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Symbols and the Image of the State in Eurasia

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Preface

One of the most abiding images of modern Uzbekistan and one that is regularly on the cover of books on the state is the imposing statue of Amir Timur, astride a horse, located in the Amir Timur Square in central Tashkent. While the park surrounding the statue itself has been significantly reduced in size by the addition of the Forum's Palace—which in addition to the Amir Timur Museum now crowds the square—and the ancient *chinar* (maple) trees have been replaced by firs, the statue itself remains a point of reference for the state. Time and again the casual visitor who may remember very little of the city otherwise would refer to the statue with the assumption that Timur remains the referent for the state. And in this they are partially correct. While Amir Timur's legacy is no longer the subject of discussion, academic of otherwise, his abiding legacy that of a strong centralized state continues to be significant for Uzbekistan's brand equity. The most enduring image for the Kazakh state, on the other hand, was generally a combination of vast steppes, yurts, apples, and the Aral Sea. Today it is represented by the city of Astana, compared to modern cities of the oil rich states of the UAE and identified as symbolic of the Kazakh state. Eclectic in design and cosmopolitan in form, it is symbolic of the inclusiveness that the Kazakh state portrays as its essential image. While most states actively promote an international 'image', in the Eurasian space the Uzbek and the Kazakh cases are interesting since they provide remarkable contrasts that are largely reflective of their heritage.

The two abiding 'images' that the two states portray are indicative of the way they wish to position themselves in the global arena. Uzbekistan positions itself as an ancient civilization at the crossroads of history while Kazakhstan promotes itself as a significant geostrategic player and a multicultural and multiethnic society. While both images are actively promoted by the state and reinforced by diplomatic campaigns, they are also occasionally challenged by alternative reporting and reflections that influence external perception of the states. International reporting about the Andijan incident in 2005 and the British-American film *Borat* (2006) are examples that affected the image of the Uzbek and Kazakh states respectively. On the other hand there are certain enduring images of the states, the blue domes of Samarkand or the vast Kazakh steppes for instance, that are clearly identified and

utilized by the state for tourism but have very little to do with recent state propaganda. The extent to which these images have impacted on the international standing of the states, however, still remains debated. *Symbols and the Image of the State in Eurasia* is an attempt at examining how post Soviet Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan legitimized their existence as separate states, redefined themselves in a 'new' form and projected national images for the global arena but also in the domestic context. In the course of this redefinition, the relationship between politics and cultural symbols/images acquired multiple possibilities. It goes on to argue that this image was also largely determined by the legacy of the states—an ancient state with a 'homogenous' people for Uzbekistan reflected in the image of a strong centralized state and the legacy of a constant process of negotiation among the *Zhuz* reflected in the cosmopolitan image that the Kazakh state subsequently portrayed. **The book went to press before 2 September 2016, the officially declared day of Uzbek President Islam Karimov's demise and so it refers to him as President and not late President throughout.**

The manuscript was written as a project for the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies, Kolkata. The author remains grateful to the Institute for the support extended to her for the completion of the manuscript. During the course of the research the author interacted with a number of scholars and researchers in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. A field trip was undertaken in Almaty, Kazakhstan in 2012 during which various departments of the Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, like International Relations, Resource Centre for American and Democratic Studies, Department of Korean Studies were visited and a number of meetings were held with scholars. Meetings were also held at the R.B. Suleimenov Institute of Oriental Studies of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Kazakhstan Institute of Strategic Studies. Interaction was held at various institutes/universities with scholars like Prof. Baizakova Kuralay Irtysovna Dean of the Department of International Relations, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Prof. Kukeyeva Fatima Turarovna, Kazakhstan Chair of International Relations, and Foreign Policy of Kazakhstan, Department of International Relations of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, German Nikolaevich Kim Head of the Department of Korean Studies at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University and one of the leading internationally recognized scholars of the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan, Galymzhan M. Duisen, Deputy Director, R.B. Suleimenov Institute of Oriental Studies, Nazigul Shaimardanova, Deputy Director of International Cooperation at the R.B. Suleimanov Institute of Oriental Studies, Leyla Muzaparova, First Deputy Director, Kazakhstan Institute of Strategic Studies, and Prof. Dr. Azhigali S. Eskendiruli, Professor of Archaeology and Ethnography at the Valikhanov Institute of History and Ethnology, Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Almaty. The author also benefited from participating for a day at the University of Turan Regional Seminar for Excellence in teaching project, on *Writing History from Below: The New Social History of Central Asia*, being held at the Altyn Karghalay Sanatorium in the outskirts of Almaty. During a field trip to Tashkent, Bukhara and Samarkand in 2013 the author benefited from interaction with faculty

and students of the University of World Economy and Diplomacy, Tashkent and the Institute of History, Uzbekistan Academy of Sciences, Tashkent. The author is particularly grateful to Prof. P.L. Dash, the then Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) India Chair at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy Tashkent, Murat M. Bakhadirov, Head, Department of International Relations, University of World Economy and Diplomacy, Tashkent and Mirzokhid Rakhimov, Head, Department of Contemporary History and International Relations at the Institute of History, Uzbekistan Academy of Sciences, Tashkent for their support during the visit and subsequent research. Meetings were also held at the Al Biruni Institute of Oriental Studies, Tashkent with Prof. Bakhtiyor Abidov, Head of the Department of South Asian countries and Deputy Director of International Cooperation. At Samarkand meetings were held at the Institute of Central Asian Studies with the Director, Shahin Mustafayev. Discussions were also held with Ambassador Yususf Abdullaev, Director of the El Mirosi theatre, Samarkand, and with Qazaqov Bahodir, former Uzbek Ambassador to Iran. The author remains grateful to all of them for sharing their knowledge, research, information and in many cases documents, books and articles.

The author wishes to thank Shinjini Chatterjee, Senior Editor, Springer for her support in the publication of the volume. She also wishes to thank Rita Banerjee for her assistance.

As always the book is for Rajarshi, Paramita, Kana and most importantly Nayantara.

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About the Author

Anita Sengupta is Senior Researcher, Calcutta Research Group and Visiting Fellow, Observer Research Foundation, India. She was formerly Fellow, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies, Kolkata. She is an area studies specialist and her work has been focused on the Eurasian region with Uzbekistan being her area of special interest. She has also worked extensively on Turkish politics. She has collaborated with academics and policy makers in a number of universities and institutes in Tashkent, Bishkek, Almaty, Ankara, Istanbul, Berlin, Washington and has published jointly with scholars in the Eurasian region. She has been associated with the Stockholm International Programme for Central Asian Studies, SIPCAS and the Nordic Network for Research on Migration, Identity, Communication and Security. Her book *Heartlands of Eurasia: The geopolitics of political space* (Lexington Books 2009) was selected by the Oxford Bibliographies Online in 2011 as a must read on the section Geopolitics and Geo-strategy. She is also the author of *The Formation of the Uzbek Nation-State: A Study in Transition* (Lexington Books 2003) and *Frontiers into Borders: The Transformation of Identities in Central Asia* (Greenwich Millennium Press 2002) She has edited a number of volumes on Eurasian politics. Her most recent publication is *Myth and Rhetoric of the Turkish Model: Exploring Developmental Alternatives* (Springer 2014).

Chapter 1
Introduction: Image, Influence and Legacy

The state in short will have to become the State.
Peter van Ham
The Rise of the Brand State
Foreign Affairs
www.foreignaffairs.com

Abstract This chapter argues that the relationship between politics and cultural symbols/'images', became particularly relevant for states that emerged in the wake of the disintegration of the Soviet Union in Central Asia. These were essentially states that had not seen the development of an independent movement prior to the implosion at the centre, and their emergence raised questions about the legitimacy of the state/nation not just from within the state but also from the global arena. How the 'new' states legitimized their existence as separate entities and redefined themselves in a new form, both internally and externally, therefore assumes importance. In the course of this redefinition competing images were articulated and new discourses were generated. Nation building and nationalist rhetoric, therefore, was intended as much for the international public as the domestic audience whether it was the projection of Kazakhstan as the 'Heart of Eurasia' or Kyrgyzstan as the 'Island of Democracy'. Though not as well articulated the image that the Uzbek state presented was that of an 'ancient state at the crossroads of civilization'. Here, the shaping of a 'post-Soviet' future, through the performative role played by the state in the arena of culture, historical memory, images and rhetoric, assumes significance. While most states actively promote an international 'image', in the Eurasian space the Uzbek and the Kazakh cases are interesting since they provide remarkable contrasts that are largely reflective of their heritage. This chapter focuses on a brief review of the history of the state in the Central Asian region since it points not only to the long history of statehood in the region, but also to the fact that the nature of the present state can only be understood in terms of an understanding of these pre-existing state forms.

Keywords Eurasia · Nation branding · State legitimation · History of statehood in Eurasia · Legacy and 'image'

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In an increasingly globalized world, nation-state building is no longer an activity confined to the domestic arena. The situating of the state within the global space and its 'image' in the international community becomes in many ways as crucial as the projection of homogeneity within the state. The relationship between politics and cultural symbols/'images', therefore acquires and represents multiple possibilities. This volume extends the argument further to contend that the image that the state projects is largely determined by its legacy and branding is impelled not just by political compulsions but also historical legacies. It attempts to do this by taking into account the Kazakh and Uzbek cases. The more inclusive and cosmopolitan 'image' of the Kazakh state reflects the legacy of the constant process of negotiation of the great, middle and small *zhuzs* that today constitutes the state. Nomadic economy was not self-contained. In fact it could survive only in a symbiotic relationship with the outside, non-pastoralist, mainly sedentary world. The dependence on the outside world was cultural and ideological, as well as economic and socio-political (Dave 2007, p. 34). This legacy of conciliation is replicated in the Eurasian ideology that the Kazakh state reflects and its numerous attempts at integration within regional and global markets and institutions. The Uzbek state on the other hand inherited the structures of the Bukharan khanate and this legacy is reflected in the exclusivity that the state showcases in its policies and rhetoric. The Emirate structure, which was the last structure that developed prior to the emergence of the territorially demarcated state, was a segmentary-lineage state. It had all the rudiments of a state, albeit of a highly authoritarian one. Under the Mangits in Bukhara, the state attempted to control all aspects of social, economic and political life. A complex system of administration was in place divided into four domains (political, financial, judicial and religious) organized at three levels (the capital, the main towns, and population centres) (Sengupta 2000). Parallel to these centralized structures of state power there was a well-established system of local government based around *muhallahs* (neighourhoods) and a group of influential clergy. The image of an ancient state with a homogeneous people that the Uzbek state presently portrays is distinctive of a state that reflects these centralized structures of state power. In the shaping of the post-Soviet future these legacies and projections as well as the policy implications of these projections in terms of governmentality and foreign policy have been decisive. The 'image' that the state projects of itself and the influence that it supposedly generates has meant that reflection on places and their reputation has now emerged as a global process.

Interest in the concept and practice of nation branding has proliferated in recent years as more and more governments around the world attempt to harness the power of commercial branding techniques in order to improve their country's image and reputation across a wide range of sectors.[1] There are numerous references in history that suggest place branding. The French state has undergone regular re-branding

[1]The literature on 'image building' covers a variety of state experiences. See for instance Kemming and Sandikci (2007), Wang (2003), Dinnie (2009), Marshall (2011), Fullerton et al. (2007), Griffin (2013).

exercises. Other examples include the remarkable transformation of the Ottoman Empire to Ataturk's modern Turkey and of the USSR to the Russian Federation (Olins 2002). As Olins argues, after 1945 the collapse of the Great European colonial empires created a new set of nations. Many of these gave themselves new names. Ceylon became Sri Lanka, Gold Coast became Ghana, Southern Rhodesia became Zimbabwe and its capital Salisbury became Harare. The Dutch East Indies became Indonesia. Its capital Batavia became Jakarta and its multiplicity of languages was replaced by Bahasa Indonesian. The former Belgian Congo was renamed Congo, then Zaire, and then Congo again. Entirely new countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh emerged from what had been the British Indian Empire. Bangladesh has had three names in just over half a century, first it was a part of India as East Bengal, then it became East Pakistan and then Bangladesh. All of these countries have sought to break away from their immediate colonial past. In doing this many of them, like their predecessors in the nineteenth century Europe uncovered or invented a pre-colonial heritage. Zimbabwe was a semi-mythical African empire located more or less where present day Zimbabwe is. The historical relationship between ancient Zimbabwe and contemporary Zimbabwe is negligible, though the emotional relationship is close (Olins 2002, p. 5). As nations emerge they create self-sustaining myths to build coherent identities. When political upheavals take place nations reinvent themselves.

While it is true that nations have always sought to promote their economic, diplomatic and military interests, it is only in the last decade that nations have turned to the explicit use of the techniques of branding. Terms such as 'brand image' and 'brand identity' are increasingly being used to describe the perceptions that are held of nations among their 'stakeholders'. This eruption of the vocabulary of branding into the international affairs of nations has not been without scepticism regarding the appropriateness and relevance of such overtly commercial practices (Velden et al. 2008). However, almost every government in the world is now engaged in one way or another with nation branding, more visibly through the commissioning of advertisements in international channels and less visibly though initiatives like consistent portrayal of certain symbols and images as constituting the essence of the state. A comprehensive nation branding strategy would also include initiatives and programmes to motivate diaspora mobilization, enhance the coordination of the nation's key institutions and organizations and ensure a reasonable degree of consistency in the country's official communications.[2]

Simon Anholt, who introduced the term 'nation brand' went on to argue that with the rapid expansion of globalization, 'place branding' becomes important because every place wants to enhance, reverse, adapt or otherwise manage its international reputation since the world has become one market (Anholt 2003, 2007, 2010). Consequently if a country is serious about enhancing its international image, it should concentrate on product development and marketing rather than branding. Potter (2009) approaches nation brand within the context of public

[2]See www.brandhorizons.com for information on nation branding.

diplomacy—cultural programmes, international education, international broadcasting, trade and investment promotion. He identifies the present age with 'communications revolution' and argues that countries need to present a 'distinct national voice' which determines how well the national image is projected. Keith Dinnie (2008) distinguishes between image and identity and argues that while image refers to how something is perceived, identity refers to its essence. Nation brand therefore includes three elements: nation brand identity which includes history, language, territory, art, religion, icons, etc.; communication of nation brand involves branded exports, sports achievements, brand ambassadors, cultural artefacts, government, tourism, etc.; the audience is the domestic and international consumer, domestic and international firms, investors, governments and media. Dinnie argues that the objectives of nation brand are to attract tourists, stimulate inward investment, boost exports and attract talent. Mellisa Aronczyk (2013) argues that commercial branding helps nations to articulate more coherent and cohesive identities, attract foreign capital and maintain citizen loyalty. She further argues that nation branding is also used as a solution to perceived contemporary problems affecting the space of the nation state, problems of economic development, democratic communication and especially national visibility and legitimacy.

Most of the literature on 'nation branding' focuses on one of the three dominant research areas: the country of origin effects for export products; branding tourist destinations and getting foreign investments (Kemming and Sandikci 2007). However, a powerful nation brand image involves much more than simply boosting branded exports around the world. It is now essential for countries to understand how they are perceived by the global publics in terms of the reflection of their achievements and failures, their assets and liabilities, their people and their products in their brand image. In the sphere of foreign politics reputation management and influencing public opinion in other countries have become important, and through public diplomacy a nation's policies and cultures are communicated to international audiences. The use of its history, geography and ethnic motifs to construct its own distinct image by 'brand states' is a benign campaign that often lacks the deep rooted often antagonistic sense of national identity and uniqueness that can accompany nationalism; yet it is quite significant in terms of 'identity politics'. In fact, place branding specialists emphasize that nation branding encourages one to revisit the debate on nationalism and the role and nature of national identity (Ham 2002).

Consequently, it is being argued that the very definition of identity politics is changing. In a section subtitled 'Identity Politics' in his seminal article in *Foreign Affairs*, The Rise of the Brand State: The Postmodern Politics of Image and Reputation, Ham (2001) notes,

> The traditional diplomacy of yesteryear is disappearing. To do their jobs well in the future, politicians will have to train themselves in brand asset management. Their task will include finding a brand niche for their state, engaging in competitive marketing, assuring customer satisfaction, and most of all, creating brand loyalty. Brand states will compete not only among themselves but also with super brands such as EU, CNN, Microsoft, and the Roman Catholic Church. In this crowded arena, states that lack relevant brand equity will not survive.