presents arguments for narrowing the sample, these are not necessarily for the benefit of her analysis (e.g. leaving out opinion pieces deliberately). Furthermore, the author presents 4 expected frames in her proposal but does not elaborate on these much in the thesis itself (identifying 5 frames at last); the thesis lacks a hypothesis which would offer a more solid ground for the analysis/interpretation going beyond the rather descriptive research question: What frames have Norwegian media used in its coverage on China since 2016?

2. EVALUATION OF THE THESIS CONTENT

Use letters A – B – C – D – E – F (A=best, F= failed)

		Grade
2.1	Quality and appropriateness of the theoretical framework	B
2.2	Ability to critically evaluate and apply the literature	C
2.3	Quality and soundness of the empirical research	C
2.4	Ability to select the appropriate methods and to use them correctly	D
2.5	Quality of the conclusion	D
2.6	Thesis originality and its contribution to academic knowledge production	C

COMMENTARY (description of thesis content and the main problems): Malene Solheim presents a relatively solid theoretical framework and is able to evaluate literature to Sino-Norwegian relations as the starting point for the first analysis on frames in Norwegian media regarding this topic. The author selects three major events of Sino-Norwegian relations since 2016 to conduct a framing analysis in news coverage by three digital media outlets (Aftenposten, NRK and Klassekampen). However, the thesis works without a hypothesis and thus has limits in operationalization of the research which would

safely navigate the author through the analytical process. Despite the fact that the theoretical part focuses much on terms such as "power" and "soft power" ("Power and the frame are terms commonly studied together", or "frames reflect power and power is reflected through frames", p. 28), these terms are not operationalized and are almost not covered either in the empirical part or in the conclusion. The same applies to the term "narrative", that is included in the title of the thesis, but is barely mentioned (11 times in the whole thesis), especially when presenting and contextualizing the findings.

3. EVALUATION OF THE THESIS FORM

Use letters A – B – C – D – E – F (A=best, F= failed)

		Grade
3.1	Quality of the structure	A
3.2	Quality of the argumentation	D
3.3	Appropriate use of academic terminology	D
3.4	Quality, quantity and appropriateness of the citations (both in the theory part and in the empirical part)	B
3.5	Conformity to quotation standards (*)	A
3.6	Use of an academic writing style, and correct use of language (both grammar and spelling)	C
3.6	Quality of the textual lay-outing and appendices	C

(*) in case the text contains quotations without references, the grade is F; in case the text contains plagiarised parts, do not recommend the thesis for defence and suggest disciplinary action against the author instead.

COMMENTARY (description of thesis form and the main problems):

The thesis has a logical structure and conforms to quotation standards. The quality of citations is appropriate. The level of argumentation is rather average and its limits coincide with gaps in communication between theoretical and empirical part of the thesis; the thesis struggles with some key terms, e.g. misleading use of the term "case study" for analyzed events of Sino-Norwegian relations without identifying dependent and independent variables, or claiming that the "methodology employed in this study use discourse analysis to investigate the frames..." in the first sentence of the section 3 (methodology), despite conducting a framing analysis indeed. The size of the sample was narrowed to 14 articles; it is not clear enough how the selection procedure was made regarding outlets with more results for the selected key words (however, the author was interested in choosing two articles each with conflicting frames within each outlet, p. 42), there is no indication of relevance of the articles (why these articles were selected and others not). The small size of the sample could be balanced by a real in-depth framing analysis, yet the author focuses more or less only on thematic analysis of frames (just 1 of 4 structures of framing analysis mentioned on page 29, quoting Linström and Marais, 2012), which does offer only limited basis for a valid interpretation of the meaning of the frames, even though the author contextualizes the findings quite well on the background of studies covering Sino-Norwegian relations. The reader's orientation in the empirical part is complicated due to the fact, that the table of analyzed articles linked with identified frames is presented only in the appendix; only here (and not in the empirical part of the thesis) the reader can get overview and information about the exact date of the publication, but not about the author, volume or significance/prominence of the article within the agenda of the media outlet, parameters that could be helpful for contextualized interpretation of the meaning of the frames. Malene Solheim presented a good thesis regarding stylistics of her academic writing style, but the intensive use of I-form (First-Person-Narrative) is rather uncommon and a little disturbing for a scientific piece of work, highlighting the subjectivity of the author. The number of typos is limited. The quality of the textual lay-outing matches the standards of diploma thesis.

4. OVERALL EVALUATION (provide a summarizing list of the thesis's strengths and weaknesses):

Malene Solheim presents the first study on frames in news coverage on Sino-Norwegian relations (since 2016). The choice of three major events in this period is appropriate and relevant; the author proves sufficient orientation in the topic and is able to summarize relevant theoretical literature on framing and framing analysis. In the empirical part, Malene Solheim identifies 5 frames and is relatively successful in analysing the meanings of these frames in the context of Sino-Norwegian relations. The author understands her role as "an observer in categorising frames, and an analyst in interpreting the meaning of these frames" (p. 33); whereas she is rather successful in the first part in identifying and categorizing the frames, the interpretation of the meaning(s) of the identified frames and validity of the conclusions have limits. Unfortunately, the simple descriptive research question, the missing hypothesis, the too small size of the sample (n=14 covering three events by three media outlets) and the struggle with key terms ("case study" for events, claim about conducting a "discourse analysis" etc.) and their application limit the reliability/validity and contribution of the thesis to academic knowledge. The potential of the thesis

was higher and more promising than the result. Despite the weaknesses, the author proved to be able to conduct an independent academic research and deserves a chance to address the criticism at the defense of the thesis.

5. QUESTIONS OR TOPICS TO BE DISCUSSED DURING THE THESIS DEFENSE:

5.1	The author analyses just 14 articles covering 3 major events of Sino-Norwegian relations since 2016 by 3 media outlets. How does she argue that the sample is big enough for a valid/reliable results/conclusions? How could the results/conclusions be affected by a broader sample of articles/media outlets? For instance, why did the author not use a broader spectrum of media outlets (e.g. out of 11 analysed by Norwegian Media Authority, 2020, p. 38) after finding out that the sample is smaller than expected? Why did she leave out opinion pieces deliberately? How relevant for framing analysis is the claim, that opinion pieces written by external contributors do not reflect the media outlet's editorial practises (p. 42) when the publishing house (represented through editor) is responsible for the published content and decides upon what is being published and what not?
5.2	Could the author formulate a hypothesis that could provide her with a better navigation through the research procedure? Or does she believe that a hypothesis was not essential for her research?
5.3	The author identifies "China is a partner" frame. She comes to a nuanced conclusion, that the partnership was framed either as economic, strategic or geopolitical, either negative or positive (p. 54). Would it not be more accurate to make the distinction more apparent or even identify more frames that would reflect the different meaning of the "partnership"?
5.4	Regarding the results of the research, could the author present the contribution of her study in more detail; what is the contribution of the study beyond the identification of the 5 frames?

6. ANTIPLAGIARISM CHECK

The reviewer is familiar with the thesis' score in plagiarism analysis in SIS.

If the score is above 5%, please evaluate and indicate problems:

6.1	The score of 13 % overall similarity by Turnitin does not indicate any problems after a detailed check. The thesis is original, conforming to quotation standards. The antiplagiarism tool of theses.cz identifies just 1 % of overall similarity.
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7. SUGGESTED GRADE OF THE THESIS AS A WHOLE (choose one or two)

- A
- B
- C
- D
- E
- F

If the mark is an "F", please provide your reasons for not recommending the thesis for defence:

-

Date: 6. 6. 2024

Signature:

A finalised review should be printed, signed and submitted in two copies to the secretary of the Department of Media Studies. The electronic version of the review should be converted into a PDF and uploaded to SIS, or sent to the Department of Media Studies secretary who will upload it to SIS on the reviewer's behalf.

Do not upload PDFs with a scanned signature, the review uploaded to SIS must be without signature.