The Cultural Interpretations of Diplomacies of China, Russia and India as Eurasian BRICS Countries*

LI Xing  
Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China  
WANG Wan  
Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China

China, Russia and India, three Eurasian BRICS countries, are close neighbors, geographically located in the Pacific Ocean, the Arctic Ocean and the Indian Ocean respectively. The research questions why these three countries have some similar characteristics in their diplomacies and foreign policies, which differentiates them both from traditional developed countries and typical developing countries. Before the assessment of this question, analysis of culture and its characteristics, international strategies and diplomacies of these three BRICS countries is necessary and appropriate. Culture plays a special and crucial role in international politics or international relations. The unique cultures of Eurasian BRICS countries, China, Russia and India, have special influences on their diplomacies, which has created a new landscape in current world economy and politics.

Key words: culture; diplomacy; BRICS; China; Russia; India

As Eurasian BRICS countries, China, Russia and India have their unique histories and cultures. With the same or similar international statuses and interests in current world economics and politics, these three countries to some extent have same or similar characteristics in their foreign strategies and policies that are different from both the traditional developed countries and the typical developing countries. The aim of this essay is to examine the cultural style of diplomacies of three Eurasian BRICS countries–Russia, China and India–from a cultural perspective. We analyzed the respective characteristics of diplomacies of these three Eurasian BRICS countries. And then we concluded that the BRICS countries have engendered a particular kind of BRICS diplomacy, which exerts its own effect on the current complicated world.

Culture and its Characteristics

Culture is different from civilization. Culture refers to the combination of the whole material and spiritual wealth created by human beings, while civilization refers to the positive part of culture that appears when cultural achievements develop to a certain stage. There exist many kinds of culture in the world, which are

---

* This essay is the phased achievement of and funded by three following projects, State Key Laboratory of Hydroscience and Engineering Tsinghua University Projet (project number is sklhse-2014-A-03), Beijing 2013 Philosophy And Social Science Planning Project-The Fundamental Research Funds For The Central Universities, and Center For Russian Studies Of Beijing Normal University Project.

LI Xing, professor, School of Government, Beijing Normal University, Director of Euroasian Studies; research fields: Russia and Eurasia studies, the research of national strategy, international relations theory, diplomacy of contemporary China.

WANG Wan, Ph.D candidate, School of Government, Beijing Normal University; research fields: contemporary international relations and diplomacy of China.
created by different backgrounds. Among them, a particular culture may be different from another one, thus containing its own uniqueness, particularity or individuality. However, there may also exist some universal and common features across different cultures. Moreover, while different cultures may have different connotations, they are on equality and can also coexist harmoniously. Culture simultaneously denotes complexity as well as representativeness, such as the western culture representing western countries. Culture is independent, but sometimes it is dependent on other forces acting upon it. Culture itself is not classified into degrees of “high” or “low”. However, different cultures can be differentiated in terms of a powerful versus weak position. A powerful culture will dominate when in competition with a weak culture, because a culture that is within the remit of a “soft power” may have its impact restricted by a “hard power” such as the economy, military, etc. In the current era of globalization, western culture plays a powerful and dominant part. Conversely, while the status and influence of oriental culture is increasing, it is still in a relatively weak position.

Political culture refers to religion, social system, ideology, values, historical tradition, national character, and other aspects that are related to international politics. Political culture plays a crucial role in modern international relations. The political culture of a country is a part of its culture and, therefore, possesses the characteristics of that culture. These characteristics then shape the face and feature of the diplomacy enacted by that particular country. It has been argued that countries that possess the same or similar cultural identities show some common features diplomatically.

Diplomacies of Eurasian BRICS Countries

China, Russia and India, three Eurasian BRICS countries, are close neighbors, geographically located in the Pacific Ocean, the Arctic Ocean and the Indian Ocean respectively. All these three countries have long histories, rich cultural backgrounds, and large populations. Russia is the largest country with the most abundant energy resources. China and India both have the world’s biggest population. In terms of modern international political systems, these three countries present something of an ambiguity. For example, even though they are regarded as “Third World” countries by the “First World”, and “First World” countries by “Third World”, they are seen as economically much more developed than other countries in that category (such as Vietnam, Malaysia). They each face the same or similar strategic missions, interest demands and edge zones. Within the international economic and political ecosystems, they are all emerging countries and leaders among developing countries. However, their political voice, pricing power of international commodities, and international cultural influence are limited relative to western developed countries.

The diplomatic strategy that Russia has adopted is one of “leaning towards the east while longing for the west”. China’s diplomacy is such that it considers relationships with all vital forces including bordering neighbors, major powers and developing countries—an “all-round” style. China also aims to be friendly to other countries, adopting a “no-enemy” style of diplomacy. India has chosen a diplomatic style that aims to balance positive relationships with major external powers such as China or the USA, in order to obtain the maximum benefits from this. Currently, the common diplomatic feature of these three countries combined is that they pay attention to the east; that is to say, the emphasis of their diplomatic tactics is on Eastern Asia, a “look east” approach.

China, Russia and India are all multi-ethnic and multi-religious countries. The dominant religion in Russia is Eastern Orthodoxy; in China it is Buddhism, that originated in ancient India and then flourished in China; and on the Indian Subcontinent it is Hinduism. These three religions all respect the role of culture, spirit,
ideology and history, and relatively denigrate the power of material goods and money. Although the dominant religion in each of these three countries differs, Islam and Buddhism exist to some extent in all. Furthermore, all three countries have experienced religious extremism, ethnic separatism and international terrorism.

The cultures of these three countries are all combinations of the eastern and western culture, which interact, communicate with, complement and influence each other. In recognition of the three features of culture, equality, diversity and inclusiveness, all three countries have adopted the diplomatic strategy of advocating multipolarization, democratization, multilateralism, anti-hegemonism and anti-unilateralism in international relations. They all advocate an independent diplomatic approach and have devoted themselves to each becoming one of the independent “poles” of today’s multipolar world in which there exist multiple dominant countries or blocks of countries (such as China, the USA, Russia and the EU). In addition, they all object to those behaviors of interfering in the domestic affairs of other countries with force.

Due to the three features of cultural development, uniqueness, particularity and complexity, these three countries each advocate a different path towards development. International relations are not simply black or white. Different countries can cooperate, compromise with and adjust to each other. They can achieve mutual benefit and a win-win result, co-existing together in the world. Different countries can also seek harmony in diversity, and smooth communication without estrangement. Moreover, countries can also seek dialogues without confrontations, not imposing their will on others with force.

Due to the two features of culture, representativeness and equality, the three BRICS countries have excavated their profound cultural, national and historical resources, and criticized so-called “west-centrism”, or “the superiority of the west”. They have become countries representative of oriental culture, which is different from western culture such as Anglo-Saxon, Christian civilization.

Given the less dominant status of oriental culture in relation to western culture, it is arguably easy for the three BRICS countries examined in this paper to share the same of similar benefits, and reach a consensus. In addition, they are likely to have the same or similar views on international or topical regional issues. For example, the comprehensive strategic partnership between Russia and China is similar to a standard alliance that has been verified by treaty. The relationship between Russia and India has also, traditionally, been a friendly one. Although there exist problems between China and India, such as the boundary issue, they have already formed strategic cooperative relations.

Another factor to consider is the BRICS countries’ relative immunity to the global economic crisis that was triggered in 2008. Since then, Europe and America have suffered continued consequences from this crisis. In contrast, BRICS countries such as China, Russia and India, have maintained a relatively good momentum in terms of economic development.

Conclusion

China is the biggest developing authoritarian country. Russia is the biggest transitional country. India is the biggest developing democratic country. The acronym “BRICS” is not an accidental feature of adding together the first letters of each of the five countries. The position of BRICS should not be “bricks” or “talk pavilion”, but “the club of second world countries” (if G7 is the club of industrial countries, G77 is the club of developing countries). The BRICS countries do not belong either to the “First World” consisting of developed countries, or typical “Third World” countries. The BRICS countries undertake common but differentiated responsibilities to the whole world. In particular, the Eurasian BRICS countries have a special economy,
politics and culture within BRICS as a whole. Thus, the BRICS countries have engendered a particular kind of BRICS diplomacy, which exerts its own effect on the current complicated world, and has created a new landscape in current world economics and politics.

References