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Soft Power of Asian Land-Locked Countries: A Comparative Study of Nepal and Mongolia

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Abstract

This study explores how Nepal and Mongolia, two landlocked Asian countries, utilize their soft power resources to overcome geographical limitations and advance their national interests. The research examines the concept of soft power, its application in both developed and developing countries, and how Nepal and Mongolia have adopted distinct strategies to address their landlocked status. Using context and policy analysis, the study highlights Nepal's active border engagement policy to overcome the landlockedness issue, which includes creating pan-regional networks, prioritizing mini-lateral initiatives, establishing spiritual circuits, diversifying exchanges, and promoting its unique cultural festivals. In contrast, Mongolia focuses on its "Third Neighbor Policy," engagement in international organizations, promotion of its historical legacy, and branding itself as a developmental state. The findings suggest that while both countries face similar challenges, their strategies differ significantly, offering valuable lessons for other landlocked nations.

Keywords: Diversification, landlockedness, national branding, pan-regionalism, soft power, third neighbour policy and national branding

Introduction

Soft power, a concept introduced by Joseph Nye, refers to a nation's ability to influence others through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or financial incentives (Nye,

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1990; Nye, 2008). For landlocked countries like Nepal and Mongolia, soft power is crucial in overcoming geographical constraints and enhancing their global presence. Nepal, situated between India and China, leverages its identity as the birthplace of Buddha and its Himalayan heritage to project cultural influence. Mongolia, on the other hand, draws on its historical legacy as the center of the Mongol Empire and its nomadic traditions to attract international attention.

While existing studies acknowledge the impact of landlockedness on foreign policy (Bhatnagar & Shahab Ahmed, 2021), there is limited research on how landlocked countries use soft power to mitigate these challenges. This study empirically aims to fill this gap by examining the strategies employed by Nepal and Mongolia to overcome their landlocked status and enhance their soft power.

Methodology

This study adopts a constructivist approach, emphasizing the intersubjective relationship between agents and structures in shaping foreign policy (Wendt, 1987). It employs two methods of investigation: contextual analysis and policy analysis. This research significantly focuses on the contemporary foreign policies of Nepal and Mongolia, using a comparative case study approach to identify similarities and differences in their strategies (Lijphart, 1971).

Literature Review

This literature review explores the theoretical and practical applications of soft power in international relations, with a focus on its relevance to landlocked countries especially Nepal and Mongolia. It examines how soft power aligns with IR theories such as liberalism and constructivism, its use in the Global North and South, and its role in addressing the unique challenges faced by landlocked nations. The review also highlights how non-Western countries, including Nepal and Mongolia, leverage cultural, historical, and diplomatic assets to enhance their global influence despite geographical constraints. By analyzing existing studies, this section sets the foundation for understanding the distinct soft power strategies employed by Nepal and Mongolia.

Soft Power in International Relations (IR) Theories

Soft power plays a crucial role in international relations, particularly aligning with theories such as liberalism and constructivism. Realist theories, which underline hard power and military strength, have traditionally dominated IR discourse (Waltz, 2014). However, liberalism introduces a broader perspective, focusing on interdependence, institutions, and shared values, which are central to the concept of soft power (Nye, 2016). According to Joseph Nye, "Power is the ability to affect others to get the outcomes one prefers, and that can be accomplished by coercion, payment, or attraction and persuasion. Soft power is the ability to obtain preferred outcomes by attraction rather than coercion or payment" (Nye, 2016, p. 1). This definition underscores the importance of attraction and persuasion in

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shaping international behavior, a concept that resonates strongly with liberalist ideals of cooperation and multilateralism.

Constructivism, on the other hand, emphasizes the role of ideas, norms, and identities in shaping global interactions, which aligns closely with the essence of soft power (Byrne, 1995). Constructivists argue that international relations are not solely determined by material capabilities but are also influenced by shared beliefs and cultural narratives. This perspective is particularly relevant for understanding how countries like Nepal and Mongolia use their cultural and historical assets to project influence. For instance, Nepal's identity as the birthplace of Buddha and Mongolia's legacy as the center of the Mongol Empire serve as powerful tools for cultural diplomacy, enabling them to attract global attention despite their geographical limitations.

While traditional realist theories prioritize military and economic strength, modern realist perspectives increasingly acknowledge the complementary role of soft power. Realists recognize that soft power can advance national interests by strengthening alliances and reducing the likelihood of conflict. For example, a country's cultural appeal can foster goodwill and cooperation, reducing the need for coercive measures. This evolving understanding of power highlights the adaptability of IR theories in addressing the complexities of contemporary global politics, particularly in the context of landlocked and non-Western nations.

In summary, soft power bridges the gap between realism's focus on hard power and liberalism's emphasis on cooperation and shared values. Constructivism further enriches this understanding by highlighting the role of cultural and ideological appeal in shaping international relations. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing how countries like Nepal and Mongolia leverage soft power to overcome their geographical constraints and enhance their global influence.

Soft Power: Global South and North

The utilization of soft power reveals significant disparities between countries in the Global North and Global South, deeply rooted in their historical, economic, and political frameworks. The Global North, which includes nations like the USA, France, and Germany, leverages significant cultural exports, progressive economies, and established international institutions to maintain influence and assertiveness. Their authority in international organizations, technological innovation, and trending culture further strengthens their soft power capabilities. For example, the United States has used Hollywood, Silicon Valley, and its higher education system as tools of cultural diplomacy, while France promotes its language, art, and cuisine through institutions like the Alliance Française (Nye, 2008).

On the other hand, countries in the Global South often contend with historical disadvantages, resource constraints, and developmental predicaments. Despite these confines, many nations in the Global South have effectively employed cultural diplomacy and distinctive heritage to toughen their international existence. For example, India has

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successfully promoted Buddhism, yoga, Ayurveda, Sanskrit, Bollywood, and democracy as major tools of soft power, particularly during the Modi era (Lahiri, 2017). Similarly, Brazil has leveraged its Carnival celebrations and football legacy to attract global admiration (Chari, 2015). These examples illustrate that the Global South, despite its limitations, can strategically deploy soft power to carve out a space in the global arena.

The disparities in soft power capabilities between the Global North and South highlight the uneven playing field in international relations. While the Global North benefits from historical advantages and economic resources, the Global South must rely on creativity and cultural uniqueness to compete. This dynamic underscores the importance of soft power as a tool for leveling the playing field, enabling countries in the Global South to assert their presence and influence in a multipolar world. By leveraging their cultural and historical assets, nations in the Global South can enhance their global standing and mitigate the challenges posed by their economic and geopolitical constraints.

Soft Power of Non-Western Countries

Non-Western nations have progressively encompassed soft power as a means to assert their existence in a multipolar world. Unlike their Western colleagues, these nations often focus on leveraging cultural heritage, economic initiatives, and regional diplomacy to extend their influence. For instance, China has utilized cultural programs, such as Confucius Institutes, alongside its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), to promote its culture and foster economic interdependence with other countries (Repnikova, 2022; Hazarika & Mishra, 2016). Similarly, Japan has combined technological advancement, pop culture, and traditional arts to establish itself as a global cultural leader (Iwabuchi, 2018).

South Korea, through its "Korean Wave" (Hallyu), has demonstrated the transformative potential of cultural exports like K-pop, Korean dramas, and cuisine in shaping global perceptions (Geun, 2009). These initiatives reflect the flexibility of non-Western countries in creating soft power strategies tailored to their unique strengths and ambitions. However, some critics argue that such efforts may lead to perceptions of cultural dominance or hidden political agendas, highlighting the complex interplay between influence and acceptance in global relations. By strategically deploying soft power, non-Western nations can further enhance their global influence and navigate the challenges of an increasingly interconnected world.

Soft Power and Landlocked Dynamics

Landlocked nations face unique challenges due to their lack of direct access to seaports, making soft power a vital tool for fostering international cooperation and visibility. Countries like Switzerland and Austria have used neutrality and hosting international organizations to build strong reputations. In Asia, Nepal and Mongolia rely on their cultural and historical assets to offset their geographical disadvantages

Foreign Policy and Soft Power of Nepal

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Nepal's foreign policy is rooted in non-alignment and peaceful coexistence. The country leverages its cultural and spiritual identity, including its status as the birthplace of Buddha and its Himalayan landscapes, to attract tourists and pilgrims. Nepal also contributes to United Nations peacekeeping missions and participates in regional organizations like SAARC and BIMSTEC. However, political instability, underdeveloped infrastructure, and economic reliance on neighboring countries hinder Nepal's full soft power potential (Adhikari, 2018).

Addressing these challenges could enable Nepal to more effectively project its soft power internationally.

Foreign Policy and Soft Power of Mongolia

Mongolia employs soft power strategically through its foreign policy, which emphasizes balanced relationships with its powerful neighbors, China and Russia, while fostering relationships with "third neighbors" like the United States, Japan, and European countries. Mongolia's rich nomadic traditions, the legacy of the Mongol Empire, and cultural events like the Naadam Festival serve as important soft power tools that attract global interest (Krishna, 2014; Krishna, 2017; Zolboo, 2018).

In addition to cultural diplomacy, Mongolia has focused on promoting eco-tourism and sustainable development, particularly in the Gobi Desert region, aligning with global environmental priorities. Its active participation in international forums, such as the Ulaanbaatar Dialogue on Northeast Asian Security, demonstrates Mongolia's commitment to fostering regional dialogue and cooperation. While Mongolia has made notable progress in leveraging its cultural and diplomatic assets, challenges such as limited infrastructure and economic dependency on neighboring countries continue to constrain its soft power potential.

The literature on soft power underscores its significance as a versatile and adaptive tool for countries seeking to enhance their global influence. For landlocked nations like both Nepal and Mongolia, soft power provides an effective means of overcoming geographic constraints and asserting their presence in international affairs. While both countries possess distinct strengths in cultural and diplomatic soft power, their challenges reveal the need for strategic investments in infrastructure, political stability, and global engagement. Future research could further explore how landlocked and non-Western nations can optimize their soft power strategies to achieve sustainable influence in an increasingly interconnected world.

Data Presentation

Strategies of Nepal and Mongolia in Overcoming the Landlockedness

Landlocked nations face unique challenges due to their lack of direct access to seaports, which significantly impacts trade, economic growth, and diplomatic relations. Dependence

on neighboring countries for transit access often creates vulnerabilities, including economic dependency and geopolitical constraints. Nepal and Mongolia, two landlocked nations in Asia, provide valuable insights into strategies for overcoming these challenges. Nepal, surrounded by India and China, and Mongolia, bordered by Russia and China, have adopted distinct strategies based on their geopolitical contexts. This section explores the approaches of Nepal and Mongolia to address their landlocked status and concludes with a comparative analysis to derive broader lessons for landlocked nations.

Nepal's Strategies

Nepal's geographical positioning between India and China offers both opportunities and challenges. This study identifies that Nepal is using an active border engagement approach to overcome the impact of landlockedness. The country employs five major tools to enhance its soft power and mitigate the limitations imposed by its geography.

a) Creation of Pan-Regional Networks

Nepal places particular emphasis on creating pan-regional networks to maintain smooth relations with its two super neighbors, India and China. It prioritizes active engagement in regional organizations such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) to enhance trade cooperation and infrastructure connectivity (Hamal, 2014). These platforms provide Nepal with opportunities to engage in multilateral discussions, foster regional cooperation, and reduce its dependency on any single neighbor. By participating in these organizations, Nepal aims to create a balanced relationship with both India and China, ensuring that it can leverage the strengths of both countries without becoming overly reliant on either.

b) Priority in Mini-Lateral Initiatives

In addition to regional organizations, Nepal has given priority to developing several mini-lateral initiatives to connect with neighboring countries. For example, Nepal's participation in the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) Initiative has facilitated smoother cross-border movement of goods and people, promoting regional trade integration. The BBIN initiative aims to enhance connectivity and economic cooperation among the four countries, providing Nepal with alternative trade routes and reducing its dependency on India. This mini-lateral approach allows Nepal to address specific regional challenges and build stronger ties with its neighbors.

c) Emphasis on Establishing Spiritual Circuits

Nepal is also focusing on establishing several spiritual circuits, such as the Buddha Circuit and Ramayan Circuit, to connect spiritual leaders and devotees from neighboring countries. These circuits not only promote religious tourism but also strengthen cultural and spiritual ties with countries like India and China. For instance, the Buddha Circuit, which includes

Lumbini (the birthplace of Buddha), attracts millions of pilgrims and tourists annually, enhancing Nepal's cultural and spiritual influence in the region. By promoting these spiritual circuits, Nepal aims to position itself as a hub for religious and cultural tourism, further boosting its soft power.

d) Diversification of Exchanges

Nepal is increasingly prioritizing the diversification of exchanges, both in terms of infrastructure and people-to-people relations. The country has engaged with China, securing agreements for access to Chinese ports such as Tianjin, leveraging the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Internally, Nepal has heavily invested in infrastructure projects to improve connectivity. Notable projects include the expansion of Tribhuvan International Airport and the development of Gautam Buddha International Airport near the Indian border. Additionally, cross-border railway projects, such as the proposed Kathmandu-Kerung railway connecting Nepal to China, aim to reduce dependency on India. Through economic diplomacy, Nepal has fostered trade relations with countries beyond its immediate neighbors, exemplified by agreements with Bangladesh that explore additional trade routes. Efforts to diversify exports, including hydropower, tourism, and handicrafts, have further reduced dependency on a single market. At the geopolitical level, Nepal maintains a delicate balance between India and China, ensuring access to both while leveraging its unique cultural and natural resources, such as Mount Everest and Lumbini, to strengthen its international presence.

e) Promotion of Unique Festivals, Rituals, and Languages

Nepal actively promotes its unique festivals, rituals, and languages to assert its cultural identity while maintaining friendly relations with India. Nepal's cultural and historical ties with its southern neighbor, India, are deep and enduring. As the birthplace of Lord Buddha and home to sacred Hindu temples like Pashupatinath, Nepal has long been a spiritual destination for Indians. The open border between the two nations facilitates not only trade and economic exchanges but also a shared cultural consciousness. Festivals like Dashain and Tihar in Nepal align with India's Dussehra and Diwali, underscoring a shared heritage that transcends boundaries. However, the open border also brings challenges, including trade imbalances and the risk of cultural overshadowing.

Mongolia's Strategies

Mongolia's landlocked position between Russia and China presents a different set of challenges and opportunities. Its strategies reflect its geopolitical realities and unique strengths. Unlike Nepal's strategy of active engagement, Mongolia's "Third Neighbor Policy" aims to build partnerships with nations beyond its immediate neighbors, including Japan, South Korea, and the United States (Ochirkhuyag, 2023). This policy reduces over-reliance on Russia and China while fostering trade, investment, and diplomatic ties with other countries. The country's vast mineral resources, including coal, copper, and gold, form the backbone of its economy. By developing partnerships with international mining

companies and diversifying export markets, Mongolia has mitigated its dependency on transit routes through neighboring countries.

a) Third Neighbor Policy

Mongolia's "Third Neighbor Policy" is a cornerstone of its foreign policy, aimed at reducing dependency on its two immediate neighbors, Russia and China. By cultivating relationships with distant powers such as the United States, Japan, and European countries, Mongolia seeks to balance the influence of its neighbors and enhance its strategic autonomy. This policy has allowed Mongolia to diversify its economic and diplomatic partnerships, reducing the risks associated with over-reliance on any single country. For example, Mongolia has signed trade and investment agreements with countries like Japan and South Korea, which have provided financial and technical support for infrastructure development and economic diversification.

b) Engagement in International Organizations

Unlike Nepal's focus on regional organizations, Mongolia has prioritized engagement in international organizations where it can interact with major global powers. Mongolia's active participation in organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) has enhanced its integration into the global economy. Additionally, its observer status in China's Belt and Road Initiative reflects a pragmatic approach to leveraging global initiatives for infrastructure benefits. To address its geographical isolation, Mongolia has also emphasized digital infrastructure and e-governance, investing in information and communication technology (ICT) to facilitate economic diversification and improve access to global markets.

c) Promotion of Glorious History and Culture

Mongolia actively promotes its historical traditions both at home and abroad. The country's rich nomadic heritage and the legacy of Genghis Khan serve as powerful tools for cultural diplomacy. For instance, the Mongolian government has actively promoted "The Mongol Khan," the first Mongolian production to tour internationally, as part of its efforts to showcase its cultural heritage (Lam, 2023). By highlighting its historical and cultural achievements, Mongolia aims to attract global attention and strengthen its soft power.

d) Branding as a Developmental State

Mongolia has also focused on branding itself as a developmental state, drawing parallels with the economic success of East Asian "tiger" economies. This strategy has helped Mongolia attract foreign investment and expand its economic relations with countries like South Korea and Japan (Minton, 2018). By positioning itself as a country with significant growth potential, Mongolia has been able to diversify its economic partnerships and reduce its dependency on its immediate neighbors.

Comparative Analysis: Soft Power and Beyond

While both Nepal and Mongolia face challenges as landlocked nations, their strategies reveal significant contrasts and similarities. Nepal's position between two rising global powers necessitates a balancing act in its foreign policy, while Mongolia's geographical isolation has driven its focus on the "Third Neighbor Policy." Nepal has emphasized cross-border road and rail projects with India and China, whereas Mongolia's infrastructure investments focus on facilitating mineral exports through the Trans-Mongolian Railway. Both nations recognize the importance of developing internal infrastructure to complement international connectivity.

Trade diversification is a shared priority for both countries. Nepal has sought to diversify trade routes through agreements with Bangladesh and China, while Mongolia has concentrated on expanding its mining sector and reducing reliance on transit through neighboring countries. The economic base of the two nations also differs significantly. Nepal's economy relies on tourism, agriculture, and hydropower, while Mongolia's economy is dominated by mining. This difference shapes their respective trade strategies and international engagement. Mongolia's Third Neighbor Policy provides a framework for engaging with countries beyond its region, whereas Nepal's engagement primarily revolves around regional platforms such as SAARC and BIMSTEC.

Cultural and strategic positioning further distinguish the two nations. Nepal leverages its cultural heritage and natural landmarks, such as Mount Everest and Lumbini, for tourism and soft power. In contrast, Mongolia emphasizes its historical ties to the legacy of Genghis Khan and cultural diplomacy to strengthen its global image. Both countries, however, demonstrate the importance of leveraging unique assets to build global recognition and soft power.

The experiences of Nepal and Mongolia offer valuable lessons for other landlocked nations. Diversifying trade and transit options is crucial to reducing dependency on a single transit partner, as illustrated by Nepal's engagement with both India and China and Mongolia's "Third Neighbor Policy." Investments in robust transportation and digital infrastructure can mitigate geographic disadvantages. Active participation in regional and global platforms enhances access to international markets, while leveraging cultural and natural resources helps build global recognition and soft power. Finally, maintaining strategic neutrality and balanced foreign relations ensures access to critical transit routes.

Mongolia's historical and cultural ties with China are both deep and complex. The ancient Silk Road facilitated trade and cultural exchanges between the two nations, leaving an enduring legacy in areas such as art and religion. Mongolian Buddhism, heavily influenced by Tibetan traditions, shares common roots with Chinese Buddhism. In modern times, however, Mongolia's economic dependence on China its largest trading partner has created challenges for maintaining sovereignty. To counterbalance this, Mongolia actively promotes its distinct nomadic culture, with events like the Naadam Festival celebrating its heritage of wrestling, archery, and horse racing.

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To the north, Mongolia's relationship with Russia has been shaped by Soviet influence during the 20th century. The introduction of the Cyrillic alphabet and Soviet-era educational reforms are legacies of this period. Despite these influences, Mongolia has retained its nomadic traditions and cultural identity, underscoring its resilience in the face of external pressures. Today, Mongolia collaborates with Russia in areas like energy, education, and transportation, reflecting a pragmatic partnership.

Mongolia's geographic location between Russia and China has also enabled it to play a unique diplomatic role. The Ulaanbaatar Dialogue, a platform initiated by Mongolia, seeks to promote peace and cooperation in Northeast Asia. This initiative emphasizes Mongolia's neutral stance and its ability to mediate sensitive issues, such as tensions between North and South Korea. As one of the few nations with friendly relations with North Korea, Mongolia offers a valuable neutral ground for dialogue, exemplifying its capacity as a small state to contribute to regional stability.

Both Nepal and Mongolia face challenges inherent to their landlocked status, such as limited access to global markets and economic dependence on neighboring countries. Environmental issues also pose significant threats, with Nepal confronting glacial melting and water scarcity, while Mongolia battles desertification and overgrazing. These shared vulnerabilities underscore the need for regional collaboration to address cross-border environmental challenges.

Cultural diplomacy emerges as a powerful tool for both nations. Nepal can leverage its Buddhist heritage to attract pilgrims and tourists from India, China, and beyond. Similarly, Mongolia's nomadic traditions and festivals hold global appeal, offering opportunities for cultural exchange and tourism. By jointly hosting cultural festivals, academic exchanges, and art exhibitions, Nepal and Mongolia can enhance their soft power and foster deeper connections with their neighbors.

Economic integration through improved infrastructure presents another opportunity. For Nepal, the development of trans-Himalayan railways and trade routes can boost connectivity with China while maintaining strong ties with India. Mongolia, positioned along the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor, can act as a transit hub for trade across Eurasia. By investing in infrastructure and diversifying trade partnerships, both nations can reduce their dependency on any single neighbor. Nepal and Mongolia have demonstrated resilience and innovation in addressing the challenges of their landlocked status. While Nepal's strategies emphasize regional cooperation and balancing its powerful neighbors, Mongolia's focus on the "Third Neighbor Policy" and leveraging its mineral wealth offers a different model. The comparative analysis underscores the importance of diversification, infrastructure development, and proactive diplomacy for landlocked nations striving to overcome their geographical constraints.

Discussion

Balanced relations or balancing remained the most popular words of Nepal's international relations since the restoration of democracy in the year 1990. Though the idea of soft power

has been often discussed (Timilsana, 2020; Karki & Dhungana, 2020), the physical power-based idea, mostly the geopolitics, has dominated the overall discussion.

The finding of this study can be useful in enhancing our understanding of Nepal's overemphasised in geopolitics or physical power-based discussion. As seen above, Nepal has adopted an active engagement policy as its key foreign policy, indeed mostly based on soft power, with the immediate neighbours. Moreover, it is emphasized in the pan-regional organizations. This active engagement becomes a major concern of the immediate neighbors and is explained as Nepal's balancing behavior.

The picture becomes clearer when we contrast the Nepali case with the Mongolian case. Mongolia is in a very different path in overcoming the landlockness. It is developing its soft power mostly through four major strategies: third neighbour policy, engagement in international organizations, the promotion of glorious history abroad, and branding Mongolia as a developmental state. Its different strategic choice helps on avoiding the balance issue and maintains more smooth relations with the immediate neighbours China and Russia.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of Nepal and Mongolia underscores the multifaceted role of soft power in enabling landlocked nations to transcend geographical constraints and assert their global influence. While both countries share the common challenge of landlockedness, their divergent strategies illuminate the interplay of geopolitics, cultural capital, and historical context in shaping soft power approaches. Nepal's emphasis on active border engagement and regional connectivity reflects its precarious position between two rising powers, India and China. By prioritizing pan-regional networks, spiritual tourism, and cultural diplomacy, Nepal seeks to balance its dependencies while leveraging its unique identity as a spiritual and ecological hub. However, this strategy is not without vulnerabilities. The success of Nepal's regional initiatives, such as the BBIN or BRI-linked infrastructure projects, hinges on the stability of Indo-Chinese relations—a variable beyond its control. Political instability and infrastructural deficits further complicate its ability to sustain long-term soft power gains, raising questions about the scalability of its current model.

In contrast, Mongolia's "Third Neighbor Policy" exemplifies a strategic pivot toward global partnerships, reducing reliance on immediate neighbors by cultivating ties with distant powers like the U.S. and Japan. This approach, combined with branding itself as a developmental state and promoting its nomadic heritage, allows Mongolia to carve a niche in global diplomacy. Yet, this outward-focused strategy risks overextension. Mongolia's economic dependence on mineral exports—a sector dominated by foreign investors—exposes it to commodity market volatility, while its historical branding risks romanticizing the past without addressing present-day developmental gaps. Moreover, the efficacy of the Third Neighbor Policy depends on the geopolitical priorities of its "neighbors," which may shift with changing global power dynamics.

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Critically, both nations highlight the limitations of traditional IR theories that prioritize hard power. Their experiences affirm constructivist assertions that identity and cultural narratives are potent tools for small states, yet they also reveal the precariousness of soft power in the absence of economic and political resilience. For instance, Nepal's cultural assets, such as Lumbini, hold immense symbolic value but require robust infrastructure and political coherence to translate into sustained influence. Similarly, Mongolia's historical legacy gains traction only when paired with modern economic diversification.

The study also prompts reflection on the broader applicability of these strategies. Landlocked nations in the Global South, often marginalized in geopolitical discourse, can draw lessons from Nepal's regional balancing and Mongolia's global outreach. However, their cases caution against one-size-fits-all solutions. Success hinges on contextual adaptability: aligning soft power strategies with domestic capacities and external realities. Future research could explore how digital diplomacy or climate advocacy—areas where both nations have untapped potential—might complement existing strategies. Ultimately, Nepal and Mongolia demonstrate that soft power, while no panacea, offers a vital pathway for landlocked states to navigate an asymmetrical world order, provided it is anchored in pragmatic, inclusive, and adaptive policymaking.

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