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Kálmán, Eszter

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National Identity Contestation and the International Order: The Role of Small Powers Investigated through the Case of Mongolia

Eszter Kálmán

s2816733

Supervisor: Sense Hofstede

Second reader: Nicolas Blarel



Universiteit Leiden

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Introduction

Constant investigation of the dynamics of the international order is crucial, as they have profound implications for the states experiencing them (Davis, 2017). However, current theories do not adequately address the future of the international order. Scholars like Gramsci (1971), Cox (1987), and Allan et al. (2018) investigate the role of common sense in great power states in influencing the international order's stability. Much attention has been paid to how dynamics between great powers and the international order shape each other. However, the role of dynamics in small power states is missing. This is a significant gap, as their role has been magnified because of globalisation and shift towards a more multipolar world (Jargalsaikhan, 2018).

In addition, by neglecting to look at small powers, scholarship misses the effect of states that join the international order, especially if joining is an outcome of social change resulting from shifts in the distribution of power. Gunitsky (2014) argues that transformation in the distribution of power leads to domestic change. Abdelal et al. (2006) argue that national identity contestation will be the outcome of questions concerning the content of a collective identity in the wake of social change. Hintz (2016) and Allan et al. (2018) claim that tensions within national identity will influence the international arena. However, a question remains: how does national identity contestation in small power states affect the international order?

This thesis aims at shedding light on this question. First, I will delve into existing research concerning social change, hegemony, national identity, and foreign policy. I will argue that shifts in the distribution of power lead to social change in states. As states join a hegemonic order, they will experience the dissemination of the legitimising ideology of the order in their structures. However, this process will be constrained unless the legitimising ideology resonates with discourses of national identity domestically. These discourses are embedded in common sense of elites and masses, which is influenced by the collective memories of individuals identifying as belonging to the same nation. In the wake of social change, contradictions between the existing and emerging interpretations of the national identity will lead to contestation. Since national identity discourses influence foreign policy, contestation will influence the international order. This process also matters for the future of the international order in case it occurs in small powers, because domestic level contestation can spill over to the international arena. In the long run, contestation in several states might lead to the construction of a counterhegemonic coalition, enabling the shifts in the distribution of power.

Subsequently, I will investigate how national identity contestation is present in the international arena by investigating the case of Mongolia. Mongolia experienced social change as the outcome of the regime changes in the early 1990s, which was the result of power shifts in the international order (de la Sablonnière et al., 2009). Through literature research, I will argue that Mongolia has been experiencing national identity contestation because of social change and identify current national identity proposals. Then, I will analyse and discuss the effect this contestation has on the international arena by looking at addresses made by Mongolia at the United Nations General Assembly.

Finally, I will conclude that the legitimising ideology of the international order is fine-tuned in response to contestation against it, which enables elites to perpetuate existing power dynamics. Thus, contestation is prevented from influencing the international order by elites and the non-representation of masses in international organisations. Instead, contestation in small powers acts as a signal that the legitimising ideology needs to be altered to keep the international order stable.

Social Change, National Identity, and the International Order

Social Change

Change is a constant feature of life (de la Sablonnière et al., 2009). However, social change is so significant that it reshapes social structures. In this process, “the existing system becomes unstable as it succumbs to the pressure of fast-paced disruptive events” (p. 328).

Social change can be the outcome of varying dynamics. Conflict within society enables a dynamism that calls for innovation to fit emerging needs (Coser, 1957). Modern war is a process of intensified dynamism in which societies get reordered, in opposition to the defined enemy and within themselves (Modell & Haggerty, 1991). Conflict stimulates innovation not only regarding norms and institutions, but also technology and the economy (Coser, 1957). Changes in technology enable humans to achieve a desired outcome with less cost and effort, which leads to new opportunities and improved life conditions (Weinstein, 1960). Societies’ conditions may turn dynamic because of weather events like floods, droughts, and earthquakes. Rapid change in population size also matters. Events like invasion, conquest, or migration are also dynamizing social determinants.

Regime transitions, processes characterised by extraordinary uncertainty, are also a form of social change resulting from a need for transformation (Bermeo et al., 1990). Large-scale hegemonic transformations in the international system act as major catalysts for domestic change (Gunitsky, 2014). Shifts in the distribution of power lead to reconfigurations in the

international order, thus to social change. As states join a new hegemonic order, they will experience the dissemination of the legitimising ideology of the order in their own structures of institutions, rules, norms, and discourses (Cox, 1987). In this paper, I will focus on social change as an outcome of regime transitions. In the next section, I will discuss hegemony more broadly and argue that the success of the process of dissemination will depend on whether the legitimising ideology resonates with the common sense of elites and masses within a state.

Hegemony, Legitimising Ideology, and Joining the International Order

According to Cox (1987), an international order is a sustained pattern of state behaviours. A hegemonic international order is created by a dominant state or coalition of states and is underpinned by broad consent regarding the ideology of the hegemon(s). It is also a system of production which extends globally and is supported by shared interests and views of social classes. In addition, it requires a legitimising ideology which is to promote and protect the rules and ideas that maintain that order. The legitimising ideology is channelled into states through a framework of institutions, rules, norms, and discourses that influence state behaviour. Cox paid special attention to the acceptance of the legitimising ideology by elites. However, as Gramsci (1971) writes, considering the common-sense beliefs of the masses is essential for the ideological hegemony to be established. Common sense is the incoherent and unorganised collection of ideas about what is good and just. Ideological hegemony must resonate with the daily common sense of masses to be stable.

The current international order is based on the interests of the United States, thus it is based on democracy and neoliberalism (Allan et al., 2018) If democracy is understood as the good and just way to organise political life and markets as the way to run the economy, it can be stated that the “Western neoliberal democratic ideology is hegemonic” (p. 847).

Although, as the neoliberal element has received criticism regarding its effects on the living standards of the wider population (especially in developing countries which are often small powers), its transformation is worth attention (Haslam et al., 2021). Neoliberalism was introduced in the 1980s to overcome debt crises. It suggested that human well-being is best achieved by liberating individual entrepreneurship while ensuring strong private property rights and free markets (Adams, 2020). To overcome debt crises, market liberalisation was needed for more efficient resource distribution, wealth creation and attracting foreign investment (Haslam et al., 2021). This policy prescription was called structural adjustment programs (SAPs) and was channelled into states in crisis or transition as a US-supported conditionality upon which they would receive loans from the International Monetary Fund.

SAPs came under pressure in the 2000s because they did not bring stable economic growth and burdened the poorest (Haslam et al., 2021). This has led to the appearance of alternative development approaches, which put more emphasis on human development, citizen participation, and local/indigenous knowledge instead of focusing merely on accumulation and modernisation (Nederveen Pieterse, 1998).

Neoliberalism has also been criticised for being detrimental to the environment (Adams, 2020). Therefore, the idea of sustainable development emerged in the Brundtland Report in 1987 and was institutionalised by the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 (Jacobs, 2012). As sustainable development focused on identifying costs and setting limits, its policy support declined in the 2000s. In a world where economic growth remains the objective of states, environmental discourse must incorporate growth. Hence was born the concept of green growth, which proclaimed that growth and environmental protection were compatible, and they led to improved growth. Economic growth could be sustained while technology would have accounted for the negative effects of development.

The appearance of alternative development, and sustainable/green growth in international discourses shows that the content of the legitimising ideology requires ‘fine-tuning’ in case of rising tensions against its elements. Widespread tensions indicate that the legitimising ideology and the structure that it underpins generate outcomes that conflict with common sense in states (Allan et al., 2018).

A hegemonic ideology “may operate as a structural factor at the international level that includes or excludes certain states from full membership or participation in the order” (Allan et al., 2018, p. 849). I argue that this has an implication for states that are experiencing social change in the form of regime transition. In times of extreme dynamism caused by shifts in the distribution of power, the legitimising ideology of the hegemonic state(s) will disseminate through its network of institutions in the domestic structures of the state that wants to join the international order (Gunitsky, 2014; Cox, 1987). I argue that elites in states experiencing social change will be especially recipient to the legitimising ideology as they will see it as beneficial due to its nature to be appealing, and as a source of internal stability (Cox, 1987). This might be increasingly true for small powers, as their ability to protect themselves from external threats is limited (Elman, 1995). Elites will portray their interest towards the masses as universal through hegemonic ideology (Gramsci, 1971). However, this ideology must consider mass common sense. In the next section, I will discuss national identity and its relationship with mass/elite common sense.

Nation, National Community, National Identity

What is a nation? Renan (2019) claims that a nation is a soul encompassed by a common past, common will in the present, and readiness to make sacrifices for the community in the future. Recognition plays an important role in people conceiving themselves as part of a nation, as it enables feelings of loyalty and solidarity as well as belief in mutual rights and duties (Gellner, 1983). For Anderson (1983), this implies that a nation is a community based on “deep, horizontal comradeship” (p. 7). Thus, nations are *imagined* communities, as co-nationals will never know each other, and they can only believe in a shared community.

People of the same nation share a system of ideas, signs, and behaviour (Gellner, 1983). Abdelal et al. (2006) address the content of a collective identity, identifying four types which are non-mutually exclusive. First, constitutive norms define the informal rules and conditions of group membership. Second, people belonging to the same identity group share social purposes, which in turn define a lens to help interpret the world and navigate decisions towards collectively appreciated outcomes. Third, collective identity serves as a cognitive model, a way of understanding political and material conditions and interests. Fourth, group identity includes relational comparisons, which help define self and other.

Other scholars think of nations as outcomes of elite orchestration. Hobsbawm (1983) writes that national communities are an outcome of social engineering by elites aiming to stay in power by inventing traditions and highlighting continuity with a shared past. However, inventing traditions is hard as they are linked to genuine ethnic past (Smith, 1991). Elites’ active orchestration is rather a reconstruction of traditions. Groups are formed through living their collective life among their shared memories, myths, and traditions. Halbwachs (as cited in Marcel & Mucchielli, 2008) highlights that material and normative representations and traditions enable and reproduce collective memories of the past. Socialisation within a group enables the reproduction of memory and identity and the transmission of responsibilities from past to present (Poole, 2008).

This means that the content of group identities is stored in collective memory, which influences mass/elite common sense (Abdelal et al., 2006; Poole, 2008; Gramsci, 1971). Allan et al. (2018) write that understandings of the national self are thus also embedded in common sense. They define national identity as “a constellation of social categories about what constitutes the national self or what it means to be a member of a nation” (p. 848). Their definition indicates the presence of a “discourse of national identity categories and concepts”

(p. 848) instead of a single national identity. It is this discourse that individuals use to make decisions about what is desirable and construct meanings in everyday life.

In short, based on the arguments of the scholars mentioned above, I argue that elite orchestration and/or the dissemination of the legitimising ideology of the international order will be constrained unless it resonates with discourses of national identity. This is since national identity is embedded in common sense, which is influenced by the collective memories of co-nationals, which can only be influenced over time. In the next section, I will argue that contradictions between the legitimising ideology and domestic common sense will lead to national identity contestation, which influences the international order.

National Identity Contestation, Small Powers, and the International Order

Regime transition as the result of reconfigurations in the distribution of power leads to social change (Bermeo et al., 1990; Gunitsky, 2014). As a country joins the international order, it will experience the dissemination of the legitimising ideology in its domestic structure (Cox, 1987). Social change shapes a society's broader environment (Davis, 2017). Thus, it requires the individual to reconstruct their identity and situate it within new and often competing cultural discourses and practices. According to Abdelal et al. (2006), the reconstruction of identity happens through contestation around the content of the national identity. They define identity contestation as "the degree of agreement within a group over the content of the shared identity" (p. 696). Identity contestation is the main purpose of identity discourse, in which group members discuss the meaning of their collective identity in everyday contexts. Through this process, interpretations of the collective identity can become fragmented and potentially create conflict within the group over meanings and purposes.

Due to regime transition and joining the international order, the legitimising ideology of the order will come into interaction with discourses of national identity as it is channelled into the state through transformations in domestic institutions (Cox, 1987). I argue that social change might lead to contestation between existing and emerging interpretations of the meaning and goals of the nation. While elites are more likely to see the benefits of the emerging identity proposed by the legitimising ideology (Cox, 1987), contestation is more likely at mass level due to their varied circumstances and limited capacity to adapt. However, contestation of the emerging identity may be expected at both levels due to shared common sense rooted in collective memory (Gramsci, 1971; Poole, 2008).

Identity hegemony theory looks at the process of contestation to reach an appropriate identity for a group (Hintz, 2016). It investigates the standard behaviours and purposes of a

subnational group, as well as their reasoning for why that is the appropriate identity. Different versions of a national identity are understood as proposals that aid in contestation and persuade group members to accept a version of a national identity. National identity contestation carries profound ontological significance concerning appropriate behaviour and definitions of self and other. Thus, supporters of a subnational identity group will “strive for hegemony of their proposals in order to satisfy personal needs and realize group interests” (p. 340).

Why is national identity contestation at the domestic level relevant for the international order? Because national identity discourses influence foreign policy decision-making (Allan et al., 2018). “Identity discourses help shape what policies are taken for granted or acceptable for both elites and masses” (p. 848), which will influence the strength and content of the hegemonic order as an outcome of interaction between national and international levels. Thus, the legitimacy of an international order depends on whether the identity it distributes through its legitimising ideology is acceptable for masses and elites in great powers. Thus, I argue that for the international order to be stable, it must fine-tune its legitimising ideology to resonate with national identity in great powers.

The IR literature lacks comprehensive insights about the foreign policy of small powers (Kassimeris, 2008). Handel (1981) defines small powers as political entities that can influence international politics. In contrast, Keohane (1969) calls small powers “system-ineffectual states” (p. 269), as they are ineffective in influencing the system affecting them. This prevents them from pursuing an independent foreign policy and initiating change (Zahariadis, 1994). Membership in international organisations (IOs) shapes small power influence (Kassimeris, 2008). The rule and decision-making capabilities of the international system over certain issues can constrain independent foreign policy formation of states. This way, small powers can get trapped by their obligations to other member states instead of promoting their national interests. However, as the international community becomes increasingly globalised, the influence of small powers grows because there are many of them. Coalitions formation is facilitated by IO-membership, which enables resisting against great-power influence. Additionally, IOs provide channels through which small powers can support attitudes and a political culture favourable to their interests (Keohane, 1969).

I argue that the process of contestation in small powers also matters due to their large number and magnified voice through IOs. Discontent with the international order might be present in other states as well, which might be harnessed into a counterhegemonic coalition in the long run (Allan et al., 2018). National identity contestation might spill over to the

international arena through IO-membership and reach a wide range of actors, enabling appeal for legitimacy and potential coalition-making (Kassimeris, 2008; Hintz, 2016).

In short, national identity contestation influences foreign policy decision making in states (Hintz, 2016, Allan et al., 2018). This process is essential to investigate not only in great powers but also in small powers because it might matter for the future of the international order (Kassimeris, 2008). In the next section, I will make a case for studying this process through Mongolia and introduce my research design.

Research Design

Case selection: Mongolia

The dissolution of the Soviet Union led to reconfigurations in the distribution of power, thus significant change in the international order (Wohlforth, 1995). From the ashes of the Soviet Union emerged the US as the sole superpower of the new hegemonic order. Post-communist states, including Mongolia experienced radical social change as they joined the international order (de la Sablonnière et al., 2009). Transitioning to democracy meant the establishment of “basic human rights, private ownership, and separation of powers” (Dore & Nagpal, 2006, p. 6). As Mongolia lost its main economic and military support, it experienced a great economic recession. To tackle this backlash, the country went through a shock therapy, meaning the implementation of a series of economic reforms leading to a transition to free market economy (de la Sablonnière et al., 2009).

I argue that by the establishment of democracy and market economy Mongolia joined the US-led international order. Consequently, they experienced the dissemination of the legitimising ideology in their domestic structures. As will be argued below, this has led to contestation between emerging and existing understandings of the national identity, which influenced Mongolia’s foreign policy. In addition, Mongolia is a small power that is party to many IOs, thus its case is appropriate to answer the research question (Jargalsaikhan, 2018).

Why is the case of Mongolia relevant? The dissolution of the Soviet Union led to the independence not only of Mongolia, but also several satellite states in Eastern-Europe, which was followed by democratic transition and market reforms (Walker, 2003). Rapid social change might also have led to national identity contestation in those states. In addition, many other countries emerged that previously were entirely under Soviet occupation (Walker, 2003). Even though their transition differs more from that of Mongolia, they also experienced radical social change due to shifts in the distribution of power, leading possibly to national identity contestation. Thus, inferences can be drawn from the Mongolian case to understand a similar

dynamic in post-Soviet states. More broadly, the case can be insightful to study national identity contestation as the outcome of regime transition.

The relevance of the Mongolian case shows how similar dynamics in small powers cumulatively might have more significant implications for the stability of the international order. Post-communist states take part in many international conferences, conventions, and bodies, to which their contributions are influenced by identity (Hintz, 2016). In the next section, I will discuss the methodology used to map national identity proposal (as described by Hintz, 2016) in Mongolia, and then move on to the method of analysing how contestation is reflected in foreign policy.

Methodology: Justification and Outline

In this research, the first step towards shedding light on the dynamics of national identity in small power states and their implications for the international order is mapping national identity proposals in Mongolia.

Discourses of national identity reveal the degree to which the legitimising ideology of the international order resonates with common sense in a state (Allan et al., 2018) Common sense can be investigated by analysing identity categories in a state. Identity categories are concepts in a text that refer to “what it means to be a member of the nation or what embodies the nation” (p. 855). Discourses of national identity reveal the degree of contestation and existing national identity proposals (Allan et al., 2018; Hintz, 2016).

To recover a coherent image of national identity proposals in Mongolia, I conduct literature research of relevant articles. The reviewed literature on Mongolian identity is from a wider time frame extending from 1998 to 2019. An advantage of this aspect is the possibility of mapping the contemporary dynamism of national identity in Mongolia instead of viewing it as static. National identity is subject to constant alteration during social interaction (Hintz, 2016). A wider time frame enables the investigation of the nature and direction of this dynamism. A framework to recover the content of identity proposals from literature can be derived from Abdelal et al.’s (2006) article. Following this, the elements that members of a subnational identity must share to form a group are constitutive norms, social purposes, relational comparisons, and cognitive models as outlined above. This framework is substituted by two other factors that academic literature is insightful about: the sources and expected consequences of contestation. The framework in this research includes these factors to better understand scholars’ findings about national identity in Mongolia and the dynamism of contestation.

To investigate the effect of national identity contestation in Mongolia on the country's foreign policy, discourse analysis is conducted. Discourses are sets of ideas, concepts, and categories that (re)produce meaning in a certain time and space (Halperin & Heath, 2020). Discourse analysis explores how discourses legitimise and give meaning to social practices and institutions. While discourse is revealed through textual analysis, the meanings attached to them can only be understood in their respective contexts. Discourse analysis assumes that people's actions are driven by socially constructed beliefs, values, or ideologies. Through them, meanings are attached to actions, which can explain political behaviour.

In this research, the context in which discourses are (re)produced is social change due to power shifts in the distribution of power and Mongolia joining this order. In the process of national identity contestation, people's socially defined values and beliefs play a large part as they construct the discourses around national identity categories and concepts (Halperin & Heath, 2020; Allan et al., 2018). National identity categories can be recovered through looking at "everything that is said or written in a given state of society, everything that is printed or talked about and represented today through electronic media." (Angenot as cited in Allan et al., 2018). Thus, analysing discourse in foreign policy documents reveals dynamics of national identity at home. In this research, addresses made by representatives of Mongolia at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) will be analysed. The UNGA is the principal policy-making body of the UN (United Nations, 2023). As all member states are present, the UNGA provides a unique space where diverse issues are discussed. Thus, during the annual sessions, states can express their standing regarding the agenda and their main views and goals, which are influenced by their national identities (Abdelal et al., 2006). For the analysis, one speech from each decade following regime transition is chosen randomly. This is done to detect how elites present themselves and what identity is conveyed, whether contestation is present, and to investigate the dynamism of national identity discourse. The speeches were accessed through the UN Audiovisual Library and the website of the UNGA. When analysing the speeches, the aim is to detect which proposal is used in the representative's discourse and whether contestation is present.

A limitation of looking at only addresses of representatives is that mass perceptions are not directly traceable. Elites will present their own interests, which are likely influenced by the legitimising ideology that appeals to them and which promises stability (Cox, 1987). However, as argued above, elite and mass perceptions overlap due to shared collective memory (Smith, 1991). In addition, elites are accountable to masses, which puts a constraint on their ability to solely present their own interests (Allan et al., 2018). Thus, elite addresses at the UNGA might

reflect the state of national identity contestation: rising tensions at home are more likely to be traceable in the speeches.

In short, to trace national identity proposals and discourse as well as its dynamism in Mongolia, literature research will be conducted. Then, to shed light on the effect of national identity contestation on foreign policy, I conduct discourse analysis of addresses made by representatives of Mongolia at the UNGA.

The Case of Mongolia

Sources of Contestation

Identification in national terms was not widespread until Mongolia became a satellite state of the Soviet Union in 1924 (Kaplonski, 1998). Thus, the first national ideology introduced to Mongolia was Marxism/Leninism, while traditional identity was suppressed (Sarlagtay, 2002). Being part of the Soviet bloc meant that modern commercial and financial services, industry, and transportation technologies were introduced to Mongolia. Along with steps taken to achieve modernisation, urban lifestyle also emerged from Soviet and Eastern-European influence.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, democracy and market economy were introduced in Mongolia (de la Sablonnière et al., 2009). Democracy resonated with Mongolians because in the 1980s they received western cultural influence (Batbayar, 2002). In addition, valuing freedom derives from the nomadic lifestyle: democratic principles can be found in traditional Mongolian law. Thus, I argue that democracy resonates with common sense in Mongolia.

However, transformation to neoliberal capitalism led to hardship and tensions for Mongolians, especially for nomadic herders (de la Sablonnière et al., 2009, Rossabi, 2005). During socialism, herders were organised into *negdels* (collectives) (Rossabi, 2005). *Negdels* were praised for bringing many benefits. They introduced innovations, provided education and training, and paid regular wages to herders. In addition, the state organised the marketing and distribution of animal products on a larger scale. These benefits reduced the risks of the nomadic lifestyle, which is characterised by uncertainty due to its dependence on weather and commodity prices. After regime transition, Western advisors proposed that Mongolia went through shock therapy to implement market economy (Rossabi, 2005). However, this approach was contested because the drive for wealth accumulation and desire to own material goods was not clearly present in Mongolia. Besides, Western advisors focused on development in the industry and urban areas, leaving herders' concerns unaddressed. Privatisation of animals but not of land led to hardship for the pastoral economy (Upton, 2010b). Privileged herders grew the size of their herds, which in combination with a lack of grazing regulation led to overgrazing

in a country vulnerable to climate change (Rossabi, 2005; Batima, 2005). Herders who could not acquire large enough herds to sustain themselves joined by those who lost most or all their livestock to extremely cold winters in 1999-2001 fled to urban areas or moved close to them (Rossabi, 2005). Immobility as an outcome of the need to be close to towns made herding less sustainable. Pasturelands that were seasonal became permanent, leading to land degradation around urban areas. In addition, mass migration to towns became a burden for the urban economy, infrastructure, and social services. In short, transformation to a neoliberal market economy and the absence of a social safety net made life more precarious, especially for herders.

State response involved the aim to urbanise ninety percent of the population and the establishment of animal husbandry cooperatives for the remaining ten percent (Rossabi, 2005). This response ignored that thirty-five percent of the population was still engaging in pastoralism, which also defined their cultural identity (Upton, 2010b). Thus, the process of transition to neoliberal capitalism, the primary focus on urbanisation and difficulties experienced by the nomadic population led to tensions around the definition of the national identity (Rossabi, 2005; Jackson, 2014). In the next two sections, I will map national identity proposals in Mongolia and show how contestation crystallised around the issue of mining and the nation's relation to nature.

National Identity Proposals in Mongolia

In the aftermath of regime transition, the remaking of national identity became a primary concern (Upton, 2010b). As the legitimising ideology characterised by democracy and neoliberalism disseminated in Mongolia, liberal cosmopolitanism emerged (Sarlagtay, 2002; Allan et al., 2018). Among urban populations, the US began to be seen as the “example of high development” (Sarlagtay, 2002, p. 103), directing urban youth away from nomadic values and towards Western ones. This tendency was significant, as two-third of the population lived in urban areas at the turn of the millennium, which was to be further encouraged by elites who aimed to advance urbanisation and industrialisation (Sarlagtay, 2002). Meanwhile, the remaining third of the population engaged in animal husbandry and identified strongly with nomadism (Sarlagtay, 2002; Upton, 2010b). These findings make a base for assuming contestation around the content of the national identity.

National identity proposals were pronounced along the lines of nomadic or urban lifestyles (Sarlagtay, 2002). Nomadic herders and the rural population, as well as nationalists among the elite advocated for enabling Mongolians to pursue their traditional lifestyles

(Batbayar, 2002). Proponents of the ‘nomadic proposal’ regarded the nomadic heritage as pure and expressed the social purpose of retaining the pastoral identity. Excessive Westernisation was seen as damaging the nomadic character of the national identity. They saw that hasty privatisation of herds had been a mistake and it led to unsustainable development (Rossabi, 2005). Thus, neoliberalism was seen as not being able to meet herders needs. Meanwhile, a social state fitted better with the cognitive model of the group, as a safety net was perceived as necessary to sustain nomadism and enable access to the opportunities offered by modernity. The latter point made by Rossabi carries significance, as it highlights that proponents of the nomadic identity did not reject modernity but saw it as aiding in sustaining the feasibility of nomadism.

A crucial point of contention can be found around the future of nomadism. In contrast to the nomadic identity group, proponents of the ‘urban proposal’, new private entrepreneurs, and business owners saw nomadism as obsolete in a modern economy (Sarlagtay, 2002; Honeychurch, 2010). They proposed that nomadism should be abandoned for the country’s competitiveness (Upton, 2010b). Their worldviews were influenced by a drive towards science and progress, and they advocated for economic liberalisation (Sarlagtay, 2002; Gardelle & Zhao, 2019). Their main social purpose was to develop Mongolia’s industry to launch the country towards economic growth (Sarlagtay, 2002). Batbayar (2002) writes that most of the elite adopted this position. At the same time, it was recognised by elites that nomadism was integral to the livelihoods and identity of a large part of the population (Upton, 2010a). Thus, elites framed Mongolian national identity as being close to nature. The national imaginary painted a symbolic image of nomadic culture, which was rather reflective of “Western steppe romanticism” (Bruun as cited in Upton, 2010a, p. 305) than a commitment to ensure the feasibility of pastoral lifestyles.

Thus, incompatibilities between the two identity groups become visible regarding the neoliberal character of the legitimising ideology (Allan et al., 2018). There seems to have been mass-level discontent concerning the laissez-faire model’s effects on the environment, herders’ lifestyles, and the implications that effect had on the nomadic character of the national identity (Rossabi, 2005; Jackson, 2014). The increasing unfeasibility of nomadism was seen as a national loss, as neoliberalism rendered it difficult for members of the group to fulfil their responsibilities of retaining their customs and lifestyle (Jackson, 2014; Poole, 2008). This point of contention crystallised around the issue of mining, which is, according to High and Schlesinger (as cited in Upton, 2010b) “emblematic of a changing Mongolia” (p. 247).

Questions around mining arose in terms of the future of people's relation to land, the environment, and the place of nomadism in Mongolia (Upton, 2010a; 2010b).

Contestation around Mining and the Nation's Relation to Nature

Mongolia is abundant in natural resources (Dore & Nagpal, 2006). Jackson (2014) examines the case of the Oyu Tolgoi copper-gold mine, which began to be constructed in 2010 and it was expected to contribute more than thirty percent of the country's GDP. It was also projected to bring new jobs, infrastructure development, and foreign investment. Thus, mining seems to have contributed to putting Mongolia on a development path towards the 'urban proposal'. However, rural populations had to be convinced about the benefits of mining. Oyu Tolgoi as a transnational corporation engaged in nation-building by circulating a narrative highlighting harmony between mining and the environment that promised to bring community and economic development (Jackson, 2014). This discourse fits with green growth approaches, that see growth being compatible with protecting the environment (Jacobs, 2012).

Oyu Tolgoi could claim that mining and nomadism were able to coexist to avoid locals' objection, but their attempt at nation-building was doomed to fail as herders and residents experienced the negative effects of mining and infrastructure development on their bodies and livelihoods (Jackson, 2014). The establishment of Oyu Tolgoi led to the redirection of resources towards the mine and the propagation of dusts that invaded the bodies of locals and livestock, rendering herders more vulnerable. Locals also stated that mining and herding were not compatible, which made it clear that mining was not the teleology of the nation. At the same time, the state was unwilling/unable to keep Oyu Tolgoi to environmental standards, reflecting contesting priorities between sustainability that would enable harmony with nature and economic growth.

Nevertheless, through restating the importance of the nomadic self in opposition to an attempt at nation-building, rural masses resisted the neoliberal content of the legitimising ideology of the international order (Myadar, 2011, Allan et al., 2019). Myadar (2011) conveys the significance of this outcome:

“Mongolia may not be able, and indeed may not wish, to turn back the tide of globalisation or the movement toward global assimilation. But it can seek to maintain a piece of itself – by defining itself culturally in opposition to the global order, while at the same time being increasingly absorbed by it. Ironically [...], nomadism has symbolically taken on greater cultural significance and a more central role in how Mongolians define themselves –

independent, free-spirited, and resilient (the ‘nomad within’) (Myadar, 2011, p. 356)”.

Indeed, Gardelle and Zhao (2019) show how incorporating the achievements of modernity enable rising living standards for herders. Consequently, the number of herders is rising, and even some young people who grew up in the city choose to live the nomadic life. This is the outcome of incorporating nomadism in the national imaginary, perhaps as an outcome of shifts in the content of the legitimising ideology to include environmental protection (Gardelle & Zhao, 2019; Jackson, 2012). While herders see themselves as custodians of being Mongolian, they are open to reforms, to becoming globalised and to the accompanying emergence of urban identities. At the same time, restating the importance of the nomadic self retains its significance (Myadar, 2011). Mass common sense stands in opposition with neoliberalism channelled by national and international elites into Mongolia that render nomadic lifestyles increasingly unfeasible (Jackson, 2014). How could herders benefit from modernity if they cannot exist?

Mass-level contestation with neoliberalism remains relevant in Mongolia, which is expected to reflect on the legitimacy of the international order. In the next section, I will examine whether this effect exists by analysing addresses made by Mongolia in the UNGA.

Analysis and Discussion of Mongolia’s Addresses to the UNGA

The address made by Tsendiin Damdinsüren, the foreign affairs minister of Mongolia to the UNGA in 1994 shows the alignment of Mongolian elites with the legitimising ideology of the international order and the objective of ‘catching up’ with Western states in terms of political and economic development. Positive identification with democracy is expressed by Damdinsüren (1994) as he congratulates South Africa in their successful transition to democracy. Positive identification with neoliberalism can be observed throughout the speech. Firstly, the World Trade Organisation, an institution which is based on the principle of market liberalism, is seen as providing fair trade and benefitting developing countries (Damdinsüren, 1994; Oatley, 2019). Damdinsüren (1994) also expresses trust in the long-term success of SAPs and mentions growth regarding the role of the private sector as a positive development. This shows the success of the process of dissemination of the legitimising ideology into Mongolia’s domestic structures and elite common sense in the 1990s. Environmental issues do not remain unaddressed. Damdinsüren criticises the disparity between promises and results regarding environmental issues and mentions worsening droughts and desertification in Mongolia. However, this is not connected to the livelihoods of people in rural areas and the feasibility of

nomadism. This reflects the fact that western donors and political elites in the 1990s focused on Westernisation (Rossabi, 2005). Furthermore, the discussion of environmental issues without mentioning nomadism can rather be interpreted as a result of raising attention to climate change in the international arena than of domestic contestation (Jacobs, 2012). Thus, the 1994 address would suggest that if elite common sense resonates with the legitimising ideology of the order and if the needs of the masses remain unaddressed by that ideology, national identity contestation at home does not matter for the legitimacy of the international order.

However, the address made by Sanjaa Bayar, the prime minister of Mongolia to the UNGA in 2008 paints a partially different picture. In line with contestation around mining domestically, Mongolia's abundance in natural resources arises (Bayar, 2008; Jackson, 2014). Bayar (2008) expresses that pursuing environmental sustainability is contested. "With rich deposits of coal, copper, gold, molybdenum, and uranium, [...] Mongolia is, indeed, faced with unprecedented opportunity to embark upon the path of rapid economic growth and sustainable development if we are able to overcome partisan division [...]" (Bayar, 2008, p. 3)". Contestation among elites crystallises around the future of natural resources, which relates to the dilemma about whether to grow sustainably or rapidly. As Bayar emphasises the well-being of masses, I assume that domestic contestation around mining influenced elite discourse and foreign policy. However, this effect is not threatening to the legitimacy of the international order, as green growth thinking emerged in the legitimising ideology in the 2000s (Jacobs, 2012). This shift is the outcome of states influencing the content of the legitimising ideology, which must resonate with their common sense to uphold the international order's stability (Allan et al., 2018). Thus, the discourse conveyed by Bayar's (2008) speech signals pro-sustainability stance both towards domestic audiences and international actors. However, nomadism or identification with it does not appear in the speech, suggesting that national identity contestation had no effect. Besides, modernisation remains the main goal. Bayar (2008) states that becoming a middle-income country and integrating deeper into the world economy are priorities for foreign policy. This reflects the ideological strength of neoliberalism.

Green growth thinking became more widespread in the 2010s (Jacobs, 2012). This is reflected in the address of Elbegdorj Tsakhia, the president of Mongolia to the UNGA in 2013. He emphasises that tackling climate change must be taken seriously and expresses support for green development. Furthermore, Tsakhia (2013) mentions that investors are invited to explore economic pathways for Mongolian development. This reflects shifts towards alternative development and green growth in the legitimising ideology (Nederveen Pieterse, 1998; Jacobs, 2012). This shift would be expected to diminish contestation at home, as it allegedly contributes

to enabling nomadic lifestyles, citizen engagement, and moving away from Western standards. However, commitment to participatory/green approaches is lacking according to the literature on Mongolia. The incorporation of the knowledge of pastoralists in conservation strategies in Mongolia is neglected (Upton, 2010a). Mining activities remain underregulated by the state despite their negative effects on the environment and citizens' livelihoods (Jackson, 2014). Thus, while the shift in the legitimising ideology fits mass common sense better, keeping up to its promises are inadequate, and the nomadic identity remains missing in the discourse.

However, the address made by Khurelsukh Ukhnaa, the president of Mongolia to the UNGA in 2022 provides interesting insights. He says:

“Eight centuries ago, our ancestor the great Chinggis Khan united all Mongolian dwellers, founded the great Mongol state under the power of the eternal blue sky, put an end to the centuries-long wars and conflicts, pacified West and East under the statehood rule of justice, and established the Pax Mongolica in the vast area of Eurasia (Ukhnaa, 2022, 5:20)”.

Subsequently, he emphasises Pax Mongolica was achieved “without imposing one’s culture and religion on others” (Ukhnaa, 2022, 6:25). He expresses the increasing relevance of living in harmony with nature, which is fundamental to nomadism. Then, he elaborates on environmental challenges in the modern world that threaten the feasibility of the nomadic identity and expresses Mongolia’s commitment to tackling climate change. The appearance of neoliberal ideas shrinks to being mentioned once by highlighting the importance of infrastructure development and industrialisation, although with keeping sustainability and both urban and rural areas in mind. The discourse in Ukhnaa’s (2022) speech takes on the nomadic identity by invoking its terminology and historic relevance, and by emphasising its importance in the present. I suggest that this discourse is enabled by several factors. First, the relevance of indigenous knowledge gained broader recognition in the international arena, therefore in the legitimising ideology, which enabled the appearance of the nomadic identity in elite discourse (Nederveen Pieterse, 1998). However, I argue that there would not have been a nomadic lifestyle to sustain without persistent advocacy for it by rural masses and their resistance against neoliberal discourse (Myadar, 2011; Jackson, 2014).

Thus, my main findings about the relationship between national identity contestation in small powers and the international order are as follows. The dissemination of the legitimising ideology in Mongolia was successful as evidenced by the reappearance of its content in each address. This can be explained by the fact that small powers and their elites are more receptive

to such ideology, as assimilation into the international order is seen to bring both stability and prosperity (Elman, 1995). In addition, the legitimising ideology shifted towards green/people-centred approaches (Jacobs, 2012; Nederveen Pieterse, 1998), and elites could incorporate this content in their discourse to address contestation at home instead of taking substantial action that would have endangered economic growth. This could explain why, despite sustained contestation by rural masses (Jackson, 2014), the nomadic proposal did not appear in elite discourse. It also demonstrates the power of discourse and how it can be used to conceal the perpetuation of existing power dynamics. Thus, I suggest that the emergence of the nomadic identity in the last speech is the outcome of fine-tuning the legitimising ideology. Its appearance in elite discourse is rather an ‘enchanted signal’ towards rural masses with the message that their concerns are heard than their voices being genuinely represented. Nevertheless, the fact that the content of the legitimising ideology shifted towards one that is open to alternative development paths, diverse ways of life, and sustainability must be attributed partially to contestation within small powers (Nederveen Pieterse, 1998; Jacobs, 2013). This contestation is persistent because for various groups of people in those states their traditional lifestyles are an indispensable part of collective identity, as seen in the case of Mongolia.

Elites in small power states shift their discourses according to the legitimising ideology of the international order. However, the legitimising ideology is fine-tuned according to the national identity contestation of the masses in states. Thus, instead of the emergence of a counterhegemonic ideology or coalition, the legitimising ideology and states co-constitute a system of beliefs that is widely accepted by most states. In this interaction, even small states and their contestation play a significant role. The dynamism of the legitimising ideology, like a protective shield, allows the international order to maintain stability. As demonstrated by elite discourse at the UNGA and subsequent (lack of) action domestically, national identity contestation is unlikely to result in substantial shifts in existing power structures and, consequently, the international order.

Conclusion

So how does national identity contestation in small power states affect the international order?

To answer this question through the case of Mongolia, I first established that there is national identity contestation as an outcome of social change and joining the international order. I found that this led to the dissemination of the legitimising ideology of the international order into Mongolia and emerging urban identities. Contestation crystallised around neoliberal development and the future of nomadic herding. While most of the elite resonated with

neoliberalism, mass-level discontent could be found regarding neoliberalism's effect on the feasibility of nomadism. To see if mass-level contestation influences the international order, I analysed four addresses made by representatives of Mongolia to the UNGA. My findings show that elite discourse shifted over time to incorporate green/people-centred approaches. This shows first that the dissemination of the legitimising ideology into elite discourse was successful. Second, it demonstrates how the legitimising ideology is fine-tuned in response to contestation against its content domestically. This process of fine-tuning through discourse enables elites to perpetuate exiting power structures instead of addressing the issues of masses, which would go against their interests and identities. Thus, contestation in small states is blocked from affecting the international order by elite interests and the non-representation of masses in IOs. Instead, it serves as a signal with the message that the legitimising ideology must be fine-tuned to keep the international order stable.

A limitation to answer the research question was source scarcity. This arose first due to a language barrier, as most foreign policy documents and texts capturing mass common sense were only available in Mongolian. Second, speech transcripts and recordings of Mongolian addresses are not available online for organisations other than the UNGA, which limits diversity of elite/mass proclamations to analyse. Another limitation is the scope of the research. First, capacities were limited in terms of the number of articles that could be covered to map national identity proposals in Mongolia. Additionally, as the articles cover a longer period, inferences drawn might be thin compared to if the texts were investigated in a narrower time frame. Second, the research question encompasses many topics that need elaboration and could only be touched upon briefly. Thus, future research could delve deeper into theoretical underpinnings and use diverse sources. In addition, new questions arise as an outcome of this research. Where is the legitimising ideology (re)produced and revised? Through what channels can national identity contestation be magnified? How can mass voices be represented in the international arena? Answering these questions might guide researchers to uncover channels towards structural change in the international order.

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