

## ДАЯАРШЛАЛЫН ЭРИНД МОНГОЛ УЛС ТУСГААР ТОГТНОЛОО ХАДГАЛАН ҮЛДЭХ НЬ: ГЕОПОЛИТИКИЙН АСУУДАЛ

### MONGOLIA'S SURVIVAL IN GLOBALIZATION: GEOPOLITICS



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**Товч агуулга:** Мөнхийн хөрш болсон хоёр том гүрний дунд оршдог, далайд гарцгүй улсын хувьд геополитикийн асуудал яригдах нь зайлшгүй бөгөөд Глобалчлалын эринд Монгол Улсын тусгаар тогтнол, нүүдлийн соёл иргэншил, үндэсний онцлогоо хадгалж үлдэх нь монголчууд бидний үүргийн хувьд энэхүү өгүүлэл Монгол Улс глобалчлалд тэсч үлдэх арга замыг хөндсөн болно.

**Abstract:** In the globalization, Mongolia has been trying to establish itself within the international community as a “real independent” actor with strong national icons and cultural identity.

**Түлхүүр үгс:** Даяарчилал, газар зүйн хил хязгаар, соёлын онцлог, тусгаал тогтнол, байгалийн баялаг- геополитикийн бодлого

**Key words:** Globalization, geographical dimensions, cultural identity and sovereignty natural resource – geopolitics.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century period of globalization, Mongolia needs to be a “real independent” nation state and have an “exit” to the world without intervention from neighbours, Russia (the Russian Federation) and China (the People’s Republic of China), because its geographical position makes Mongolia dependent on its neighbours. Mongolia has been a territorial buffer for centuries since the Manchus conquered China and established the Qing empire that they swept Mongolia into their realm. However, when the Qing collapsed due to China’s revolution and the independence of Mongolia, then Russia sucked Mongolia into its own expanding domain from the 1921 where it remained until the democratic revolution in 1989.

In the globalization, Mongolia has been trying to establish itself within the international community as an independent actor. Mongolia cannot escape from its geographical landlocked location between Russia and China. Mongolia is bound by the

history of relations with each of our neighbours and to the history of relations with one another that interests arising from geography. Therefore, it is inevitable to discuss the geographic and political tensions in such depth.

This vast landlocked central Asian territory has some inherent geopolitical issues such as sovereignty, political and cultural burdens. Also, in the last few decades, Mongolian cultural identity-nomadic heritage lifestyle has weakened due to modernization. Originally, Mongolians were a nomadic people that pastured their five kinds of domestic animals such as horse, camel, cow goat and sheep in the open steppe and benefitted from the productivity of the livestock throughout its known history. However, Mongolian nomadic cultural identity is in danger of assimilating into its southern neighbour as many of the cultural custom, clothes and traditional icons have been replaced by the Chinese made products and ideology.

In addition, Mongolia is seeking the “crutch” neighbour through the “third neighbour” policy for balancing neighbours relationship and seeing the further exit the world. According to the Mongolian government, this policy seeks support from the other developed countries such as the United States and Japan. Particularly, Mongolia has looked to the United States’ comparative power, wealth democracy and security as a much valued source of support.

Recently, this geographical position has increased economic weakness as a result of poor mineral resource distribution challenges which cause sovereignty to be more vulnerable. It should be noted that Mongolia is in danger of suffering from a “natural resource curse” if not properly managed. Therefore, it is important for the Mongolian government to have better policy on allocating its resources so that these could contribute to the social development of Mongolia and its sovereignty in the future.

### Geographical dimensions of Mongolian identity

How geographical-landlocked position makes Mongolia threatened with domination by their neighbours

Geography is a dominant influence on Mongolian national security matter. Before this time when almost the whole known world came under the influence of the Mongolia, for the past over six centuries Mongolian security has been intertwined in its relation with Russia and China and their relation with one another.<sup>1</sup>

Mongolia’s geographical position on the Eurasian landmass between China and Russia defines many of the countries asset and liabilities. Due to its neighbour-relationship to the great continental powers, Mongolia was a permanent object of attention of its two giant neighbours Russia and China and other nomadic empires<sup>2</sup>. During its history, Mongolia was the focus of political and military power within the vast territory at certain times, for example, Chinggis Khan’s steppe warriors conquered the half of the known world of that time<sup>3</sup>, remain vivid memory to the neighbours of Mongolia.

Moreover, Mongolia’s landlocked position has subjected it to nearly continuous manipulation by its neighbours and made it a pawn in the geopolitical fetch of Russia, China, and Japan before World War II. However, Mongolia’s harsh continental climate

<sup>1</sup> Alan Watchman, ‘Mongolia’s Geopolitical Gambit: Preserving a Precarious Independence While Resiting “Soft Colonialism”’, (2009), East Asia Institute.

<sup>2</sup> Tsedendamba Batbayar, ‘Geopolitics and Mongolia’s Search for Post-Soviet Identity’, (10 May 2013), (43), Eurasian Geography and Economics, Routledge, 324.

<sup>3</sup> Chamber Games, ‘Devil’s Horsemen: The Mongol Invasion of Europe’, London, UK: Phoenix Press, 2001

and vast semi-desert land make it unwelcoming to all schemers except the indigenous nomadic people, and its essentially these conditions which have saved the territory and left Mongolia as a “safe place” for nomads. (and yet consider what China has done in Tibet)

Historically, Mongolia sought ways of getting along with their neighbours, especially the strong ones. Thus, Mongolia’s friendship interactions with its neighbours and hostilities among them are determined by geostrategic realities.<sup>4</sup>

Mongolia has always been threatened with domination by their neighbours due to its geography. Therefore, leaders of Mongolia confronted the centuries-lasting dilemmas, particularly in 1691 and in 1911 during its history. In 1691 Mongolia confronted the hard choice of either becoming a part of the Manchu or seek alliance with Russia. At that time, Mongolian rulers decided to follow Manchu empire for the reason of cultural and religious matters- both the same Tibetan Lamaism faith and had nearly similar customs and traditional costumes. <sup>5</sup> However, Russian Mongolian tradition, custom, language and religious practices, adopted after 1911, were totally different. Nowadays, as a result of the westernization some similarities can be seen within society particularly, the ordinary clothes and lifestyle of people who obtained education in Russia are almost the same.

Admittedly, a certain question arises about why Mongolians were not assimilated during the over 200 years of Manchu-Chinese rule. Besides such geographical factors as harsh climate and remoteness of Mongolia, one worth noting that the cultural and religious matter. Mongolians culturally, consider themselves as more part of the Indi-Tibetan cultural world than with the Confucian world of the majority Chinese (Han). <sup>6</sup> Another important factor which saved Mongolians from assimilating into Chinese culture was that Manchus were interested in promoting the Mongolian territory as a nomadic homeland so they introduced and implemented several anti-Chinese laws. Those regulations might have prohibited the ethnic Chinese people from entering Mongolian border, using pasture land and marrying Mongolian women. <sup>7</sup>

After the Manchu empire collapsed Mongolia faced another crossroad in 1911, and needed to seek Russian assistance, proclaiming its independence as a sovereign state. This revolutionary reform was significant to the recent Mongolian history and appears to have been a response first to Mongolian recognition of its exposed geographical position and foreign affairs.<sup>8</sup>

For over 70 years, Mongolia was a part of the Soviet bloc, after the People’s Revolution of 1921 until the democratic revolution of 1990. Moscow’s policy during that period was in a large part closely related to the geographical and strategic matter. From a military strategic point of view, in 1930s Russia faced the threat of war in two fronts with Germany in the west and Japan in the east so that geopolitical significance of Mongolia was most important.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Batbayar, above n, 324.

<sup>5</sup> Tsedendamba Batbayar, ‘Modern Mongolia: Concise History’, (1996). Ulaanbaatar, Mongolian Centre for Scientific and Technological Information.

<sup>6</sup> Batbayar above n.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ewing T, ‘Between the Hammer and Anvil? Chinese and Russian Policies in Outer Mongolia 1911-1921’, (1980), Bloomington, IN, Indiana University.

<sup>9</sup> Batbayar above n. 325.

Therefore, the Soviets were vulnerable through Mongolia, because an enemy could conquer the entire Soviet Far East by invading the Trans-Siberian Railway. Russia understood the importance of Mongolia as a natural extension of Siberian security and signed a defence protocol with Mongolia in 1936. This unity joined two countries forces in defeating the military of Japan in the significant battle of Khalkhin-Gol in 1939, preventing the Japanese occupation of Central Asia.<sup>10</sup> This railway is still crucial both to Mongolia and Russia because of the political, economic and also sovereignty matters of each states and later in this paper it will be mentioned more detailed.

Moreover, in the Sino-Soviet conflicts in the 1960s and 1970s, Mongolia played an influential role. The Soviet rulers emphasized Mongolia's role as a strategic buffer against China, and accommodated troops into Mongolia. Regarding the troops, in 1966 Russia and Mongolia contracted the "Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance" that enacted the transfer of 100,000 Russian troops, tanks, and missiles to Mongolian territory to take all "necessary measures" including military measures to defend the territorial integrity of both states.<sup>11</sup> In my opinion, that transfer of troops to Mongolia might have been only advantageous to Mongolia otherwise our country could have faced more troubles from the south.

The Soviet qualified Mongolia either as a buffer or as "suspension territory" against China.<sup>12</sup> At that time, from the strategic point of view, the Soviet was offered both offensive and defensive advantages by Mongolia. From the Chinese view, Mongolia probably was not strategic buffer between the Soviet and China; rather Beijing perceived the as the military threat from the northern part of its country.<sup>13</sup>

This may impress the readers that Mongolia itself threatened China by forming the military alliance with the Soviet; however, the following fact reveals that Mongolian geographical position and territory constantly had been a passion of China and explains why now Mongolia fears assimilating into China in relation to geographical matter?

In Chinese eyes, Mongolia was always a part of China. In the time period between 1949 and 1991, rulers of China repeatedly expressed to Soviet officials their disturbance at China's loss of Mongolia, although China has not formally contested Mongolia's independent status. Even the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping stated in his dialogue with former the United States President George H.W Bush; according to Bush, Deng said that:

I hope you will look at the map to see what happened after the Soviets took Outer Mongolia from China. What kind of strategic situation did we find ourselves in? Over fifty years China remembers that shape of China was like a maple leaf. Now, if you look at a map, you see a huge chunk of the north cut away.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Dittmer Lowell, 'Sino-Soviet Normalization and its International Implications: 1945-1990', (1992), Washington University Press,

<sup>12</sup> Elleman, B. A, 'Russian Foreign Policy in the Chinese Context' in the Stephen J Blank and Alvin Z Rubinstein, eds, *Imperial Decline: Russia's Changing Role in Asia*, (1997), Durham, NC and London, Duke University Press, , 99-116.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Alan Watchman, ' Mongolia's Geopolitical Gambit: Preserving a Precarious Independence While Resiting

Moreover, in 1989 Deng told Romanian Ambassador to China that Russia used unequal treaties, including the Yalta Accords<sup>15</sup>, to take from China about three million square kilometres of territory, including the territory now known as the Mongolia, that is rightfully China's.<sup>16</sup>

These facts illustrate China's illusion of Mongolia as China's lost territory, and after 1949, Chinese leaders sought to press Russia to return Mongolia, however, the Russian leader Stalin refused to renegotiate the status of Mongolia.<sup>17</sup>

However, I argue that Mongolia was never part of China nor Russia contrarily, both countries were a part of Mongolia. From the historic perspective, from the ancient time Mongolian territory never belonged to any country. Historically, the first powerful state of mankind Khunnu existed in our territory and Great Empire had existence in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, so that Mongolia was a powerful empire which had conquered half of the known world at that time. In addition, Chinese have historically proven that Mongolia had a unique identity by building a wall to keep them out. Thus, the wall is an enduring legacy to the Chinese acknowledgement of Mongolian sovereignty.

Centuries later, in 1990 Mongolia declared itself a democracy and since that time has consciously repositioned itself in the international arena. Meanwhile, our country managed to return to a neutral role between two neighbours by the adopting of the new constitution in 1992 and by the removal of the Soviet-Russian troops from Mongolia. Interestingly, I do remember participating in the meeting of see-off Russian troops that were going back to their country. My colleagues gifted the flowers to the soldiers and thanked for them saving our country from the enemy (Japanese military and Chinese border aggression). Personally, I had some anxiety about losing the defence security of Russian troops.

Nowadays, however, particularly, China's pretention of possession of Mongolia may come to fulfilment under the cultural and economic circumstances if the Mongolian government cannot administer the country wisely and properly.

Cultural dimensions of Mongolian identity

Is there any mystery that Mongolian nomads still exist reserving their traditional way of life between giants?

There are several features of national identity: an historic territory and memories, common myths, a mass culture, a common economy and legal rights and obligations of all members. The historic territory can be implied as a narrative of conquest, defence, liberation, and loss in that certain others played a role. National identity cannot be imagined without feelings of loss and pride that arises from external relations.<sup>18</sup> In this regard, it is difficult to separate the feeling of national identity and geopolitical visions.

Mongolian identity as evidence of survival despite globalization that Mongolians are one of the few nomadic people who have been able to preserve their traditional way

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"Soft Colonialism", East Asia Institute, 2009.

<sup>15</sup> In 1945 at Yalta, illusions of Chinese sovereignty over Mongolia collapsed that so that it was stated that "The status quo in Outer Mongolia(the Mongolian People's Republic)shall be preserved'.

<sup>16</sup> Cold War International Project.

<sup>17</sup> Dittmer Lowell, 'Sino-Soviet Normalization and its International Implications: 1945-1990', (1992) Washington University Press.

<sup>18</sup> Anthony Smith D, 'The Ethnic Revival in the Modern World, Cambridge University Press, (1981), 231.

of life in the modern world.<sup>19</sup> Mongolian cultural identity can be revealed as nomadic heritage and nomads who have to adapt to their ever-changing and severe climate to survive.<sup>20</sup> The Mongolian nomadic life is best practiced in the domestication and control of a large number of animals in the vast steppe. Also they manage great tracts of semi-arid land for providing food and water for the family and livestock. The nomad had meat and milk from the five kinds of domestic animals for food and their skins and productivity for clothing and ger covering. The ger is Mongolian traditional dwelling that is built by the products of the livestock and wood and easy to collapse and construct when to move. Thus nomads are free from restraints of walled cities and duties to feudal rulers and free to live as they wanted.<sup>21</sup> This manner tended to create an independence, nearly a fervour, in the nomads' outlook. Mongolians acknowledged no "master" as the Chinese do, but would be ready accept to follow a strong leader and they are more like the Scots than the Brits.<sup>22</sup> Due to their nomad behaviour, Mongols were successful in gaining and occupying a vaster territory than any other nomadic Asiatic nations.<sup>23</sup>

Another contributing factor for this success lies in the existence of a highly developed code of law by which Mongol nomads lived. Like other nomad law, Mongol law had generality its roots in the organization, administration and court of clan. The law developed from the fundamental needs of the nomadic hunters and livestock breeders, that relatively few inherited traditions or written records. The oldest one is the Yasa of Chinggis Khan was the most well-known and the important Mongol code of laws.<sup>24</sup> That law of code was engrossment between 1206 and 1218, the first couple years of the empire of Chinggis Khan as Emperor of the Steppe, consequence of the recording of a series of careful examination of Chinggis Khan and his supreme judge Shihi-Khutughu. The code is combination of criminal law and establishment of legal precedent through the recording of other many law suits.<sup>25</sup> Also the work included a record of certain regulations or decisions in relation to local administration or government.<sup>26</sup> Thus Mongolians could reserve the sovereignty and cultural identity through obeying the codes of laws and traditional custom for long time.

To what extent will modernization affect nomadic identity of Mongols in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the globalization era?

This should be noted that globalization is not really a unique modern phenomenon since nations have been influencing each other for years – Mongolization, Sinification, Russification – all of these were movements involving cultural pressure from one to others. Were any of them 'wrong' or evil in the way that globalization is seen as being evil?

Mongolia has always striven to retain Mongolian identity and will continue to do so

<sup>19</sup> Huntington, above n, 1;

<sup>20</sup> Tsedendamba Batbayar, 'Geopolitics and Mongolia's Search for Post-Soviet Identity, Eurasian Geography and Economics, (2013) 43, Routledge, 326.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 327

<sup>22</sup> Macpherson C, 'Nomads or Barbarians?' Ulaanbaatar Post, 7 December 2000.

<sup>23</sup> Batbayar, above n, 1;

<sup>24</sup> Batbayar, above n, 1;

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Jagchid S, P Hyer, Mongolia's Culture and Society,( 1979) Westview Press.



despite the influence of globalization. Ken Robinson makes the point in his famous TED talk on education that countries use education to prepare people for the economic imperatives yet also to maintain cultural identity.

In my opinion, regarding of keeping our nomadic cultural heritage Mongolians have polarized on the issue of whether Mongolians have to stay as nomads or fully become like westernized nations in the modern world. Some influential nationalistic writers and former parliament member such as M. Zenée and O. Dashbalbar (unfortunately both passed away prematurely- people suspect that they were poisoned) strongly advocated to “Let Mongols Remain Mongols” which emphasized the “purity” of the Mongols as nomads and opposed excessive westernization which is believed to easily collapse the basic characteristics of nomadic identity. However, others such as B.Baabar argued that western civilization has already affected strongly Mongolian nomadic life through the Soviet dominance for over 70 years and that Mongols have to abandon their nomadic identity in order to survive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

However, I argue that Mongolians do not have to sacrifice their precious cultural identity to survive in the new era and that Mongols should not abandon their culture as it is that identity that makes Mongolians as Mongols. I wonder why we cannot live harmonizing and balancing the two different ways of life nomad and westernization in the integration period.

Many herders prefer to live in a city due to the difficulties in relation to land possession problems and mining resulted environment pollution. However, it is my belief that there are many ways to keep our cultural nomadic lifestyle through proper government policy with the assistance of the institutions and community encouraging many to stay as nomads. Firstly, government needs to introduce the land owner law and regulations which allow herders to live peacefully in their possessed land. Secondly, encourage community using traditional items such as deel (Mongolian traditional clothes). It is true that youths feel ashamed to wear deel in special occasions. Lastly, Mongolian script should be used in the official business documentation, particularly in the national state affairs. At least, these traditional aspects of cultural heritage reveal Mongolian independent and strengthen national identity in the globalized world.

“Third neighbour” policy

How Mongolia is seeking a way to be not over-dependant on her two neighbours through the balanced political policy

Geopolitical perspective may be described as the many factors within a foreign policy belief-system. Generally, it is described as an all-purpose set of lenses through which decision makers understand their environment.<sup>27</sup>

In 1991, well-known Mongolian historian Ch.Dalai published an article entitled “Do not forget the fact that we have only two big neighbours” by emphasizing that “Mongolian independence was sold twice when in 1260 and in 1691.”<sup>28</sup> What do these years refer to? In 1260, Khubilai Khan (son of Chinggis Khan) moved the capital city of Mongol Empire from Kharkhorum (the site of the ancient capital city that is located in the central part of the present Mongolia) to Shandu in China, hence the Professor Ch.Dalai and the other historians perceive that transforming the heart of the Mongol

<sup>27</sup> Holsti O. R, ‘The Belief System and National Images’, (1964) Journal of Conflict Resolution, 229.

<sup>28</sup> Ch. Dalai, ‘Do not Forget the Fact that We Have Only Two Big Neighbours’, Unen Newspaper, 25 June, 1991, vol,151.

Empire from Mongolia proper to China. Moreover, as mentioned above, in 1691, the Khalkha Mongol (dominant ethnic of Mongolia who lived in the central part of the territory) joined to the Manchus, thus the Qing dynasty dominated Mongolia over the 200 years. These bitter experience are emblematic of deep-rooted feelings of the Mongolian elite that Mongolia is sandwiched between two giants.

Therefore, Mongolia has struggled to declare “true” independence for the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century. At that time, a western historian Ewing described that situation as being “between the hammer and anvil”.<sup>29</sup>

These political constraints coloured by geographical determining causes contemporary Mongolia to have strong thinking of foreign and security policy. Therefore, during the 1990s, a political debate was waged over type of policy that Mongolia should adopt with respect to its two neighbours. Eventually, in 1994 Mongolian parliament adopted the Concept of National Security, a strategy of taking into account geopolitical reality and the interests of Mongolia’s neighbours without compromising the country’s sovereignty. The “balanced relationship” concept was adopted. Also, that strategy meant that developing all good neighbourly-relationships and mutually beneficial cooperation and strengthening trust both of the neighbours.<sup>30</sup>

In addition, in the discussion of the common theme of foreign policy, Mongolian authors agreed to the “third neighbour” policy due to the lack of necessary political and economic power to implement its national security policy, Mongolia needs a third strong balance of power to the neighbours.<sup>31</sup> At that time, in 2001, former Prime Minister Enkhbayar interviewed in the Far Eastern Economic Review, noted that “ties with countries such as the US and Japan will make Mongolians feel more secure economically, technologically and even psychologically”<sup>32</sup>

Since the Mongolia and the US established relations in 1987, in the two decades, the US has showed much attention to Mongolia. In 2005, the US former President George W. Bush visited Mongolia but before his visit many political and military officials passed through Ulaanbaatar.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, from the US, Mongolia has received considerable economic and military assistance aimed at encouraging development. Also, the US established a collaborative military-to military relationship with the Mongolian Army and have had annual peacekeeping exercise involving troops from both states.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, more than 600 Peace Corps volunteers have served in Mongolia and Mongolia has contributed troops about ten times in Iraq and had dispatched soldiers to Afghanistan although domestic sensitivities and political pressure on the Mongolian government caused this to discontinue.

Admittedly, while Mongolia is seeking the balanced relationship with their two neighbours they perceived the “third neighbour” policy through the role of the US and Japan from a different angle. For example, one Chinese author wrote that:

The US took advantage of Russia’s departure to fill the geopolitical vacuum,

<sup>29</sup> Ewing T, ‘Between the Hammer and Anvil’ Chinese and Russian Policies in Outer Mongolia 1911-1921, (1980) Bloomington, Indiana Press.

<sup>30</sup> Elleman, above n, 1;

<sup>31</sup> Erdenchuluun L, ‘Mongolia’s Strategic Options: Independence and Conflict?, in Kyongsoo Lho and Kay Moller, eds, North –east Asia Towards 2000, Baden Baden, Germany, 1999, 98.

<sup>32</sup> Murphy, above n.

<sup>33</sup> Watchman, above n.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



rapidly develop relations with Mongolia, and sustaining “Mongolia independence” separate forces. This must arouse us to be on guard against the penetration of the US forces that threaten the security of Inner Mongolia.<sup>35</sup>

Clearly, many Chinese analysts have published expression of the same concern toward relations with Mongolia and the US such noting that the US aims “to use Mongolia as a base to watch and deter Russia and China.”<sup>36</sup>

Also, Chinese concern about Japan is implicated in their worries about Mongolia. Deputy Director of the Department for Information and Contingencies Analysis of the China Institute of the International Studies, deputy director Zhang Lijun, stated that Japan’s interest in developing relations with Mongolia derives from Tokyo’s geostrategic ambition, moreover, Mongolia is the best place for Tokyo to carry out its “Tanaka Memorial”- imperialist plan to conquer Mongolia, China and whole of Asia.<sup>37</sup>

In addition, Mongolia has experienced some taste of hegemony from its neighbours, for instance, when Dalai Lama visited Mongolia, in November 2002, the railway link between Mongolia and China closed for what Chinese described as ‘a technical problem’. During the Dalai Lama’s three days visit, trains stopped at Erliang (Chinese border crossing city). However, the Associated Press reported that an unnamed executive of China’s copper industry told that Beijing ordered to suspend all shipment from Mongolia because of the Dalai Lama’s visit.<sup>38</sup>

As to Russia, when the US announced to give \$285 million in loans from the Millennium Challenge Account(MCA), \$188 million of which were projected to renew the railway system in Mongolia. Due to the Russian objection the project stopped.<sup>39</sup> Regarding the railway, Russia is the co-ownership of the Ulaanbaatar Railway Joint Stock Company- that was established during the Soviet era. Personally, I assume that Russian block was due to the USMCA involvement.

On the other hand, however, Mongolia has been an appreciative and cooperative partner, sending soldiers to Iraq and Afghanistan, generally, the US has no vital interest in Mongolia, measured in terms of security, survival, and economic well-being despite providing \$285 million through MCA, military training and Peace Corp volunteers.<sup>40</sup> In Washington, much is at stake concerning its credibility, relevance and integrity toward Mongolia.<sup>41</sup>

Therefore, in my opinion, changing these relations would not be easy for Mongolia and the independence of our country appears to be vulnerable to any fundamental shift in relations among the three giant powers to balance.

Sovereignty and natural resource

Is it the best way to put the mining sector at the forefront of the state’s development?

<sup>35</sup> Shen Weilie, Zhongguo guojia anquan dili, [The Geography of China’s National Security], 403.

<sup>36</sup> Hsin wan Pao, “New US Moves Toward China and Its Northern Neighbours”, Hong Kong Hsin, 1992,

<sup>37</sup> Zhang Lijun, ‘Strategic Nuances: Mongolians bask in the spotlight and cement their bonds with Japanese “neighbours”’, Beijing Review, 21 September, vol 38, 2006.

<sup>38</sup> McDonald Joe, ‘China Restores Mongolia Rail Service, Associated Press Online, 7 November, 2002, LexisNexus.

<sup>39</sup> Sumiyabazar Ch, ‘Mongolia, Russia to Discuss Rail Upgrade’, UB Post, 10 April, 2008.

<sup>40</sup> Watman Alan, ‘Don’t Forsake Mongolia’ Asia Policy, National Bureau of Asian Research, January 2009, vol 7, p 57.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

For developing states, rich natural resource have the potential to be a curse or blessing. Consequently, each state has to decide how to manage the wealth its resources generate.<sup>42</sup> In theory, if a state has a strong sovereignty it can exercise control over all state matters if a state has weak sovereignty and its political system is also not strong it leads more unacceptable outcome that feed corruption and reduce accountability.<sup>43</sup> Thus effective governance is essential in relation to the natural resource sector so that if our government cannot properly manage it could contribute to a "natural resource curse".

The revenue generated from natural resources has the potential to be significant to the conversion of the state and society of Mongolia. Actually, investment in mining has already brought much development throughout the entire country. After the democratic changes, Mongolia has put the mining sector as fundamental to development plan. This policy has proven successful in many ways. For example, GDP was doubled (6%-13%) between 1999 and 2008 just under 80 million tonnes of coal production.<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, a significant percentage of the foreign direct investment (FDI) goes into the only mining industry (60%) compared to the other sectors such as manufacturing and construction.<sup>45</sup>

As regarding the international legal sovereignty, Mongolia has become economically, socially, militarily and environmentally- integrated as a regional actor. Also, it is almost unlikely that any state would overtly act against the Mongolian government to undermine its legal sovereignty.

However, it has been clear that Mongolian government has neglected other domestic industries and overemphasis on the mining sector has raised many issues such as sovereignty and corruption. For instance, Chinese investment has led Mongolia to be over-dependent because Mongolian regulations do not discriminate against investors regarding nationality and foreigners thus such legislation allowed Chinese businesses to dominate the country's mines. A majority of active mining companies are either party or totally financed by the Chinese and China's state-owned enterprises also takes a major role in the strategic deposits such as Oyu-Tolgoi (the biggest copper mine in the world) and Tavan Tolgoi-coalmine.<sup>46</sup> In addition, loopholes in the present legislation enabled corrupt officials to skirt the laws that contributed to environmental destruction.

Therefore, it should be noted that Chinese dominance of the Mongolian mining, and also construction industry, may affect our country's independence sovereignties that puts limits on the government's ability to manage its domestic affairs. Personally, I believe that Mongolia is at the edge of losing their sovereignty unless we manage it properly so that we have to understand that weak independent sovereignty allows for overdependence of the foreign.

In relation to Russia, Mongolia imports 76% of its gasoline and diesel fuel and some electric power from Russia. Bilateral trade has reached approximately \$1.6 billion

<sup>42</sup> Jeffrey Reeves, 'Resource, Sovereignty, and Governance: Can Mongolia Avoid the 'Resource Curse', Asian Journal of Political Science, vol 19, No 2, August 2011, p170.

<sup>43</sup> Collier P, Elliot V L, 'Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy', Washington, World Bank Publication, 2003.

<sup>44</sup> Mongolia National Statistical Office, [www.en.nso.mn](http://www.en.nso.mn).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Asia Foundation and Sant Maral, Trends in Corruption Attitudes, 2012.

in 2013 and Russia plays an important role in extracting our country's minerals such as silver, coal, and uranium mining sector. However, this is minimal compared with China whose bilateral trade has reached \$6 billion.<sup>47</sup> Obviously, despite these figures, Mongolians are eager to avoid circumstances in which both neighbours engage in what may be termed "soft colonialism".<sup>48</sup>

Therefore, our government needs to focus on strengthening the policy, strategy and legal system to check and balance security and sovereignty surrounding the mining industry. Also, Mongolian state have to enhance the corruption watchdog system that operates independent from the authorities. Eventually, government should scrutinize and revisit the practice and pay attention to lessons learned from the past post-Cold War transitions and to understand that pandering to the international community is not always best for Mongolia.

### **Future of Mongolia**

How the two recent leaders' visit will impact the future of Mongolia?

Recently, Mongolia has been refocusing its foreign policy on its neighbours. Hence, leaders of both China and Russia have visited Mongolia in turns in August and September 2014. Both countries are seeking to benefit from our country's globally significant mineral resources and seem likely to extend their trade and financial support to Mongolia. Also, they are interested in investing in infrastructure mainly, the railway links and oil and gas pipeline from Russia to China that strategically important for all countries.

In my opinion, if Mongolia gets much financial support from them it will again deepen our overdependence on both neighbours so that we should find the better solution and policy to develop our country to escape "soft colonialism".

### **Conclusion**

Mongolia has succeeded in establishing and reserving its independence without dissolving into either of her two giant neighbours although Mongolia has had a share of wins and failures in the history. Nonetheless, a democratic and prosperous Mongolia can play an important role as the link of stability between Asia and Europe using its geographical position between giants.

In globalization, as Huntington stated that the sovereignty might be weakened and lost not by the war but by the "changing and clashing" cultural identity thus in order to survive in the international community as active sovereignty nation state, therefore, for Mongolia it is better to preserve their cultural identity that with strong national icons. Regarding the "third neighbour" policy, Mongolia needs to balance the influence of its two neighbours while broadening the relationships with other countries such as Canada, Australia and South Korea and not relying on the two dominant countries, the US and Japan.

It is my belief that the mining industry is not the only key to Mongolian development as the Mongolian officials say, however, it is essential for the Mongolian people's national intelligence to develop the country as a sovereign national state and thereby to save Mongolia now and into the future.

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.dw.de/dw-akademie/media-development/s-12120>

<sup>48</sup> Watchman, above n.

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