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The paper proposed deals with the history of Japanese-Mongolian relations over the period between 1997 and 2017 in the context of Eurasian diplomacy adopted by the Hashimoto cabinet in 1997. The paper on the evolution of the twenty-year bilateral political, economic and security cooperation, aligned with Eurasian policy and developed from “soft power” to “smart power”, focuses on the analysis of the Hashimoto Ryutaro, Koizumi Junichiro and Abe Shinzo administrations approaches.

Keywords: Japanese-Mongolian relations, Abe Shinzo, Eurasian Diplomacy, North-East Asia, DPRK, “smart power”

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Introduction

The Mongolian direction ought to be assessed as a representative, though very specific line in the Japanese foreign strategy from the late 20th century up to nowadays. The main objective of this research is to examine the evolution of the Japanese policy towards Mongolia in the context of Japan's Eurasian policy, introduced by Hashimoto Ryutaro in 1997 and developed in various ways by prime ministers Koizumi Junichiro (“Central Asia Plus Japan”) and Abe Shinzo (“Arc of Freedom and Prosperity” and new Eurasian Policy).

A hypothesis, advanced in the paper, is that Japan started to use not only economic diplomacy, “aid diplomacy” and “soft power” methods in Mongolia, but also implemented a specific Japanese version of “smart power” of this policy in the 2010's. “Smart power” is a term offered by US scholars J.S. Nye and R.L. Armitage in “CSIS Commission on smart power” report: “Smart power is neither hard nor soft – it is the skillful combination of both” [Armitage, Nye, 2007 p. 7]. “Smart power” strategy investigated for the US foreign policy lies in investing alliances and multilateralism, supporting global development and establishment of global health network, using worldwide public diplomacy through personal contacts and education, advancing economic integration and innovations globally. Applying of hard or forced power seems to be appropriate in critical situations, such as anti-terrorist companies or peacekeeping operations. Therefore, a macro-level analysis of socio-economic, political and military cooperation between Japan

and Mongolia is used as a basic method of the research, along with comparative analysis of the Japanese strategy for Mongolia and other Eurasian states.

The Mongolian direction of Japan's Eurasian strategy may be considered from various theoretical perspectives. It is critical for this analysis to consider the attitude of Japanese intellectuals towards Eurasia. In the mid 1990's – mid 2000's specialists of the Slavic Research Center of Hokkaido University (now – Slavic-Eurasian Research Center) formulated the term of “Big Eurasia” which means the megaregion from Japan, Korea and China in the East, India in the South, the Middle East and even Eastern Europe in the West and Russia in the North [Yurajia chiki taikoku...]. The core region of Eurasia was marked as Russia and Central Asian independent states. Mongolia had been traditionally classified as a North East Asian country sandwiched between Russian Siberia and the Far East and China, but from the mid 1990's the Mongolian geographic position and identity were reviewed and since then it has been included in this discourse as one of the Central Asian countries [Soni 2014, p. 39]. This fact allowed to form a new line for the Japanese strategy towards Eurasia in which Mongolia became a continental bridge in attempts to introduce a new proactive policy in the megaregion of Eurasia. Mongolia is extremely rich in mineral resources (uranium, coal, metals) and agriculture products, which is the reason for Japan to become nationally interested in developing economic relations with it.

Great powers are assessed in Mongolia from various theoretical perspectives, including the geopolitical theory of “New Great Game” in Central Asia, with Mongolia among “key players” together with Russia, China, the US, while Japan, Turkey, South Korea are “minor players” [Her 1997, p. 62–71; Mikhalyov 2012, p. 120]. At the same time, it was prime minister Koizumi Junichiro who spoke out against “New Great Game” in Central Asia in 2006 [Len, Uyama, Hirose (ed.) 2008, p. 42–43], which demonstrates that the idea itself of competing “great powers” threatens the Japanese political elites. The interstate hierarchy in Asia (East, North-East) and Eurasia is also estimated, and numerous western and Asian international relations experts treat the regional order in Asia within the framework of the US-led regional hierarchy: “US military supremacy is the indispensable guarantor of regional ‘stability’” [Jerden 2017, p. 495]. The hegemonic power of US in this hierarchy, security alliances created in the Asia Pacific region and in inner Asia, where the Japan-US Alliance is a durable one, is the foundation for stability, and this fact is proved by multilateral economic and security relationships of the region's states with the US, as well as by security triangular ties: Japan-ROK-US, Japan-India-US and in the 2010's Japan-Mongolia-US.

Historical Background of Japan-Mongolia Dialogue

Japan-Mongolia relations are characterized by a long-term direct interaction, dating back to Japan's invasion of East Asia in the early 20th century,

conflicts with the USSR on the territory of Mongolia in 1938 – 1939 (the Battle of Lake Khasan and the Battles of Khalkhin Gol). After World War II, in Japan's policy towards Mongolia started a new stage. It began to focus on economic interactions from the 1970's, although negotiations on official and nonofficial levels had been conducted since the 1950's. The diplomatic relations between Japan and Mongolia were reestablished in 1972 in parallel with the opening of the Japan-China relations [Bazarov2009, p. 157]. The strategy of Japan of that time put the main stress on economic issues, framed by the Japanese economic diplomacy flourishing from the 1960's to the 1970's.

Bilateral dialogue rose up to a new level from the early 1990's according to the weakening of the USSR's influence on Mongolia. The official ties and bilateral high-level visits intensified after 1989, when the first visit of minister of foreign affairs Uno Sosuke was paid to Mongolia [Nalin 2006, p. 37]. During the 1990's high executives from Mongolia and Japan paid about ten mutual visits, showing deep interest of the both sides in developing their engagements [Nalin 2006 p. 37–41]. From the Mongolian side, that activity was brought about by the desire of the Mongolian democratic government to find new partners among developed western nations or the so called “third neighbor” policy aimed to rebalance its geopolitical position between China and Russia. This period of the Japanese policy in Mongolia can be considered from three standpoints:

1. Japan's intention to play a greater role in global and Asian regional affairs, due to the inner demand for active foreign policy;
2. The high level of “soft power” implementation made by Japan for its foreign strategy, focusing on the “aid diplomacy”;
3. The way to construct Asian identity for the Japanese, who considered themselves as having obtained a western identity or special Japanese identity outside Asia after World War II.

In this context, the Mongolian nation and language were found to have ancient ties with the Japanese islands [Mongoru joho kurozu appu...2013]. That fact distinguished Mongolians from other Asian and Eurasian nations in the eyes of Japan.

Since the beginning of the 1990's Japan received unpredictable freedom from the US, caused by the end of the Cold War, which happened simultaneously with the forming of a new agenda for the Japanese foreign policy aimed to find its new role in the international affairs in this new and uncertain world order. Posing itself as a peace-loving nation, after 1992 the Japanese Self Defense Forces (JSDF) started to participate in peacekeeping operations together with the United Nations troops [Ishizuka 2013]. These actions seem to have laid the groundwork for Japan to use its military potential in the world politics, but they also opened heated debates among pacifists and non-pacifist in the country, and provoked an inner claim to make Japan a

“normal state”, formulated by the politician Ozawa Ichiro. The Japanese diplomat Kawashima Yutaka emphasized that versus narratives are inherent for the Japanese policy: peace-loving vs importance of the security and being a “normal state”, values-oriented approach vs results-oriented approach, catching up with the west versus maintaining an Asian identity [Kawashima 2003, p. 10–14]

These narratives exerted a decisive influence on the strategy in Eurasian direction. Reevaluation of Asia and Eurasia and the role of Japan among the Asian nations community, and, finally, a strong intention to return to Asia (*Datsu-A Nyu-O, Ki-A Ri-O*) from the end of the 1990’s [Chugrov 2007, p. 100–101], made Eurasia a training field for the Japanese strategic actions and, furthermore, military activation. The US political scientist K. J. Cooney noted: “A major problem for a more independent Japan is that it has no friends in the region, only rivals” [Cooney 2007 p. 58].

Thus, the processes of finding Eurasian friends had an objective of strengthening the international position and role of Japan in the world. The definite advantage of Eurasian countries, in comparison to East Asian nations, was that they did not have a negative experience and image of Japan in what concerns historical memory issues. Japan had no contacts with Central Asian nations up to the early 1990’s. However, at first Mongolia stayed on a distinct position, having economic relations with Japan since the 1970’s. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 1990’s all Central Asian, South Caucasian nations and Mongolia with them remained in a state of economic and political crisis and looked forward to the western nations financial aid. At that time “aid diplomacy” was the basis for the Japanese policy towards the region. At the same time, in 1993 – 1996 inner political and economic challenges in Japan did not allow it to provide an active foreign policy towards Eurasian states. Meanwhile, Mongolia was involved in economic integration projects, requested by Japan, for example, the “Tumen River” project or the “Sea of Japan special economic zone” integration project.

Mongolia in Japanese Eurasian initiatives

Phase 1: Hashimoto Ryutaro approach

The first Japanese-Eurasian initiative was investigated by the Hashimoto Ryutaro cabinet in 1996 – 1997, aiming to form the sole principles of the policy towards a number of Eurasian states, to align its strategy for Russia, China, Central Asian states, South Caucasus and even Mongolia and Korea. The so-called “Eurasian diplomacy viewed from the Pacific” or Eurasian Diplomacy (*taiheiyo: kara mita yu:rajia gaiko:*) was announced on July 24, 1997, at the assembly of the Japan Association of Corporate Executives [Address by Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto...1997]. At the same time, a “multilevel-approach” (*jyu:zo:teki apuro:chi*) was articulated for the policy

towards Russia, which was raise interaction with Russia to a new level of more effective dialogues, demonstrating results-oriented approach of the Japanese government. The “Silk Road” was chosen to be a backbone of Eurasian Diplomacy. Although the TRACECA initiative was the first Eurasian integration strategy, involving new independent states of Central Asia and South Caucuses after the USSR collapse, articulated by new independent governments of the above-mentioned states, the Japanese “Silk Road” concept became the first initiative of an Asian nation to form a big integration project on open spaces of the megaregion of Eurasia, aiming to maintain open regionalism there.

From 1997 to 2001 and even up to 2004, the engagement of Japan in Eurasian policy was based on “aid diplomacy”, which was defined by the Japanese researchers Kato Hiroshi and Fujiwara Kiichi as a very important mechanism of Japan's policymaking for developing countries. Kato Hiroshi underlined that development of infrastructure and assistance in upgrading the human potential were to be proposed as a basic activity towards developing nations [Japan's Development Assistance...2016]. It is possible to see that Eurasian diplomacy from 1997 to the first years of the Koizumi reign was focused exactly on the “aid diplomacy” and “soft power” towards Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in the post-soviet Central Asia [Country Assistance Evaluation... 2005].

For Mongolia, grant aid in the years 2000–2006 amounted to 29,441 billion yen (total sum of grant aid to 2007 amounted to 83,160 billion yen), technical cooperation over the same period – to 2,349 billion yen, loan aid in 1991–2005 – to 39,107 billion yen [Japan's Assistance to Mongolia...]. The diplomacy for Mongolia evolved according to the same principles, as it was done for Central Asian states, despite the fact that it was built on the basis of bilateral engagement.

The Hashimoto Ryutaro and, later, Obuchi Keizo cabinets showed great interest to Mongolia, when prime-minister M. Enkhsaikhan visited Tokyo in February 1997, commemorating the 25th anniversary of the establishment of Japan-Mongolia diplomatic relations [Visit to Japan by Mr M. Enkhsaikhan... 1997]. Next year, in 1998, during the visit of the Mongolian president N. Bagabandi to Japan, the “Japan-Mongolia Joint Statement for Friendship and Cooperation” was signed, highlighting the pillars of bilateral relations [Nihon to mongoru koku... 2003].

The Statement was prompted by the spirit of comprehensive partnership (*so:go:tekipa:tona-shippu*), negotiated by the two governments in the two previous years. The main directions of this comprehensive partnership were noted as:

1. Extension of political and security dialogue;
2. Economic cooperation;
3. Intensification of people-to-people exchange and cultural ties;
4. Regional and global partnership [Nihon to mongoru koku... 2003].

These pillars evidently lie within the “soft power” paradigm.

The above-mentioned points of the Japanese-Mongolian joint statement have particular similarity with the positions of the “Moscow Declaration on Building a Creative Partnership between Japan and the Russian Federation” signed in 1998. Thus, it is possible to suggest that Eurasian Diplomacy towards Russia and Mongolia was based on the common principles, dictating to keep those diplomacy directions within the single Eurasian strategy, provided by the Hashimoto-Obuchi cabinets. Meanwhile, the “aid diplomacy” mechanisms for their part demonstrated deep similarities with the policy towards Central Asian states and Mongolia.

Phase 2: Koizumi Junichiro approach

Koizumi Junichiro came to power in April 2001, and September of the same year was marked by the terrorist attacks against the US, which occurred in New York, and resulted in the US anti-terrorist campaign in the Middle East and Central Asia. Japan together with most of European and Asian nations supported the American anti-terrorist campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, and, quite logically, this involvement considerably contributed to the development of the JSDF and security system. Since the late 1990’s the Japan-US Security Alliance underwent reconsideration and was reevaluated, in 2000 “The United States and Japan: Advancing Toward a Mature Partnership” or Armitage – Nye Report was published, and finally Koizumi Junichiro underlined that the alliance with US is to be considered as a foundation for the Japanese security policy [Remarks by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi... 2001; *Nihon to mongoru koku*... 2003].

In this context, Japan-Eurasian engagement was affected by considerable changes, based on the anti-terrorist actions. In addition, the Japanese government set a goal of more active involvement in foreign policy by using the military forces, adopting anti-terrorist legislative package and Humanitarian Relief and Iraqi Reconstruction Special Measures Law [Nelidov 2009, p. 81]. Therefore, a new phase of the US-Japan security cooperation was launched. Moreover, since the beginning of 21st century, a tendency for Japan and NATO to have closer contacts has been noticed, which became even stronger under the Koizumi and Abe administrations in the 2000’s – 2010’s [Dobrinskaya 2014]. The rapprochement with NATO was also demonstrated by the Mongolian government in the 2000’s, that started a special Japan-Mongolia military cooperation, in agreement with the engagements with NATO.

Furthermore, the US operation in Afghanistan is suggested to be unprecedented in Eurasia in what concerns its scale, considerably affecting stability in Central Asia and giving rise to reviewing Russian and Chinese Eurasia projects. The role of Mongolia was also reconsidered. In 1999 – 2000 the Mongolian government legislated participation in peacekeeping cooperation,

and Mongolia since that time has started to send its military personnel to participate in peacekeeping operations within the UN military forces [Mongolia and the United Nations].

Mongolia participated in 12 of 13 events during 2000–2003 in Africa and Asia, including multinational peacekeeping field exercise in Kazakhstan in 2000 [Byambasuren 2005]. Those actions could be considered as a new path of Japan-Mongolia interaction in Eurasia in the peacekeeping aspect, particularly taking into account that Mongolian and Japanese soldiers were sent both to Afghanistan and Iraq in the 2000's.

For instance, trying to extend its participation in the global anti-terrorist campaign, the Mongolian government allowed the US military forces to conduct multinational peacekeeping military exercises on its territory, while recognizing its involvement in the US-led regional hierarchy in Asia. These military exercises received a catchy title – “Khaan Quest” and have been held every year since 2003, organized by the Mongolian Armed Forces General Staff in conjunction with the U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) [Byambasuren 2005]. Japan welcomed these developments and participated in “Khaan Quest” at first as an observer.

The beginning of the 2000's was also the time of escalation of tensions connected with North Korean nuclear problem. Japan suffered from the PDRK actions and missiles tests more than any other country. The Japanese government attempted to cooperate with the regional powers – China and Russia – aiming to exert pressure upon the North Korean government, however, the attempts still did not succeed. Mongolia proclaimed itself a nuclear weapon free zone region and started to reconsider whether or not to be a partner of Japan against North Korea [Enkhsaikhan 2017, p. 88-89]. In December 2003, Japan-Mongolia Summit Meeting was held when the president of Mongolia N. Bagabandi paid a visit to Tokyo to have a meeting with prime minister Koizumi Junichiro [Japan-Mongolia Summit Meeting, 2003]. The focus of the talks was on North Korea nuclear issue as well as on protecting peace and stability, coordinating activity against PDRK. The main directions of bilateral collaboration, including economic ties, people-to-people relations, education exchange and anti-terrorist and anti-nuclear weapon points were enshrined in the Joint Statement [Nihon to mongoru kouku...2003].

A noticeable trend of the Koizumi rule is the revision of the position of Japan in Asia (and, wider, Eurasia) as not a Western, but Asian nation, sharing common history and cultural features with other Asian nations and seeking for Asian identity. That motivated Japan to review its role in the ASEAN cooperation, to strengthen its intention to collaborate with APEC, to expand its ties with China and South Korea and to find friendly governments among new independent players in Eurasia. The cooperation in Eurasia with Central Asian and South Caucasian states demonstrated growth and mutual interest. In 2004 the Minister of Foreign Affairs Kawaguchi Yuriko had a round trip

to Central Asia during which she initiated a new format of regional cooperation with these states, calling for “Central Asia Plus Japan” Dialogue (CAJ dialogue). The Japanese scholar Yuasa Takeshi noted that “Concepts of Eurasian diplomacy and the CAJ dialogue are rare examples for understanding geopolitics that have long been forgotten in Japanese diplomacy” [Yuasa 2008].

The activity of the Koizumi administration towards Mongolia was aligned with the policy towards Central Asian states, but the parallel with the Russian policy was gradually weakening. Immediately after the round trip to Central Asian states in August, on September 2, 2004, Kawaguchi Yuriko paid a visit to Mongolia [Visit by Minister for Foreign... 2004]. The official goal to intensify the interaction was announced as assistance in developing a more democratic market economy in Mongolia, but as a matter of fact the Japanese government tried to strengthen its geopolitical positions in the megaregion of Eurasia, trying to balance itself with the regional superpowers – the rising economic leader China and the energy giant Russia.

Finally, prime minister Koizumi Junichiro paid a visit to Mongolia in the mentioned year of 2006, along with his visit to Central Asia. Prime ministers Koizumi Junichiro and M. Enkhbold emphasized that Japan and Mongolia were interested in constructing close relations, in balance Russia's and China's power in the region. The Japanese side was extremely eager to collaborate with Mongolia as a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization – the first new Eurasian alliance project in the 2000's – and as a partner in negotiations on North Korea nuclear threat [Outline of Prime Minister... 2006].

M. Enkhbold invited the Emperor, the Empress and the Crown Prince of Japan to visit Mongolia in 2007 to take part in the 35th anniversary of establishing Japan-Mongolia diplomatic relations, and the visit of the Crown Prince with purpose to foster friendly relations was paid in July 2007. Using the “Emperor diplomacy”¹ might be considered as evidence of a particular role of Mongolia for the Japanese Eurasian policy. Of note is that the Mongolian direction during the Koizumi acquired a truly strategic importance, compared to other directions of Eurasian Diplomacy. It brought about a possibility to sustain friendly relations with new independent states of Eurasia, as well as an opportunity to balance in Eurasia with the super-powers – Russia and China – mostly using “soft power” approach.

From the economic perspective, the period between 2004 and 2007 is marked by a steady growth in Japan-Mongolia dialogue.

¹“Emperor diplomacy” means the considerable visits of the Emperor of Japan family to countries, elected to be very important for the Japanese foreign policy.

	Japan export to Mongolia	Japan import from Mongolia	Trade balance
2004	73 723 000 \$	8 176 000 \$	65 547 000 \$
2005	73 746 000 \$	6 529 000 \$	67 217 000 \$
2006	106 178 000 \$	8 411 000 \$	97 766 000 \$
2007	153 647 000 \$	16 243 000 \$	137 404 000 \$

The table uses the JETRO statistics [Japan's International Trade in Goods...]

As the table shows, 2004 – 2005 years were not characterized by a considerable trade growth, but to 2007 both exports and imports of Japan to Mongolia doubled, which went in parallel with the rise of political engagements. Not only Japanese financial aid, but trade and mutual projects in heavy industry, mining in Mongolia, business connections and even tourism rose in the 2000's, and this intensive cooperation continued to grow in 2010, under Abe Shinzo rule and his political line.

Phase 3: Abe Shinzo approach

From the middle of the 2000's Mongolia has become a very important logistics and energy grid for China and Russia, especially taking into account the fact that from the beginning of the 2000's Russia advanced several energy projects with the objective to supply Asian states with oil and natural gas. The Ulan-Bator railroad is one of the alternative transport routes for China to deliver oil, gas and goods from Russia to China and back. By the 2010's China replaced Japan as a main consumer of Russian oil and natural gas, and that was documented in the "Energy Strategy of Russia for the Period up to 2030" [Soni 2014, p. 37].

Understanding the rising rivalry in megaregion Eurasia² motivated the first cabinet of Abe Shinzo to investigate a course capable of easing these tensions. Therefore, the concept of the "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity" (AFP, *jiyu: to hanei no ko*) was declared by the Minister of foreign affairs Aso Taro in 2006 [Jiyu to hanei no ko wo tsukuru... 2006]. The concept was proclaimed as values-oriented strategy (for freedom, democracy, human rights, rule of law, and market economy) towards the megaregion of Eurasia, stretching from not only outer edge of Eurasia, but also through from North-east Asia to Central Asia and the Caucasus, Turkey, Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic states [Jiyu to hanei no ko wo tsukuru... 2006].

In its scope, the concept can be compared with the Konoe Fumimaro concept of "The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere", and as it will be shown

² Inner political instability in Central Asian states, Afghanistan terrorist problem, Pakistan instability, numerous border tensions in whole Eurasia, wars in the Middle East, rise of nuclear problem on the Korean peninsula, tensions between Russia and Georgia.

below, in its economic and even military aspects were also implemented while the concept was realized under the Abe Shinzo administrations.

According to the AFP, Japan-US strategic alliance is viewed as a basis for the Japanese foreign strategy and its security hierarchy, but Mongolia and South Korea together with Australia and New Zealand should be partners of Japan for stability, common interests and values in Eurasia [Aso gaimudaijin enzetsu... 2007]. The adoption of Japan-Mongolia Action plan for 10 years, signed by prime minister Abe Shinzo and president N. Enkhbayar on February 26, 2007, was to become a bilateral foundation for this concept to be adopted [Kongo 10 nenkan no nihon... 2007]. The Action Plan gave green light for the development of strategic partnership between Japan and Mongolia as one of the basic grids for the Eurasian policy of Japan. The inner political situation in Japan – LDP opposition in 2009 – 2012 – alongside with the 2009 financial crisis slowed the process of strengthening Japan-Mongolia strategic partnership. Nevertheless, the bilateral Strategic Partnership Agreement was signed in November 2010 [Senryaku patonashippu kotiku... 2010], demonstrating mutual interest to advance further engagement and to coordinate Eurasian developments and to apply AFP ideals, shared even by oppositional Democratic party governments.

After LDP returned to power in 2012, the Abe cabinet intended to accumulate its foreign initiatives and formulated a well-shaped foreign policy doctrine and then first National Security Strategy (2013), based on the improvement of Japan-US security alliance, security and military alliances with Australia, India, the Philippines, Malaysia and even Mongolia [Dobrinskaya 2015, p. 241–248; Japan's Security and Defense Policy... 2015; Policy Speech by Prime Minister... 2013].

It was the time of rising of Eurasian initiatives of “great powers”. According to the US “New Silk Road project” (2011), Japan's involvements in Eurasian integration and security interactions had to be extended in the southern direction (Afghanistan-Pakistan-India), but the Russian Eurasian Economic Community (2000 – 2014) and its “turn to the East”, as well as Chinese “One belt, One road” (2013) compelled Japan to provide active and results-oriented policy in Eurasia, so that not to lose its leadership in the megaregion. In the 2010's JSDF participated in several military maneuvers in the Indian Ocean, in the Pacific Ocean, and on the lands of India and Mongolia, which after becoming the training field for a new Japan, rejected the pacifist doctrine. That confirms that Japan, in spite of having a pacifist constitution, in reality began to use “smart power” methods in “Big Eurasia”, training in South Eurasia and Mongolia, participating in multilateral peace-keeping exercises there (“Khaan Quest”, “Cobra Gold” in Thailand, military rapprochement with Australia, Philippines, Vietnam, India).

Abe Shinzo's visit to Mongolia in March 2013 was seven years after high-level visit of prime minister Koizumi Junichiro. The Japanese leader

proclaimed three guiding values-oriented principles for Japan-Mongolia partnership: freedom and democracy, peace and mutual help [Remarks by H.E. Mr. Shinzo Abe... 2013]. The Japanese side suggested a results-oriented energy initiative, deepening cooperation in energy supplies from Mongolia [Graivovronskiy 2014, p. 182]. Owing to this visit, the strategic partnership was enlarged, and these actions can be estimated as an attempt of the Japanese government not to lose its position in Eurasia with of Russia and China's expansion to the megaregion in the background.

In March 2015, a large-scale "Agreement between Japan and Mongolia for an Economic Partnership" was signed laying a foundation for the enlargement of bilateral economic ties. In October 22 – 27, 2015 Abe Shinzo took the so-called historical tour of Mongolia and five Central Asian states. The Japanese prime minister together with representative delegation of Japanese politicians, universities representatives, businessmen visited Mongolia and five former Soviet Central Asian republics and signed a big set of treaties for economic partnership, people-to-people exchange, widening of cultural and educational ties, strengthening intergovernmental cooperation [Nichi-Mongoru... 2015; Shusho chuoajia rekiho... 2015; Sanchoen no keizai... 2015].

A considerable contribution for Japan-Mongolia business interactions was made by JETRO. Under this organization assistance, in 2014 the Japan-Mongolia Business Networking was held which gathered 300 companies from the both countries, then in 2016 "The Mongolia Trade and Investment Forum" was organized in Japan [Japan-Mongolia Business Networking 2014; The Mongolia Trade... 2016]. In 2005 – 2016, Japanese-Mongolian trade rose by 2,5 times in the period from 2005 to 2008, in 2009 it sank to the 2007 level, then went up again in 2011 – 2014, when the Japanese export grew by 3 times. In 2015 – 2016 export and import to Japan plunged again [Japan's International Trade in Goods]. The essential feature of mutual trade is that exports from Japan to Mongolia are much greater than imports, surpassing them by 10 times.

Abe Shinzo's visit to Mongolia and Central Asia showed that Japan's policy was restricted by the unified policy-making in Eurasia and had to go along the common strategic line, therefore it was based on common principles and was shaped similarly shape. However, engagement with Mongolia demonstrates a deeper security and military involvement, which is evident in the fact that the Mongol Army accepted the Japanese assistance (in infrastructure reconstruction, educational programs for Mongolian officers, common military exercises), which was realized immediately after the adoption of the first National Security Strategy allowing such kind of activities [Heisei nijyushichinendo mongoru ...].

During the high-level talks in October 2015, Mongolia and Japan leaders agreed to advance policy, supported the proactive contribution to peace policy.

Abe Shinzo stated: “Japan will contribute even more proactively to the peace and stability of the international community in the future, and explained that the Legislation for Peace and Security forms the core for putting the policy of Proactive Contribution to Peace into practice” [Prime Minister Abe Visits Mongolia... 2015]. He also noted that defense cooperation between Japan and Mongolia was increasing, and a JSDF unit was dispatched to a multilateral military exercise (“Khaan Quest”) in June for the first time. Prime minister Abe explained that in the field of capacity-building support, the JSDF was earnestly carrying out training in roadbuilding in Mongolia, and he expressed hope to further advance this cooperation and exchange. Additionally, the prime minister expressed his delight that a triangular Japan–U.S.–Mongolia dialogue was possible to be held for the first time in September, and stated that he hoped the strategic dialogue between the three countries would continue.

Therefore, the US seems to be the most influential global participant, while Japan is a technological and developing military regional leader, with Mongolia as a subordinate state and a good training field in the core of Eurasia, allowing to provide control over China, Russia and officially proclaimed North Korea. From the point of view of security, this triangular partnership might be considered as the greatest Japanese contribution to peace and stability in northern Eurasia and as a means to prevent possible risks for the Japanese islands from the North Korean side, but at the same time as a path to maintain the lasting US-led hierarchy in the region.

Japan-Mongolia strategic partnership has been enhanced according to a new mid-term Action plan for the next five years, which was signed on March 29, 2017, and which puts economy and security together with military collaboration as the pillars for the future strategic partnership [Mongoru ni boeichu zaikan... 2017]. Signing the document marked the 45th anniversary of the Japanese-Mongolian diplomatic relations. In March 2017, the countries came to an agreement to establish a special office of defense ministry in Mongolia to prevent any threats to security from North Korea, and even China and Russia [Asia's Dream... 2017]. Consequently, the basis of the Abe administration's policy towards Mongolia lies in combination of intergovernmental, economic and military cooperation, or in applying a Japanese version of “smart power”, carrying out one of its basic ideas which consists in forming alliances with subordinate states.

Conclusion

The Japan’s Mongolian diplomacy had a considerable evolution over the last 20 years, and the Eurasian context exerted a great impact on its developments. At the first phase, Eurasian diplomacy towards Russia, Central Asian states and Mongolia developed on the basis of equality principles and

laid foundation for intensive economic ties and people-to-people exchange. Under the Koizumi administration, it transformed and took the form of political and strategic cooperation in the megaregion of Eurasia, while financial aid and “soft power” methods preserved its leading role in policy-making for Central Asia and Mongolia, but it distinguished from the strategy for Russia. The US-Japan alliance principles have begun to extend over to Asia and Eurasia, constructing strong regional hierarchy. At the same time, with the rise of Eurasian projects among Eurasian great powers and according to the revision of Japan’s priorities in Eurasia on the basis of the AFP concept, the Japanese government under the Abe administration raised interaction with Mongolia to a level of strategic partnership. As it has been considered, the attitude of Japan to Mongolia is characterized by very specific features, compared to the dialogue with the other Central Asian states, however, Abe’s visit to Central Asia in 2015 was scheduled for the same period with his visit to Mongolia, thus demonstrating that the same principles were used in both directions. The military exchange and triangular strategic ties distinguish it from other Central Asian states, while aligning its Mongolian diplomacy with the diplomacy in the southern direction – towards India, the Philippines, Vietnam, and even Australia and New Zealand, fits into the US-led hierarchy of regional strategic ties, which is confirmed by the Abe’s speech at the International Conference on The Future of Asia on 5 June 2017.

Although the political line of Japan towards Central Asian states is characterized by using mostly “soft power” methods, Tokyo’s policy towards Mongolia has gone further, having started to implement “smart power” tactics, using a combination of military approaches in achieving political goals with establishing strategic regional alliances and economic cooperation for sustained growth and stability. Nevertheless, applying “smart power” mechanisms is very likely to develop in the future, even despite the power shift in Japan after a probable resignation of the Abe administration.

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