Punching Above One’s Weight in World Politics: The Case of Bhutan

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Abstract

Power is a key concept in the discipline of Political Science. Although being widely discussed in the academic world, it is an ambiguous concept because it can be defined in different ways. For the purpose of this thesis power is defined as the ability to affect others in order to get the outcome one desires. Nye identifies three ways in order to get the outcomes one desires: threaten people with coercion; inducement and payments; and the ability to attract others. The first two are forms of hard power whereas the latter refers to soft power. This thesis sets out to understand the driving force of soft power in world politics. It aims to identify and grasp the soft power of small nation-states because it is hypothesized that small nation-states use soft power in order to enhance and safeguard their position in the regional and global arena. Through investigating the soft power of small nation-states, this research seeks to overcome a deficit present in the Political Science literature: most of the scientific literature on soft power is related to soft power of big nation-states. To approach an understanding of the driving force of soft power of small nation-states, one typical case-study is selected: Bhutan. Bhutan is selected because it is seen as an example in (inter)national politics of small nation-states and it is the only country in the world that has developed an alternative development philosophy named Gross National Happiness. The findings of this research indicate that Bhutan is indeed punching above its weight in world politics. Accordingly, the hypothesis that small nation-states can use soft power in order to enhance and safeguard their position in the regional and global arena is thereby confirmed.