REPORT ON THE MASTER THESIS

IEPS – International Economic and Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Title of the thesis:	Analyzing the Effects of Ethnicity on Internal Armed Conflicts in Burma: Identity Crisis and the Struggle for Recognition
Author of the thesis:	Myo Win Nyunt
Referee:	Mgr. Bc. Jakub Tesař, Ph.D.

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

1) Theoretical background:
The thesis focuses on the ethnic-based armed conflicts in Burma. It builds on a solid grasp of ethnicity and ethnicity theories (chap. 3). It is also detailed and knowledgeable with respect to the selected case. However, if the study attempted to study the link between ethnicity and armed conflicts, it failed to reflect the relevant literature on this specific phenomenon and relate the thesis findings back to it.

2) Contribution:
Research questions and three connected hypotheses are clearly stated on page 17.
The main research question asks *In which conditions and how 'ethnicity' produce adverse effects that fuel armed conflicts?* The thesis focuses on this question throughout the text, and it convincingly shows how 'ethnicity' has produced specific effects in the selected case. However, it fails to address the general question – what the analysis of Burma's case says about the phenomenon in general. What are the conditions in which ethnicity produce such effects?
The thesis further works with three hypotheses, which guides the analysis well but could be more specific (what are the expectations regarding "negative effects" of colonial rule) and also more explicit regarding the counterfactuals - why we could even consider something different (hypothesis 3: when dominant group use ceasefire to consolidate power instead of solving the grievances, why should we expect that is will help to solve ethnic grievances? isn't the hypothesis trivial then?)
Concerning the first hypothesis, the analysis shows a highly relevant context of the British colonial rule and transition to independence. It provides good evidence on how British colonial rule impacted the situation; it is nevertheless unclear how it has created the problem or whether it just intensified the existing issue. Regarding the second hypothesis, the text provides good context but does not directly test the hypothesis (which ideologies were meant to overcome the differences? why has it not the assumed effect?). For the final hypothesis, it is claimed that Tatmadaw exploited the situation in 1988/9 and consolidated the power. Still, the text shows that the power was consolidated rather than the intention of Tatmadaw to exploit the situation. (It is compelling, but what evidence do we have for such a claim?)
Overall, the presented argument is convincing, but often without providing direct evidence of the claims (p. 33: "the only marker they used was language differences" – it is not evident from the quote which says that the tribes change languages often; "each group appeared to be independent of one another, though some groups share more similarities than differences" – it may be, but how do we know that? and what does it mean?)

3) Methods:
The thesis discussed the selected method in the second chapter. It refers to case study and nested cases as a method, but it does not specify how the author proposes to proceed with testing the hypothesis. Is it expected to be self-evident after reviewing what is known about the case? The

method should specify what evidence we are looking for and how we recognize whether the hypothesis is valid or not. The analysis is well structured according to the hypotheses, but is not guided by a clear research method.

However, the main methodological issue is that it focuses "only" on the case. The findings are not related back to the more general phenomenon (as was intended and reflected in the research question). When we would focus on the phenomenon instead of the selected case, we should also ask why we should study Burma (instead of some other case) to understand the phenomenon.

4) Literature:

The literature is rich on ethnicity, but it is not entirely clear how various approaches contribute to this specific thesis (does the author use them all? or does he combine some of them?). What is missing is the reflection of the existing literature on the discussed phenomenon -- what does the literature say about how ethnicity fuels armed conflict?

5) Manuscript form:

The thesis is formatted well; there are only minor issues (especially with figures, but I appreciate the author uses them, they illustrate the points well). The thesis works with a vast number of sources and refers to them well throughout the text. Minor issues are to be found in the bibliography - some sources are referred only by URL link (https://cidcm.umd.edu), some entries are not complete (60), or are imprecise concerning names (63, 71, 74, etc.). There are also some language issues in the thesis („community party" instead of the communist party, „inclusive process" which intend to mean that excludes some actors or ethnicities, etc.)

The thesis seems to be somehow long (88 pages of text), especially when considering that some parts are not directly relevant to the research goals (Cold war, p. 9-10; history of Burmese kingdoms, p. 29-30). Data from Upsala and the other project are relevant and used well.

Suggested questions for the defence are:
- How would you defend the following claims „demands of ethnic groups cannot be satisfied by simply passing laws or offering political economy interests" (p. 6). Why could not the demands be satisfied by legislation? What about, e.g., regional autonomy, minority laws, education in the native language, etc.
- What is the difference between claiming that "ethnic characteristics are fixed" and that "they cannot be easily changed" in Burma? Is both the same (as suggested on page 24)?

I do recommend the thesis for the final defence.

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

CATEGORY	POINTS
Theoretical background (max. 20 points)	16
Contribution (max. 20 points)	17
Methods (max. 20 points)	14
Literature (max. 20 points)	19
Manuscript form (max. 20 points)	18
TOTAL POINTS *(max. 100 points)*	**84**
The proposed grade (A-B-C-D-E-F)	**B**

DATE OF EVALUATION: January 25, 2022

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Referee Signature