MEXISTAN
Raymond Krischchyanas

The fragrance of the spring steppe near Dzhezkazgan is inebriating. In the area where the grasslands are not yet plowed under or overgrazed to become a desert, where the land blooms blood red with poppies and the wild tulips grow, the memories brought back by that smell may drive a native Kazakh or Russian alike to sense the hidden strength and vanished glory of this land. In the restlessly nomadic Russian spirit it awakens the subdued urge to move into open spaces; in the hearts of yesterday’s nomads, the Kazakh people, it may stir the image of the pastoralists’ happiness, expressed in the poem of Kazakh 19th century poet Abai Kunanibaev:

On springtime pasture my people gather;
Kinsmen embrace and rejoice together.
Joking and laughing, they stand and chat,
About everything -from their herds to the weather.

But the pleasant reverie set off by the spring grasses may end abruptly with the roar and blast-off of a rocket from nearby Baikonur, for this ancient steppe was turned into the launching site for all Soviet manned missions into space. The faces of this region could not be in greater contrast, yet is it any wonder in this place where two worlds meet?

MEXISTAN
Wilbur Zelinsky

Could this place be in the United States? The plaza in Santa Fe, New Mexico does not seem to be standard American. The architecture suits the southwest desert and the merchandise offered by the sidewalk vendors is unfamiliar, but appealing in its own way - pottery and weavings, Spanish-American food, mementos of the Old Anglo West. Even the skies are bluer, the air more transparent, and the smells different. People may expect something exotic in border towns like Mexicali, but this place is more than 200 miles from Mexico, and no foreign flags are flapping in the breeze.

But at a second look the city begins to feel less alien, even to East Coast Americans. The “southwestern” furniture and jewelry displayed in the shop windows look similar to ones sold in fashionable establishments back east, and the more adventurous suburbs throughout the United States are copying these Pueblo or Spanish motif buildings.

Santa Fe turns out to be not an exotic place at all, but rather something both uniquely influential and peculiarly emblematic of a special region and a new way of thinking about places in the United States. This is the land of intertwined peoples, a place clearly rooted in times long past, but a place that speaks to Americans of an altogether possible postmodern future, where cultures and lifestyles hybridize into new, unpredictable forms.
A GRASSLAND COMMONS WHICH DOESN'T QUITE UNIFY
Almost all of the region is a wide belt of dry grasslands and semi-deserts. To the north lie the steppes and forest; to the south, the mountains of Central Asia with their intricate lace of piedmont oases. From ancient times this sea of grass was home to a succession of nomadic peoples who navigated it on camel and horseback. For the nomads the grasslands, extending from China to the very doorstep of Europe, were a highway of expansion and a base of operations for plundering richer sedentary neighbors to the north and south. The Kalmyk people in the extreme west who speak a Mongol-related language and profess Buddhism are an exotic reminder of the past unity of the huge nomadic sea.

The heirs to the latest wave of nomads, the Kazakhs and Kirgiz, are a product of the blending of various local Turkic peoples with Mongol invaders. Their languages are Turkic, while in racial type they are distinctly Mongoloid. Among the Kazakhs, Kirgiz and Tatarmens, the nomadic way of life prevailed until the 20th century, and nomadic traits are still a visible element of their culture. The origins of the ethnic name “Kazakh” are probably the same as of “Kazak” (the Russian for Cossack) and are often traced to the Turkic “qaz” (to wander).

Being a nomad is practically defined through cattle ownership. Abai Kunanbaev wrote, “Honor, reason, science, all for them is less than the herds. They think that by the gift of livestock they receive the good opinion even of God. For them religion, the people and influence is all livestock.” Even the souls of dead ancestors were believed to occupy animal bodies. The Kirgiz, with their annual migrations from alpine pastures to lower valleys, were nomadic as well and are closely related to Kazakhs, although their mountain environment is quite different from dry grasslands.

AN INTERNATIONAL BORDER WHICH DOESN'T QUITE DIVIDE
The international boundary between Mexico and the United States bisects two halves which are certainly distinct, yet are intimately intertwined. It is this line that gives vitality and substance to the entire region, acting as the spine or central organizing mechanism. “Mexistan” is the place where two streams of people and their cultures have entered, met head-on, and intersected, one arriving from the south, the other from the east and north, and both superimposing themselves upon various earlier, stubbornly surviving Native American societies.

The border is a crucible for intense interaction and some remarkable international chemistry, an interface that has sprayed its effects far into the interiors of the U.S. and Mexico alike. It is difficult to think of any other border that jostles together two such utterly different ways of life. More than 1500 miles in length, it has much in common with many other international boundaries established by the imperial European powers and their settler colonies during the 19th Century. Generally, there was little thought given to historical or cultural realities, but maximum attention to national power, profit, and convenience. The outcome is the legacy of a one-sided conflict and US invasion in the 1840s and the subsequent diplomatic arm-twisting, and has never made a great deal of sense in terms of either physical or human geography.

The Rio Grande is a flimsy, porous barrier since its waters are only waist-deep or even lower much of the time. Elsewhere the boundary is a sequence of straight segments that blithely ignore the lay of the land and seldom impede the determined wanderer. In fact, the whole U.S.-Mexican boundary has always been a rather permeable sort of membrane, so much so that the social and cultural presence of the foreign neighbor is readily detectable some hundreds of miles beyond the border checkpoints.
Both the Kazakhs and Kirgizs became distinctly separate people around the year 1500, about the same time as the emergence of their future adversaries, Russians and Uzbeks. Ever since, the region has been either a buffer or a bridge between two mutually opposed worlds: European-Christian Russia to the north and Islamic Central Asia (where the Uzbeks dominated) to the south. Maneuvering between these two expansionist forces, the Kazakhs managed to preserve the independence of their tribal federations until the mid-19th century, when Central Asia was annexed by the Russian Empire in the worldwide scramble for colonies. The native population found itself within the same state with Russia and Islamic Asia and was heavily influenced by both. But even if the two once opposed worlds overlapped here, they have as yet hardly blended. The grassland commons are vast enough to be shared by both Europe and Asia, presenting the two faces of the dual society of the region.

Where Russia and Islam Converge

Even a hundred years ago the nomadic corridor was much wider. But for the sedentary neighbors of the nomads, the grasslands were an open frontier. By the late 18th century, Southern Ukraine and lands on the Volga were lost to the nomad and gained by the Slav farmer. What remained was no longer the commons for the nomads’ wandering, but rather their besieged refuge. Already by the 17th century, Russian and Kazakh expansion clashed in the zone between the Siberian forests and the grasslands - the zone that was summer pastures to the Kazakhs, but virgin lands waiting for the plow from the European viewpoint.

The cliche of official Soviet history about the peaceful incorporation of Kazakhstan into the Empire was not entirely hypocritical. Acting as an arbiter in the perpetual squabbling of the khans (local leaders, considered the direct political successors of the Mongol Genghiz Khan) for about a 150 years Russia did not move beyond its fortified boundary which stretched almost exactly along the present-day northern boundary of

The least “Mexican” segment of Mexico may be the northern Mexican states along the border - places in which the imprint of North American culture is inescapable - and likewise, in terms of U.S. territory, New Mexico, roughly half of Arizona and Texas, and small slivers of Colorado and California are the least standard region within the U.S based on the traditional Anglo definition of what is American. But perhaps these terms are already out-of-date, and here in Mexistan, a new idea of "American" is being born.

Where Mexico Meets Anglo-America

The initial European thrust into the region came in the 1540s, not long after the conquest of Mexico. Motivated by rumors of opulent cities to the north, Spanish explorers marched through New Mexico and as far as Kansas before turning back with empty hands. So great was their disillusionment that it was not until 1598 that the Spanish regime founded the first church missions and settler colonies in the upper Rio Grande valley. The settlers were few because the economic potential of the area was so meager and the supply lines and communications to the well-settled core area of New Spain were so slow and hazardous. Nevertheless this remote outpost has somehow persisted, and the descendants of the pioneer generations still cling proudly to their Spanish (rather than simply Mexican) heritage. The introduction of European cultural items, most notably livestock, metal-working, and an assortment of grains, fruits, vegetables, and other domesticated plants, meant considerable change in the economy and lifestyles of the surviving Native American groups.

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Kazakhstan. One after another the khans of major groups accepted the Russian protectorate, but Russian presence became a reality only after the 1840s when the line of forts encircled Kazakh territory. The subjugation of the grasslands was made easier by the nomads’ lack of unity. Until they were brought together by the Russian rule, the three major groups of Kazakhs were quite separate and each was caught in a personal vice between Russia and Asia. The term for their social and political organization was “horde,” and the Kazakhs were divided into three of these federations, believed to date back to the sixteenth century, and translated as “Great, Middle, and Small.” The Smaller (or Junior) Horde was under pressure from the special Russian government in Orenburg and from the oasis Khanate (or kingdom under the khan leadership) of Khiva. The Middle Horde was controlled by the Russian governor in Petrovavlovsk on the one side and lost territory to the Khanate of Kokand on the other. The Great, or “Senior,” Horde was gripped between a third Russian headquarters in Semipalatinsk and Chinese pressure. The Turkmens were caught between traditional dependency to Persia and the Russian conquest, which arrived across the sea and spread from the coastal base in Krasnovodsk. These separate corridors of conquest were later revived in the configuration of railways that crossed the region en route to Central Asia. Historic disunity persists in the economic disunity of the region today.

By the 1870s when the conquest of Central Asia was complete, the nomads discovered themselves living in the midst of Russian possessions. The long process of the shrinking of the nomadic sea culminated with the opening of the Kazakh grasslands to Russian homesteaders in 1889. By 1917, the northern zone of more fertile steppe (the Virgin Lands) was settled by a flood of Slavs, and the range became Russia’s latest granary. The boundaries of what remained to become our region can be easily drawn as ethnic and cultural ones. To the north, Russian-speaking population strongly dominates and large-scale grain farming prevails over livestock breeding. In the south, the boundary is drawn where the ancient tradition of oasis-based irrigated farming and the heritage of Islam become prevalent over nomadic patterns.

While this Rio Grande corridor was the least unsuccessful Hispanic venture into Mexistan, there were two other paths of colonization ino the region. Missionaries and settlers managed to create a foothold in the Santa Cruz Valley in southern Arizona. To the east, the Spanich had explored parts of Texas, but it was not until 1690 that the first church missions were attempted, and gradually handfuls of colonists and soldiers set up small outposts in central Texas. But the Texas strategy was a halfhearted one, and the newcomers had barely begun to set down serious roots in the region before bands of Anglo-Americans started to arrive in the 1820s to dispute ownership of the land. At that time, this was as remote and obscure a sector of the Greater European World as could be imagined—almost totally out of sight and out of mind, an area of the most marginal economic value and of concern only because of potential geopolitical conflicts.

The coming of the Americans heralded the beginning of the modern Mexistan. The movement of an expanding United States started with the incursion into the Mexistan periphery, the fertile, well-watered woodlands and prairies of central Texas by land-hungry folk from the American South who were quickly to evolve into Texans. At the same time, the central segment of “MexAmerica” became a player on the North American stage by virtue of its location. Merchants from the United States rushed to exploit the lucrative trade of transporting goods in pack trains via the so-called Santa Fe Trail, one of the principal land routes to California. The Gold Rush and the subsequent population and economic developments in California shortly after the U.S. annexation of “MexAmerica” made it imperative to have reliable overland connections with the East. Wagon trails and steam railroad systems were promptly created. Burgeoning commerce breathed considerable life into both older and newer towns situated at strategic nodes along the routes: El Paso, Albuquerque, Tucson, and Yuma.
Islamic Asia was winning the nomads' hearts at the same time that Russia was gaining their lands. Although in their numerous treaties with the Steppe rulers Russia consistently referred to the natives as Moslems, that was an overstatement. Kazakhs and Kirgiz embraced Islam only superficially, retaining nearly unchanged the old totemistic cults dating back to the times of Tamerlane (sometimes called “Timur”); Tamerlane centered his empire of the late 14th century in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, and conquered an area from Iran through India. In fact, the devout Moslems of the oases of Central Asia proper treated them as infidels. Following Russian conquest, Islam became the natural rallying point in seeking a resistant cultural image, reinforced by the fact that the nomads were united within the same Empire that incorporated the Islamic centers of Bukhara and Samarkand. Ironically, Russian conquest thus actually promoted the recent Islamization of the steppe.

Exactly one hundred years after Russian colonization began, the 1989 population estimate of this vast region found a sparse 12 million inhabitants, 48 percent of whom were indigenous Muslim peoples, while the Slavic population (mostly Russians and russified Ukrainians) accounted for 35 percent. Yet this ethnic duality developed only recently. Even immediately before the Second World War, the region’s population was only 4 million and was heavily dominated by natives. The attraction of mineral wealth brought about swift and sweeping change. Strategically located far from troublesome western boundaries, the mineral resources of the former nomadic range became especially important during the Second World War and Cold War years. As the native population remained in the countryside, Russians mostly carried out development. New industrial cities have become ethnic islands, and the gap between the modernity of urban areas and the traditionalism of countryside coincides with the divide between the European and native populations.

The end of the Mexican War in 1848 removed all doubt as to who would be the controlling population in Texas, with Anglos subduing the Hispanic population. Yet in a sense Mexico responded with a steadily growing migration of its residents into the United States. Today, the outer boundary of American Mexistan is that of the area where important Hispanic presence is clearly evident. This boundary may partially reflect the environmental tastes of Mexican migrants gravitating to places that look and feel familiar. With its several rugged, north-south-trending mountain ranges, various plateaus and basins, a multitude of dry stream beds and short supply of rivers, and an abundance of deserts, nearly all of Mexistan would look like home to any citizen from the upland sections of Mexico.

By 1900 the total number of persons inhabiting the core of Mexistan (i.e. without Texas) was only approximately 200,000. But by the 1990 count, Mexistan was home to some 12 million persons. The older string of cities along the Santa Fe trail was supplemented by a new string of twin cities that have grown like crystals along the string that is the international border: from San Diego/Tijuana to Brownsville/Matamoros. The presence of these paired cities indicates confluence of two social streams that cannot quite be kept apart, even by such a significant line on the map.
Soviet Union’s Testing Ground

With the advent of Soviet control, the region became a huge testing ground in the experiment of planting socialism on Asiatic soil. Stalin’s collectivization drive revived the tsarist attempt to settle the nomads and completely uprooted the traditional way of life. While the Kazakhs had no conception of private land ownership, livestock was always owned privately and was the single most important measure of one’s social status. Loath to give their animals to the collective, Kazakhs preferred to slaughter their herds. In the famine that followed, the population decreased by a quarter—a loss of life unprecedented even in Stalinist USSR, and the blow that sealed Kazakh submission to whatever system the Russians imported. It is sadly ironic that the shocks to the native way of life here were particularly heavy exactly because the region was never perceived or treated by Russians as a mere colony, but rather as a land of people who could be taught to accept mainstream Russian/Soviet civilization for their own benefit. As early as the 18th century, Catherine the Great sent wheat seeds and advisers to teach the Kazakhs to grow grain, and Kazakh youths began to receive Russian education. The far-sightedness of such policies became apparent later: in an about-face, many Kazakh nationalist intellectuals who proclaimed independence during Russia’s Civil War became early Kazakh Bolsheviks. Even one of the leaders of the 1916 anti-Russian rebellion became a pro-Bolshevik field commander in the Civil War and later the communist leader of Kazakhstan. Altogether, the republics of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan had the unofficial reputation of being the more quiescent parts of the former USSR.

The fanciful name for the region, “Mexistan,” provides a unifying idea of cultural blending, but certainly would not appear on any map of real places; therefore, the notion of a “Rossistan” (joining the Persian “stan” or “country” and the Russian influence) may be more appropriate here. While the Empire-builders saw this region

The Market’s Testing Ground

These dramatic changes reflect major post-war developments in Mexamerica, which became a sort of testing ground for the latest permutations of a hi-tech driven economy and sun-driven urbanization.

Entrepreneurs have set up a multitude of “Maquiladoras” or “maquilas” south of the international border that cuts through Mexistan. These inventions are factories owned by non-Mexicans and usually run by foreign-supplied machinery, but with a largely Mexican female work force. Products manufactured or assembled here are exported to the United States and elsewhere. The Maquiladora phenomenon has changed the character of the border and with it, of Mexistan. Almost half a million people are employed in these factories which have become the second highest source of revenue for the Mexican economy, surpassed only by the oil industry. Boomtowns are growing along the border, attracting migrants by the tens and hundreds of thousands, person in search of jobs and a better life. And the opportunities are there, at least for those with modest expectations.

The arterial heart of Mexistan, the international border, has attracted more than two thousand Maquiladoras now, all within a few miles of the boundary. Productivity in these factories is reputed to be close to that of U.S. workers, despite much lower wages (which, from the viewpoint of the Mexicans, are still higher than those available elsewhere in their country). The desirability of the Maquiladoras is debated in both the U.S. and Mexico, but one conclusion is clear: two “L” factors have come together in a formula that is changing the character of the region: Labor and the Line. A new twist on the economics of the region is sure to be The North American Free Trade Agreement, taking effect in 1994 and promising to eliminate all trade barriers between Canada, the United States, and Mexico within fifteen years. Thanks to NAFTA, the international boundary may become even less relevant over time.
as a hinge between Russia-in-Europe and Russia-in-Asia, and as an intermediary for the further expansion of the Euro-Asian Empire, the non-imperial Russian approach to Asia was represented by the so-called Eurasianists. The latter believed that Russia-Eurasia constituted an independent civilization, equally separate from both Europe and true Asia, but organically blending elements of both. For them “Rossistan” was a model for the future grandiose synthesis of Europe and Asia, facilitated by certain common qualities of Russians and natives that made mutual rapport possible. Russian culture contains such elements linking it to the East as the penchant for contemplation, the devotion to ritual, and the quality of udal (extravagant daring or audacity), a purely steppe value which Turkic people understood and appreciated. The Russians’ spiritual proximity to the steppe is matched by the relative adaptability of the nomads. The Kazakh open-mindedness and near-paganism (so contrasting with religious fundamentalism of Central Asia) seemed to make them more receptive to Russian influence. From the Tatars, the original mediators between East and West, the relay baton could be passed on to the Kazakhs.

The new political configuration emerging in place of the former USSR may finally fulfill the Eurasianist expectations. Symbolically, Alma Ata (now Almaty) was the site for the signing of the 1991 agreement that created the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) out of eleven former republics of the USSR. Along with Belarus, Kazakhstan as an independent state has become the most ardent advocate of closer integration among the republics of the CIS. This emerging axis of states favoring strong ties, Belarus-Russia-Kazakhstan, includes the traditional geographic go-betweens who have bridged West and East. And just as Belarus of the Crossroads region served as a model case of Soviet socialism in its westernized version, so Kazakhstan was the only case of its relatively successful application in Asia.

In New Mexico and Arizona, the nature of the region’s lure for the outsider tends to be quite different. If the international border has lent the region its focal identity, it is the sun that has helped spur the recent enormous growth of Phoenix and other Mexistan metropolises not clinging to the boundary. In terms of climate, natural scenery, and the human landscape, here is a region absolutely unlike anything in the eastern United States. This is the sunniest part of the country and the warmest as well, an area with precipitation well below the national average. The simple pleasures of sun and warmth have been enough to satisfy many newcomers and visitors, especially during the winter months. The availability of air-conditioning has been a critical factor in making the region livable.

Arizona can claim the championship in a novel North American activity: as the leading roosting place for snowbirds. From December through March by the tens of thousands these seasonal visitors arrive, either pulling their own trailers or motor homes or renting some at the scores of trailer parks. They are mostly middle-aged or elderly couples, coming from the Mid-West and Canada. For a large percentage of these persons, the seasonal stayover leads gradually to full-time retirement in Mexistan. The region has begun to rival Florida and California as a retirement mecca. Added to many other enticements is the presence of a large number of residential complexes specifically designed for the elderly, exclusive colonies with thousands of well-to-do residents all over the age of 50.
THEME 1: THE DUAL SOCIETY
City vs. Countryside

In a truly Eurasian synthesizing manner, the region developed a working model of “Asiatic Socialism.” Soviet institutions in the region were in fact a thin veneer hiding a largely traditional society, based on the system of extended family and kinship relationships. Thus high profits earned by the illegal grazing of unaccounted for flocks on socialist pastures were used to milk the benefits of the urban power system. The natives’ comfortable make-believe Socialism contrasted sharply with the exacting mainstream Soviet system in which Russians were enmeshed. The system of clan cooperation with accepted forms of official corruption clearly excluded the Russians, who perceived it all as a kind of collective Kazakh conspiracy. But from the Kazakh viewpoint, the superfluous adoption of communist rituals was a clever attempt to outwit the dominating Russians at their own game. In contrast to Central Asia, which attempted a defensive withdrawal into Islamic identity, the Kazakhs accepted Russian challenges. Characteristically, the Kazakhs display by far the highest level of bilingualism of all the Asian republics (63% of Kazakhs are fluent in Russian).

The main line of divide between Russians and Kazakhs is that between the city and countryside. Notwithstanding the recent influx of native population into the cities, they are still by majority Russian, and natives are seldom encountered in the industrial sector of the economy. Thus in 1989, Kazakhs accounted for 40 percent of population of Kazakhstan (in its political boundaries) but made up only 27 percent of its urban population and 20 percent of its industrial workforce. At the same time, over 80 percent of the rural population were natives. And yet, a vigorous policy of “nativization of the cadres” has brought important changes in the comparative employment profiles for the two communities. Key positions were normally held by Kazakhs “sandwiched” with Russian deputies to maintain the Russian-Kazakh balance of power, but by

THEME 1: THE DUAL SOCIETY
The Cities: Mosaic of Barrios

For all the permeability of the international boundary, American and Mexican societies stand in rather sharp contrast across the border. In addition to economic and political differences, there are sharp distinctions in the way houses, churches, and other buildings are designed and built, rural land parcels bounded, and towns laid out. And, despite a good deal of hybridizing and other forms of give-and-take, one is struck immediately by the differences in foodways, dress, music, sport, and all manner of artistic expression. Also standing in stark contrast are two dissimilar demographic regimes that in a real sense clash at the international line. Levels of fertility, age structures, forms of mobility, and education and occupational profiles are worlds apart whenever you compare the numbers for the American and Mexican states that share a common boundary.

On the American side of the international boundary, Mexistan is definitely a zone where a variety of cultures meet. A predominantly Protestant and English-speaking society coexists with one in which patterns of speech and the Roman Catholic faith have been implanted from Spain via Mexico. In this region, the predominant Anglo culture is Texan, with its famous reputation for enjoying bigness and wealth. But other cultures enter in as well, from German to Native American, creating a study in contrasting cultures.

All the metropolises of Mexistan have something essential in common: located in a region that failed to become a melting pot, they are conglomerates of barrios. In a narrow sense barrios are the ghettos of newly arrived Hispanics. But in cities made up of cells of mutual social exclusion, the term can be equally applied to the segregation of newly arrived African-American immigrants or to the self segregated communities of haughty old Spanish elites and affluent sunbelters and snowbirds. In a
now the balance has clearly shifted. Russians are still strongly overrepresented in the essentially blue-collar sectors of industry, transport, and construction—occupations shunned by the Kazakhs, who now dominate the white-collar sectors (with the exception of science). Although it may be premature to talk about a complete reversal of social roles, in such cities as Almaty, the main social divide is already that between the more proletarian Russians and the new white-collar Kazakh elite.

As educated Kazakhs and Russians compete for the same professional positions in the cities, the friction between the divided populations of the region grows. Increasing instances of pressure and discrimination force many Russians to leave. In the 1980s the migrational balance of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan demonstrated a complete reversal of earlier patterns as Russian exodus began. But most important of all, Russians have long been losing the battle of the cradles. The much higher birth rate among the Muslims is fast tipping the population scale back toward native predominance. While in the 1960s Slavs outnumbered native people in both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, by the year 1990 the situation was reversed.

The duality of the region has a geographic expression as well. In the past, the relative strength of Russian versus Islamic influence was markedly different in the north and south of the region. The southern tier rather resembled Central Asia. It was within easy reach of renowned centers of Islamic thought in Bukhara and Samarkand and embraced the fundamentalist and mystical Islam propagated from there, as well as irrigated farming techniques. But just as Quranic schools were opening in the south, more progressive schools were opened in the north where missionary activity was mostly carried out by the Tatars, who by that time had already experienced strong European impact.

Today, the North-South split persists with the symbolic juxtaposition between official and "shadow" capitals of the region's states. In Kyrgyzstan, the predominantly Russian fabric of city landscapes corresponds to the social hierarchy of Mexistan, where the top rungs of the occupational ladder are much more likely to be occupied by Anglos. The modern high-tech industries of Phoenix or Houston are overwhelmingly Anglo in terms of financing, management, and work force, with only minimal involvement on the part of the Hispanic and African-American communities. One rung down economically from Anglos are the "old Spanish," who may be poor but are politically active, the proud aristocracy of a land bound together by traditions of patronage. In contrast, recent arrivals from Mexico share with African-Americans the lowest rungs of the social ladder and thus the least desirable occupations.

The demographic seesaw of Mexicanans answers the influx of each new batch of sun-seeking Anglos with the importation of equal or greater number of Hispanics to serve the needs created by new Anglo arrivals. With its growing numbers, the Hispanic community has achieved considerable political power and recognition at levels from local to national. New Mexico, where the proportion of Spanish-speakers is more than 35 percent of the population, has even become the only officially bilingual state of the country. But does a coherent Hispanic identity exist?

Many internal divisions split Hispanics along lines of location, ideology, and even time of arrival. In fact, there is no general consensus even as to what name best applies to the entire community. Such terms as Tejanos, Californios, Chicanos, MexAmericans, and La Raza all have some popularity. According to the 1993 Latino National Political Survey, few of those surveyed actually call themselves Latinos or Hispanics. Eighty percent supported bilingual education, but as a means of learning English, not as a way of maintaining separate identity. More than two thirds of American-born Hispanics speak English better than Spanish. The more ardent ethnic champions use “Aztlan,” the name of a mythical pre-Columbian kingdom, as the name for Mexistan, but no irredentist movement exists, no effort to reattach their homeland to the Mexican
and industrial capital of Bishkek faces off with the city of Osh in the south, which became notorious for the first calls for an anti-Russian religious crusade. The industrial and Russian Krasnovodsk is warily watched by Ashgabat, the cultural center for indigenous Turkmen. In Kazakhstan, Almaty is the essentially administrative capital and the home to white-collar Kazakhs, nationalist intellectuals, and educated youths agitating for Islamic and national revival. By contrast, the economic capital, Karaganda, is a grim proletarian city exemplifying the worst aspects of hasty socialist industrialization. The city is largely a memorial to the World War II effort to provide the USSR with a new source of coal and steel, and its development was mostly carried out by political prisoners’ labor in prisons of the GULAG, an acronym standing for Chief Administration of Corrective Labor. (Solzhenitzyn’s GULAG Archipelago is based on his personal experience in the camps in that area). Yet both Almaty and Karaganda are predominantly Russian (over 75 percent), and the interspersed pattern of settlement will doom any plans to carve separate ethnic states. The future of the region depends on whether it will learn to live with this dual nature; otherwise, it may be forced to make an impossible choice between Russia and Asia, its two estranged parents.

Escaping Dualism

Today’s independent states of the region are again caught in a vise, this time a dilemma of choice between the imperial frying pan and the fire of Islamic fundamentalism. To remain faithful to Moscow in an attempt to forge a new Eurasian Empire or to side with pan-Islamists and pan-Turkists from Central Asia? Understandably, many see the answer in reviving an identity independent from both neighbors. After all, the distinctiveness of the indigenous Kazakh culture clearly makes the grasslands a world of its own, not merely a transition zone between Russia and Asia.

Republic. In fact, the barrier separating the Hispanic community from their “poor cousins” in Mexico may be higher than the one between them and Anglos.

Overcoming Dualism

From the Hispanic vantage point, the annexation of Mexistan by the United States has had the most tremendous consequences. The new arrangement placed the large, politically stranded Hispanic component of Mexistan’s population in a rather confusing psychological situation: they must adjust and submit as best they can to a basically alien set of laws, regulations, and cultural intrusions, annoyances that may be alleviated by the material benefits that flow from allegiance to the most prosperous state in North America. While in parts of Texas, the Anglo-Latino relationships may still look like a caste system, the duality of Mexamerica seems to be partially overcome in the vibrant mix and interpretation of cultures in the region. Norteno music, born of Hispanic and German origins, is heard in Texas, and rock songs sung in Spanish are infiltrating “Anglo” radio stations. Even such limited fusion (or rather sharing of traits) as has occurred has created something special in the way of a generalized regional culture. Thus the Anglos have borrowed much from the Native Americans, especially in terms of architectural and artistic motifs, while the latter group has born the impact of European civilization. In similar fashion, the Hispanics, including the fresh arrivals as well as those whose ancestors came centuries ago, have been obliged to absorb great gobs of the Anglos’ material culture as well as at least a smattering of English. Of more than passing interest is the appearance of a bastardized “Spanglish” usage (to the horror of linguistic purists), or the conversion of many Hispanics to the Protestant faith. But for evidence of the continuing vitality of the Hispanic culture you need only look at the growing swarm of colorful outdoor mural paintings, so much in the modern Mexican vein.
Some of the region’s intellectuals advocate the return to pre-Islamic “pure” Turkic values related to the old totemistic religion - a culture of nature harmoniously blended with the world of humans, a combination of materialism with spirituality. Quite possibly, the greatest asset of this Oi-Turk heritage is the innate liberalism of basic clan people, combining individualism with deep-rooted pragmatism. Representative of such an outlook is the local folklore figure of Akylman, a man of wisdom who derives his skill from respect for past traditions. The contrast with Russian cast of mind is very profound: where Russians restlessly pursue change, the natives value continuity. The difference may be seen in Kazakhstani’s conservatively pragmatic approach to reforms resembling the Chinese way - gradual economic liberalization without the complicating upheavals of a political one. In the final analysis, the Kazakhs’ pragmatic individualism may pave an easier road to a market economy and steer the former nomads away from the collectivist myths of both pan-Islamism and communism.

Another valuable part of the Kazakh heritage is their open-mindedness and tolerance. Past exposure to Christianity and Buddhism that spread along the Route might have influenced Kazakh’s receptiveness to new ideas and their gift for synthesis. This gift may be seen in the way in which earlier Kazakh intellectuals tried to build the Kazakh state on the combination of Islam and secular ideology borrowed from Kemalist Turkey, or their later idea of Islamic communism. Modern Turkey is Kazakhstan’s likeliest model in the attempt to reconcile Islamic roots with freemarket ideology through the cultivation of secular nationalism. The region also hopes to revert to its ancient role as the Silk Route, the great corridor between the West and the Far East, a dramatic realignment that would mean escape from the dilemma of choosing between Russia and Central Asia.

But what is particularly thought-provoking is the partial Hispanicization of a still economically and politically dominant Anglo community. Although most of its members may be quite reluctant to learn more than a few words of Spanish, many have taken warmly to Mexican themes in architecture, furniture, clothing and jewelry, and have adopted Spanish names for new residential developments and shopping centers. Desert landscaping with its strong regional roots has become fashionable among Anglos in Tucson, Phoenix, and elsewhere. Mexican cuisine may have recently diffused to restaurants and supermarkets all over the United States, but nowhere is it more firmly entrenched among non-Hispanics than in Mexistan, and one of the glories of Texas life is the invention of Tex-Mex food, a culinary complex that differs from, but richly honors, its obvious parents. From food styles to political power, all that embodies the various peoples of the region mingles, argues, and coexists.
THEME 2: WEALTH AND WATER

In attempting such an escape maneuver the region may rely on its mineral wealth. The pillar of the region’s economic strength is its energy resources: oil and natural gas along the Caspian coasts of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, coal in Karaganda, and uranium ore in the Mangyshlak Peninsula. For Kazakhstan, wealth in hydrocarbons combined with other mineral resources and low population pressure promises some chance for evolving into a new Asian industrial dragon. Even now Kazakhstan is far ahead of Central Asia in terms of industrial development, urbanization, and income levels. As to its economic prospects as an independent state, Kazakhstan is second only to Russia, and its economic clout enables the republic to be something of a second power-broker in post-Soviet space.

The down side of the success of resource-led development in the region is its new vulnerabilities, especially thirst for water. Karaganda only receives water via a 300 mile canal from the Irtysh river, and the oil and uranium area on the Mangyshlak Peninsula has to be supplied by a unique, nuclear-powered desalination plant. The Volga and Irtysh rivers are peripheral to the region, and the major sources of water are the narrow lifelines of the Amu-Darya and Syr-Darya rivers, which begin in the mountains of Central Asia and flow into the land-locked Aral Sea. Because the rivers are drawn so heavily for irrigation, the Aral Sea is evaporating from the face of the earth in a global environmental catastrophe. Between 1960 and the late 1980s, the Aral Sea fell about 40 feet and the surface area shrank by 40 percent. The sea has split into several basins, where the salinity of water is so high that marine life is impossible, thus eliminating the local fishing industry and leaving ports high and dry. The exposed sea bottom is a massive saltpan where winds pick up over 100 million tons of salt annually and deposit it over the already saline agricultural lands of Central Asia. The very survival of the local Kara-Kalpak people is in question, as severe shortages of drinking water and...
contamination with salts and pesticides in the Kara-Kalpak republic cause an infant mortality rate on par with the poorer countries of Africa.

Unfortunately, plans to save the Aral resemble other grandiose but poorly thought-out experiments that have colored the region's history. The so-called Siberia-Aral water diversion project was to transfer fresh water from Arctic-bound Siberian rivers to Central Asia, initially via a 1300-mile navigable canal from the Irtysh. The water of other Siberian rivers was to be tapped later and brought as far south as Turkmenistan. Dropped because of potential environmental consequences only in late 1980s, the project is still being pushed by the governments of the Central Asian republics.

These environmental challenges are set against an already vulnerable economy. The agricultural sector remains crucial, but its productivity is extremely low. The region is still more than half rural, and between 1959 and 1989 the proportion of urban population increased very slowly (in Kyrgyzstan only from 34 to 38 percent).

Furthermore, the dominance of primary industries means that economies are at the mercy of volatile international prices. Equally serious is the dependence on the presence of skilled Russian specialists (likely to be the first to emigrate). The impressive mineral potential of the state of Kazakhstan lies largely in the predominantly Russian area north of our region’s boundary. Any government of a more assertively ethnocentric Kazakh state would find control of those areas problematic.

Regardless of whether the region chooses to be a bridge or a buffer between increasingly divergent Russia and Central Asia, it cannot afford to dispose of its Russian affiliation altogether. Ardent Oz-Turk nationalists like to point out the relation of the Turkic word “toru” (mode of government) to the old word for “marriage.” The future may depend on whether its marriage with Russians will be a truly equal alliance or just a twist on the ancient nomadic custom of wife abduction.

to share the waters of the Colorado among seven U.S. states, but arguments over its use have increased with the population boom. The Colorado also belongs in part to Mexico, and a dam has been built at Morelos to drain off the last bit of water for Mexican farm fields. In addition to its disappearing act, the Colorado is also suffering from water quality problems as salts build up from both natural and human-aggravated sources, making it the most saline river in North America.

Mexistan shares this problem with neighboring southern California, and water transfer schemes from as far away as the Pacific Northwest have been suggested. Everyone argues about water in Mexistan. Cotton farmers are at odds with urban dwellers; environmental concerns compete with golf courses and lawns in areas that once held only cactus; states are rivals for new projects and discuss exchanging water rights in fear that once leased out, the water will not be available for return should future growth demand it; and Mexico and the United States face off for water along the booming border.

Thirst may be one of the few truly unifying characteristics along both sides of the Mexistan spine. Another overwhelming distinction that promises to keep Mexistan a unique corner of North America is that whatever may happen elsewhere, this is not a melting pot. Substantial though the seepage of cultural traits may be, there is little prospect that the divide among them will ever dissolve or become meaningless. The cultural traditions and social stamina are simply too stubborn and deep to tolerate extinction. Whatever the future may hold in store for the region, one characteristic will remain as a constant: the enduring importance of that long border that both separates and stitches together two such fundamentally unmixable worlds.