

MASTER'S EXAMINER REPORT

GPS – Geopolitical Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Thesis title:	China's Debt Trap Diplomacy in the Democratic Republic of Congo: A case study of a failed state (2006-2023) through Neoclassical Geopolitics
Name of Student:	Pauline Lampereur
Referee (incl. titles):	Martin Riegl
Report Due Date:	28.5.2024

No issues with plagiarism within the text were detected.

1) Contribution and argument:

While I do appreciate the choice of the topic, the overall impression is very mixed. The author sets a relevant objective for her paper which is an analysis of geopolitical motives behind Beijing's engagement in DRC and its consequences. This is particularly interesting given P. Lumumba's foreign policy orientation towards the communist camp. I fully agree that the reality of a politically fragmented world forces Western strategists to rethink our approach as our traditional business model might not work and DRC is an excellent example.

I do not question purely geopolitical drivers of China's economic penetration on the continent, but I would be careful to draw a parallel between Beijing's predatory practices and DRC's state failure. The story of Zaire and DRC is a story of a collapsed state since 1960. This leads me to RQs defined in the paper which seem to head in the right direction, but linking China's economic grip on DRC with Beijing's global status seems to be exaggerated. The thesis makes several interesting points and offers interesting information, but there seem to be factual mistakes too. I do not think that as many as 52 African countries joined BRI. Here the author also seems to „buy“ a Chinese narrative that presents BRI as an unprecedented geopolitical project connecting the globe. E.g. „...BRI, is seen as the most important geostrategic and organization project of the 21st century...(p. 15). For others, such as R.D. Kaplan it's not more than a branding campaign. Secondly, I do not understand the following statement: „China's Soft Power tools in controlling African's strategic resources have devastated local economies a global economic power that overtakes the USA (p. 3.). First of all, soft power is not about control or exploitation, second, this sounds rather like one of the alarmist statements that frequently appeared on the front pages in the US in the 2010s rather than a cold description of economic reality. Lastly, given the fact that BRI was sidelined due to a significantly changed geoeconomic context, I do miss a reflection of more recent initiatives such as GCI, GDI, or GSI.

1) Theoretical and methodological framework:

The theory and methodology are clearly stated and described. I do not object to the application of the Neo-classical geopolitical approach and Nuno's model, on the other, the author should be aware of its explanatory limits. Notably in the area of security, where China – by far – is not a preferred partner.

2) Sources and literature:

The author has gathered a sufficient amount of resources.

3) Manuscript form and structure:

That's a major problem. I do not know if this is a case of the thesis finished at the last minute, but it's exactly my impression. The overall layout is very poor, one may start from a weird (sub)chapter headings to a bibliography where author names are capitalized sometimes etc. Spelling errors and typos appear too often and it already starts in the abstract.

4) Quality of presentation:

I am sorry to say, that the quality of the language is weak, and it's clear that additional proofreading would be necessary. It's not grammar errors only, but full sentences are often difficult to follow. Just to provide an example from the intro part: „Then, from an investment aspect, China is only targeting unenviable economic countries“ (p. 3). I am sorry for the harsh comments, but this badly affects the overall impression of the thesis.

CATEGORY	POINTS
<i>Contribution (research quality, analysis, and conclusions) (max. 40 points)</i>	23
<i>Theoretical and methodological framework (max. 25 points)</i>	18
<i>Sources and literature (max. 10 points)</i>	7
<i>Manuscript form and structure (max. 15 points)</i>	3
<i>Quality of presentation (grammar, style, coherence) (max. 10 points)</i>	2
TOTAL POINTS (max. 100 points)	53
The proposed grade (A-B-C-D-E-F)	E

Suggested questions for the defence are:

You mention China to have an access to 80% of Cobalt reserves. Does this % refer to DRC or other countries as well?

I (do not) recommend the thesis for final defence.

Referee Signature

Overall grading scheme at FSV UK:

TOTAL POINTS	GRADE	Quality standard
91 – 100	A	= outstanding (high honor)
81 – 90	B	= superior (honor)
71 – 80	C	= good
61 – 70	D	= satisfactory
51 – 60	E	= low pass at a margin of failure
0 – 50	F	= failing. The thesis is not recommended for defence.