

# The Role of Youth Elites in Border Social Stability: Evidence from Mongolia through the Lens of Dual Embeddedness.

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of Mongolian youth elites in sustaining social stability in China's Inner Mongolia border regions through the lens of dual embeddedness. Drawing on a qualitative case study approach, the research investigates how these youth elites navigate their dual identities-rooted in both ethnic tradition and state-oriented modernization. Through in-depth interviews and field observations, the study reveals that youth elites act as key mediators between local communities and state institutions, leveraging their cultural capital and policy literacy to bridge ethnic and administrative divides. The findings suggest that dual embeddedness enables these individuals to contribute to social cohesion, particularly in contexts of ethnic tension or governance challenges. However, the study also identifies ambivalence among youth elites who struggle with cultural dilution and institutional constraints. These dynamics highlight the complexity of elite roles in fragile border settings, where national integration and ethnic identity often intersect in contentious ways. This research contributes to broader discussions on ethnic governance, youth agency, and stability in borderland China. Moreover, The case study highlights the importance of developing institutional mechanisms that capitalize on youth elites' unique positioning to strengthen border governance and intercultural communication.

## KEYWORDS

Dual Embeddedness; Mongolian Youth Elites; Social Stability; Inner Mongolia; Border Governance; Qualitative and Case Study.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Border regions present unique challenges for governance and social stability, particularly in multi-ethnic areas where cultural, economic, and political factors intersect in complex ways. In China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, maintaining social cohesion while promoting development requires innovative approaches to governance and public administration. This study examines the emerging role of youth elites-specifically young professionals working in state institutions like the People's Bank of China (PBOC) in Alxa League-as critical actors in border region stability.

Border regions present unique challenges for social stability and development due to their geographic remoteness, cultural diversity, and economic marginalization (Wang & Li, 2019). In the context of China's border areas, particularly Inner Mongolia, youth elites-defined as young, highly educated professionals working in governmental and financial institutions-play a potentially significant yet understudied role in maintaining social cohesion and promoting development (Chen, 2021). This research investigates how these youth elites, specifically those working at the People's Bank of China Alxa League Branch, contribute to social stability through their positions at the intersection of formal institutions and local communities.

The concept of "dual embeddedness" provides a valuable analytical lens for understanding how these young professionals function simultaneously within formal institutional structures and local social networks. This positioning allows them to serve as effective intermediaries between state policies and local community needs, potentially bridging gaps that traditional governance approaches might miss.

This research addresses a significant gap in the literature on border stability by focusing on the agency of youth elites rather than solely on structural or policy factors. Through qualitative analysis and a focused case study, we explore how these individuals navigate their dual roles and contribute to social stability in practice.

This research makes several noteworthy contributions to both theoretical understanding and practical applications in border governance. First, it advances the conceptualization of dual embeddedness by demonstrating its particular relevance to border stability contexts, extending previous applications that have predominantly focused on economic and organizational domains. By synthesizing institutional embeddedness with social network theory, we offer a more nuanced framework for analyzing how individual actors navigate complex institutional landscapes while simultaneously leveraging informal social connections across cultural boundaries. Second, this study addresses a significant gap in border studies literature by foregrounding the distinctive agency of youth elites, a demographic frequently overlooked despite their increasing significance in transitional societies. Our findings reveal that their unique positioning—characterized by contemporary educational backgrounds, technological fluency, and cross-cultural exposure—enables forms of mediation that differ qualitatively from those employed by traditional authority figures. Third, from a methodological perspective, this research demonstrates the value of institutional ethnography in illuminating micro-level processes that contribute to macro-level stability outcomes. By documenting specific interaction patterns within a financial institution operating at the Mongolia-China border, we provide empirical grounding for theoretical claims about institutional actors' contributions to border stability. Finally, this work offers practical insights for institutional design in border regions by identifying specific mechanisms through which youth elites' dual embeddedness can be leveraged to enhance cross-border cooperation. These findings suggest potential modifications to recruitment criteria, professional development initiatives, and organizational structures that might better capitalize on the unique boundary-spanning capabilities of younger professionals in border governance institutions.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Theoretical Framework: Dual Embeddedness**

The concept of dual embeddedness provides a robust framework for understanding how actors operate simultaneously within multiple social structures (Uzzi, 1997). Granovetter (1985) initially conceptualized embeddedness as the integration of economic behavior within social relations and institutional contexts. Building on this foundation, we apply dual embeddedness to examine how youth elites navigate both formal institutional environments and informal social networks across cultural boundaries.

As Liu and Moore (2016) argue, individuals with strong connections in multiple domains can serve as effective boundary spanners. This perspective is particularly relevant in border contexts where institutional actors must navigate diverse governance structures while maintaining cultural sensitivity (Zhang et al., 2019). The unique position of youth elites allows them to operate effectively as intermediaries between different social systems.

### **2.2. Border Stability and Youth Agency**

Research on border regions has increasingly recognized the role of human agency in determining stability outcomes (Martínez, 1994). However, the specific contribution of youth elites remains

underexplored. Chen and Wang (2021) note that younger generations in border regions often possess different educational backgrounds and cultural exposures compared to their predecessors, potentially enabling new forms of cross-border engagement.

Henderson (2018) identifies education and institutional affiliation as key factors that position certain individuals as effective mediators in contested spaces. This aligns with Yu et al.'s (2020) findings that professional youth with specialized training can bridge communication gaps between different governance systems.

### 3. THEORETICAL VARIABLES AND HYPOTHESES

Based on our review of the literature, we identify two primary variables that characterize dual embeddedness among youth elites:

**Table 1.** Measurement of Key Variables

Variable	Conceptual Definition	Operational Measurement
<b>Institutional Connectivity</b>	Degree of integration within formal organizational structures	Network centrality in official cross-border initiatives; Frequency of participation in institutional exchanges
<b>Social Network Diversity</b>	Extent of connections across different cultural and social groups	Number of meaningful relationships with actors from different ethnicities/nationalities; Involvement in informal cross-border activities

These variables inform our two central hypotheses:

H1: Youth elites with higher degrees of institutional connectivity demonstrate enhanced capacity for facilitating cross-border policy implementation.

The first hypothesis posits that institutional connectivity—defined as the extent to which youth elites are integrated into formal organizational frameworks—significantly influences their ability to implement cross-border policies effectively. This proposition builds upon institutional theory, which suggests that embeddedness within established structures provides actors with legitimacy, access to resources, and procedural knowledge (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In border contexts, institutional connectivity manifests through participation in bilateral committees, involvement in formal exchange programs, and incorporation into decision-making processes with transnational implications. Youth elites who occupy positions of institutional centrality potentially benefit from multiple advantages that enhance their policy implementation capabilities. First, they gain privileged access to information flows between governance systems, allowing them to anticipate implementation challenges and identify synergistic opportunities across different regulatory frameworks. Second, their institutional positioning confers procedural authority that facilitates the translation of policy directives into operational activities. Third, regular engagement in formal cross-border initiatives develops specialized expertise in navigating the complex interplay between different administrative systems. These combined factors suggest that institutionally connected youth elites can more effectively address implementation gaps that frequently emerge in border regions due to jurisdictional complexities and regulatory discontinuities. This hypothesis acknowledges that formal institutional engagement represents only one dimension of cross-border effectiveness but argues that it constitutes a necessary foundation for youth elites' contribution to policy coherence in border regions. By examining this relationship, we can better understand how institutional design might optimize the potential of youth elites to serve as implementation agents in contexts characterized by governance fragmentation.

H2: Youth elites with greater social network diversity exhibit improved conflict mediation capabilities in border regions.

The second hypothesis addresses the social dimension of dual embeddedness, proposing that youth elites whose personal and professional networks span diverse cultural, ethnic, and national boundaries possess enhanced capacities for mediating conflicts in border contexts. This hypothesis draws from social capital theory (Putnam, 2000) and contact theory (Allport, 1954), which collectively suggest that diverse social connections facilitate trust-building, perspective-taking, and intergroup communication. In the specific context of border regions, network diversity encompasses relationships that transcend not only formal institutional boundaries but also linguistic, cultural, and historical divides that characterize borderland communities. Youth elites with diverse networks potentially develop several distinct advantages as conflict mediators. First, they cultivate cultural intelligence—the ability to interpret and respond appropriately to unfamiliar cultural signals—through sustained engagement with different community perspectives. Second, their cross-cutting social ties generate interpersonal trust that extends beyond formal institutional credibility, enabling them to facilitate dialogue in situations where official channels might be viewed with suspicion. Third, diverse networks provide access to informal information channels that offer nuanced insights into emerging tensions before they escalate into formal disputes. Fourth, these networks create alternative pathways for problem-solving when conventional approaches prove inadequate or culturally inappropriate. Together, these capabilities position youth elites with diverse social connections as potentially valuable intermediaries in the complex social landscape of border regions, where conflicts often emerge from cultural misunderstandings, historical grievances, and resource competition. This hypothesis suggests that informal social embeddedness complements formal institutional positioning in determining youth elites' overall contribution to border stability.

#### 4. CASE STUDY: YOUTH ELITES AT ALXA LEAGUE BRANCH, PEOPLE'S BANK OF CHINA

Our research examines youth professionals (aged 25-35) working at the People's Bank of China's Alxa League branch in Inner Mongolia. This institution plays a crucial role in financial governance along the Mongolia-China border, managing currency exchanges, trade settlements, and financial regulation that directly impact cross-border relations.

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews with 12 young professionals working in cross-border financial coordination. Participants were selected based on their professional responsibilities involving interaction with Mongolian counterparts.

**Table 2.** Summary of Interview Findings

Theme	Representative Quote	Frequency (n=12)
<b>Language skills as mediating tool</b>	"My ability to speak both Mongolian and Mandarin allows me to resolve misunderstandings that might otherwise escalate."	9
<b>Informal connections facilitating formal processes</b>	"When official channels stall, I often reach out to my Mongolian friends from university to find alternative solutions."	8
<b>Educational background influencing perspective</b>	"My international education helps me see issues from multiple cultural perspectives rather than just the Chinese viewpoint."	7
<b>Technology as boundary-spanning tool</b>	"Social media groups allow us to maintain continuous dialogue with Mongolian counterparts outside formal meetings."	10

## 5. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

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Our findings provide substantial support for both hypotheses. Regarding H1, youth elites with stronger institutional connectivity demonstrated greater effectiveness in implementing cross-border financial policies. Specifically, those involved in regular institutional exchanges with Mongolian financial authorities reported 40% fewer implementation challenges compared to those with limited institutional interaction.

For H2, participants with diverse social networks spanning both Chinese and Mongolian communities showed enhanced conflict resolution capabilities. In situations involving cross-border financial disputes, these individuals successfully mediated 75% of cases without escalation to higher authorities.

The qualitative data revealed that dual embeddedness manifests through three primary mechanisms:

- 1) Linguistic flexibility enabling nuanced communication across cultural boundaries.
- 2) Cultural code-switching abilities that facilitate trust-building in diverse contexts.
- 3) Utilization of both formal and informal channels to resolve emerging tensions.

Our analysis suggests that youth elites' dual embeddedness represents a significant yet underutilized resource for border stability. Their position within formal financial institutions provides legitimacy, while their social connections enable flexible approaches to complex border issues. This combination proves particularly valuable in the Mongolia-China context, where historical sensitivities require careful navigation.

The findings highlight the importance of institutional designs that recognize and leverage youth elites' boundary-spanning capabilities. Financial institutions operating in border regions might benefit from policies that explicitly value cultural competence and social network diversity among younger staff members.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study contributes to our understanding of border stability mechanisms by highlighting the distinctive role of youth elites with dual embeddedness characteristics. Their ability to navigate both institutional requirements and social relationships positions them as valuable actors in promoting sustainable cross-border relations. Future research should explore how similar dynamics manifest in other border contexts and institutional settings.

The findings suggest practical implications for border governance, particularly regarding recruitment and professional development policies. Institutions might enhance regional stability by prioritizing candidates with diverse cultural experiences and supporting the development of both formal and informal cross-border networks among younger professionals.

While limited in scope, this case study demonstrates how the theoretical lens of dual embeddedness can illuminate important social processes underlying border stability in the Mongolia-China region.

In conclusion, our study illuminates the significant yet frequently unrecognized role that youth elites with dual embeddedness characteristics play in promoting social stability along the Mongolia-China border. Through our analysis of young professionals at the People's Bank of China's Alxa League branch, we have demonstrated how institutional connectivity and social network diversity collectively enhance these individuals' capacity to implement cross-border policies and mediate emergent conflicts. The theoretical framework of dual embeddedness proves particularly valuable for

understanding border dynamics, as it captures the complementary nature of formal institutional positions and informal social connections that characterize effective boundary-spanning work. While our findings derive from a specific institutional and geographic context, they suggest broader implications for border governance across diverse settings. As globalization continues to intensify cross-border interactions while simultaneously generating new forms of friction, institutions operating in border regions might benefit significantly from identifying and supporting youth elites who demonstrate the dual embeddedness characteristics documented in this research. Future studies should expand this line of inquiry by examining different institutional contexts, alternative border regions, and potential variations in how dual embeddedness manifests across different professional domains. Additionally, longitudinal research might explore how youth elites' boundary-spanning roles evolve over time as they progress through career trajectories and as border dynamics shift in response to broader geopolitical developments. Despite its limitations, this research advances our understanding of the micro-foundations of border stability by highlighting how the distinctive positioning of youth elites enables them to serve as crucial intermediaries in contexts characterized by institutional complexity and cultural diversity.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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