Modern ''Nomadic' Civilisation: Construction and Politics in Mongolia

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Abstract

In the last 40 years, Mongolia has been forming a nation-state free from external influences and colonial policies. This paper[1] aims to discuss how the discourse about nomadic cultures and civilizations has changed over time and how it impacted people and institutions in post-socialist Mongolia. Furthermore, it investigated how reflexive new concepts and public policies on nomadic civilization have formed. The paper argues that Mongolia is developing the so-called nomadic civilization to resist the cultural hegemony of foreign countries and institutions and unify its people. Moreover, this paper contributes to the academic debates about how civilizational populism is used in foreign policies and national politics. This study used discourse analysis and ethnographic observations since the 1990s.

Keywords: nomad; civilization; tradition; populism, colonisation

Introduction

Mongolia's traditional way of life has faced significant challenges, especially the rise and fall of state socialist modernization and Cold War geopolitical tensions in the 20th century. After the socialist system collapsed in the early 1990s, Mongolia threw out political and cultural domination of the Soviet Union and pursued political independence. The Soviet Union implemented colonial rule in Mongolia by replacing Mongolia's existing political and social systems with Soviet-imposed communist ideologies and radical revolutionary reforms since the 1920s. Thousands of people, often leaders, elites, monks, and educated people, were purged to materialize the soviet colonization of Mongolia (Baabar, 2010) and make space for reformers prepared by the Soviets throughout the 20th century. Being labelled as a land of nomads, Mongolia was treated as alien to human civilization, like a "society without a history", argued by Arnold J. Toynbee (1987). According to Deleuze and Guattari (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), sedentary people often write history, and their historical documents usually deny the role and achievement of the so-called nomads in their history. The Soviets also did the same for Mongolia by rewriting Mongolian history. Bum-Ochir (Bum-Ochir Dulam, 2023) argued that Soviet scholars developed colonialist knowledge on nomadism under the umbrella term

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"nomadic feudalism." He further argued that by adopting this knowledge, socialist Mongolia attacked its 'traditional' culture as feudal culture and replaced it with Marxist ideologies and propaganda. Such colonial policies produced the "concept of 'nomadic civilization' emerged as an imagined historical category" (B. Tsetsentsolmon, 2014b), and it was an attempt to "break with Marxist orthodoxy of social evolution" in Mongolia (Baatarnaran Tsetsentsolmon, 2024). The political suppression of cultures of the past, for example, the heavy punishment of nationalist movements, the organizers of Chinggis Khaan's 800th anniversary in the early 1960s (J.Boldbaatar, 2010 [1999]), had led to silent public resistance. The historical imagery of Mongolia's past glories became the foundation for democratic protests (Christopher, 2004) and the development of the discourse of nomadic civilization. The debate about the role of nomads and nomadic civilization is increasing among academic researchers and practitioners (B.Enkhtuvshin, 2011; Bayar, 2014; D.Algai, D.Gankhuyag, Kh.Gundendamba, G.Chuluunbaatar, & Ts.Sharavdorj, 1994; B. Dulam, 2017; S. Dulam, 2013; G.Nandinbileg et al., 2021; Gelegpil, Oidov, & Zhelezniakov, 2020; Humphrey & Sneath, 1999; Huntington, 1993; Munkh-Erdene, 2023; Sneath, 2014; Zhelezniakov A.S., 2016) and well recorded in their writings (see more on the forthcoming issue of Nomadic Studies and the Journal of Intercultural Dialogue). Apart from the academic debates, the concept of nomadic civilization was understood by ordinary people when asked in the fieldwork, with simple terms such as the past, livestock herding, living in harmony with nature, ancestors and grandparents, rituals and traditions, language and scripts, and Khaans. Overall, these discussions direct our attention to the vacuum created in the study of the discourse of nomadic civilization. The gap is the lack of ordinary people's opinions and views about nomadic civilization, and it further demands the researchers to study from the bottom-up perspectives by engaging the public and other participants in the post-socialist period.

In this paper, I will discuss how the discourse about nomadic cultures and civilizations has quickly changed and shaped society since the mid-1980s until now. English historian Eric Hobsbawm (1983) proposed the concept of "tradition is created" and challenged former understanding. As he said, everyone used to think that tradition existed in history, but many traditions that we believe are thousands of years old have come into existence in modern times. These invented practices established the social cohesion of groups or nations, legitimized institutions and status of authorities, and inculcated value systems and beliefs while teaching certain behaviours (Hobsbawm, 1983, p.9). These concepts are not difficult to understand today, where histories and cultures are constantly revised topdown for many reasons, including conflicts, rivalry, and politics. Thus, it leads to the further assumption that the construction of culture and traditions is more dependent on the collective imagination and continuation of political dominance, in other words, knowledge colonization, for the period of at least one generation rather than the actual facts in history. Likewise, I argue that nomadic civilization is remade and is being re-invented to resist cultural colonization. This time, in post-socialist Mongolia, the discourse of nomadic civilization contested not only the legacies of Soviet 'cultural colonization' but also the newly emerged 'cultural colonization' in the form of development

intervention, imposition of foreign ideologies and values, and geopolitical advancement from Global South and emerging economies. Moreover, in three periods of the past 30-40 years between the 1980s and 2020s, the concept of nomadic civilization was invented, attacked, re-created, then became a weapon against foreign companies, institutes, and political rivalries, and finally, ethical values around the nomadic civilization are forming a unified national identity for Mongolia. Furthermore, this paper contributes to the academic debates about how civilizational populism is being used in foreign policies and nationalist politics (Brubaker, 2017; Linklater, 2022; Morieson, 2023; O'Hagan, 2020; Saleem, 2023; Yilmaz & Morieson, 2023). In the Mongolian case, the changing narratives of civilizational populism - construction of nomadic civilization in the Inner Asian context focusing on legacies of Mongolian Great Empires - allow researchers and politicians to cooperate and rewrite history by creating the past, more precisely the so-called traditions and new form of ethical and geopolitical ideologies of Mongolia, in the present and for the future.

This study uses discourse analysis of nomadic civilization and document analysis of Mongolia's domestic and foreign policies. My life experiences and observation since 1990 and the participant observation of Mongolia as a native researcher since 2010 were used as ethnographies and vignettes. My field research in Bayanjargalan in the southern Govi region and Tes in western Mongolia gave me an opportunity to talk a lot more about local experiences of socialist and post-socialist times and their strong views about the revival of Mongolian nationalism in the early 2010s. My later fieldwork in Khentii, the birthplace of Chinggis khaan, Arkhangai representing the centre of Mongolia, and Zavkhan symbolizing the places of Reincarnated Lamas have contrasted sharply with my earlier findings by giving more insight into political competition and suppression and public support for reviving their former customs and practices. I anonymized some institutional ethnographies that were unpurposefully conducted during the course of my career.

Background of post-socialist and 'nomadic' Mongolia

Since the mid-1980s, the aspiration for transparency and openness began with the revival of nomadic civilization. In the Soviet Union, perestroika and glasnosti started in 1985, and these changes were mirrored in Mongolia. Nationalist sentiments and traditionalist ideologies filled the vacuum created by the collapse of state socialism in the early 1990s. These new goals have conflicted with the Western market-oriented policies and the European and American development concepts imposed on Mongolia (Ichinkhorloo, 2019). In other words, the development approaches of Europe and the United States are no different from the Soviet Union. These policies overlook the history and cultures of Mongolia following the social evolutionary development approaches and imposing neoliberal policies, modernization theory and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Due to neoliberalism, Mongolia chose to privatize former State-owned factories, cooperatives and collective farms, which resulted in mass bankruptcy and unemployment. Such policies failed to support the population and forced Mongolia to seek foreign investment and external support. These made Mongolia adopt foreign policies

unconditionally rather than considering social and cultural integrity. According to the ratified conventions and adopted policies such as Mongolia SDG-2030, pastoralism, especially in Mongolia's climatic conditions, became the most backward and less efficient, so developing the national economy through mining was advisable. Agriculture and plantation have historically been anti-nomadic, but during the modernization in post-socialist Mongolia, mining has become the backbone of the economy. The mining triggered the destruction of pastures and pollution of water sources. However, the herders were blamed for this. In this process, Mongolian academics employed by international development organizations as consultants have played a shameful role in explaining why nomadism is destructive and outdated.

In recent years, the situation has started to change. The urban people, consisting of politicians, business people, academics and the elites of various parties, began to discuss these issues favourable for herders for political gain. In other words, most members of the Parliament are elected from rural places where herders serve as a backbone of the nomadic cultures. Even though mining contributes significantly to the economy, the unfair share and inequality have deepened. Thus, political parties and scholars shifted their attention from economic progress to social issues and geopolitics. The nomadic civilization became Mongolia's soft power. These policies were documented in the country's strategy, "Vision 2050". This document was developed by over 1,500 experts and scientists over seven months, regardless of party affiliation. Notably, academics and policymakers have collaborated since the mid-2010s after 20 years of internal divides over the nomadic civilizations. After it became a national policy, Mongolia began to pay attention to countries with nomadic cultures and traditions and started to learn from their experience and lessons. Mongolia has begun embracing nomadic cultures as its core concept and rushed to organize international nomadic festivals in 2019 while branding the country as the land of nomads. Mongolia collectively constructs a new identity based on nomadic civilization. It is rewriting its history to unite Mongolians internally and to resist improper treatment of Mongolian culture and nomadic civilizations from outside. It is also interesting to see how nomadic civilizations shape cultural hegemony and national values in Mongolia, and by using it, Mongolia changed its strategy to interact with other nomadic peoples, especially in Inner Asia and worldwide, using international platforms such as UNESCO. In the following sections, I will discuss what constitutes 'nomadic' culture and civilization in Mongolia and how it passed and became the essential content of Mongolian national identity and its values. Then, in three sections, I will discuss the details of the invention of cultures, civilization, and resistance against cultural colonization in Mongolia.

Local knowledge and nomadic education

When discussing how cultures are created and passed down to successive generations, the structure of extended family and the teachings of grandchildren by their grandparents inevitably come to mind. Undoubtedly, cultures are identities with similarities within a group and differences from others. On the one hand, the issue of cultures we are talking about is that it is like being whole in which people are united and realize how similar they are. Being identical

is a matter of solidarity, mutual understanding and carrying the same identity. However, on the outside, people look for what makes them different from others and their strengths and weaknesses. The core of culture is the shared knowledge and memories the people have created together, and it is a custom passed down from generation to generation, from grandfather to grandson, and from parent to child.

People look for cultures and civilization in their own lives, family, and country, and they co-create it by teaching the younger generation from the elders and passing down revised knowledge and experience to others. Grandparents of my host family in Tes complained about Mongolia's current school system, which has children separated from their pastoralist family for over 8 months in the school dormitory at the administrative centres. They could not teach them local rituals, customs and herding techniques properly. Families split temporarily to be with their children (Ahearn, 2018). In Bayanjargalan, many grandparents collect their grandchildren at the centre. When grandparents live with their grandchildren, they often teach them and share stories. Grandparents praise their grandchildren and say that their parents work hard to make ends meet. It creates respect for parents and strengthens the bond between children and parents for their whole life. Here, we are discussing the knowledge transfer system of the nomads, which we know about the three generation connection or the knowledge filtered through the life experience and passing the wisdom of the grandparents. According to my interviewees, lifelong views and perspectives are implanted in childhood, becoming the basis for all knowledge. As Mongolians live in unique cultures and environments, the best knowledge for survival is their grandparents' experience combined with scientific knowledge. When clarified about where their children and grandchildren choose to live, for example, in urban or rural places or foreign countries, pastoralists are surprisingly open to their choices but with conditions. If they are born as Mongolians, they will be Mongolians forever and have the duty to carry out the indigenous knowledge to their children. This system is the primary system that creates knowledge about cultures and civilization. The grandparents pass on the knowledge, experience, and oral history they heard from their grandparents. This means knowledge accumulated in five generations. In this way, Mongolian people easily transmit the knowledge produced from the three to nine generations to their children.

Different knowledge systems in every country transmit the way of life and world view (cosmology) through educational institutes, religious teachings, temples, home teaching, and libraries. However, the pastoralists have developed a knowledge transmission system in which the skills of telling stories and memorizing what was heard play a special role. Nowadays, according to parents, formal school education teaches about the cultures and civilization of our society through textbooks, using the example of someone you don't know. Still, it is difficult for children to absorb this knowledge. Grandchildren take the stories seriously when they hear from their parents and grandparents. Children are especially proud of the heroic stories of their grandparents and their communities and receive these stories and knowledge as their own: the history of their relatives, the history of my community, our country, and the national history of our country. From here, nutagism, a sense of belonging and collective memories are born

to shape a collective mindset and shared knowledge. First of all, this system passes the local knowledge. Secondly, it nurtures children's attitudes toward the collective identity of us and ours. It also trains the idea of unity, solidarity, and cooperation. Thirdly, even though children learn other knowledge or get influenced by it at later ages, they remain loyal to their cultures throughout their lives. It is simple logic that people do not deny themselves or their ancestors but disseminate knowledge by reinterpreting and reformulating. This knowledge system further raises the issue of ethics, what is wrong or right for nomadic people. If the children were affected by selfishness and unethical behaviours due to new policies from elsewhere, home teaching during the summer vacation or informal education system serves as an immune system for nomadic cultures, as argued by many parents in rural Mongolia. The nomadic cultures and so-called civilizations have roots in family and the above knowledge system. Among these internal and external factors, we cannot help but consider many things, such as cultural transformation and changes in social order, forms of economic relations, wars, famines, and droughts. The state's role is crucial to managing those issues beyond the capacity of pastoral families. Let's discuss this further in the following section.

State and nomadic culture

The State is understood as the people and organization system in which officers sit in the office, prepare documents, discuss issues at government and party meetings, make decisions, and implement them universally (Weber, 1978:89). Other researchers say that the State is formed based on the fetishism (Taussig, 1992) created in people's minds. On the other hand, the State is our imagination (Anderson, 2006 [1983]). Furthermore, the state is believed to be the agency that has many masks and images (Navaro-Yashin, 2002). What institutions can be considered to have done much work in creating nomadic culture and civilization in Mongolia? Is it the state or other stakeholders such as communities, companies, civil society academic scholars or external organizations? What did these agencies do to create nomadic cultures and civilizations?

Before answering the above question, let's examine what initiatives and events have taken place in Mongolia to create nomadic cultures and civilizations. A detailed analysis of my field works and observations (Ichinkhorloo, 2017b, 2017a, 2018, 2021; Ichinkhorloo & Yeh, 2016) and a review of secondary source materials since the 1990s reveals the following findings. The process of creating nomadic culture and civilization in Mongolia can be divided into three periods. The first period begins with the reforms that started in 1985 and ends in the late 1990s. The second is the period from the mid-2000s to the beginning of the mid-2010s, coinciding with the intensified globalization in Mongolia. The third one began in the mid-2010s and continues to this day. In the first period, Mongolia revived old traditions from the historical and ethnological materials, resisting the former colonial policies of the two neighbours. Academic scholars developed it with assistance from the State. Mongolian people's perspectives about their cultures have changed from backwards to good. In the second period, new rivalries to the nomadic culture emerged through environmentalism and a mining boom backed by development agencies and the neoliberal government. Surprisingly, these two contradictory sectors attacked

herders together for environmental degradation. As the host of these two sectors, the state was hesitant to be involved in this process, and herders mobilized against it along with local governments. Most academic researchers acted against pastoralists, but scholars who support cultures and traditions. In the third period, the discourse of nomadic civilization was recreated to unite the people, bind them under one goal, and expand Mongolia's history and cultural hegemony. The government is leading this campaign in collaboration with scholars in the social and humanitarian sciences. Interestingly, Mongolian people are observing with their support. The question for them seems to be how this new identity, nomadic civilization, will benefit Mongolian people in the globalized world.

Colonised language and history and resistance

In the first period, ideological change and reform had begun in 1986. It was the period of resistance to foreign influences, especially the ideology of the Soviet Union, that discredited the Mongols, their way of life and history, and their cultures. At this time, the movement of overthrowing the foreign or colonial ideology prevailed, and rebuilding the country's traditional cultures was mainly carried out. The cultural values of Mongolian people, their beliefs and rituals, standards of good and evil, and norms of behaviour of Mongolian people were all determined and controlled by the Soviet Union, namely Russian leaders, Russian experts, and Russian academics between 1950 and 1985. In the 20th century, Mongolian people, including government officials and scholars, were subjected to periodic arrest and purges for their opinions about Mongolia's independent policies. These arrests and condemnations ended in 1984 by punishing traditional medical practitioners. This strict system of controlling cultures and customs created a vacuum for nomadic cultures and civilization.

Other issues for reviving traditional cultures were the debate about using traditional Mongolian scripts or cyrillic letters. It was a contest to restore forbidden history and cultures and create the pride of nomadic cultures. Mongolia switched from a traditional Mongolian script to a Russian Cyrillic script in 1946 due to the Soviet Union's pressure. 1945-1986, the cyrillic alphabet was the only script used in Mongolia. An attempt to revive the Mongolian traditional script was carried out by Dr Byamba-iin Rinchen by teaching in the 8th and 9th grades of 10-year schools from 1958-1959. However, it stopped in 1960 by the order of the Soviet Union and Dr. Byamba-iin Rinchen was persecuted. Russian political, economic and cultural domination in Mongolia in the 1960s-1980s crushed it. In 1986, Mongolia restarted teaching Mongolian script from the 6th grade in the general education school, which was an unimaginable event. The Textbook Board of the Ministry of Education approved the textbook by J. Luvsandorj and T. Sharkhuu, headed by Professor Choi. Luvsanjav. Teaching Mongolian script was included in the secondary school curriculum. When I asked the teacher who taught the Mongolian script in the late 1980s about his experience, he said, "We just followed the textbook, and we learned it together with our students." When I asked the students how they learned it, they confessed that they just learnt to write their names in Mongolian script. The most interesting information was that everyone supported the idea of teaching Mongolian

script, which later awakened Mongolian national and cultural consciousness, including using terms such as 'nomadic' Mongolia and 'nomadic' culture and civilization.

During the Soviet time, Marxist scholars did not include Mongolian culture and history in the category of civilization. Mongolia's historical past was considered feudal, dark, rude, and vicious. Therefore, nomadic culture and civilization did not become Mongolia's values. In particular, the initiative to make the Mongolian script the official script between 1991 and 1995 became a battleground between the pro-Russian educators and the reformers who wanted to create a nomadic civilization. In 1991, the government of Mongolia approved the programme to adopt the Mongolian script as an official script within five years by its resolution number 36. Many academics and politicians supported this idea. The democratic party also supported it to win the election in 1992. Ironically, the democratic party lost the election and dropped this initiative, and the winning political party continued it. On the other hand, the Association for the Protection of the Cyrillic script was established mainly by Russian language teachers, politicians and writers trained in the Soviet Union. The advocates of Russian cultures considered the Mongolian script as the basis for nationalism and a symbol of backwardness. Unfortunately, the followers of Dr Ts. Damdinsuren, a linguist and philologist who wrote a Cyrillic grammar for Mongolians and the followers of Dr. B. Rinchen, who were for teaching Mongolian scripts, fought each other and divided Mongolia into two. In other words, it is a classic method of intervention that divides nations, and it is used by the big powers against small countries to keep them under their influence. The colonial powers often used political ideology, such as rescuing poor nations from extinction or supporting the poor nations to modernize and overcome nationalism. Mongolia also experienced an economic and political crisis in 1992-1994, and most people were living in poverty under uncertainty, so some people believed that life would be better if they stayed with the Russian Cyrillic script and hoped to receive Russian financial support in return. However, their hopes were not accomplished. The transition programme for Mongolian script was implemented and extended in 1995-2005, 2008-2015, and 2020-2024. Finally, Mongolia adopted the law [of 2015] on the Mongolian language that regulated the use of both Mongolian and Cyrillic in government documents starting from January 1, 2025. Now, let us discuss how the discussion about the nomadic culture and civilization started in Mongolia in the late 20th century.

Two neighbours of Mongolia, namely the Soviet Union and China, have had different policies toward Mongolia and were highly cautious about the closeness of Mongolian ethnic people living in these three countries. Talk about glorifying Chinggis Khaan, Mongolian Empires, and nomadic cultures and civilizations was forbidden until 1990 by the Soviet and Mongolian governments. The collapse of the socialist system weakened these policies, and Mongolia carefully celebrated the return of Chinggis Khaan. This was the Danshig Naadam (Festival dedicated initially to Mongolia's last religious leader and khaan Bogd by all Mongolian ethnic people divided among these three countries) that was organized in 1990 on the occasion of the 750th anniversary of the "Secret History of the Mongols," the book about Chinggis Khaan written in the Mongolian language using Chinese characters. At the

same time, Mongolia opened its border to non-socialist countries in 1991 after the democratic revolution and invited foreign scholars to revive Chinggis in Mongolia. There were three different approaches toward Chinggis khaan at that time: Soviet scholars, officials, and school textbooks labelled Chinggis khaan as a brutal murderer, enslaver, and rapist and treated the Mongolian Empires as a tyrant evil. Chinese scholars labelled Chinggis as a Chinese hero and denied Mongolia's existence. Western scholars had mixed opinions and were neutral and academic. For this reason, Mongolia invited Western scholars to conferences by the International Association for Mongolian Studies to neutralize these two hostile policies. Such policies continue now.

Discourse about nomadic cultures and civilization is closely linked to Mongolian ethnic people worldwide and Mongolia's foreign policies and relations with its neighbours. Frank Bille argued that Mongolia is scared to death of China and Russia according to public perception (Billé, 2015), which makes Mongolia treat other Mongolian ethnic people in neighbouring countries - Buriyads, Khalimag, Tuvans, and Inner Mongolians - unfairly. Mongolian authorities, in fear of the Soviets manipulated public opinions. For example, talks about Chinese espionage and threats from China in the daily newspaper readings, hearings and weekly party meetings had brainwashed Mongolians during the socialist time due to Sino-Soviet conflicts. In the republics of Buriyad, Tuva, Khalimag, and Inner Mongolia, myths about Mongolia's backwardness, barbaric lifestyle, and miserable life continue to be made up and create misunderstandings, even now. Buriyads coming from Russia recently shared their understanding of Mongolia and shocked Mongolians in 2022-2023. One Buriyat gave an interview and informed that he learned that there were no cities in Mongolia, everyone lived in the countryside by herding livestock, and Mongolians didn't know about development, high buildings and technology. The most concerning issue was that young Buriyats consider themselves Russian ethnic people and cannot speak the Buryat Mongolian language at all and do not want to learn it. For Inner Mongolia, such assimilation is getting deeper as the Chinese government banned the use of Mongolian language and script in educational institutes. Such manipulative ideology distances ethnic Mongolians in Russia and China from the 'backward' nomadic cultures and Mongolia. To overcome such distancing and mistrust among Mongolian ethnic people, Mongolia used different platforms and strategies. At the international level, the building of nomadic culture and civilization was initiated by UNESCO, and post-Soviet countries participated in the early 1990s. For example, Mongolia initiated the International Institute for the Study of Nomadic Civilizations in Mongolia at the UNESCO Conference in 1992. The governments of Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Turkey, and Indonesia signed the agreement and established it in Mongolia in 1998. It was no wonder why two countries bordering Mongolia did not participate in this agreement.

In summary, the term "nomadic civilization" has changed to mean 1) resistance to cultural colonization and 2) independence from the influence of other countries. Until the 1980s, Soviet policies of cultural colonization were belittling Mongolian cultures to crush potential Mongolian nationalism. In other words, the building of nomadic civilization aimed to stop

the Soviet policies of cultural colonization and gradual assimilation while making its policy independently and involving other third neighbours in the 1990s.

Contestation over nomadic pastoralism and new form of 'colonial policy'

In the second period in the 2000s, more actors started to participate in discussing nomadic cultures and civilizations by attacking pastoralists. In the theory of power, researchers often address cooperation between more than two players. Mongolia looked for third neighbours as the country is landlocked between China and Russia. Mongolia announced its third neighbours: the USA, Japan, India, the European Union, South Korea, etc. These countries donated to Mongolia by injecting assistance and implementing development policies and programmes. Euro-American policies replaced former Soviet policies (Munkh-erdene, 2012) and attacked Mongolia's traditional way of life as unsustainable and destroying the environment. The environmental programmes' main focus was environmental conservation, especially saving grassland from herder-made degradation. As a result, dozens of development organizations implemented projects and intervened in Mongolian policies by changing laws and regulations to abandon pastoralism (Ichinkhorloo, 2017a; Ichinkhorloo & Yeh, 2016). The core of the nomadic cultures and civilizations is the pastoral herding and herders' way of life, moving freely in four seasons. The new friends - third neighbours of Mongolia - are the same as the other two in their aggressive policies of crashing nomadic cultures. In parallel, the policies to open Mongolia's natural resources to the world followed to increase commodity supply.

Global environmental movements and international non-governmental organizations came to Mongolia and declared that pastoralism is the root cause of all bad things to the environment. Pastoralists were blamed for pasture degradation, pollution, illegal hunting, poverty, being opportunistic, and receiving too much assistance (B. Dulam, 2017). Many myths and discourses were born. As a result, nomadic culture and civilization have become obsolete and were forgotten in the 2000s. By devaluing the nomadic way of life, mining companies gained power in collaboration with the Mongolian government. According to new policies, such as MDG and infrastructure and mining policies of Mongolia, mining benefited the Mongolian government, whereas nomadic people became parasites. Many scientists and scholars in the name of civil society and NGOs hired by development agencies and mining companies had served to defend new policies and prove that pastoralism is useless (Byambajav, 2014; B. Dulam, 2018). For example, Mongolian research scientists worked according to the ideology of organizations, testing their theories and implementing dozens of projects (Dorligsuren, Batbuyan, Densambu, & Fassnacht, 2012), such as Sustainable Livelihood, Green Gold, Livestock Indexed Insurance, and Sustainable pasture management. In other words, hundreds of researchers have been hired to document and prove their hypothesis that pastoralists destroy pasture, water sources and the environment. Therefore, those scholars argued that pastoralists' social organization and behaviours should be changed following European-American models. Mongolia's scientific industry has become a strong critic of nomadic cultures and civilizations and is enslaved to development projects. The government,

private companies, and many researchers assume nomadic cultures and society as the enemy of global conservation programmes.

Local people, local administration, and some urban residents had a more positive view of pastoralists. Since 1997, intensive mining activities have encroached on the herders' living space, causing conflicts. Local administrations and representatives of citizens' meetings were drawn into a fight against the pollution of drinking water, especially river water, rather than grazing land. Competition between political parties has been used to close some mining companies and improve environmental laws. Conflicts between nomadic pastoralists and mining companies had intensified over ecological degradation in the 2000s. Pastoral herders used the identity of nomadic culture and civilization by organizing demonstrations in which they rode horses, carried bows and arrows, and called themselves Fire Nation and Blue Mongols (Bumochir, 2020). Pastoralists and environmental protestors gained power over the mining companies while development agencies became cautious and supportive due to increased attention from UN rapporteurs and global Indigenous movements. The idea of a nomadic civilization was reborn in the late 2000s as a hero to defend Mongolia from foreign interests and exploitation.

Local people and local governments strengthened the political power of pastoralists, who learned to use their election votes against politicians. Over 70% of Mongolia's politics and officials were elected by pastoral herders, who constitute one-third of Mongolia's population and have kinship ties with many living in semi-urban and urban places (Ichinkhorloo & Yeh, 2016). Most importantly, middle-ranking government officials and experts supported these movements (Bumochir, 2020) and protected the nomadic cultures of their parents and ancestors. The environmental movement has evolved into protecting nomadic cultures, indigenous people and their tangible and intangible cultural heritages. On the other hand, the mining control was tightened by passing a law protecting rivers, banks and lakes after a decade-long conflict between pastoralists, environmentalists, mining companies and the State.

Revival of nomadic civilisation

Social and political discussions about nomadic civilization started in 2015. The competition between political parties over power and the control of natural resources has been intensified by dragging academic researchers and the public into their debates. Environmental degradation and pollution have been investigated by joint working groups that include local pastoralists, ecological activists, experts, government officials, and companies (Lezak, Ahearn, McConnell, & Sternberg, 2019; Sternberg, Ahearn, & McConnell, 2019). Such cooperation increased mutual understanding among participants and allowed the political parties to pursue different paths. The corrupt activities around the natural resources made mining inpure, and attempted privatization of the public mining Erdenet defeated the ruling party in the parliamentary election 2016 (Sternberg, Toktomushev, & Ichinkhorloo, 2022). A new hero emerged from the defending Mongolian cultural heritages and nomadic civilization. In particular, many politicians and scholars participated in the new wave of research on nomadism in contemporary

Mongolia and criticized the blaming of pastoralists for environmental degradation. This time, the prestige of the nomadic cultures and civilization was restored. Nomadic pastoralists in Mongolia were compared to the other herders in Inner Mongolia, Russia, and Kyrgyzstan, where pastures were fenced, and local people clashed with mining. By studying the experience of other countries, more policy documents and regulations were developed to support nomadic cultures and civilizations. Also, the inscription of cultural heritage at UNESCO, especially the issues of registering long songs with other ethnic Mongolians, has intensified the government support for cultural heritage and nomadic civilizations at all levels (Bumochir & Munkherdene, 2019; B. Tsetsentsolmon, 2014a, 2015). The above issue significantly increased the Mongolian government's ownership of nomadic civilization and heritage due to the regional competition for registering the nomadic cultural heritages at UNESCO. This has changed the state policies and public attitudes toward nomadic civilization. Politicians have started to understand that nomadic cultures do exist not only in Mongolia but also in many places around the world.

As economic growth and incomes increased, the value of nomadic cultures also changed. Among the affluent classes, the value and expression of nomadic cultures have increased significantly for political reasons to have more prestige among local people. Politicians and business people conducted populist election campaigns where they often praised nomadic cultures and civilizations to earn more votes and gain respect from herders. For example, most wealthy people and politicians started sponsoring local wrestling clubs, collecting racehorses and attending local festivals to show their common nomadic background and how much they love nomadic cultures and civilization. As a result, a unique image of the nomadic culture and civilization was created among the public. Following them, urban people began to collect and display objects representing the nomadic cultures and civilizations, such as horse saddles, bridles, traditional chests, utensils, traditional kitchen utensils such as dombo bowls, and so on, in their homes. The whole hotel at Terelj was decorated with rare old chests and handicrafts of nomadic herders, and some wealthy people have collections of artefacts and have made their museum exhibits in the hall of Chinggis horse riding statue. Using traditional robes, hats, silver belts, and snuff bottles created a new image expressing the user's wealth and showing the traditionalist images and solidarity with the local community and nomadic cultures. Such nationalistic and civilizational populism is widespread in Mongolia. By observing these changes and reform from the top down, the researchers rushed to conduct research on the cultural values, traditional rituals, intangible cultural heritages, histories of nomadic empires and Mongolian languages and scripts. For example, nine sets of Mongolian values, namely Mongolian people, Family, State, Motherland, Mongolian language, Education, Ethics and Morals, Heritage, Culture, and Nomadic knowledge and Skills, were defined as precious wisdom for Mongolians and inscribed on the Golden Sutras and placed at the Mongolian Government building with a ceremony on December 22, 2020. In the same way, many educational and research institutes have carried out similar studies with government funding (see more on the https://sudalgaa.gov.mn/u/stf). The reputation and value of the nomadic civilization have changed dramatically.

Based on the above studies, the research document called Vision-2050 was developed in 2019 at the government level with the participation of more than 1,500 people, including researchers. Mongolia's Parliament approved it as a development strategy for Mongolia in 2020. This document prioritized the Nomadic Civilisation and national values, especially unity, Mongolian language, science, and global Mongolian, as the first goal. The strategy has been enforced at the government level by training all employees, developing short-term and medium-term strategic plans, and implementing and investing. Accordingly, the Ministry of Culture has been re-established, focusing on creating contemporary cultural production with elements of nomadic cultures and civilization. For example, the Ministry conducted activities such as building a museum in UB, reviving and renovating the cultural centres in every corner of the country, organizing an international cultural festival of nomads, developing the creative cultural industry following the UNESCO convention, and supporting the cinematography. Implementing these state-led and directed cultural activities in the post-COVID years has catalyzed public support. Mongolia is living on the dream of becoming "the centre of world nomadic cultures and civilizations." There is insufficient quality research to understand and study the definition and characteristics of nomadic civilization, and it is unclear how to expand its influence in the region and attract other nations. Mongolia is following UNESCO's cultural heritage policies and working to build a nomadic civilization to limit the influence of foreign cultures and establish its cultural hegemony by 2050.

Conclusion

This paper reviewed how the discourse of nomadic culture and civilization developed and who was involved in the past 38 years. Political, economic, and social life changed during this period, affecting public attitude and behaviour. Socialism became neo-liberal capitalism, and the economy shifted from a centrally planned to a market hybrid. The individualism replaced the spirit of cooperation. However, the discussion about nomadic culture and civilization has never stopped during these changes. Decolonization of knowledge and culture from Soviet hegemony took several decades for Mongolia, even after its political independence in 1991. Mongolia is still developing a nomadic civilization to resist the "cultural colonial policies" of the Soviet Union at first and Mongolia's second and third neighbours these days. This demands Mongolia rewrite its history and revive cultural traditions involving many stakeholders. Since 1986, the social understanding of right and wrong has been enriched concerning nomadic culture and civilization. In the first period between 1985 and 1996, restoring the country's traditional cultures and creating equality became a moral issue. However, between 1997 and 2012, with the deepening of the market economy, Mongolia unanimously protected the pastoralists, who carry nomadic cultures and civilization, from irresponsible mining. Since 2015, politicians and researchers have organized the restoration of nomadic cultures and civilizations. The discourse about nomadic civilization drew the attention of not only scholars, politicians, pastoralists and business people but also foreign policymakers working with Mongolia from abroad and its third neighbours. Mongolia's internal politics became

dependent on this discourse and civilizational populism. The very conclusion of this paper about cultural colonization and nomadic civilization reminds us of George Orwell's writing (Orwell, 1949, p.250) that "who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past" in the nineteen eighty-four.

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