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**Symbolic diplomacy of place and space in Eurasia: “multi-vector” vs. “third neighbor” policies-impact of nomadic features on foreign policy strategies of Kazakhstan and Mongolia**

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**Abstract.** This paper examines the present-day diplomatic policies of Kazakhstan and Mongolia, which are two landlocked Eurasian nations that share a common nomadic and Soviet heritage. Both utilize symbolism of place and space as intersections between transcontinental subgroupings to promote economic development within a continent dominated by superpower neighbors, China and Russia. The two nations in the democratic era after the collapse of the Soviet Union have devised “Multi-Vector” and “Third Neighbor” strategies derived from their historic nomadic experiences to break out of their landlocked geographical constraints.

**Keywords:** Kazakhstan, Mongolia, multi-vector, Third Neighbor, nomadic heritage, trilateralism.

### **Introduction**

This paper examines the diplomatic policies of two successful landlocked Eurasian nations that share a common nomadic and Soviet heritage. Kazakhstan and Mongolia today both employ mineral-based and soft power foreign policy strategies influenced by nomadic cultural experiences to strengthen their national security while also encouraging regional economic integration. Both nations utilize symbolism of place and space as intersections between transcontinental subgroupings to promote their own economic development within a continent dominated by superpower states, China and Russia. The two nations in the democratic era after the collapse of the Soviet Union have devised “Multi-Vector” and “Third Neighbor” security strategies to link themselves to Europe and Asia and break out of their landlocked geographical constraints.

Missing from most international relations analysis on the two nations is the key fact that both Kazakhstan and Mongolia are countries that are particularly impacted by the psychology of their nomadic history. Researchers in international studies in general do not apply analytical models regarding manipulation of symbolism that are common in sociological studies. With the advent of soft power memes, this type of analysis can provide a window into the decision-making protocols of policymakers. For Kazakhstan and Mongolia there is an additional and fundamental impediment to attaining full comprehension of their contemporary foreign policy methodologies. In traditional political science literature nomads are regarded as non-state actors predating the modern state system itself who challenge sovereignty and necessarily cause conflict between the role of state and the eco-culture of nomadism. Nomadism is considered a conceptual as well as material threat to nation states: “By disrupting states’ territorial configuration, nomadism undermines the ideational foundations of statehood.” [1, p. 1]. However, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, as these two countries struggled to re-establish a national identity and develop a modern economy, they simultaneously embraced their previously devalued nomadic heritage to anchor the government’s right to rule domestically and proclaim their legitimacy within regional politics.

When we look back on the past thirty years, elements of commonality can be seen in their approach to balancing relations with their major neighbors, China and Russia, by expanding

diplomatic and cultural ties to other nations over the greater Eurasian continent and onward to the Middle East, Europe and the Pacific. This is more than an economic strategy of multiplying trade partners. It is a re-enactment of their historical use of space and location, which stems from nomadic norms different from sedentary societies, and based upon a positive, even flexible, reality when dealing with their landlocked status. Thus, the embrace of their nomadic heritage is not a disruptive force for national identity, but has been recast as a unique set of values that are to be cherished and nurtured to promote a strong sense of nationhood and guide foreign policy strategy.

### **Materials and methods**

This analysis attempts to comparatively discuss how the countries of Kazakhstan and Mongolia are devising specific foreign policy strategies that incorporate perspectives and lessons from their rich nomadic heritage. This requires examination of historical and anthropological sources on nomadism, but also acquiring an understanding of the contemporary economic and political challenges confronting the two nations as they seek to strengthen their national security and identity within the larger Eurasian and even global scene. Because this is a new analytical approach to how these nations develop policymaking in the post-Cold War era, it is necessary to rely on the speeches and writings of the specific Kazakh and Mongolian leaders themselves to find motivation and justification. In addition, the government public relations offices within their ministries, particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which must implement the new strategies, are rich in material. Finally, on-line and traditional media voices which have commented on the strategies, are very useful for this research.

### **Literature Review**

It has been evident that recent scholarship about places and space re Kazakhstan and Mongolia has revealed that both nations have attempted to manipulate cultural heritage as a vehicle to rebuild national history during transition in the post-socialist world in order to bolster a sense of national identity. This renegotiation of cultural identity and reclaiming of the pre-socialist, nomadic past through physical representations have been associated with reviving nationalist sentiment and traditional cultural motifs. While there is much post-Cold War analytical, including archaeological, published material on the historical place of nomadism within the territories of modern-day Kazakhstan and Mongolia, studies of nomadic life and economy in contemporary Kazakhstan are very few, while those on Mongolian nomads are rather abundant. Major reasons for the difference are that nomads are a significant factor within today's Mongolian political society and nomadism in Mongolia has rebounded as a viable economic lifestyle in the democratic era to the extent that it is practiced by as much as 40 percent of the population. Meanwhile in Kazakhstan, it is reported that less than one percent of the people truly are nomads and so have no measurable political and economic clout.

There are numerous Mongolian government research projects, internationally funded studies by institutions such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), university studies, and popular media articles depending on the topic about Mongolian nomadism that are available to the analyst. The vast majority of this information is focused on documenting specifics of life, work, and ritual, and relatively little attention has been given to the symbolic elements surrounding nomadism that have permeated into or deliberately have been embraced into modern Mongolian image making and branding. There is little discussion in this literature about the impact of Mongolian nomadic motifs on contemporary foreign policymaking, which is the main theme of the present article. Somewhat useful references can be found in works of this author, such as: (2019) *Mongolia's Foreign Policy in the Democratic Era* [2]; (2018) "Policies Through Which Central Eurasian Nations Are Promoting Their Civilizational Experiences: An Exercise in 'Soft Power' and Global Image Making" [3]; (2004) "Problems Integrating Mongolia's Nomads into a 21st Century Nationstate" [4]; (2003) "Mongolia as a Bridge

to Central Asia” [5]; (1998) “Moving Mongolian Nomadism into the 21st Century: Cultural and Ecological Preservation Coupled with Economic Vitality and National Security” [6]; and (1994) “The Special Cultural and Sociological Challenges Involved in Modernizing Mongolia’s Nomadic Socialist Economy” [7].

There is some additional material touching on modern day Mongolian nomads and their symbolic role in domestic society, such as Orhon (2011), “Imaginary Nomads: Deconstructing the Representation of Mongolia as a Land of Nomads,” [8] and Sabloff (2001), *Modern Mongolia: Reclaiming Genghis Khan*. [9] This research emphasizes the revival of nomadism in Mongolia and its connection to strengthening national identity. A very insightful study on the creation of Mongolian modern national identity as exemplified in concrete special memory places is found within Watterson (2014), “Jinkhin Mongol/True Mongolian: Mongolian museums and the construction of national identity.” Her analysis of Mongolian national identity building is placed in the context of the substantial research on museum remaking in the post-socialism era in Central Asia and Europe. She notes that contemporary Mongols construct a national identity linked to Chinggis Khaan and the Great Mongol Empire “as the basis of Mongolian democracy and a golden age of pan-Mongol pride, strength and connection to geographical homelands. This view encapsulates key aspects of the revised Mongol identity; the strength of Mongolia as a single nation of united nomads, the pan-Mongol ideal and the centrality of nomadism and the steppe to Mongol identity.” [10, p. 112].

Mongolian anthropologists, ethnologists, and historians have yet to directly connect nomadic experience and sensibility to contemporary foreign policymaking. However, this process is beginning as Mongolian historians start to grapple with a greater understanding of the vagaries of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and place trends and events into a broader context. An example is [Bat-saikhan](#) (2017) in “Recovery of the Historical Memory of the Mongolian People as a Basis for the Strengthening of National Identity--from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,” who, while not specifically addressing nomadism or post-Cold War Mongolia, does recognize respecting traditional values such as history and culture as the ideological basis for reviving the Mongolian nation, the national memory, and the unity of the nation: “The future of the Mongolian nation will undoubtedly depend on how we take over the rich cultural heritage and traditions passed down to us from our ancestors. ...In order to create a new image of our nation, it is more important for post-socialist Mongolians to restore our national memory and get to know our history and culture.” [11, p. 15].

Additional information is obtainable about modern Mongolian nomads on blogs and other on-line sources. Although such articles vary in quality of scholarship, they all attest to the fact that nomads are now an important part of the country’s societal fabric and are facing many challenges. Nomads have captured the imagination especially of foreign journalists. For instance, there is Kingsley’s (2017) “Nomads no more: why Mongolian herders are moving to the city” [12] which discusses climate change, weather disasters, nomadic migration to the capital, and the work of the NGO Save the Children to offer assistance. On the other hand, Reyes’ (2014) “Nomads in Transition” [13] is more optimistic in its approach by focusing on how Mongolian nomads are adapting to modernization and technology in their own way. Similar commentary topics can be found in Mongolian language blogs and socio-anthropological research studies. However, in perusing the Mongolian sources covering foreign policy, whether in foreign or Mongolian language, no mention is made of the impact of nomadic economy and mentality on developing modern Mongolian foreign policy or on the “Third Neighbor” policy. For these international relations and political science specialists, nomadism so far is a dead letter that is not even considered.

In Kazakhstan, on the other hand, nomadism is only at the beginning stages of revival as a viable economic form, so it is no surprise that the literature focuses on the historical symbolism surrounding nomads for Kazakh national identity and nation-building. A typical example is the article (2018) “On Nomad Culture and Its Contribution” which states: “The Kazakh nomadic society in the system of world nomadism created high patterns of economic, socio-political

and cultural-domestic ethnic life.” [14]. There are studies that do see a special purpose behind creating symbolic places, images, and statuary on Kazakh territory. An illustration is found in Isaacs (2015) “Nomads, warriors and bureaucrats: nation-building and film in post-Soviet Kazakhstan” [15] which claims that “imagined” vs “real” nation-building can be evidenced not only in government-sponsored efforts around nomadism for identity formation, but also in how Kazakh privately-produced cinematic works contribute their own version of nationhood. Burkhanov (2020) in “Multiculturalism and Nation-Building in Kazakhstan: Trends in Media Discourse, State Policy, and Popular Perceptions” [16] presents the interesting thesis that the Triumphal Arch “Mangilik Yel” was opened in Nur Sultan to connect to the city’s toponymics and landmarks, but he does not dig deeper into the symbolism of the nomadic Kazakh *zhuzes*. Another example is Mehran Kamrava (2020), “Nation-Building in Central Asia: Institutions, Politics, and Culture” [17] that discusses the complex and overlapping interactions between institutions, politics, and sociocultural dynamics in nation building which result in state-society interactions with symbiotic consequences. Atai (1999) “Post-Soviet Art and Culture in Central Asia” surveys cultural institutions in the five former Soviet Republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, and argues that the role of the arts and culture had a clear sense of their place in the Soviet system, but with the end of the Soviet era many state organisations with national status have struggled with developing a narrative to promote national identity [18, p. 55].

Ferret at the French National Centre for Scientific Research has explained in “The Ambiguities of the Kazakhs’ Nomadic Heritage” (2016) that “Presenting themselves as the heirs of the steppe nomads, the Kazakhs have, since the independence of Kazakhstan in 1991, emphasised their nomadic inheritance as the basis of their identity. Nonetheless, for all that they reclaim this heritage, they remain influenced by negative representations of nomads, and, hav[e] difficulty in combining pastoralism and modernity...” [19, p. 176]. Nazar (2016) in his article on “Mangilik El’-The Symbol of Unity” has written about the significance of “code memory” to understand the essence of the Kazakh world view, and how the inner philosophy of the centuries-long nomadic culture determined the rules and values of the modern Kazakh nation: “Turks and Kipchaks were building the statehood and the Kazakhs, as worthy descendants of the fearsome nomadic civilizations, continued the story of their ancestors.” [20].

However, some Kazakh researchers have indicated that modern Kazakhstan has found deeper inspiration within the nomadic tradition. Nazar maintains that: “The traditionalism of the Kazakhs is determined by the nomadic way of life, which for all the external dynamism preserved the inner essence of nomads, as well as the generic structure. In conditions of ever-increasing globalization, a constructive dialogue of the values of the traditional culture of the people of Kazakhstan and the liberal-democratic society is needed.” [20]. Nysanbaev et al (2001) in *Evolution politicheskii sistemy Kazakhstan [Evolution of the political system of Kazakhstan]* see promise in the development of 21<sup>st</sup> century culture defined as the “Eurasian cultural space” and equate the traditionalism of the Kazakhs with the nomadic way of life.” [21]. The contemporary focus of this process, according to former Kazakh President Nursultsan Nazarbayev (2007), is the national idea of *Mangilik el*, which is the paradigm linked to ancient Kazakh symbolic totems, signs, ornaments, and decorations from its nomadic past to represent national unity and development of Kazakhstan in the context of globalization [22]. Such concepts in the literature provide the foundation for the analysis on multi-vector policy presented in this article.

## Analysis

### *Kazakhstan*

Kazakhstan’s multi-vector foreign policy has been described as a form of distancing from Russia policy [6, p. 271] and rooted in former Kazakh President Nazarbayev’s words of “mutually advantageous” and “good neighborly relations of confidence on the whole of

the Eurasian continent.” [23]. Clarke (2015) has spoken of this multi-vector foreign policy of constantly pivoting and rebalancing “between traditional ties to Russia and the gravitational pull of the rising economic and strategic weight of China in Central Asia.” [23]. At the Asan Forum in 2015 Nazarbayev labeled the reconstruction of the Kazakhstani identity as peaceloving, economically liberal, and internationalist with a “special” relationship with Moscow while at the same time seeking to bolster the legitimacy of Kazakh independence in the post-Soviet space. Cull (2018) of the University of Southern California links Astana’s [Nur Sultan’s] desire for *reputational security* to symbolic geospatial diplomacy, whereby “A country with reputational security is accepted as legitimately sovereign over its territory, not just in law but also in international public perception. It is appreciated as a member of the international community and seen as an integral part of the fabric of that community.” [24]. He cites President Nazarbayev’s move of the national capital from Almaty to Astana, to build a concept capital recognized by UNESCO as a city of peace in 1998, in order to pursue “a range of strategies that have not merely sought to develop his country’s economy, but to build its relevance and reputation among global audiences.” [24]. Cull also notes that Kazakhstan has been willing to join existing international organizations (Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)), and launch its own international initiatives (founding member of the Shanghai Five, the predecessor of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions) to enhance its reputation for international engagement and religious tolerance. One aspect of such initiatives has been stunning architectural constructions, including the building of the new Nazarbayev University in Nur Sultan, dramatic pavilions in international expositions, and staging mega events with themes of innovation and sustainable energy such as in Expo 2017 Astana. Cull’s analysis does not consider that the projects to promote modern Kazakhstani civilization were necessary because its historical nomadic foundation was so thoroughly discredited during the Soviet period that it had to be physically, as well as mentally, rebuilt.

Kazakh scholar Kassen (2018) has explored the importance of geographical location through the paradox of Kazakhstan’s landlocked yet transcontinental status as a key component of its foreign policy strategy. He has predicated his analysis based on Kazakhstan’s position within the huge Eurasian landmass with no maritime access, and sees “its unique geography at the centre of the Eurasian supercontinent as both a challenge and an opportunity, promoting various foreign policy initiatives aiming to establish an area of economic cooperation and mutually beneficial trade in the region.” [25, p. 319]. His research does not mention the specific soft power spatial construction projects to glorify and beautify Kazakhstan in international eyes cited by Cull, but rather stresses the macro level, as if looking at a map of Eurasia, of how the nation’s intermediary role in global politics “at the intersection of major transportation and logistical routes between the two most economically developed regions of the globe, Europe and East Asia, affect the development of its foreign policy and trade.” [25, p. 320]. Noting that landlocked transit states are under permanent pressure from neighboring countries, Kassen recognizes that they must adapt their foreign and even domestic policies to events occurring within the neighbors in order to maintain their own peace and stability: “This is especially true when it comes to landlocked countries that border only a small number of neighbours, resulting in fewer options for maneuverability in external relations and diversification of trade routes.” [25, p. 322].

Kassen examines Kazakhstan’s intimate connection between nation building and foreign policy and rightly sees that “the multi-vectorized diplomacy of Kazakhstan cannot be regarded as fully non-ideological, as relationships with the country’s main allies and partners in the global arena certainly informs the overall direction of its diplomacy.” [25, p. 324]. He emphasizes that Kazakhstan has developed a policy of diversification of trade partners because it is a transcontinental country situated between the two global markets of China and Europe (note that he does not say Russia), and he examines Kazakhstan’s proactive soft power stance in foreign relations

of integrating itself into international organizational platforms. This multi-vector approach and willingness to embrace regional integration processes strengthen Kazakh claims to be a transportation hub between Europe and Asia and positive promoter of security and stability as a mediator in many regional conflicts [25, p. 336-337]. While Kassen does recognize the historical pattern of previous Turkic khaghanates that controlled major transportation and trade routes across Eurasia during medieval times, he fails to argue that the society's nomadic experience contributed to its ideation of being an economic and cultural bridge between East and West.

Other researchers have concentrated on Kazakhstan's embrace of what is deemed the political myth of "Eurasianism" as the explanation underlying its multi-vector foreign policy strategy in order "to change its periphery status and re-imagine it both as a bridge between different cultures and a locus for harmonious co-existence of various ethnocultural groups" in a newly built nation-state in post-Soviet space [14, p. 3]. The concept of Kazakhstani Eurasianism is viewed as arising from its geopolitical and geographical location and is the basis for transcontinental economic linkages and foreign policy directions [26]. Mostafa (2013) includes some historical analysis linking the concept to waves of Eurasian exchanges in the past, but does not connect Kazakh nomadic identity to its roots in Turkic and medieval Mongol tribes, such as the Argyns, Dughlats, Naimans, Jalairs, Keraites, Khazars, and Qarluqs, or to the medieval experience of the Kazakh Khanate between 1456 and 1465 in the Transoxiana. At that time, Kazakhs traditionally were still pastoral nomads and strongly associated themselves with horse culture. They had adapted themselves over 3000 years to the peculiarities of the natural environment by sustaining themselves over the land through transhumant cattle breeding. With the increase in the number of livestock, they had to constantly move in search of new pastures, which led to the emergence of a nomadic way of life [27, p. 164].

Since the large territory of Eurasia does not have internal geographic boundaries separating different regions, survival directly depended on the creative utilization and expansion of the living space. Kazakhs repeatedly absorbed the onslaught of Central Asian rulers fleeing across the steppe or seeking to extend their own empires. The necessity for rapid movement in space, permitted by their horses, required constant expansion of territory. "In different epochs due to climate change, and also due to the constantly changing ethnic and socioeconomic situation in these regions, then settled, then semi-settled, then completely nomadic ways of doing business and organizing everyday life prevailed." [14]. This historical experience has created a special psychological approach to the 'outsider' and an ability to give and withdraw loyalty and linkage in response to prevailing but changeable power structures on the steppe. This was evidenced particularly in the last two centuries with the rise of Czarist and then Soviet power throughout the whole region, and noticeable today with Kazakh leveraging of Chinese and U.S. economic and political dominance in the region.

The Kazakh multi-vector policy can be situated within the experience of Kazakhstani modernization. Sagatova and Abdrahmanova (2019) state that "the civilization that developed in the Kazakh steppe absorbed the signs of both the East and the West, being at the intersection of two sides of the world, the phenomenon of nomadism combined the collectivist and individualistic, statist and liberal principles." [28]. They express the essence of nomadism by the memorable image of a kind of «centaur» with a wonderful intertwining of individualism and corporatism: "Specificity of nomadic democracy was also in freedom-loving, compromise and political balancing." [28]. Surely, this is a superb explanation of the goal of today's Kazakh multi-vectorism.

### ***Mongolia***

While Kazakhstan may regard itself as a leader in promoting the interests of all landlocked nations in Eurasia, Mongolia to the east has developed rival, but often similar foreign policy concepts and soft power initiatives to promote its global image as a landlocked "economic corridor" for the same continental space--that is especially oriented towards the Northeast Asian corner of

Eurasia. Mongolian strategists since 1990 have believed that across the Eurasian continent their former historical relations with Turkic civilizations would permit them to revive Mongolia's geopolitical space as a crossroads of Central Asia, Northeast Asia, the Far East, China, and Russia. This compelled them to devise domestic and foreign policy strategies to connect the modern Mongolian nation and its development into a democratic state to the wisdom and success of their ancient leader Chinggis Khaan and to promulgate the belief that respect for traditional nomadic culture and steppe life was a relevant ideological model for contemporary times [29, p. 13]. However, they felt the country's Buddhist cultural background should link it to India and Tibet to the south more than to the Islamic Turkic or Orthodox civilizations to the west. Although most policymakers believed that Mongolia's future could not escape its geographical position between Russia and China, they overwhelmingly hoped that any new order in the post-Cold War environment would free Mongolia from choosing one border neighbor over the other.

The overarching concept guiding the country's political and national security since 1993 has been its "Third Neighbor" policy [30] of balancing its relations with its only two border neighbors, Russia and China, by reaching over to other democracies, including the United States, Japan, the European Community, and South Korea, for political and economic support. In the last decade, Mongolia has further expanded its "Third Neighbor" definition to include a more Eurasian approach by emphasizing Turkey, Persian Gulf nations, Vietnam, and Iran in order to diversify trade partners for its minerals and find new sources of energy and consumer goods [2, p. 254]. The "Third Neighbor" strategic concept has political, military, cultural, and economic components. It originally meant that another large power, such as the U.S., Germany, or Japan, or even a collection of nations such as the United Nations (U.N.) or Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) would act as a "Third Neighbor" for Mongolia to counterbalance its traditional buffer state role between Russia and China. Mongolia's goal was to find a path forward, particularly in the economic and political realms that would not require dependence on and control by either Russia or China. However, distinct from Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy, Mongolia's "Third Neighbor" strategy from its inception openly admitted that maintaining friendly relations with the Russian Federation and China is its number one priority direction [29, p. 16]. This is due to the fact that Mongolia recognizes that it cannot overcome the reality of being positioned between only two border nations and these neighbors are superpowers. It is landlocked psychologically far more than Kazakhstan, which has five border neighbors.

After the first two decades of democracy, the Mongols realized that the "Third Neighbor" policy had succeeded politically, but failed economically, since from the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century almost 90 percent of Mongolia's trade is with China. This explains the ongoing process in the last ten years to expand the category of "Third Neighbors" to develop trade partners across the continent. How the strategy is implemented in the future will determine whether Mongolia "remains a minor, local nation or sets out to become a full member of the global community." [31]. Moreover, this is the reason for promotion of Mongolia as an Economic Transit Corridor or Steppe Road across Eurasia which can facilitate continental communication instead of blocking it. Faced with serious economic challenges, Mongolia today is very interested in diversifying away from its mineral-based economy and participating in transcontinental economic growth through transportation integration. As a nomadic society, the Mongols in previous eras had much experience in making contacts with the competitors and enemies of the peoples directly on their borders. Leaping over these border peoples to find commonalities with other states quite distant from the homeland and flexibly reacting to the changing political and military world all these tribes and societies operated in were Mongolian specialties in the past. In recent years, Mongolian researchers have promulgated the view that "Third Neighbor" diplomacy was "not a new concept," but attempted throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially after Mongolia's 1911 and again 1921 declarations of independence, when political leaders actively sought diplomatic relations with Western nations [32]. Thus, the Mongolian government is becoming comfortable with promoting

the theory that the “Third Neighbor” concept is not a modern one but a time-honored Mongolian foreign policy strategy renamed and modernized.

In today’s world, to break out of its landlocked isolation at the eastern end of Eurasia, Mongolia often describes itself as a “bridge nation” in order to rationalize its participation in solving broader Asian development issues through such projects as the Mongolian-Russian-Chinese Northern Railway and Asian Energy Super Grid [33]. Concerned that its two powerful neighbors might proceed with transportation and energy cooperation without taking into account the best interests of Mongolia, and that, strategically speaking, this challenge could not be met by the “Third Neighbor” principle, in 2014 the government developed a trilateralism policy with China and Russia that focused on transnational infrastructure development and economic cooperation stimulated by annual summits at the presidential level. Concurrently, it promoted a second or “democratic” triangular relationship among Mongolia, Japan, and the U.S., which has been invigorated during the Trump administration, to convince western investors it was not returning to a more authoritarian-controlled economy. However, the public reason given by the Mongols for the U.S.-Japanese-Mongolian trilateral relationship has been centered around the participation of Mongolia in a multilateral framework to approach North Korea for inclusion in face-to-face discussions. For the Mongols, the question is how to continue to maximize into the future such pre-COVID-virus continental integration trends.

One of the major directions in Mongolian foreign policy in the second decade of the 21st century has been a sweeping and imaginative focus on promoting the image of Mongolia globally. Similar to the mentality of Kazakhstan is Mongolia’s strong motivation to use soft power and even international peacekeeping activism on the diplomatic front to raise its international visibility. As Mongolia has struggled to find a pattern of economic growth that fortifies its national security and foreign policy requirements, it has decided both to deliberately initiate institutional framework mechanisms in the region to raise its national profile and to promote its nomadic civilization as its own “brand”. Thus, the Mongols have established a history of acting as a nonjudgmental facilitator between North Korea and other nations hostile to the Kim regime, such as Japan, South Korea, and the U.S. Mongolia, which was excluded from the now stymied Korean Peninsula Six-Party Talks, believes that the Korean situation and other Northeast Asian disputes have festered for decades because the region lacks a security dialogue mechanism. Altering this situation would “bring good influence to the world and especially open a new way of development for Mongolia” [34, p. 96], especially if the North Korean deep-water Pacific port at Rajin Sonbong was developed and could be utilized for landlocked Mongolia’s sea freight. As a result, the Mongolian government created its own dialogue mechanism in 2013 called the Ulaanbaatar Dialogue on Northeast Asian Security to discuss North-South Korean issues. It already has had six successful annual iterations, and four of the six meetings included the participation of DPRK representatives.

The interweaving of Mongolia’s nomadic heritage into its foreign policymaking has been a multi-decade process. The glorification of Chinggis Khaan and Mongolia’s nomadic heritage among the populace began immediately after the collapse of the socialist system in 1990 as part of the democratic political movement and grew in intensity throughout the 1990s. In 2005, Mongolian President Nambar Enkhbayar linked Chinggis Khaan and distinctly nomadic traditions to Mongolian national identity by stating that democratic Mongolia is “a direct result of the enormous experience of the Mongols in the culture of statehood.” [10, p. 259]. For the 2006 celebration of 800 years of Mongolian nationhood, Enkhbayar had a huge Imperial Map Monument erected on the site of the old Mongol empire’s capital of Karakhorum. In fact, the monument embraces 2000 years of history on the Mongolian plateau from the Xiongnu Empire’s confederation of nomadic tribes living on the steppes from the 3rd century BCE to the 1st century CE, to the Turkic Khaganate Empire of the Göktürks from 682 to 744, to the 13-14<sup>th</sup> century Mongol Empire. It has been correctly noted that in the democratic era “Temporally, this centralisation of the ancient states, Chinggis Khan and traditional ancient culture in the democratic Mongolian psyche was reflected



in museums” and promoted internationally by traveling exhibits and through international aid and funding of large scale archaeological projects [10, p. 259].

Enkhbayar’s successor, President Tsakhia Elbegdorj (2009-2017), recognized that the uniqueness and strength of Mongolia’s nomadic heritage was being stimulated by domestic political reaction to the loss of “Mongolness” reflected in the modernization of the country as seen in the overcrowded capital of Ulaanbaatar, fears of Chinese economic domination, and the polluting impact of foreign mining companies: “If nomadic pastoralism, the matrix of Mongolian society, is destroyed, what would happen to the community and the individual? What kind of new social structures would replace the old ones?” [35, p. 141]. In addition to “articulating policies and implementing programs using soft power and public diplomacy as effective strategies for increasing its cultural and political presence within regional and global politics,” he also constructed physical symbols of the nomadic spirit which were not represented during the Soviet period [36, p. 56]. The Mongolian government sought to capture the essence of the nomad’s *ger* or *yurta* by reconfiguring its Soviet-era Parliament building to look like a giant nomadic tent with huge statues of Mongolian empire great Khaans, the old main square was renamed Chinggis Khaan Square, and the Mongolian guard of honor was dressed in colorful Hollywood-version of medieval style uniforms to greet foreign heads of state on horseback.

Mongolia’s nomadic branding movement, conceptualized formally by Elbegdorj, is much more pronounced than in Kazakhstan. Originally, Mongolian policymakers did not attach special cultural significance to maintaining nomadism or linking Mongolian modern national identity to the nomadic tradition. In fact, when Mongolia entered the mineral resource era twenty-five years ago, the rationale behind nomadism again was questioned. Many foreign environmentalists linked climate warming, increasing desertification of Mongolia’s steppes, and poverty rates to the nomadic economy [26]. However, President Elbegdorj, during the 2009 presidential campaign, asserted that, while Mongolia’s foreign policy had been relatively stable and overcome enormous obstacles during two decades of democracy, the country needed a new international style, which included soft power and branding of its nomadic heritage. For Elbegdorj, the son of herdsman, the cultural meaning of nomads was embraced as a metaphor for the uniqueness of Mongolia and a symbol of its national identity. In the campaign he chose to discuss, or some might say politicize, the role of nomads in the modern development of the nation, not only because nomadic herdsman formed a powerful constituency in Parliament, but also because his campaign identified nomadism with the country’s spiritual essence. Elbegdorj explored the “problem of establishing democratic legal institutions on a rural nomadic society with a socialist legacy.” [35, p. 141]. The essential element that reflected Elbegdorj’s vision was that, for the first time since the collapse of communism, Mongolian culture, lifestyle, and traditional nomadic economy were linked in a positive way to national security in the country’s National Security Concept of 2010 Article VIII that closely identifies nomads and their traditions with a revised definition of Mongolia’s national identity. This formulation gave new life and meaning to the “Third Neighbor” strategy which continues on today.

### Conclusion

It is important that Kazakhstan and Mongolia not fall into the trap of competing visions of being transit hubs for Eurasia and/or centers of nomadic civilization. Rather, they should recognize their complementarities as landlocked, energy mineral-rich societies which can maximize their economic potential, strengthen their national identities, and raise their global profiles by cooperation and coordination rather than competition. Kazakhstan is a transit hub facing west; Mongolia is a hub facing east. They share the great Inner Asian space and have similar historical nomadic traditions and culture. Their bilateral relations have been growing as the volume of transit and passenger traffic between the two countries have increased [37]. The nations need to increase their economic and people-to-people contacts on all levels to better balance their giant superpower neighbors and create a transcontinental economic corridor that conforms to their in-

terests. In March 2019 the two countries renewed a 2008 agreement whereby the Kazakhstani government gave five Mongolian students annual scholarships. The two sides also exchanged views on cooperation in historical and archaeological sector projects and to mutually recognize each other's academic degrees [38]. Yet this is only a beginning.

Pastoral nomadism, while in many ways distant from the realities of modern Kazakh and Mongolian city dwellers, captures the national imagination and differentiates these two peoples from most other Asians. Relevance of the nomadic tradition still remains the key to comprehending their psyches, foreign policy strategies, and physical and ideational spatial thinking. The resurgence of the nomadic heritage theme makes it "normal" and "legitimate" and thus a force to be reckoned with in analyzing Kazakhstan and Mongolia's domestic and international actions. Mongolia particularly incorporates its nomadic heritage as a potent representation of its soft power image making. These transcontinental nations believe it is their right to promote nomadic tourism along the Silk Road so it can become a major contributor to their economies.

The multi-vector policy of Kazakhstan and the "Third Neighbor" policy of Mongolia illustrate a flexibility of approach to partnering with nations far beyond their landlocked borders that is unique to modern developing societies. Usually such outreach is led by the economic planners seeking new trade partners and development assistance. In the cases of Kazakhstan and Mongolia, these foreign policy strategies must be understood as political and psychological reflections of their nomadic history of not being tied to pre-determined borders or geospatial limitations. Economic benefits are one aspect of such policymaking, but not the fundamental core. Rather, these policies are modern manifestations of creative, very flexible, visions gleaned over centuries of nomadic experience regarding what is necessary to protect the national identity and national security of these two landlocked nations.

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**Еуразиядағы орын мен кеңістіктің символикалық дипломатиясы: «үшінші көршінің» саясатына қарсы «көпвекторлылық» саясаты - көшпенділік ерекшеліктерінің Қазақстан мен Моңғолияның сыртқы саяси стратегияларына әсері**

**Аннотация.** Бұл мақалада теңізге шыға алмайтын, ортақ көшпелі және кеңестік мұрасы бар еуразиялық екі мемлекет болып саналатын Қазақстан мен Моңғолияның қазіргі заманғы дипломатиялық саясаты қарастырылады; Екеуі де орын мен кеңістік рәміздемесін құрлықтағы экономикалық дамуды алға жылжыту үшін трансконтинентальды кіші топтар арасындағы қиылыстар ретінде пайдаланады, онда үлкен көрші державалар – Қытай мен Ресей ықпалы басым. Кеңес Одағы ыдырағаннан кейінгі демократия дәуірінде екі ел теңізге шыға алмайтын географиялық шектеулерден арылу үшін тарихи көшпелілік тәжірибесіне негізделген «көпвекторлық» және «үшінші көрші» стратегияларын жасады.

**Кілт сөздер:** Қазақстан, Моңғолия, көпвекторлық, «үшінші көрші», көшпелілер мұрасы, үшжақты тәсіл.

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**Символическая дипломатия места и пространства в Евразии: политика «многовекторности» против политики «третьего соседа» - влияние особенностей кочевничества на внешнеполитические стратегии Казахстана и Монголии**

**Аннотация.** В данной статье рассматривается современная дипломатическая политика Казахстана и Монголии, которые являются двумя не имеющими выхода к морю евразийскими государствами, имеющими общее кочевое и советское наследие. Оба используют символику места и пространства в качестве перекрестков между трансконтинентальными подгруппами для содействия экономическому развитию на континенте, где доминируют соседи-сверхдержавы, Китай и Россия. Две страны в демократическую эпоху после распада Советского Союза разработали стратегии «многовекторности» и «третьего соседа», основанные на их историческом кочевом опыте, чтобы вырваться из своих географических ограничений, не имеющих выхода к морю.

**Ключевые слова:** Казахстан, Монголия, многовекторность, «третий сосед», кочевое наследие, трехсторонний подход.

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