

# MASTER'S EXAMINER REPORT

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

<b>Thesis title:</b>	Subversion as the Modus Operandi China's integration of influence operations into the Belt and Road Initiative as a mode of disrupting geopolitical powers in Vietnam and Pakistan
<b>Name of Student:</b>	Daniel Olah
<b>Referee (incl. titles):</b>	Martin Riegl
<b>Report Due Date:</b>	10.9.2024

*The Submitted thesis does not show signs of plagiarism.*

**Comments of the referee on the thesis highlights and shortcomings (following the four numbered aspects of your assessment indicated below).**

## **1) Contribution and argument:**

According to the author, the aim of the presented work is to expand the critical geopolitical literature regarding China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Overall, it is a rather ambitious goal, based on the hypothesis that Beijing's infrastructure development initiative actually serves as a gateway mechanism for the implementation of Chinese influence operations. This is a premise that, based on the current level of knowledge, can hardly be disputed. Although I evaluate the choice of the topic very positively, I equally appreciate the choice of the 2 case studies. Lastly I want to appreciate the way Daniel approached the topic, especially the way he examined how Beijing is reinventing the old Soviet tactic or strategy. This itself is an added value of the paper.

However, I have to conclude that the objectives and ambitions have not been 100% achieved. Although one can agree with the conclusions presented, I do not find them extremely surprising. The main problem I see is that they are not based on a systematic analysis of clearly defined criteria that would be subsequently applied in empirical work. As far as the structure of the thesis is concerned, I consider the introductory excursions into the development of geopolitics and theories of international relations to be superfluous. It would have been quite sufficient if the author had indicated the choice of his own, original, theoretical framework.

## **2) Theoretical and methodological framework:**

What I appreciate about the thesis is the novel choice of the theoretical framework, which is realist constructivism. Although these are at first sight incompatible schemes with regard to their view of the world, I find it very appropriate with regard to the practice of Beijings. Especially because the objectives of the BRI are undoubtedly geopolitical, and at the same time the way China presents the GDI, GCI and GSI as completely relevant. However, this brings me to the question of why the author does not work with the concepts of Global Development, Civilization and Security Initiative, which seem to downplay the relevance of BRI in China's policy. Nevertheless, I consider the research questions chosen by the author to be well posed. The author also states his methodology, but then does not elaborate much on it and the reader is not entirely clear about the subsequent methodological approach.

For this reason, the empirical part, although very informative, remains a bit descriptive. Although the conduct of interviews can be appreciated, the case studies presented and the information contained in them are often only marginally related to the BRI issue. It would also have been beneficial if the

author had devoted more attention to conceptual work - e.g. a more detailed link between BRI and the defined concepts of Political Warfare (at the same time I can also imagine the use of the concepts of hybrid warfare, cognitive warfare etc.) and sharp power.

### 3) Sources and literature:

Author has gathered a sufficient amount of primary as well as secondary sources, however, it would be advisable to pay much more attention to the format of citations. For example, direct quotations should always include the No. Pages (e.g.) p. 15, the format of the citation on p. 13 is not entirely clear to me (Bittman 1985:43ff.), and stating "following pages" is rather vague.

### 4) Manuscript form and structure:

I consider it very inappropriate to insert photographs in the text of the thesis, individual infographics must always contain a title (e.g. p. 12, 24 and further in the text), on p. 35 a table is inserted in German, etc.

### 5) Quality of presentation

The language and stylistic level is sufficient and I do not find major deficiencies.

CATEGORY	POINTS
<i>Contribution (research quality, analysis, and conclusions) (max. 40 points)</i>	30
<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>	9
<i>Quality of presentation (grammar, style, coherence) (max. 10 points)</i>	8
<b>TOTAL POINTS (max. 100 points)</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>The proposed grade (A-B-C-D-E-F)</b>	<b>C</b>

Suggested questions for the defence are:

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

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**Referee Signature**

Overall grading scheme at FSV UK:

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