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## **The third neighbour policy of mongolia: A review of mongolia-Japan relationship**

**Manish Kumar Pujari**

Research Scholar, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi, Delhi, India

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### **Abstract**

This articles will examine Mongolia's "third neighbour policy" and its effects on Mongolia-Japan relations. Foreign policy is a business of engagement, engagement with neighbours, with world powers, with as many as countries of the world as possible, engagement for political reasons, engagement for economic reasons, for peace and development for security reasons and for energy considerations. In the wake of the international socialist economic system's collapse and the disintegration of the former Soviet Union, Mongolians began to pursue an independent and non-aligned foreign policy. Mongolia is landlocked between Russia and China and seeks cordial relations with both nations. At the same time, Mongolia has sought to advance its regional and global relations. Mongolia's ties with Japan and South Korea are particularly strong. In the frame of the 'Third Neighbour Policy' Mongolia advances bilateral and multilateral relationships with developed and democratic countries in the political, economic, cultural, humanitarian areas. Mongolia-Japan cooperation in general and their increasing cooperation in post-Cold War era, in particular, is an extension of Mongolia's 'third neighbour' policy where Mongolia wants to lessen its economic and political dependence from its two permanent neighbours, i.e. Russia and China. The central focus of Mongolia's 'third neighbour' policy is to develop a strategic partnership with Japan as well as comprehensive partnerships with U.S, Germany, India, the Republic of Korea and expanded partnership with Canada and Australia. This article postulates that adoption of 'third neighbour' policy was a geostrategic need of Mongolia to avoid control of its two geographic neighbours i.e. Russia and China. This article examines Mongolia's third neighbour policy and its impact on Mongolia-Japan relations.

**Keywords:** strategic partnership, 'third neighbour' policy, comprehensive partnership, pragmatism

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### **Introduction**

Mongolia is a landlocked country also historically known as country of Chinggis( Genghis) Khann. A country which is rich in resources particularly mining deposits with a rapid urbanizing population asserted its presence in the international arena through its foreign policy particularly after the the disintegration of USSR. After the collapse of Soviet Union Mongolia brought many drastic changes into its foreign policy its reformed policy impacted political, social and economic system of the country.

The 20th century has witnessed many events such as establishment of new states after World War II, opening of global markets due to rapid globalization, and the most important event occurred in the 1990s when disintegration of USSR occurred which not only had a huge impact on global politics, in fact, it also brought drastic changes in the political and economic system of many countries particularly those countries which were heavily depended on the economy of the Soviet Union and Mongolia was no exception. This event is also described as one of the reason behind the establishment of democracy in many countries. Batbayar (2001) explains that the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disassembling of apartheid in South Africa were responsible for democracy to flourish and become a global phenomenon.

Foreign policy generally revolves around twin significant interest i.e. national security and sovereignty of a country. Diplomatic relationship with 'third neighbour' is not a new policy of Mongolia. The historical roots in 20<sup>th</sup> century, can be dated back to year 1911, when Mongolia's government was under Bogd Khan. He submitted a missive to many countries such as Japan, France, Germany, US, UK etc., this attempt was to establish trade relations with these countries, and to recognize Mongolia as a sovereign State (Bayasakh 2018). Thus, it can be postulated that inception of 'third neighbour' foreign policy of Mongolia initiated in early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Mongolia's Third Neighbour Policy**

Mongolia's foreign policy is formulated on the assumptions of 'neo-realism' and 'liberal institutionalism' theories of international relations. In other words, we can say that foreign policy of Mongolia particularly after the collapse of Soviet Union reflects some elements of neo-realism and liberal institutionalism. Since the end of Cold War in 1990, Mongolia is cited as the ideal example in the western countries due to peaceful and successful transition to democracy from a communist system (Rinna, 2015) <sup>[28]</sup>. Mongolia's foreign policy is based on its national and strategic interest and 'third neighbour' policy is a major element of Mongolia's multi-pillared

foreign policy. Under this policy Mongolia is developing and long-term and healthy relationship with different countries which includes India, Turkey, Australia, United States and Japan.

It was in year 1990 when the first time the word third neighbour was used by US secretary of state James Baker. The policy of third neighbour was adopted by Mongolia in order to balance its relationship with two permanent neighbours and to establish relationship with major countries of the world. So one can say that foreign policy of Mongolia can be also called as third neighbour policy. (Soni 2012) <sup>[20]</sup>.

The fresh idea provided by James Baker was soon adopted and incorporated in the foreign policy of Mongolia by Mongolian policy makers. The term became very popular among the scholars and academicians and also among the media. One of the prominent diplomat and Mongolist Alicia Campi in a conference addressed that US can be called as the third neighbour of Mongolia (Campi, 2010) <sup>[3]</sup>.

In order to overcome the limitation of landlocked country Mongolia adopted a policy which can be termed as third neighbour policy as Russia and China being the permanent two neighbours. In 2007 then President of Mongolia N.Enkhbayar explained Mongolia third neighbour policy as engagement with as many as countries possible, engagement with international institutions, international organisations and others stakeholders which help Mongolia in its development and also strengthening its democratic apparatus. The the main objective behind adopting such policy was to reduce Mongolia as dependency on its permanent neighbours (Soni, 2012)

Former President of Mongolia N. Enkhbayar further states that multi pillar foreign policy of Mongolia means Mongolia will engage with prominent players at the international arena it will engage with countries like South Korea, Japan USA, and also with important organisations such as United Nations. The Ultimate vision of this policy that Mongolia will be dependent on many countries of the world rather than two geographical numbers. Third neighbour policy covers areas searches economic, political, cultural and humanitarian (Dovchinsuren, 2012) <sup>[20]</sup>.

Ministry of foreign affairs (MoFA) specifies that Mongolia foreign policy Under Article 14.2. under this policy Mongolia will establish relationship with Japan, USA, European Union (EU), Republic of Korea, India and other countries under its " third neighbour policy".

The two components from which the third neighbour foreign policy is derived are historical cultural ties and friendly relations with countries which shares common values with Mongolia. The basic characteristics which these countries shares with Mongolia are are democratic values, economic engagements and peace and security e in the region. As Mongolia identifies itself as a country of of Northeast Asia region, so in that scenario Mongolia relationship with these democratic countries becomes significant (Soni, 2009) <sup>[19]</sup>. Mongolia adopted a policy of non-involvement and neutrality with its disputed neighbours. Geography becomes important aspect of third neighbour policy apart from cultural and historical linkages (Wachman 2012) <sup>[23]</sup>.

The central theme of Mongolia third neighbour foreign policy is to balance Mongolia relations with Russia and China and also to engage with countries which will helps in development of Mongolia. Establishing strategic partnership becomes vital component of third neighbour policy with country such as Germany, India, USA and Japan.

The geopolitical and geostrategic position of Mongolia has a significant influence on formulating foreign policy of the country. Mongolia ascertains itself as a country of North East Asia region. Geographically landlocked between Russia and China, Mongolia's 'third neighbour' policy is constituted to diversify its relations with countries other than these two neighbours. Lakhajaav (2016) elucidates that the 'third neighbour' policy is a strategic foreign policy by Mongolia in which the State adopts soft power as a tool to expand it's economic, cultural and political engagements. The other sectors in which Mongolia wants to expand its engagements includes education, science and technology, energy infrastructure and mining.

### **The third neighbour: Japan**

The bilateral relationship between Mongolia and Japan are based on the mutual interest shared by both the countries. Porter (2009) <sup>[17]</sup> elaborates that the relationship between Mongolia and Japan is beneficial for both the countries. Japan has largely contributed in form of economic assistance to Mongolia in its transition to democracy as the reason behind this generosity is the peace and stability in the region. As stated by the Foreign Ministry of Japan that the success of democratization of Mongolia and transformation to an open market-friendly economy is an indispensable condition for the peace, stability, and security of the region (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006). Japan is among the active donor and loan provider to Mongolia since the 1990s and since 1991 Japan is the largest donor of aid to Mongolia (MoFA, 2006).

### **Political Aspect**

The diplomatic relationship between Mongolia and Japan were established in 1972. Japan was among the first great powers to have established political engagements with Mongolia. Mongolia Japan relations have witnessed many developments since 1972. The diplomatic and political relationship between two countries was ceremonial in nature until the collapse of Soviet Union (Goleman, 2014). The first economic assistance from Japan to Mongolia was provided in 1977 when Japan invested and helped Mongolia to establish Gobi Cashmere factory in the capital city, Ulaanbaatar, which later on became one of the major plants of Mongolia and main producer and manufacturer of mohair, cashmere and wool products.

In subsequent years Mongolia Japan relationship has reached a new height when the high levels visit started from both the countries. The diplomatic visits were started between both the countries. The foreign minister of

Japan visited Mongolia in 1989, in 1990 Mongolian Prime minister, Sodnem visited Japan. In 1991 Prime Minister of Japan visited Mongolia (Porter, 2009) <sup>[17]</sup>. Prime Minister of Mongolia Puntsagiyn Jasray, paid an official visit to Japan in November 1993. In this visit, agreements were signed in the aviation sector and an agreement on cultural cooperation was also signed. Japan also assured Mongolian government for assistance in cultural cooperation.

Campi (2005) <sup>[2]</sup> elaborates that post-1990 period has witnessed many visits from high levels of visits from both the countries. In 1996, when Mongolian Democratic Coalition Government came into power, there was a consideration for the comprehensive partnership between Mongolia and Japan which will lead to a strong economic cooperation, political cooperation, and security cooperation between two countries. At the end of the 1990s, an economic assistance of 16 billion yen was announced by the Japanese government for the renovation and makeover of the 4th Ulaanbaatar power generation station. Apart from this Japanese government also announced a special plan for the studies of 500 Mongolian students to Japan. Since 1991 Japan is the largest aid donor to Mongolia. Japan wanted to have long-term engagement with Mongolia (Lizun, 2006).

Japan's political cooperation to Mongolia was enormous particularly in the initial phase of the democratic political system of Mongolia. Japan has always supported Mongolia and encouraged it to become economically independent. Also at the global level, Japan supported Mongolia by hosting the meeting with the World Bank regarding the economic assistance to Mongolia for its smooth political transaction in the initial years of democratization i.e. from 1991-93. Apart from political and economic cooperation, Japan has been providing technical assistance to Mongolia. The assistance from Japan to Mongolia is provided in various sectors such as agriculture, environment, industry, mining, public transport which includes road and airports, machine repair, education sector, health sector, telecommunications, mining, rural development, business management, etc. (Japan & World, 2015). Mongolian people have the respect and affinity for the people of Japan. Batbayar (2001) explains the following reasons for the strengthening of the bilateral relationship between Mongolia and Japan in the post-1990 period. The first reason explained by Batbayar is that the democratic political system and free-market economic system of Mongolia have created a new prospect for the improvement in bilateral relations between two countries. He further elucidates that the Japanese government supported democratic transformation in Mongolia because it was thought among the policy makers of Japan that the successful democratic political system in Mongolia will have a spillover effect among the other countries of Asia. The second reason according to Batbayar is that under 'third neighbour policy' of Mongolia, Japan is considered as one of the significant third neighbour of Mongolia. The other important third 'neighbours' are US and Germany. The final reason according to Batbayar for strengthening the relationship between Mongolia and Japan is related to economic turbulence of 1991-93. As Mongolian economy was passing through a tough economic phase and this period was also the period of transition to democracy, which reminded Japan of their own phase of "reconstruction in the post-World War II era".

Hioriki (2014) explains that the geo-strategic and geopolitical realities of the Mongolia remain unchanged. Mongolia is a landlocked country with its two geographical giant neighbours, i.e. Russia and China. However, presently Mongolia enjoys cordial relations with both the countries. In the 'Foreign Policy Concept' of 1994, Mongolia has adopted a multi-pillared and omnidirectional foreign policy. In order to enhance its security, Mongolia has been looking for an alternative to its two geographical neighbours and 'third neighbour' policy of Mongolia has played an important role in achieving this objective. Japan and United States are the two significant neighbors of Mongolia (Hiroiki, 2014). Many scholars and authors of "Mongolian Academy of Sciences" has explained the cooperation between Mongolia and Japan and Mongolia and USA. They have explained that the major reason behind increasing cooperation between Mongolia and US is the military security of Mongolia. The Mongolia- Japan relationship is more defined in the terms of economic security for Mongolia.

### **Regional Cooperation**

We can say that the economic development of Mongolia is also related to the peace and stability of North East Asia region. Mongolia identifies it as the country of North East Asia. Mongolia- Japan relationship has this strategic component as the countries of North East Asia both understand the importance of peace and stability of North East Asia region. Mongolia is a genuine facilitator of peace and stability in this region as it enjoys good friendly relations with all the countries of this region including both the Koreas (North Korea and South Korea), Russia and China and Japan. The fourth chapter of this study chapter has explained the cooperation of Mongolia and Japan in North East Asia region.

Lahamsuren (2012) describes that the NEA region has vast economic resources and potential. The existence of complementary among the countries of NEA region creates an opportunity for economic cooperation between these countries which will be mutually beneficial to all the countries of this region. Japan is one of the important countries of this region due to its technologically advanced capabilities, its financial capital and geopolitical location and market which could serve complementary to the natural and mineral resources enriched country Mongolia. Japan's trade with North East Asian countries is increasing every year. The economic and political interest of Japan and countries of North East Asia is closely interwoven. Therefore, it is important to study Mongolia-Japan economic and political cooperation in as the countries of North East Asia. Although Japan's political and economic engagements have been increased with the countries of North East Asia, however, one of the important aspects is that Japan's bilateral relations with Mongolia have witnessed a remarkable growth.

Galsanjamts (2000) <sup>[8]</sup> argues that although Japan is undoubtedly economically and technologically advanced country, however, the political and military influence of Japan is not much effective in the region. Japan has played an active role in the international arena, and its bid for the permanent member of UNSC has also increased in the recent years. Mongolia has been the active supporter of Japan's membership in UNSC. Japan visualizes a larger role for itself in encouraging disarmament and nonproliferation. We can say that disarmament and nonproliferation are the prominent interest of Mongolia as well, which reflects the importance of economic and political cooperation between Mongolia and Japan for the stability and security of the region. Although political and economic cooperation between Mongolia and Japan is increasing on the one hand, on the other hand Japan's relations with China is in "some degree strained" due to rapid increase in the military expenditure of China, the stockpiling of missiles and the increased naval exercises by China in the surrounding area of Japan. These issues have created concerns in the minds of policymakers of China which resulted in the reviewing of ODA to China by Japan.

Lakhaajav (2017) explains that the geopolitical and geostrategic location of Mongolia gives a critical role for the country as it can play a significant role of mediator in improving the relations between China-Japan, Japan's relations with two Koreas, and in Russia-Japan. Mongolia has good relations with all the countries of North East Asia which makes it the genuine facilitator of peace and stability in this region. However, Japan's relations with countries of North East Asia are not smooth. Masaki (2007) elucidates that the Japan does not enjoy any diplomatic relationship with North Korea. He elaborates that anti-Japanese feeling is prevalent among many peoples of NEA countries particularly among China and South Korea. The reason behind the anti-Japan feeling in these countries was the atrocities by imperial Japan during wartime in these countries. Mongolia has all the potential to become a mediator in improving the relationship between the countries of North East Asia particularly the relationship of Japan with these countries.

Enkhsaikhan (2014) explains that Mongolia's role is critical in achieving peace and stability of the North East Asia region. Enkhsaikhan, argues that Mongolia is the genuine facilitator of stability in the NEA region because Mongolia enjoys cordial relations with its two geographical neighbours also it enjoys friendly relations with other countries of this region including North Korea and South Korea; secondly as the small country it do not have narrow political interest and third and most important point is that Mongolia wants to institutionalize NWFZ status.

Soni (2014) <sup>[21]</sup> explains that the collapse of Soviet Union created a security dilemma for Mongolia, in terms of the regional identity of the country. This dilemma was resolved when post-socialist Mongolia asserted its identification as the country of North East Asia. The most important reason for this identification as the country of North East Asia region was the economic and national security of the country. Thus we can say that Mongolia's identity as the country of North East Asian region has helped the landlocked country to attract the foreign investments from the technologically advanced countries particularly Japan.

Campi (2017) argues that in present times the role of Mongolia becomes crucial in the peace and stability of North East Asian region. Campi also states that Mongolia has willing to act as the genuine facilitator and neutral bridge to North Korea. Hence, for Japan, Mongolia is the significant partner for peace and stability in NEA region. This study Mongolia-Japan Relations, 1991-2002 has analyzed the various dimensions of the relationship between Mongolia and Japan. The North East Asian identity of Mongolia is one of the significant reason behind the increasing cooperation between Mongolia and Japan.

### **Economic Aspect**

Mongolia is a resource-rich nation. It has substantial untapped deposits of various mineral resources including coal, minerals etc. Hence, this resource-rich country has been scouring the globe for investors. Mongolia needs investment for its economic development, and it is not selective in attracting those investors. After the disintegration of USSR, the investments from the Soviet Union to Mongolia declined which led to a search for an alternative investment and Japan was the natural option for Mongolia. The economic assistance from Japan has been enormous particularly in the post-Cold War era.

The trade cooperation between Mongolia and Japan has witnessed rapid developments particularly after the end of Cold War. The areas of cooperation have been increased drastically between Mongolia and Japan in the every passing year. The economic assistance which was limited to technological or technical assistance initially was broadened by Japan in different sectors. The economic relations between these two countries cannot be studied without understanding the broader assistance provided by Japan to Mongolia in other sectors of development.

Delegertsogt (1998) explains Mongolia- Japan economic relations into three phases. He divides three-phase into a timeline from 1972 to present times. The three phases are as follows: First phase is from 1972-1980. Under this phase, the relationship between Mongolia and Japan was very limited. The two areas in which cooperation between two countries was occurring were trade and political relations. The diplomatic relationship between Mongolia and Japan were established in 1972, and initially, the relationship was ceremonial between these two countries. The second phase is from 1980-90, the trade cooperation between two countries was the major area of cooperation between Mongolia and Japan. It is the third phase which is most important phase according to Delgertsogt (1998) which is from 1990 to present times. There were many reasons behind the increasing cooperation between Mongolia and Japan in this period. Some of the reasons were, the collapse of Soviet Union; transition of Mongolian political system from socialism to democracy and major change in the economic structure of the country which was transformed from the closed economy to open market economy. The Japanese

cooperation with Mongolia in the third phase increased very significantly in the various sectors. Apart from economic assistance in the form of aid and loan assistance, Japan cooperation was also broadened in the service and manufacturing sector.

Official Development Assistance (ODA) is one of the major assistance provided by the Japanese government to developing countries. In the past, ODA as assistance has helped in dealing with the challenges which Japan as a country face and also to deal with challenges to the international community. The fundamental reason for the ODA to Mongolia is to ensure peace, harmony and prosperity in the region (Embassy of Japan) Japan's assistance to Mongolia is implemented from a viewpoint that "economic development and humanitarian assistance in Mongolia will contribute to peace and prosperity in the region and the world" (Embassy of Japan ). From 1990 to 1998 the total ODA to Mongolia was in the form of a loan was ¥256.89 million and in the form of aid, it was aid ¥339.57 million (Delgertsogt, 1998).

Mongolia consider Japan as it's important third neighbour. Both the countries are member of Asia Pacific security region, also so their economic and trade relations become significant in their cordial relations. Official Development Assistance (ODA), Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) highlights strong relationship between these two countries.

Mongolia foreign policy of 2011 states that Japan is an important third neighbour in political economic and security spheres. Recent events such as rise of China, Maritime security issues, and disputes in South China sea and East China sea etc further resulted into to close a relationship between Mongolia and Japan. Mongolia's friendly relationship with Russia, provide an opportunity to Mongolia to intermediate and reduce the conflicts and tensions between the the rivalry states of these regions (Lakhajaav, 2019) China and Japan both complete for Mongolia lucrative markets of mining and infrastructure. Mitsubishi Corporation and Chiyoga corporations won contract act to build an international airport at Hushigtiin Hundii in 2013. The investment in this project was of dollar 493 million dollars. In recent years also many economic agreements were signed between Mongolia and Japan. In 2015 Prime Minister Ch. Sakhanbileg's government signed Economic Partnership Agreement for developing Tavan Tolgoi mining deposits and railways. This was another blow for Chinese company China Senhua Energy Company. Mongolia identity country of Northeast Asia region become significant in strengthening its relation with Japan. In 2016 foreign minister of Mongolia and foreign minister of Japan condemned North Korea's actions. Foreign minister Fumio Kishida stated that Mongolia is important partner of Japan as its shares principles and values with Japan (Lakhaajav, 2019)

What basically needs to be pointed out is that the recent push to boost Mongolia-Japan relations owes much to Ulaanbaatar's 'third neighbour' policy and is driven by strategic concerns. India, on its part, has been patiently expanding its diplomatic and security, economic links with Mongolia as part of an effort to build strategic ties with keeping in mind the peace and security of the region. Therefore, it may be concluded that while Mongolia's proximity with Japan remains to be a significant factor to balance off the equation with Russia and China.

Today, we need Mongolia as a country, more politically stable, economically strong because as a vibrant independent democratic country Mongolia can play a significant role in global and regional peace, stability and security. And the fact of the matter is that Mongolia's third neighbour policy is helping Mongolia in achieving above mentioned objectives, as Japan is not only largest aid donor to Mongolia since 1990 but the assistance in the form ODA by Japan has taken the relationship between these two Asian countries to the next level.

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