

Name of the student:	Shang-Yen Lee
Title of the thesis:	Political Engagement and Identity Awareness among Czech-Vietnamese University Students
Reviewer:	Mitchell Young

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

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

The research addresses the tripartite relationship between minority identity, political participation and civic participation. It adds to an already developed field of scholarship, but one which still has significant open questions in terms of the relationship between these three concepts, as the author demonstrates. By using the Vietnamese minority in the Czech Republic as the object of the study, the author addresses both a concrete case that has received little attention in English language discourses, as well as shedding light on some of the key theoretical issues in an exploratory way.

Since the author's original proposal, the research objective has undergone significant modification as a result of several factors: the author's not having Czech or Vietnamese languages skills, the difficulty of identifying research targets, and the lack of a sufficient base of politically active politicians with Vietnamese descent. This last factor required the researcher to change her initial proposal after reviewing the municipal election rolls in search of Vietnamese candidates. What she found was evidence of non-participation rather than a set of possible interview targets. This resulted in a new focus to her research, one of interviewing 2nd generation Vietnamese to test a set of hypotheses in an exploratory way. While this means the research cannot be broadly generalised, it does provide interesting insights and ideas for future work.

The literature review is well done, showing an understanding of the various debates in the field. Some of the section sub-titles (i.e. case selection) would fit better in the methodology section, but the content as it is written fits the section it is in.

2. ANALYSIS

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

The author develops a triangular theoretical framework and uses a set of semi-structured interviews to examine a set of hypotheses based on positive and negative relationships between each of the three elements. Theoretically, the triangular framework is well designed, and provides a good point of departure for exploration. The hypotheses are grounded in the literature, though in a few places this is a bit confusing (i.e. in the description of H1/H2 there are elements of the negative H2 hypothesis in the description of H1, and in H5 and H6 there is too much emphasis on Willems, who's research should probably only be mentioned in H6.) Overall, by using this approach the author shows that there are conflicting findings about each of the three relationships in questions, which provides a sound basis for her call for further exploration.

Methodologically, the criteria for selecting interviewees is clear and logical. The author gets some very insightful observations out of her interviews.

Sources are well used and summarised in a proper academic manner.

3. CONCLUSIONS

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

The author does a good job in connecting the interview data to her hypotheses and explaining how it is relevant. She is able also to find some counterintuitive results, for example on p.60 where she explains that one interviewee was intentionally not civically active so as to avoid supporting stereotypes.

In some ways the author struggles with not being able to use the interview results to show correlations in the way quantitative data could be used; however, in general she has done a good job of avoiding those sort of statements (except on p.57 where the claim of 'disproving' can't be substantiated), and is able to focus more on identifying evidence of what fosters or blocks political and civic participation.

The author recognizes that this is not an area of study that yields simple conclusions. In her findings, she shows that there is evidence on both sides of the conflicting hypotheses within the Czech case. As such, there is a need for deeper exploration in the future in an attempt to find the variables that produce these conflicting results (though that may prove impossible).

The author also provides evidence as to why civic participation should be treated as a separate category from political participation and not be subsumed under it as some recent scholars (i.e. Verba et al) have attempted to do. She makes the point nicely on pp.65-66.

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

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

The language is acceptable, and the work is not difficult to read but there remain quite a few typos and grammatical errors. It adheres to academic standards. The layout is clear, but in some places the quotes are not indented and italicised.

The references section has several issues: one, some of the references are missing sources (Cernik, Caro and Shultz, Sirinic, etc.); two, the formatting should be single spaced and ideally reverse indented; and three, it needs to be alphabetised.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

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

Overall the work is well done and can be of assistance in further research in the field. The strengths of the work are in developing a theoretical framework that exposes theoretical contradictions and providing evidence of them in the Czech Vietnamese case. Also, the argument against making civic participation a subcategory of political participation is convincing.

The thesis could be improved in several ways. The operationalisation of the hypotheses could be more developed. Also, I would have like to see more comparisons with the society at large to triangulate (at least partially) the interview findings (i.e. what percentage of the equivalent age group for all Czech's vote?) There are also a few items that could have also been clarified further (i.e. what does it mean that the country has recognised the Vietnamese as a minority?) Finally, there is very little connection with the Czech literature on this topic – while given her limited time in Prague, learning the language could not have been expected, there may have been other ways to do more with this.

The author showed a resilient attitude towards her research even as she ran into some dead ends. We met regularly to discuss her research and she actively sought feedback and took that on board in her work. Overall, she has done a fine job with the research and work she has produced.

Grade (A-F):	B
Date:	Signature:
11.6.2019	