

REPORT ON THE MASTER THESIS

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

Title of the thesis:	Chinese Foreign Aid and Investment in Central Asia: Implications on Sino-Russian Relations from a Geopolitical Perspective
Author of the thesis:	Carter Oswood
Referee (incl. titles):	Martin Riegl

Remark: It is a standard at the FSV UK that the Referee's Report is at least 500 words long. In case you will assess the thesis as "non-defendable", please explain the concrete reasons for that in detail.

SUMMARY OF POINTS AWARDED (for details, see below):

CATEGORY	POINTS
<i>Theoretical background (max. 20)</i>	19
<i>Contribution (max. 20)</i>	19
<i>Methods (max. 20)</i>	17
<i>Literature (max. 20)</i>	19
<i>Manuscript form (max. 20)</i>	15
TOTAL POINTS (max. 100)	89
The proposed grade (A-B-C-D-E-F)	B

Comments of the referee on the thesis highlights and shortcomings (following the 5 numbered aspects of your assessment indicated below).

1) Theoretical background:

The submitted paper offers a geopolitical analysis aiming to answer whether the whole spektrum of Chinese economic activities (foreign aid, trade, and state investments) did impact Sino-Russian relations between 2001 – 2014 or not. Also historical roots and development of geopolitics and geoeconomics are explained in the theoretical part (this might be a bit redundant).

2) Contribution:

Analyzing the topic through the lenses of geopolitics/geoeconomics allowed Carter to provide a detailed, insightful and comprehensive analysis of the problem (here I do fully agree with the author). I also agree that Chinese economic activities in the region are overshadowed by the current academic/political debate on China's debt-trap-diplomacy in Africa, or Indo-Pacific Ocean.

3) Methods:

Carter applies both qualitative as well as quantitative methods throughout the paper in order to answer the research question and support/falsify two following hypotheses.

- 1) Chinese Foreign Aid, Trade and Government-Sponsored Investment in Central Asia has increased over the time period of 2001-2014 relative to Russian Foreign Aid, Trade and Government-Sponsored Investment.*
- 2) Chinese Foreign Aid, Trade and Government-Sponsored Investment in the region has been used to secure access to natural resources in Central Asia to satisfy domestic demand of energy.*

The first of them seems to me a bit trivial (I do understand it takes time to reach aggregate numbers but it is still mostly statistics).

Research on two hypotheses that were removed (I understand why) from the original scope of the paper would be also fascinating, but maybe additional hypothesis focused on measurement of increase (eventual) of China's soft-power in the region would be of mine interest and could also help Carter to find an answer whether Chinese flow of money do impact Sino-Russian relations (balance of power). Carter also defines the concept of FATGIA and provides his geographical definition of Central Asian region comprising the republic born after the dissolution of the USSR (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan) and its position within the world system (based on Cohen's approach).

4) Literature:

Carter has gathered all relevant sources (both theoretical literature as well as statistical data).

5) Manuscript form:

The thesis meets all formal requirements for diploma thesis. Regarding the form of paper, I would recommend to open the paper by introducing a reader into the topic (why it is topical, relevant, important and so on). Jumping straight to the research questions is a bit straightforward and unusual. There are some minor issues, e.g. some graphics could be in a higher resolution, or using different colors in the text (purple, blue, pink, light blue) is slightly irritating and very unusual.

DATE OF EVALUATION: 22.5.2019

Referee Signature

The referee should give comments to the following requirements:

1) THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: Can you recognize that the thesis was guided by some **theoretical fundamentals** relevant for this thesis topic? Were some important theoretical concepts omitted? Was the theory used in the thesis consistently incorporated with the topic and hypotheses tested?

Strong Average Weak
20 10 0 points

2) CONTRIBUTION: Evaluate if the author presents **original ideas** on the topic and aims at demonstrating **critical thinking** and ability to draw conclusions based on the knowledge of relevant theory and relevant empirical material. Is there a distinct **value added** of the thesis (relative to knowledge of a university-educated person interested in given topic)? Did the author explain **why** the observed phenomena occurred? Were the policy implications well founded?

Strong Average Weak
20 10 0 points

3) METHODS: Are the **hypotheses** for this study clearly stated, allowing their further verification and testing? Are the theoretical explanations, empirical material and **analytical tools** used in the thesis relevant to the research question being investigated, and adequate to the aspiration level of the study? Is the thesis **topic comprehensively analyzed** and does the thesis not make trivial or irrelevant detours off the main body stated in the thesis proposal? More than 10 points signal an exceptional work, **which requires your explanation "why" it is so**.

Strong Average Weak
20 10 0 points

4) LITERATURE REVIEW: The thesis demonstrates author's full understanding and **command of recent literature**. The author quotes relevant literature in a proper way and disposes with a representative bibliography. (Remark: references to Wikipedia, websites and newspaper articles are a sign of **poor research**). If they dominate you cannot give more than 8 points. References to books published by prestigious publishers and articles in renowned journals give much better impression.

Strong Average Weak
20 10 0 points

5) MANUSCRIPT FORM: The thesis is **clear and well structured**. The author uses appropriate language and style, including academic **format** for quotations, graphs and tables. The text effectively refers to graphs and tables, is easily readable and **stimulates thinking**.

Strong Average Weak
20 10 0 points

Overall grading scheme at FSV UK:

TOTAL POINTS	GRADE	Czech grading
91 – 100	A	= excellent
81 - 90	B	= good
71 – 80	C	= satisfactory
61 - 70	D	= satisfactory
51 - 60	E	
0	F	= fail (not recommended for defence)