

# IMESS DISSERTATION

**Note: Please email the completed mark sheet to Year 2 coordinator (cc Chiara Amini [chiara.amini@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:chiara.amini@ucl.ac.uk) and [fiona.rushworth@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:fiona.rushworth@ucl.ac.uk))**

Please note that IMESS students are not required to use a particular set of methods (e.g. qualitative, quantitative, or comparative) in their dissertation.

<b>Student:</b>	Dongyu Zhai
<b>Dissertation title:</b>	Desecuritisation and Strategic Narratives: China's 16/17+1 Initiative in the Central and Eastern European Countries

	70+	69-65	60-61	59-55	54-50	<50
	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>Knowledge</b> <i>Knowledge of problems involved, e.g. historical and social context, specialist literature on the topic. Evidence of capacity to gather information through a wide and appropriate range of reading, and to digest and process knowledge.</i>	/					
<b>Analysis &amp; Interpretation</b> <i>Demonstrates a clear grasp of concepts. Application of appropriate methodology and understanding; willingness to apply an independent approach or interpretation recognition of alternative interpretations; Use of precise terminology and avoidance of ambiguity; avoidance of excessive generalisations or gross oversimplifications.</i>		/				
<b>Structure &amp; Argument</b> <i>Demonstrates ability to structure work with clarity, relevance and coherence. Ability to argue a case; clear evidence of analysis and logical thought; recognition of an argument's limitation or alternative views; Ability to use other evidence to support arguments and structure appropriately.</i>	/					
<b>Presentation &amp; Documentation</b> <i>Accurate and consistently presented footnotes and bibliographic references; accuracy of grammar and spelling; correct and clear presentation of charts/graphs/tables or other data. Appropriate and correct referencing throughout. Correct and contextually correct handling of quotations.</i>	/					
<b>Methodology</b> <i>Understanding of techniques applicable to the chosen field of research, showing an ability to engage in sustained independent research.</i>		/				

<b>ECTS Mark:</b>	70	<b>Charles Mark:</b>	Excellent/A	<b>Marker:</b>	Aglaya Snetkov
<i>Deducted for late submission:</i>				<b>Signed:</b>	Aglaya Snetkov
<i>Deducted for inadequate referencing:</i>				<b>Date:</b>	28/08/2020

## MARKING GUIDELINES

**A (UCL mark 70+) = A (Charles mark- excellent):** Note: marks of over 80 are given rarely and only for truly exceptional pieces of work.

Distinctively sophisticated and focused analysis, critical use of sources and insightful interpretation. Comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to the chosen field of research, showing an ability to engage in sustained independent research.

**B (UCL mark 69-65) = B (Charles mark – very good)**

**C (UCL mark 64-60) = C (Charles mark – good):** A high level of analysis, critical use of sources and insightful interpretation. Good understanding of techniques applicable to the chosen field of research,

showing an ability to engage in sustained independent research. 65 or over equates to a B grade.

**D (UCL mark 59-55) = D (Charles mark – satisfactory)**

**E (UCL mark 54-50) = E (Charles mark – sufficient):**

Demonstration of a critical use of sources and ability to engage in systematic inquiry. An ability to engage in sustained research work, demonstrating methodological awareness. 55 or over equates to a D grade.

**F (UCL mark less than 50) = F (Charles mark - insufficient):**

Demonstrates failure to use sources and an inadequate ability to engage in systematic inquiry. Inadequate evidence of ability to engage in sustained research work and poor understanding of appropriate research techniques.

## **Please provide substantive and detailed feedback!**

### **Comments, explaining strengths and weaknesses (*at least 300 words*):**

This is a very interesting and well-presented thesis. It aptly identifies a gap in the existing literature and seeks to fill it by investigating China's de-securitisation strategic narratives and soft power influence in the CEE region. It presents a very sophisticated discussion regarding the nature of de-securitisation that refers to most of the literature on the subject. It also presents an excellent review of the Chinese scholars' engagement with the securitisation theory. Its main conceptual contribution is by relating its de-securitisation strategies with efforts to increase its soft power resonances in the region. This is particularly original point as until now both of these literatures have been considered in isolation. However, the paper could have been strengthened by having a more in-depth discussion regarding the extent to which the de-securitisation and critical discourse approaches are in fact ontologically and epistemologically compatible. It would have also been good to see a bit more engagement with the types of sources and methods of collection used.

The thesis then moves on to present very detailed analysis of China's perceived role in the international system. In particular, it delves into depth regarding its International System Narrative and Identity Narrative – two underlying foreign policy discourses that drive its overall international engagement. However, I would have liked to see a more thorough engagement with both the external and China's own characterisation and perception of its own soft power. Indeed, beyond being presented as the Other in the international system, there is quite a substantial literature that exists on the subject.

The empirical section of analysis of how China seeks to de-securitise its presence in the CEE region and its successes or otherwise is effective and shows the clear application of the theoretical apparatus developed earlier in the paper. In particular, the author demonstrates ways in which China uses its foreign policy narratives to de-securitise its growing influence in the region through processes of pre-emptive rebuttal, silencing, replacement and common identity formation as presented in its Issue Narrative. The author puts forward a particularly convincing argument in Chapters 4 and 5 that China's policy towards the CEE countries is primarily centred promoting and exalting the economic benefits associated with its growing influence in the region. In practice, however, as the author suggests this policy has not been fully effective, particularly when it comes to the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia, although more successes have been seen in the case of Hungary. The thesis does strive to disassociate the reasons for its different successes/failures – and relate it to the CEE region's differing relations with Western actors and their particular narrative and soft power engagement.

One possible avenue that could have been explore further was the extent to which China's attempt to de-securitise its presence in the region in fact goes beyond a more conventional interpretation of de-securitisation i.e. the return to normal politics and represents a novel approach that seeks to transcend politics altogether by focusing instead on economics as the default modus operandi. Furthermore, a little bit more analysis on what implications does this have for China's soft power capabilities in the face of its Western counterparts – and what does this mean for the overall successes of its foreign policy aspirations?

**Specific questions you would like addressing at the oral defence (at least 2 questions):**

Could you elaborate on which de-securitisation e.g. pre-emptive, replacement, silencing and common identity been more successful for China in the CEE region?

Which do you think - the International System Narrative and Identity Narrative has been more important China's de-securitisation efforts?