MASTER'S THESIS REPORT
International Economic and Political Studies (IEPS)
Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Thesis title:	
Student's name:	Aldi Shehu
Reviewer's name:	Jakub Franěk

Criteria	Maximum	Points
Contribution and argument (originality, justifiable research question and hypotheses, argumentation)	25	12
Theoretical framework (situating research into the existing knowledge)	25	18
Methodology (methods and data relevant to the research question and appropriately used)	20	15
Referencing to sources	15	14
Formal aspects (structure, logical coherence, layout, tables, figures)	10	7
Presentation (language, style, cohesion)	5	3
Total	**100**	**69**

Plagiarism-check (URKUND) match score (if the plagiarism-check (URKUND) match score is above 15%, the reviewer has to include his/her assessment of the originality of the reviewed thesis in his/her review):
Despite the 22% Turnitin match score, there are now reasons to suspect plagiarism. The detected matches concern isolated fragments of texts or duly referenced citations.

Reviewer's commentary according to the above criteria

Aldi Shehu has conceived a rather ambitious Master Thesis project on an interesting and highly relevant topic. Taking his cue from John Rawls' claim that "the causes of the wealth of a people and the forms it takes lie in their political culture and in the religious, philosophical, and moral traditions that support the basic structure of their political and social institutions"), he aims to explore (or redefine) the relationship "between political culture and the [apparently mostly economic] development of nations" (p. 13, cf. p. 20). In doing so, he aims to answer no less than three research questions (or goals): (i) How the political specific components of political culture influence a country's development; (ii) to examine the interplay between domestic and international factors in shaping such development; and (iii) to examine how a country's local political culture mediates the impact of external factors on its development (pp. 15-16).

To answer these research questions, the author intends to use a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches including e.g. semi-structured interviews, comparative analysis of an unspecified number of cases, an in-depth case study focused on Albania's post-communist transition, as well as "statistical methods like regression analysis and structural equation modelling" (p. 22).

The above outline of the research aims, as well as the complex methodology proposed to tackle them implies that the author has raised his stakes quite high. Unfortunately, the resulting text fails to meet these aims. The resulting thesis fails not only to be entirely persuasive in its main

argumentative line – which otherwise contains many interesting points – but also fails to contain the material promised in the Introduction.

The promised statistical methods do not appear in the provided text. Instead of employing any original statistical analysis of his own, the author merely references and comments upon the results of already published studies. The advertised "in-depth case study" of Albania consists of less then five pages of text, which partially repeats previously raised points. Similarly, while the reader does receive the evaluation of the results of the conducted semi-structured interviews, their outcome appears somewhat inconclusive and unrelated to the central argumentative strand of the present thesis, i.e of the theoretical examination of political culture and its relation to what the author initially, and perhaps pertinently, described as "national development" (p. 15).

While the theoretical component of the thesis is contained largely in Chapter 2 entitled "Defining Political Culture", it in fact permeates through all other chapters. As suggested above, this theoretical component of the present thesis is also its most persuasive one. Not so much because the author would have managed to achieve his goal of construing a "robust theoretical framework to evaluate Rawls' hypothesis" (p. 14) but rather because it offers an interesting and informed discussion about the problems inherent in such task. Specifically, this means the issues related to the problem of the mutual relationship between political institutions on the one hand and political culture on the other hand, and the problem of the relationship between democracy and economic development (or performance) on the other hand.

The author's definition of the three key components of political culture (*Political efficacy – Trust – Participation and civic engagement*) is clearly related to specifically *democratic* political culture. One should perhaps note that Rawls' claim about the importance of a nation's political culture for its ability to generate wealth, which forms the starting point of this thesis, appears more pluralistic, insofar as it allows for a possibility of a non-democratic political culture conducive to high levels of economic development. And indeed, out author does engage in a discussion of at least two non-democratic countries with an impressive track-record of economic growth: China (PRC) one hand and South Korea (SK) on the other hand (pp. 49-50).

This rather brief discussion however illustrates quite well the main problems of the theoretical argument of the present thesis. The author argues that while the PRC managed to retain "its authoritarian political structure" while effectively modernising its economic system and performance since 1980s, "South Korea has gone form a totalitarian system to a system of robust democracy while undergoing rapid industrialization and economic growth" (p.50). As expected, our author explains the divergent development pathways by alleged differences in the political cultural of the two countries. While China's "local political culture" is in his words "rooted in state control and centralised authority", the South Korea's one was originally based on the "Confucian values of respect for hierarchy and respect for authority", nonetheless under the impact or the county's economic growth, there appeared "a cultural shift towards greater political participation and democratisation" (p.50).

Besides the rather bizarre and misleading characterisation of the South Korea's (pre-1987) regime as "totalitarian" and China's regime as "authoritarian", the previously summarised argument strikes the reader by the extremely vague use of the crucial term of *political culture*. While the political culture of PRC is defined by its "authoritarian political structure", South Korea's political culture is defined by its Confucian heritage but also (at a later stage) as a result of its successful economic reforms. Moreover, the same passage describes today China's combination of market economy and political authoritarianism as "unique" without noticing that the same characteristic fits also (among other countries) the pre-1987 South Korea (pp. 49-50).

The brief comparison of the developments of PRC on one hand, and South Korea on the other, raises a couple of questions relevant to the central argument of the reviewed thesis. First of all, an attentive reader might wonder, why the seemingly miraculous transformation of the Confucian political culture characterised by the "values of hierarchy and respect for authority" (p. 50) to a more democratic culture experienced by South Korea as a consequence of its successful economic policies did not occur a couple of decades later also in China. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, why is (the pre-1987) South Korea's political culture defined by the centuries-long tradition of Confucianism, while the political culture of mainland China, i.e. the cradle of Confucianism, is defined as a consequence of a couple of decades long communist rule? This ambivalent approach to political culture reappears in the brief case study of Albania's post-communist transformation, which explains the country's political culture simultaneously as a consequence of its previous communist regime, and as a result of the surviving traditional pre-modern social structures and values.

The author might respond to the above raised questions by referencing his well-informed and truly relevant analysis of the mutual interplay between political culture on the one hand, and institutionalised as well as informal social practice on the other hand. This analysis, nonetheless, appears somewhat inconclusive, insofar as it fails to answer the most important question present in the current academic debate concerning political culture: i.e. is a country's development determined by its engrained political culture or, rather, by the set-up of its political institutions, which may be obviously (among other matters) influenced by external, i.e. international, factors?

The author of the reviewed thesis unfortunately fails to face the above-described question directly although the examples discussed in his thesis provide opportunities to do so. The comparison of the different developmental pathways of South Korea and PRC could have included the assessment of the different institutional settings of their respective political regimes, as well as their different roles in international relations. On the other hand, the case study of Albania would have benefited from including a comparison with another formerly communist country that experienced a notably different (and more successful) post-communist transition – e.g. Slovenia.

One last critical remark. The author repeatedly attempts to vindicate the myth of a positive correlation between liberal democracy on hand, and successful, dynamically developing (market) economy on the other hand. This line of argumentation is present not only in the chosen conceptualisation of political culture, but also in the empirical arguments contained mostly to the author's comments on various charts contained in the chapter somewhat misleadingly entitled as "List of Figures".

Proposed grade: D

Suggested questions for the defence:

I recommend the thesis for the final defence.

_____
Signature

Overall grading scheme at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University:

Total Points	Grade	Quality standard
91–100	A	= outstanding (high honour)

81–90	B	= superior (honour)
71–80	C	= good
61–70	D	= satisfactory
51–60	E	= low pass at a margin of failure
0–50	F	= failing, the thesis is not recommended for defence