

Name of the student:	Nguyen Dao
Title of the thesis:	The EU's Response to China's Belt and Road Initiative: A Geopolitical Analysis
Reviewer:	Robert Kissack

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

(relevance of the research question, research objective, literature review):

The application of geopolitics as a theoretical lens to the study of EU FP is not a usual choice. The fact that it is applied to EU-China relations in part makes it seem more logical. While geopolitics is often associated with realist IR theory (especially the 'classical' literature reviewed in the paper – the sea-power and land-power theses), there are two claims made in the paper that justify the decision. The first is the focus on economic power, which in the areas identified as investment-trade (EU competency) and infrastructure (large EU budget allocated) make sense – diplomacy somewhat less easy to make the case of the EU as a unified actor. The second, and arguably more important issue, is the application of critical geopolitics, in which spatiality and ideology/ideational are integrated. This works well with idea that the scope of EU regulatory governance may be curtailed and challenged by Chinese influence.

2. ANALYSIS

(methodology, argument, theoretical backing, appropriate work with sources):

The methods used – the temporal periods for analysis, the sources of data and the way it was interpreted, are all logically set out. The central claim of the paper is that the behaviour of the EU has changed over the last two decades, becoming more heavily drawn into a competitive, rather than collaborative, relationship with China, and that the EU is thus 'seeing the world' more akin to the Chinese perspective, and that geopolitics informs *that* perspective. Alternative explanations, such as domestic actors complaining against Chinese competition, or US government positions, may allow similar conclusions to be drawn using other theories; these are not really considered in detail.

3. CONCLUSIONS

(persuasiveness, link between data and conclusions, achievement of research objectives):

This is a 'positive' argument – the case is made in favour of the approach chosen. The evidence provided is systematic and comprehensive, and there is no doubt it is well-researched and highly informed. While the thesis seeks to make the broadest set of claims in favour of the application of geopolitics, the critical schools seems to be the more applicable of the two, introducing territoriality back into the analysis of how far ideational power can travel.

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

(appropriate language, adherence to academic standards, citation style, layout):

Presentation of the paper was of a high standard.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

(strong and weak point of the dissertation, other issues)

Overall, this is an informed and informative essay – it does a good job of making a positive argument in favour of applying geopolitical thinking to the EU – at least in relation to China’s Belt and Road initiative, which is understood as heavily impact on physical geography – connectivity, interdependence, influence and power. I think the spatial analysis of critical geopolitics is also an interesting line of analysis. A suggestion for improvement would be to condense the text down, making it more punchy and concise, as one would do if wishing to develop the work further.

Grade (A-F)	B / 8.3
Date	Signature
26/06/2021	R.Kissack