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Kazakhstan Nation Brand: Economic, Political and Cultural Narratives

Abstract

Kazakhstan is considered to be one of the successfully developing countries in the post-soviet area. Since declaring independence in 1991, the state had a need for self-identification and establishment of its image in the world arena because Kazakhstan had been part of the USSR for seventy years. For almost twenty years, Kazakhstan has demonstrated a willingness to be recognized worldwide through external policies and global amity. At the same time, Kazakhstan faced an unusual situation when an undesirable image of the country was presented in the infamous movie “Borat”. The reaction to the movie demonstrated that the Government of Kazakhstan paid attention mainly to public diplomacy and economic factors in the development of the nation’s image while culture, history, and traditions of the country remained almost unknown to the world and thus could be easily misrepresented.

The purpose of this paper is to acquaint the world community with the political, economic and cultural dimensions of the Kazakhstan national brand. The article discusses the main aspects of nation branding developed by the government of the country. It reviews the economic, political and cultural aspects of Kazakhstan. The authors suggest further directions for building a strong and unique multifaceted brand of Kazakhstan that will be appealing not only to politicians, investors, but to people from all over the world.

Introduction

The concept of a nation’s branding has received increasing attention among academics, politicians, branding and international relations experts during last two decades.

A nation’s brand can be understood as an image of the country that consists of its culture, history, nature and landscape, people, government, and business practices (Anholt 2007, p.405). The concept of nation branding was introduced in the middle of the 90’s and refers to the

development of a unique national image with the use of international relations and diplomacy, attraction of foreign investment and related investment policies, economic development, favorable conditions for business development, and tourism (Anholt 2007, p.3).

There are nations that consider a nation's branding as a crucial aspect of long-term development so they take a proactive approach to the nation's brand development and hire international experts like Simon Anholt in order to develop a long-term strategy for building their nation's reputation and credibility in the international arena (Dinnie 2008). Examples of such nations are South Korea, Spain, New Zealand, Germany, Estonia and South Africa.

There are other countries that have almost been forced to get involved in nation branding or have had to react to international level events that affected the image of the country. One example is the Republic of Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan was practically unknown to the average citizen of the US and EU before the fall of 2006 when the infamous movie "Borat" was introduced to the cinema.

The officials of Kazakhstan have realized, for the first time, that if the government of a country does not take initiative, there might be a case when an individual from outside will create an image for the country which will be very difficult to dispute, erase or replace with a desired one. There were a series of meetings with the Kazakhstani Diaspora and cultural events organized at Kazakhstan's embassies in the UK, USA and other countries (Verhotunmov 2007, Idrissov 2006). There were significant resources spent on presenting a positive image of Kazakhstan in international media like BBC, CNN, and *The New York Times* in 2006-2007 (Marat 2009). In May 2007, the government of Kazakhstan formed a Department of International Information within The Ministry of Foreign Affairs that is responsible for the development and promotion of Kazakhstan in the international arena (Marat 2009). In 2007, the Government of Kazakhstan reassured the international public about continuing the program of the nation's image development and plans to invest another \$ 10 million on these activities.¹

There have been some substantial achievements in the last 3 years in the development of Kazakhstan's nation brand. Kazakhstan competed to host the Winter Olympic Games in 2014. Kazakhstan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs sponsored the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions and a meeting of foreign ministers with the theme 'Common World: Progress through Diversity'. In 2010, Kazakhstan obtained the chairmanship of the OSCE and in 2011, Kazakhstan will be the chairman of the Organization Islamic Conference, and will host the Asian Olympic Games. All these initiatives and activities have helped to improve the nation's brand image. According to The Global Nation Branding Index 200 by East West Communications that

¹ 'Boratu-brata? Pravitel'stvo Kazahstana vydelyayet \$10 mln na sozdanie imidzha strany za rubezhom' ['Brother or Borat? Government of Kazakhstan Allocating \$10 mln to create the Country's Image Abroad'], available at: www.ktk-tv.kz, accessed 29 December 2008.

ranks 200 countries of the world on the nation's brand perception, Kazakhstan reached 28th place². Despite these achievements, Kazakhstan still needs to work further on increasing recognition of country's multiethnic and multicultural composition, vast nature and landscape, geopolitical location. As it was stated by Anholt, the image of country's brand can be built for 250 years and destroyed within 2-3 years (Danayeva 2005).

This essay reviews the existing views on a nation's branding and presents the political, economic and cultural aspects of Kazakhstan's national brand. The article discusses key aspects of national branding developed by the government of Kazakhstan and then suggests the elements of a national brand image and an identity that might be developed in order to build a strong and unique brand for Kazakhstan.

Views on nation brand

K. Dinnie has defined Nation Brand as "the unique, multi-dimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences" (2008, p. 15). It is worth pointing that the definition of nation brand suggested by K. Dinnie accentuates the cultural dimensions of a nation as a brand. Another distinguishing aspect of the definition is that each nation as a brand has several groups of audiences to appeal to and thus the national image created for one target audience may vary from the image elements developed to appeal to another audience. Holt considers the a 'cultural branding' approach is the most appropriate for nation branding which assumes incorporating cultural and social trends for the development of a brand image (K. Dinnie 2008, p.14). Simon Anholt has a different perspective and suggests the main aspect of nation brand to be reputation, referring to corporate reputation as one of the important elements of corporate brand. He compares brand value to ... "competitive identity, because it has to do more with national identity and the politics and economics of competitiveness than with branding as it usually understood in the commercial sector" (K. Dinnie 2008, p.22). Anholt stresses public diplomacy to be the most important area in building nation brand (Danayeva 2005). As it can be seen from the presented perspectives on nation brand, experts place emphasis on either cultural or political aspects of nation as a brand.

But there is another group of marketing academics who place emphasis on the brand of a nation for the development of tourism and exports, and thus pay attention to the nature and landscape as well as favorable business conditions and quality of products produced in the nation (Kotler and Gertner 2002, Porter 1998). A positive and powerful image of nation brand can become one of the competitive advantages for the country as a nation. Porter (1998) has raised the issue of

² http://www.eastwestcoms.com/global_alpha_annual_2009.htm

national image importance for the national economy and the development of export activities for companies originating from a specific country in the book “Competitive Advantage of Nations”. He has emphasized that national differences can become the key factors for building competitive advantages and linked the national image to country-of-origin effect as one of the important elements of national brand when considering the competitiveness of products and services manufactured in the country and their perception by foreign consumers. It is worthwhile to mention that national brand is important for the attraction of tourists and an inflow of investors and entrepreneurs to the country.

According to the International Institute of Management Development, Kazakhstan has moved up three places to 33rd in an international competitiveness ranking, passing Spain and far ahead of Russia³. Kazakhstan ranked 20th among the 58 countries in government efficiency and is 29th in business efficiency. Within the government-efficiency category, it ranked 12th in sound fiscal policy and 16th in public-finance policy. Within the business-efficiency category, it was eighth in labour-market efficiency. Institute research indicated that key reasons for the high ranking are the country’s flexible policies on setting wages and on hiring and firing.⁴ All of these achievements demonstrate the successful policy of the Kazakhstani government in the development of national brand. Elements of the nation brand and dimensions of the Kazakhstan brand have been successfully developing and will be reviewed in the next section.

Kazakhstan Nation Brand and Its Identity Elements

Brand Name is considered to be the main and key element of brand identity and image (Keller 2008). When people from The US hear the name Kazakhstan, they immediately associate it with Pakistan and Afghanistan, perceiving that it is an undeveloped country and most probably experiences ethnic conflict or war. The ending of country name with suffix ‘stan’ is from ancient Persian and means a land of, or place of, country, nation⁵. Kazakh is from Turkish and can be translated as an independent and free individual.⁶ The name of the country means a nation of free and independent people. The complete name fully reflects the historical background of a nomadic nation when Kazakhs used to ride horses along vast steppes with their cattle, live in mobile homes

³ The International Institute for Management Development ranks countries on their ability to create an environment that allows businesses to compete effectively. It looked at 327 criteria in making its 2010 ranking. Most fell into four categories: pace of economic development, business efficiency, government efficiency and infrastructure, <http://www.imd.ch/research/publications/index.cfm?nav1=true>

⁴ <http://www.imd.ch/research/publications/index.cfm?nav1=true>

⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/-stan>

⁶ <http://www.worldatlas.com/aatlas/infopage/stan.htm>

called “yurta” and freely migrate from one to another region for hundreds and thousands of kilometers.

The main elements of the nation brand are attributes that represent the country’s traditions, history and policy. Among them there are a national flag and national emblem with their main meanings. The National Flag of the Republic of Kazakhstan is a piece of right-angled cloth, sky-blue color with a picture of a golden sun with 32 rays in the center sitting above a soaring steppe eagle. The flagstaff has a vertical line of national ornamentation. The picture of the sun, its rays, eagle and ornament are gold in color.⁷

The National Emblem of the Republic of Kazakhstan is an image of shanyrak, the upper dome-like portion of a yurt, against a sky blue background which irradiates (in the form of sun rays) uyks (supports) set off by wings of mythical horses. The circle shape of the Emblem is a symbol of life and eternity. The shanyrak symbolizes the well-being of family, peace and calmness. The colour version of the National Emblem of the Republic of Kazakhstan consists of two colours: gold and sky blue. The golden color corresponds to the bright, clear future of the Kazakhstani people. The blue sky color is a symbol of the aspiration to peace, goodwill, friendship and unity with all peoples.⁸

The choice of colour, objects of nature and cultural elements present the idea of Kazakhstan as peaceful, independent and freedom respecting nation that lives in friendship with other people in the world.

Traditionally, nations select objects of nature like a sun, a bird, flower, plant or an animal that is famous for its origin from the country. Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of Kazakhstan, identified the image for the nation brand as the following: “I, for my part, am sure that by the year of 2030 Kazakhstan would have become a Central-Asian Snow Leopard and would serve a fine example to be followed by other developing countries. Tigers are not found in Kazakhstan while the Snow Leopard inhabiting our mountains is but a stranger in the world community. Though a relation to the Tiger in the animal kingdom, the Snow Leopard bears some substantial distinctions there from. It will be virtually a Kazakhstani Snow Leopard with inherent elitarianism, sense of independence, intelligence, courage and nobleness, bravery and cunning. It will never be the first to attack anyone, ever prone to avoiding direct clashes.”⁹ This animal is beautiful and extremely rare. The Snow leopard was selected as a mascot for upcoming Asian Olympic Games to be held in Kazakhstan. The selection of the snow leopard as a symbol of the country and description of its character gives an idea of the country image as being strong and beautiful, independent and unique.

⁷ <http://www.kazakhstan.orexca.com/>

⁸ <http://www.kazakhstan.orexca.com/>

⁹ Nazarbayev N., Strategy “Kazakhstan-2030”, Speech 1997, http://www.akorda.kz/ru/speeches/addresses_of_the_president_of_kazakhstan/october_1997

The most popular statement developed by the government in promoting the nation, “Kazakhstan – the Heart of Eurasia”, represents the location of the country in the crossing of Europe and Asia. It was selected in order to symbolize the country with mix of culture and nationalities, languages and infrastructure. Kazakhstan holds a strategic position between Russia and China, being 9th largest country in the world. It has very powerful neighbors as well as reputation of being a leader in Central Asia. The emphasis on the word - heart reflects the warmth and hospitality of the Kazakh people, who as nomads would not be able to survive without having a tradition of hosting distant relatives, travelers and strangers in their house for as long as guests wished to stay.

Development of Kazakhstan Nation Brand by Government

Since its independence, Kazakhstan has long-term and short-term strategies for country development indicating the major fields. The program “Kazakhstan - 2030” is a long-term strategy for country development. There were documents developed to support the main plan. They are “Nationwide plan of basic actions for implementation annual messages of the Presidents to Kazakhstani nation for 2005-2007 years,” “The Program of the Government for 2007-2009 years” and other documents.¹⁰ The long-term Strategy was built according to two major strategic goals. “First, Kazakhstan became a sovereign independent state. Second, we have embarked on the way of implementing broad-scale social, political and economic transformations. The said goals are not yet realized though some areas have clearly manifest tangible results.”(Nazarbayev N.)¹¹ Therefore, the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan defined the following seven priorities for further development, which clearly implement new vision of the Kazakhstani brand: 1) National Security; 2) Domestic Political Stability and Consolidation of the Society; 3) Economic Growth Based on an Open Market Economy with High Level of Foreign Investments and Internal Savings. Gain realistic, stable and steadily growing rates of economic growth; 4) Health, Education and Well-being of Kazakhstani Citizens; 5) Power Resources; 6) Infrastructure; 7) Professional State.”¹² Country, which had developed a strategic development plan for three decades time span has a very profound opportunity to become a successful nation.

¹⁰ Общенациональный план основных направлений (мероприятий) по реализации ежегодных 2005-2007 годов посланий Главы государства народу Казахстана (далее – Общенациональный план); Программа Правительства Республики Казахстан на 2007-2009 годы

¹¹ Nazarbayev N., Strategy “Kazakhstan-2030”, Speech 1997

¹² Nazarbayev N., Strategy “Kazakhstan-2030”, Speech 1997,

http://www.akorda.kz/ru/speeches/addresses_of_the_president_of_kazakhstan/october_1997

Political aspects of nation brand of Kazakhstan

The government plays a crucial role in the development of national brand. While an internal policy brings mostly tangible assets and advantages for inhabitants, the external policy creates the image of the country in the international arena as well as pride for the successful diplomacy and prosperity.

Kazakhstan leads CIS countries with its recent achievements. First of all, the accession Kazakhstan to the WTO provided the opportunity to “access to international goods and services markets on the basis of predictable and stable development of trade relations with WTO member states, including transparency of their foreign economic policies...”¹³ Kazakhstan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs conducted the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, a meeting of foreign ministers ‘Common World: Progress through Diversity’. The OSCE chairmanship of Kazakhstan became a symbol of recognition of the country as being the most stable and peaceful in the region, and its leadership in helping to resolve conflicts in the neighboring country of Kyrgyzstan. A great deal depends on what kind of assessment Kazakhstan’s presidency will get finally from this international organization. The presidency is in itself valuable. It in a sense opens “window to Europe” for Kazakhstan. Cooperation with European structures, on one hand, imposes certain obligations associated with the optimization of the democratic processes within Kazakhstan itself on the country’s leadership. However, for the image of Kazakhstan, The OSCE chairmanship is certainly a bonus.

Though it is also a multiethnic country like Russia, Kazakhstan is considered to be the most stable and peaceful country in the CIS region. The President of the country is perceived as one of the key leaders in stabilizing the situation in the neighboring country of Kyrgyzstan. The government of Kazakhstan promotes the development of all ethnic groups living in the state and has established a special organization called The Assembly of Nations of the Republic of Kazakhstan that promotes multicultural diversity, preservation and development of ethnic group cultures. This organization ensures the equality of access to education and the opportunity for children to study their mother tongue at school.

Economic Aspects of Nation Brand

Kazakhstan has a stable, growing and one of the most advanced economies in the region. At the beginning of Kazakhstani independence in 1991 and after the financial crisis in Russia in

¹³World Trade Organization: principal objectives and functions, accession procedure, <http://www.wto.ru/chto.asp?f=spravka&t=6>

1998, Kazakhstan's economy turned downward with a 2.5% decline in GDP growth. However, since 2001, the GDP of Kazakhstan has been among the highest in the world¹⁴. The establishment of the Kazakhstan Investment Fund (KIF) provided financial support to private sector initiatives in non-extraction sectors through non-control holding of the authorized capital of the enterprises both in Kazakhstan and abroad.¹⁵ The drastic increase in the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to Kazakhstan was seen in the early 2000's due to the adoption of new investment legislation, and the massive exploration of Caspian oil fields. Considering the volume of the Foreign Direct Investment into the country by FDI per person, the Republic of Kazakhstan takes the lead in CIS countries. In absolute measures, Kazakhstan places third after Russia and Ukraine¹⁶. The World Bank has listed Kazakhstan among the 20 most attractive countries for investments: over \$21 million has been invested into the country since its independence.¹⁷ As was mentioned before, Kazakhstan is highly ranked in terms of international competitiveness¹⁸, government efficiency and business efficiency.¹⁹ It can be concluded that Kazakhstan has a stable economy and a favorable business environment with positive determinants for further development.

Cultural Aspects of Nation Brand Kazakhstan

Origins of Kazakhs as a nation

Kazakhs are considered to be descendants of several regions and tribes: Turkic tribes (Argyns, Dughlat, Kipchaks and Qarluqs),²⁰ and other tribes probably of Iranian origin (Kankalis, Wusun, Sarmatians, Sacae, Scythians, etc.); Turko-Mongol groups (Naimans, Nogais, Kiyat, Kerait, Onggirat, , Manghud, Jalayir, etc.), and ancient Huns who inhabited the territory between Siberia and the Black Sea and remained in Central Asia when the Turkic and Turko-Mongolic groups started to invade and conquer the area between the fifth and thirteenth centuries AD²¹.

¹⁴Statistics of Republic of Kazakhstan,

http://www.stat.kz/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=86&Itemid=41&lang=ru

¹⁵ Innovative Industrial Development Strategy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2003-2015, Decree of the President of Kazakhstan (2003), from www.government.kz

¹⁶ <http://www.transkazakhstan.kz/en/press/11-09-2009trans-pr/>

¹⁷ Report on Kazakhstan Financial outlook, Almaty, July, 2008, from <http://www.gfmag.com>

¹⁸ The International Institute for Management Development ranks countries on their ability to create an environment that allows businesses to compete effectively. It looked at 327 criteria in making its 2010 ranking. Most fell into four categories: pace of economic development, business efficiency, government efficiency and infrastructure,

<http://www.imd.ch/research/publications/index.cfm?nav1=true>

¹⁹ <http://www.imd.ch/research/publications/index.cfm?nav1=true>

²⁰ <http://www.angelfire.com/on/paksoy/ozkaz.html>

²¹ <http://hgm2002.hgu.mrc.ac.uk/Abstracts/Publish/WorkshopPosters/WorkshopPoster04/hgm0179.htm>

The Lifestyle of Kazakhs

The Kazakh people traditionally roamed from place to place following warm weather. Each kin group had its own routes which other kin groups were not permitted to use. There was also a relatively strict system of land-use and land-ownership that was seasonally determined. Winters were considered to be the most difficult. Livestock was fed on pasturage and when ice prevented livestock from getting to the grass, starvation resulted. Kazakh's referred to this tragedy as a "Jut".²² Catastrophic "Juts" usually occurred once every 10-12 years and thoroughly devastated the nomadic economy of the Kazakhs. During dry seasons, this nomadic economy was also weakened and often disempowering state and military power as well. Some Kazakhs also engaged in agriculture, especially on the rich lands of Syrdaria, Talas, Tchu river valley on the edges of the Altai Mountains in the Irtysh valley and in the Zaisan depression. However, even in these areas, nomadic live-stock-breeding remained dominant.

Language

The Kazakhs language belongs to the family of Turkic languages which combines Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Tatar, Uyghur, Turkish, Azeri, Turkmen and other languages spoken in Central Asia, Eastern Europe, Siberia and the Xinjiang region of China. It belongs to Kipchak or Northwestern group of Turkic languages. Kazakhs used Arabic script for writing during 19th century due to the rebellion of some poets and writers against imposture of the Russian language. In 1927, during The Soviet Union, Arabic script was banned and the Latin alphabet was introduced for Kazakh, which in its turn was replaced by the Cyrillic alphabet in 1940. In 1940, an alphabet on the basis of Cyrillics was created with 33 letters of the Russian and 9 letters (ә, і, ө, ү, ұ, ғ, һ, к, ң) for sounds of the Kazakh language.²³ The Cyrillic alphabet remains the main alphabet for writing in Kazakh though discussions about change to the Latin alphabet continues among language experts due to contradictions in spelling.

Due to the multiethnic composition of Kazakhstan, though Kazakh language is the principal and state language, other languages are spoken and used in its territory such as Russian, which was declared to be a language of conversation, Uyghur, Ukrainian, Tatar, Korean and others.

Literature

There are some world famous scientists, philosophers, poets and writers that originated or developed their masterpieces in Kazakhstan during the periods of cultural and scientific rise of its territory.

²² http://www.unesco.kz/heritagenet/kz/hn-english/history_en.htm

²³ <http://ts.1in.kz/index.php?showtopic=5102>

The Great Silk Road not only stimulated the development of trade, but also became a channel of progressive scientific and cultural ideas. For example, the life and creative activity of the great philosopher Al-Farabi (870-959) dates back to these times.²⁴ Al-Farabi was known in the East as the Second Teacher after Aristotle. He is best known for his detailed research into philosophy, astronomy, theories of music and mathematics. Another well known 11th century scholar of Turkic philology is Mahmud Kashgari. His “piece de resistance” was a three-volume “Dictionary of Turkic dialects” which to this day serves as an important source of the history of Turkic folklore and literature. Hodja Ahmet Jassawi, who lived in what is today southern Kazakhstan during the 12 century is known by his collection of poetic thoughts "Divan-i Hikmet" (“The book of wisdom”).²⁵

Historically, the educational system and literature in Kazakhstan were built on the basis of the Arabic alphabet, the mores of Islam and the peoples’ traditional nomadic upbringing. The verbal-poetic and musical traditions of the Kazakhs are already highly developed. To this day, these traditions remain a cultural trademark of the Kazakh nation. Modern Kazakh culture is based on the reconstruction of the best examples of poetic improvisation and on the history of well-known “Akyns” (poets) and “Biys” (sages) as Asan-kaygy, Kaztugan-zhyrau, Tole bi, Aiteke bi, Kazybek bi, Bukhar-zhyrau and others.

Along with many less successful social and economic experiments, there were numerous successful attempts by the creative Kazakh intelligentsia at ethnic and cultural adaptation to European civilization in the context of local conditions. One of the Kazakh intellectuals who avidly supported such ideas was the scientist and writer Shokan Valikhanov (1835-1865). An outstanding scholar-orientalist, he is perhaps best remembered as the first scientist from the West to travel to and thoroughly describe the region of Kashgaria and as a recorder of one of the great Central Asian masterpieces of verbal folklore: the epic “Manas”. Another important Kazakh intellectual from the Russian imperial period is the great poet-philosopher Abai Kunanbayev (1845-1904). Abai was one of the founders of Kazakh literary language and wrote many of the classics of Kazakh literature. He was not only a talented poet, but also a skillful translator of masterpieces from Eastern, Russian and European literature. During the Soviet time, the famous poet and writer, Dzhambul Dzhabayev, wrote poem devoted to people who suffered in the siege of Leningrad and became recognized world-wide for it. Poet Olzhas Suleimenov led the antinuclear movement “Nevada-Semipalatinsk” in 90-s and serves as an Ambassador of Kazakhstan in Italy.

Cuisine

²⁴http://www.unesco.kz/heritagenet/kz/hn-english/history_en.htm

²⁵http://www.unesco.kz/heritagenet/kz/hn-english/history_en.htm

Kazakh cuisine traditionally revolves around mutton and horse meat and as well as various milk products. The cooking techniques and major ingredients have been strongly influenced by the nation's nomadic way of life. For example, most cooking techniques are aimed at the long-term preservation of food.

Meat in various forms has always been the primary ingredient of Kazakh cuisine. *Besbarmak*, a dish consisting of boiled horse or mutton meat, is the most popular Kazakh dish. Other popular meat dishes are *kazy* and *shuzhuk* (horsemeat sausages), *kuyrdak* (also spelled *kuirdak*, a dish made from roasted horse, sheep, or cow offal, such as heart, liver, kidneys, and other organs, diced and served with onions and peppers), and various horse delicacies, such as *zhal* (smoked lard from horse's neck) and *zhaya* (salted and smoked meat from horse's hip and hind leg).²⁶

The traditional drinks are fermented mare's milk (*kumys*), and camel's milk (*shubat*) as well as sheep milk and its products—*kaymak* (sour cream), *katyk* or *ayran* (buttermilk), *kurt*, *irimshik* (dried sour milk product similar to kurt, but not rolled into balls). The most popular traditional drink in Kazakhstan is a black tea with milk, known since the foundation of the Silk Way when it was brought from near-by China. Tea was usually consumed with *boursak* and sweets before the main course (meat), while other traditional drinks were consumed with main course. Today, tea with milk has practically replaced other traditional drinks in every day life and is consumed with main course.²⁷

Music

Music plays important part in every nation's culture. Kazakhs have developed skills in playing national musical instruments and performing of Kazakh traditional songs - *kyui*. One of the most commonly used traditional musical instruments of the Kazakhs is the *dombra*, a plucked lute with two strings. It is often used to accompany solo or group singing. The *dombra* is considered to be a unique instrument due to two strings only and requires mastery in playing. A notable composer Kurmangazy, who lived in the 19th century, was famous for composing and playing music on this instrument that fascinated music experts from all over the world. Another popular instrument is *kobyz*, a bow instrument played on one's knees. Along with other instruments, these two instruments play a key role in the traditional Kazakh orchestra. Kazakhs also have traditional dances where female performance prevails. During the Soviet period, ballet, opera and other classical types of arts developed in Kazakhstan. Today, rock and other modern types of music, movie, dance and circus are well developed and popular in Kazakhstan.

²⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kazakh_cuisine

²⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kazakh_cuisine

Architecture

Due to the nomadic lifestyle of Kazakhs, the country cannot impress travelers by the number of ancient castles and monuments like neighboring Uzbekistan (Marat 2009). At the same time, the path of the Great Silk Road through most of the modern territory of Kazakhstan has stimulated the establishment of several towns during first thousand years AD. A number of major cities and trade centers such as Otrar (Farab), Taraz, Rulan, Yassi (Turkestan), Sauran, Balasagun and others were established on this route. One of most famous buildings in Kazakhstan that can be visited today is the Mausoleum of Hodja Ahmed Yasavi that can be visited in the city Turkestan. It is one of the treasuries of the ancient world. The famous city of Yasa (Turkestan) was built in the twelfth century as a place of preaching activity by the Sufi saint - Sheikh Ahmed Yasavi. After his death in the cemetery of the city, Yasa formed a religious cult center, which became a center of attraction for pilgrims.²⁸ This place is famous for its mausoleum and one of the sites of pilgrimage.

Education

Kazakhstan has well established educational system inherited from Soviet Union and one of the highest adult literacy rates in the world - 99.8% according to UNESCO.²⁹ The country has a very high number of universities and colleges taking into account the population size³⁰.

Key decision makers can have different goals for the development of the nation brand: national identity, attraction of foreign direct investment, tourism sector development and attraction of tourists from all over the world. Due to increasing globalization, countries not only compete for investors and tourists but they need to retain or attract highly qualified specialists and talented people to remain competitive and appealing in science, industry, or the cultural aspects of citizenship.

There are several countries that raise concerns regarding talented scientists and professionals leaving and heading to USA. These include India, China, and Eastern Europe. Kazakhstan has established the “Bolashak” International Scholarship of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan in 1993 with the goal to educate the most talented students from Kazakhstan at the world’s best universities and then have them return to lead state and business institutions. Three research centers are planned to be created within the “New University of Astana” project. The Center of Life Sciences will undertake joint research projects with leading world research centers in the transplantation of organs, artificial heart and lungs, stem cell research and age prevention medicine. The Center for Alternative Energy will focus on issues of renewable

²⁸ http://www.unesco.kz/heritagenet/kz/content/history/monument/turkestan1/history_turk.htm

²⁹ http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/kazakhstan_background.html

³⁰ <http://portal.unesco.org/geography/en/files/10898/12353680055Kazakhstan.pdf/Kazakhstan.pdf>

energy, physics and techniques of high energies. The International Instrumentation Center will be an engineering center, laboratory base and construction bureau".³¹ Kazakhstan has signed an agreement with hundreds of universities worldwide for the exchange of professors, students and collaborative research projects. All these initiatives and activities demonstrate the high importance of the development of education in the building of nation.

Nature and Landscape

The land of Kazakhs is wealthy with nature: stunning mountain landscapes, canyons, beautiful lakes, steppe, deserts. Kazakhstan has ten national parks and ten nature reserves³². Two landscape places in Kazakhstan have been included in the list of world heritage by UNESCO. Construction of infrastructure and, again, spinning the appropriate way, of course, make this thread much more significant. It is also an opportunity to attract tourists to visit a country. Tourism development is one of the strategic priorities in this context as it was stated by M. Porter's (2005)³³ presentation to the Government of Kazakhstan when tourism was identified as one of the main business sectors to be developed by the country.

The aspects of economy, politics and culture described and reviewed above provide a solid foundation for further the development of Kazakhstan nation brand. The authors suggest accentuating some facts and conducting some activities in order to build the country brand image further.

Future directions for the development of Kazakhstan Nation Brand

Sport

Sports can become one of the successful dimensions of a national brand for Kazakhstan. Kazakhstani boxers, weightlifters and wrestlers are famous in the world sport arena and have won Olympic medals. The Country has medals from the Games in track and field, judo and shooting. Bicyclists like Vladimir Vinokurov and the cycling team Astana are becoming well known in Europe. The opportunity of hosting the Asian Olympic Games in 2011 is a unique chance for Kazakhstan to attract attention of the mass media and to broadcast our country to the world for two weeks and present a new image that will resemble the actual identity of our nation. Kazakhstan may continue to compete to host the summer Olympic games as it had attempted before with a more solid program and accent on the stability of the situation and absence of ethnic conflicts,

³¹ The Message of the President of Republic of Kazakhstan N.A. Nazarbayev to the nation of Kazakhstan. "New decade – new economic growth – new opportunities of Kazakhstan" January 29, 2010. <http://rus.nu.edu.kz/>.

³² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_protected_areas_in_Kazakhstan

³³ http://www.isc.hbs.edu/pdf/Kazakhstan_Competitiveness_2005.01.26.pdf

terrorist attacks in the country, and its uniqueness that can add value to the Olympic Games as a brand.

Cultural artifacts and the development of tourism

There are several cultural artifacts that can be embedded in the development of nation brand image. The Golden Saks Warrior-Prince, discovered in the town of Issyk, close to the capital city of Almaty, is famous for its integrity, beauty and elegance.³⁴ This so called Golden Man is greatly recognized among archeologists and historians and can become an object of interest for tourists coming to Kazakhstan. UNESCO has included three objects from Kazakhstan in the list of World heritage. One included object, “Petroglyphs within the Archaeological Landscape of Tamgaly,” is an object of cultural the landscape. It is somehow similar to the Golden Man in its nature and attracts a lot of tourists. The Sary-Arka steppes and lakes of Northern Kazakhstan are selected as the gem of natural beauty and landscape. The Mausoleum of Khoja Yasawi is an architectural, historical, cultural and Muslim religion pilgrimage place. All these places can be used in the development of unique nation brand image.

Kazakhstan has a wonderful holiday called Nauryz which is the New Year according to nomadic traditions that is celebrated during spring equinox. This holiday can become a wonderful international folk festival like the Slavyanski Bazar conducted in Belarus (festival of Slavic ethnic groups’ songs and music) or even Carnival in Brazil and attract thousands of tourists to the region during most beautiful time of the year to observe the awakening nature and experience local culture and hospitality

What other facts or legends about Kazakhstan can be included in the process?

- Kazakhstan's Altai Mountains and its magic Mount Belukha are considered to be the homeland of the magic Shambala, the mystical Buddhist paradise.
- According to legend, the Mother of Genghis Khan is said to be Kazakh.
- Kazakhstan is also the homeland of the first cosmonaut to travel into space and Kosmodrom Baikonur is located in the territory of Kazakhstan.
- Kazakhstan is a motherland of tulips and apple trees
- Kazakhstan has the Charyn canyon that, in its beauty, can be comparable to Grand Canyon
- The capital city Astana is unique because of its location right in the middle of Eurasia.

³⁴ http://www.unesco.kz/heritagenet/kz/hn-english/history_en.htm

Nation Brand Ambassadors

Timur Bekmambetov is a famous movie director, producer and script writer who became world known after his movies “Day Watch” and “Night Watch” were distributed in Hollywood and sometimes works with such celebrities as Angelina Jolie in “Wanted”. Timur Bekmambetov is considered to be one of the most famous Kazakh man in modern times, who lives mostly in Russia but recently started being actively involved in the development of culture in Kazakhstan. Recently Timur Bekmambetov directed the International Action Movie Festival in Kazakhstan. This event can become a starting point for developing a new image for Kazakhstan and its culture in the eyes of the world community. Timur Bekmambetov might be viewed as an ambassador of Kazakhstani modern culture who presents a high level of intelligence and rich cultural background that is able to break any stereotypes established about Kazakhstan before in the movie industry.

Summary and Conclusion

The President and Government of the Kazakhstan are attempting to develop a strong image of a stable and democratic nation in the political arena. Kazakhstan emphasizes its multiethnic and multicultural society composition. The chairmanship in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe gives Kazakhstan the opportunity to make the great contribution in world development and to establish a unique nation brand as well. In the opinion of Simon Anholt, The International Media Forum held in Kazakhstan every year, is also a successful element in nation branding (Danayeva 2005), Kazakhstan is considered to be one of the most economically developed countries in Central Asia and the CIS region. At the same time, the country’s cultural, natural, and historical heritage is almost unknown in most parts of the world.

The government of Kazakhstan is doing a great job in this direction, there are a lot of documents and strategic plans determining the main features of national identity, plans for further development; and the most important thing is that there have been great achievements in different fields of country development that can prove the existence of the Kazakhstani brand.

Anholt (2003) suggested nation branding to be a very complex activity but there are some successful examples such as the countries of Spain, Malaysia, and Slovenia. The authors believe that with the development of culture, sport and landscape as elements of nation brand, Kazakhstan has all the assets to become a well known and unique nation that people will want to see and experience.

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