

O. Roqueplo²

BRICS+ AND HISTORY OF THE WORLD ORDER: CULTUROLOGICAL THINKING OF “TSARS OF THE WORLD”

The world will change its basis, we who were
nothing will become everything.

The International (French version)

The International lyrics were of special importance for anti-colonial struggle. This struggle with majority of the world nations involved was carried out both against colonial seizures and military occupation and against the ideology that justified them, as well as against destructive cultural invasion. These anthem lyrics meant that colonized peoples identified themselves with the proletariat and were struggling for their place in the world. This was the third world with the Bandung conference having become the embodiment thereof.

2022 and flat refusal of Asian, African and Latin American countries from sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation, despite the demands and threats of the Euro-American world and *Homo euramericanus*, is likely to signify the end of the colonial era that began in the eighteenth century. Anti-colonial struggle is passing over to another stage, the stage of BRICS+: “We were everything, let’s become everything again.” Indeed, the history and memory of BRICS+ great peoples are that they remember that they were the leading world states before the colonial era. Understanding of BRICS+ position today first of all means studying of great historical cycles and, in particular, the history of the *world order*, a notion that is poorly understood

and poorly defined today. The world order will be considered here from the cultural point of view, that is not as a simple Anglo-Saxon legal and political concept, but as a very profound cultural, symbolic and even spiritual issue. Our hypothesis is that the group BRICS+ is an attempt to unite civilizing countries so as to restore the world order after 250 years of colonial chaos that have destroyed the essential cultural ties between states and peoples.

To begin this study, we offer first of all to characterize and determine the location of the historical era we have just come out of, and of that we will enter in 2022 (I). After that we will analyze traditional cultural visions of the world originating from the main BRICS+ countries and will evaluate their difference from the North Atlantic colonizing world, in order to demonstrate that only BRICS+ countries have a cultural potential to create real world order (II). Finally, we will consider the meaning of BRICS+ actions in relation to the cultural notion of the world order (III).

This is definitely a vast issue, and this is only the beginning of thinking and preliminary areas of research. The idea of D. S. Likhachov will serve as a guide for us in our attempt to comprehend fundamental nature of evident and, primarily, not evident cultural preconceptions that predetermine the behavior of nations and states with respect to each other.

The World We Knew Was Born As a Result of the Seven Years’ War, and We Face the New Seventeenth Century

The monopolar world is not exclusively the result of the end of the USSR. We are citing a great text of Sun Yatsen, known as the speech in Kobe on Pan Asian world, to understand

² Professor of Sorbonne University (France), Dr. Sc. (History), Dr. Sc. (Political Sciences). Author of 30 publications on geopolitics, history, international relations and color revolutions, including: “The Aftertaste of Color Revolutions” (co-authored, Great Prize “Triumph” of the National Competition “Art of Book” (Belarus), 2024), “Kaliningrad: A Prussian Epicenter of Tension in the Baltic Region?”, “Russia and its Far Western Mirror: Russia’s Geopolitical Identity through the Prism of the Kaliningrad Region” and others. Winner of several awards from the Herder-Institut in Marburg (Germany).

that the world we knew before 2022 today did not appear in 1991. In his speech in Kobe it is shown almost the same as in 1924. The Chinese president noted that the world is divided into two parts, between that what he called the World of Might and the World of Right. The World of Might is a colonizing world consisting of the West European countries headed by Great Britain and the USA that pursue the same policy and are raised in the same world. In opposition to them is the World of Right, which, according to the president, includes Asian countries that once formed part of Mongol Empire: China, Iran, Turkey, Afghanistan and the USSR, which, as Sun noted, broke from the colonizing Western Europe and came back into the fold of Asia in 1917. Sun adds Japan (by mistake) and Egypt (fairly) to the World of Right. Sun describes the world that was under threat of colonial conquests, both direct and indirect, and that was reshaped by them. That is why he refers to the World of Right, that is to the historical Chinese and Mongolian law, which was another way to organize the known world in accordance with traditional and long-term concepts. Hold that thought. In other words, the speech in Kobe continues to be relevant 100 years after it was written. Ethiopian war of 1935–36 differs little from wars in Iraq, Syria or Libya in the twenty first century.

Since the time of their total victory in the Seven Years' War in 1763, the British have laid down the groundwork for peace in India, which, unlike the Pyrenean empires, extended indirectly to the entire Planet. The British colonialism sometimes supported by other states has imposed its legal, economic and, first of all, cultural order wherever it came. A British man has never become acclimatized as Pyrenean people, and has never mixed, on the contrary, he imposed his own laws, rules and habits. He established what Likhachov called a "wall of disunity", the impenetrable cultural border that is a close companion of the very strong aggression of destruction.¹

Colonialism destroyed all traditional political and cultural links that structured the rest of the world, in particular, very strong links that united great civilizational empires (Ottoman Empire, Iran, India, China) with peripheral states having common cultural origin (for example, the links between Ottoman pole and Sahara people; links between Chinese pole and Indo-China). These were not mere links of political vassalage, but a whole number of intellectual, religious and symbolic ties that made it possible for the nations to be well-informed about the world through the counting pole which provided the existential cultural and psychological stability for them.

The West European rationalism and positivism imposed by the injury of colonial seizures have ruined cultural guides of Asian and African peoples, and symbolic measurement of the world was washed out. As a matter of fact, for all these peoples the world appeared to be in a state of complete cultural chaos. Here is the world that Sun described to us in 1924. After 1945 this world basically remained unchanged, because the English colonialism was just transferred to the North American imperialism, that in fact was directly derived from it. Of course, USSR and then PRC tried to offer an alternative to such colonizing world. One often speak about bipolarity within the period from 1945 to 1990. USSR was a balancing state, a counterbal-

ance to the colonizing unipolar world rather than the second equal right pole, as it has always lacked commercial power which would support global leadership economically. From 1763 to 2022, the world remained structured as the Anglo-Saxon colonizing world, if not by form, then at least in substance and in the mental sphere. Official decolonization only meant that the former colonies were again integrated into the same colonizing structures with a slightly better status. It does not mean that the world structure suffered any drastic change.

This era ended in 2022. As in 1700, Russia has to make a choice, because it is between several worlds. The Western European cycle opened by Peter the Great in 1700 has just terminated, and a new cycle opens in 2022. This time Russia is likely to turn towards China, an idea Sun called to in 1924. However, resemblance between the world of 1700 and the world of 2024 is obvious all around the world. Great powers of the seventeenth century are making an impressive return to the global stage: Turkey, Iran, China, India and heirs of the luzo Spanish empire, that is Brazil, Argentina and Mexico.

Multipolarity in Cultural Traditions of Former Empires: the Image of the "Tsars of the World"

In the 21st century, the speculations on multipolarity should be held on the other level and by models other than the UNO. At a deeper level it is necessary for us to bear in mind the sustainable models which, therefore, are rooted in the history and culture of peoples. Since ancient times quite a lot of civilizations have already thought in terms of the well-balanced multipolar worlds. Here are a few examples that will give us food for thought.

One of the most ancient models known to us is a Persian model. According to the ancient tradition, *in the palace of the Sasanian shah there was a separate room with four thrones: his own and one throne for each of three other sovereigns of the known world – the Roman emperor, the Chinese emperor and the Khazar (or Turkic) Khagan.*² It follows from these data that the Sasanian cultural and geopolitical thought was of the opinion that the world consists of four equal rights each of which is reigned by one tsar who is equal to the Persian one. Such vision stands in sharp contrast to ethnocentricity we got accustomed to in Western Europe. The Sasanian shahinshah not only recognized his tsars as theoretically equal to him and not only allocated places to them, but these tsars also represented the realms that were totally strange to the Iran civilization and were even enemies (especially the Romans). This means that the Persians, using the title of the Tsar of tsars, were able to unite other empires, other civilizations, other worlds, and imagine collegiality or even a kind of brotherhood among these emperors in ideal vision, as such emperors were to be able to sit together in kind mutual understanding. This is a bright example of conventional thinking, where real world meas-

¹ Лихачев Д. С. Два типа границ между культурами // Лихачев Д. С. Очерки по философии художественного творчества. СПб. : Русско-Балтийский информ. центр «БЛИЦ», 1996. С. 97–102.

² Grenet F. Religions du monde iranien ancien // Annuaire EPHE. Section des sciences religieuses. 2003. № 110 (2001–2002). P. 207–211 ; *Idem*. À propos de la restauration de la 'Peinture des Ambassadeurs' à Samarkand (c. 600). Retour sur une oeuvre majeure de la peinture sogdienne // Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres, séance du 21 décembre 2018, à paraître 2020. P. 1847–1869 ; *Idem*. A Historical Figure at the Origin of Gesar of Phrom Frum Kësar, King of Kābul (737–745) // The Many Faces of King Gesar. Tibetan and Central Asian Studies in Homage to R. Stein / ed. by M. Kapstein, C. Ramble. Brill, 2022. P. 39–53.

urement and real multipolarity among the four idealized emperors are achieved.

Persian vision is not alone in that. It had a natural impact on the Arabian vision of the world. It is known that the Arabs traditionally treated peoples of the North (for example, the Turks) and the South (for example, the Indians) with contempt in the name of the climate theory. However, for instance, on the "Six Tsars" wall painting in Quseir Amra the Umayyad Crown prince is surrounded by basileus, Sasanian shah, Abyssinian Negus and the Spanish king Roderic. The other two tsars are obviously the maharaja Dahir and the Turkic Khagan. This is a family vision of the world, as the shah, basileus and Khagan are the ancestors the Crown prince lays claims to, and other sovereigns are shown as equal to them.¹ Ibn Haukal, the geographer, also agreed that the world consists of four empires: Iran (= Islamic world), Rome, India and China.² Thus, the Arabs of the classical era also thought of the world in a multipolar way, that is on a totality of the worlds, that are very different in terms of culture but equal by symbolic dignity.

Byzantine vision did not differ much and was equally multipolar in its substance. Byzantine tsars considered themselves the center of the world, however they always recognized the Persians and then the Arabs as equal to them. Since 900, they recognized as equal to them the German Roman Empire. They also recognized dignity of the Khazar khan and sent him the most valuable presents as to the other emperor, and took his princesses as wives.³ The reason is simple: Byzantium was surrounded by other empires representing various civilizations but having the equivalent level of might and culture.

Mongolian vision of Genghis Khanids was completely independent and different from Byzantine, Iran and Arab ones. Mongol Empire made the nearest approach to becoming a real world or at least All-Eurasian empire. This empire thought of its great spaces not as of the monolithic structure but as a totality of various empires connected with genealogical links of brotherhood: Yuan Empire (Mongolia and China), Chagatai Empire (Central Asia), Ilkhan Empire (Iran), the Golden Horde Empire. This is a universal empire that is, therefore, a symbolic image of the whole world. This empire recognizes a well-organized internal pluralism. It goes without saying that there is a hierarchy among these structures: Yuan ranks above all, Iran depends on them directly, and Chagatai is in indirect dependence. However, at the other end of the Steppe the Golden Horde is taken as an independent, yet fraternal and equal state, and we also see a multipolar model here.⁴ Of course, the dynastic and ethnic connection is of great importance here. But we shall see now that this concept has been preserved even without such links, in the symbolic and diplomatic vision of the successor states.

Let's take China as an example. We know that in 1385, under the rule of the Min dynasty, Mongolian ideas were transferred to the Chinese.⁵ To date, it is important for us

that this concept gave birth to an idea in mind of the Chinese president Sun that, in spite of tremendous cultural differences, almost all great nations of Asia are a part of single historical world, and that they are simultaneously recognized by China as independent from it. This is a multipolar vision which is broad enough to include even Russia into the Chinese vision.

It appears from literature and works of Dmitry Sergeyevich Likhachov, that Ancient Rus was also aware of four tsars of the world representing different civilizations: the orthodox Grand Prince of Rus (whether the grand prince of Kiev or the grand prince of Vladimir and Moscow), the pagan and catholic Grand Duke of Lithuania, the orthodox tsar of Greece, the Islamic tsar of the Horde. Even in the Tale of Bygone Years, a fairy tale on the choice of religion by the Grand Prince Vladimir, we see spiritual ambassadors from four tsars offering religions: Islam from the Bulgarian khan, Judaism from the Khazar Khagan, Catholicism from the German emperor and the Pope, the Orthodox faith from basileus. Likhachov wrote: "Russia served as a huge bridge between nations. First of all, as a cultural bridge."⁶ It is worth adding that the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (with Belarus being its today's successor) had similar concepts before its constitutional union with Poland in 1569 and even much later.

Finally, we will consider India. The Sasanian concept of the world's four tsars has supposedly come from India⁷ or, it is likely to be the Indo-European one. Anyway, the four tsars of the world reflect four gods ruling the worlds, that is four Lokapalas.⁸ Since the 12th century, the Northern India has been a powerful Islamic empire with dominating Turk and Afghans from Eastern Iran and Central Asia. Therefore, an absolutely multipolar vision of the world has been formed in India, as this Islamic empire could not ignore any other large Moslem empires, namely the Persian Empire, the Ottoman Empire and the Central Asian Empire from which Indian dynasties originated. It didn't mean, of course, that India lost its links with the civilizations of which it was a matrix: Indo-China, Insulinia and even China itself that was Buddhist in part. India could neither consider them barbarians nor ignore them. The Indian world was also quite ready to perceive the world in its entire complexity. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Indian nationalists viewed the great Afro-Asian states – the Ottoman Empire, Egypt, China and Japan – as equal to India, that is actually the members of the world tsars list.⁹

This is where the history paradox can be found: the globalized diplomatic and cultural system was built just by the states that didn't think in a multipolar way. Western Europeans are unipolar in terms of culture. In practice, these are the nations of the Far Western Eurasia, that is why they have no access to the center of the continent. Actually, the colonizing world is the North Sea nations: Franks and Saxons who are too far from the rest of the world to be threatened by it. The rest of the world is understood by us as other nearest civilizations: the Eurasian steppe, the Greek

¹ Grabar O. The painting of the six kings at Qusayr Amra // *Ars Orientalis*. 1954. № 1. P. 185–187; Grenet F. Religions du monde iranien ancien.

² Martinez-Gros G. La division du monde selon Idrisi // *Le partage du monde : Échanges et colonisation dans la Méditerranée médiévale* / eds. : M. Balard, A. Ducellier. P. : Éditions de la Sorbonne, 1988. P. 315–334.

³ Grousset R. L'Empire des Steppes. Payot, 1965. P. 235.

⁴ Ibid. P. 341, note 3, 471, 478–479.

⁵ Grousset R. L'Empire des Steppes. P. 533.

⁶ Лихачев Д. С. Избранные труды по русской и мировой культуре. СПб. : СПбГУП. 2022. С. 19.

⁷ Grenet F. Religions du monde iranien ancien.

⁸ Vyasa K.-D. Mahabharata / transl. by K. M. Ganguli. Book 2 : Sabha Parva. Lokapala Sabhakhayana Parva. Section VII–XIII. 1884–1894.

⁹ Keenleyside T. Nationalist Indian attitudes towards Asia: a troublesome legacy for post-Independence Indian foreign policy // *Pacific Affairs*. Summer 1982. Vol. 55, № 2. P. 210–230.

empire or the empire of the crescent, Moslem Africa. Of course, for example, Spain, Portugal and Sicily used to be Moslem countries and, therefore, represented what Likhachov called “a strip of communication”.¹ The Byzantians, Osmans and Mongols reached Hungary and Croatia. All countries that were on such a frontline had or some time will be able to restore non-colonizing cosmology. Behind the frontline, the countries being in direct contact with such external civilizations should have treated them with respect or even integrate them into their vision of the world: Venice, Napoli, Austrian monarchy, Poland and Grand Duchy of Lithuania (ancestor of Belarus) – they all fall within this category and were often also the “strips of communication”. But the most far located are the North Sea nations from France to Sweden which ignore Eurasia.

It is in this North Sea world which is also the world of Liberalism, Protestantism having emerged based on the empires of Charles the Great and Canute the Great, that colonialism originated and is still alive. It is the North-West that has dominated in the European thinking for the last 250 years and for the last twenty centuries it has wrongly pretended to the role of “Europe” by excluding, usurping or diminishing the far more critical role the Greek and Latin matrixes, that were considered “peripheral” and “degrading”. Yet, this Saxon and Frankish core forms now the basis of the European Union and gave birth to the USA under the French protection. Moreover, the North Sea peoples are in a situation that is very similar to that of the Japanese, who are also unipolar world supporters: historically, the Japanese knew only the Chinese world they were a part of. Inability of the North Sea peoples to imagine the notion of the true world order prevents them from understanding BRICS countries as well, which are still interpreted through merely colonizing and completely obsolete geopolitical concepts of Spykman and Mackinder (*Heartland, Rimland*) due to lack of cultural measurement and sufficient historical retrospective.²

In a word, the issue on unipolarity and multipolarity is first of all the issue of cultural geography. Nations with the traditional multipolar vision are the nations of Central Eurasia who keep in touch with each other in such a way. These are the nations that know and respect other civilizations. Nations with unipolar vision are the nations located on the outskirts of Eurasia who have no access to several other civilizations, that is why they ignore or negate them, and then, when facing such nations, they try to destroy them, starting from 1763. Thus, multipolarity and unipolarity are not only political issues. This is the issue of cultural attitude to reality of different civilizations.

BRICS as the Union of Civilizing Forces

The Indian-Brazil initiative to reform the UN Security Council has become the decisive moment in occurrence of multipolarity. India and Brazil have been demanding to have a permanent representative in the UN Security Council since 1993. It is essential here that these two huge states have claimed for the permanent chairs not merely for the sake of own significance like other candidates, but as the representatives of their relevant “continents”, that is Latin America and Asia, and that they confirmed this meas-

urement by requiring that a representative state from Africa and a state from the Arabian and Moslem world join them in the UN Security Council with similar places. It is a radical deviation from the “extended European concert” represented by a group of five permanent members who only meet for the sake of their joint victory over the Axis in 1945 and, therefore, in the name of the net force legitimacy. Brazil and India actually offer nothing else than the world cosmization with creation of the new list of “tsars of the world” who meet because each of them represents one “world”, one civilization, that is something different from what they are and the power of raw materials (economic, demographic, military, diplomatic, etc.). This is a revolution. It is this initiative that is a driving power of BRICS union, with the support of the ancient “Eastern antipole” (RF and PRC).

It is worth noting that BRICS is in no way an anti-European union, for both RF and Brazil are demographic centers of attraction of the Orthodox-Slavonic and Catholic-Latin civilizations. They are the very European peoples who were despised by Napoleon (his citation: “The Spanish have never been Europeans, and Russians will never become Europeans”), and this reveals deep cultural logics of BRICS. Today, BRICS+ comprises Iran, Egypt, Arabia (and UAE) as Moslem world representatives.

Besides, cultural dimension of BRICS and BRICS+ is evident. The majority of members are civilizational matrixes, basic cultural world centers since ancient times. From the viewpoint of historical geopolitics, BRICS+ is almost the union of Mongol Empire (Russia, China, Iran) and Portuguese Empire (the Portugal king’s title: *the master of conquest, navigation and trade of Ethiopia, Arabia, Persia and India*, and Brazil). No one in the human history has ever seen such a great union of civilizations. This is logical: the whole world, except for the North Sea sailors, is anti-colonial. It is necessary to develop anticolonialism as the general cultural movement.

On the one hand, it is essential to reorganize the links between members of the common civilization, on the other hand, one should make bridges between civilizations. Such links are primarily cultural and human, symbolic ones. PRC was not mistaken when, from the very start of the “New Silk Road” project, it remembered that the Pakistan-China Axis is a historical axis of Buddhism. It is a deadly mistake not to respect the symbolic dimension. The extremists’ attempts to rebuild the Caliphate are related to the fact that other groups stay out of this greatest symbol that is important for a billion of people. BRICS+ should occupy this symbolic and human dimension and become a union of the world cultural pillars. Historically, taming and making the power civilized took the form of symbolic pomposity, legally spiritual (“Right” of Sun Yatsen) and cultural theories that not for 50 years but for several centuries provided for consistency of the (regional) worlds with a civilizational matrix and not just a great power being in the center of each of them.

1,400 years later, BRICS+ countries have not gone so far from six tsars of the world depicted on the walls of Quseir Amra. India, Iran and Ethiopia are still here, and Brazil has grown from the kingdom of Roderic through Portugal. Russia is a successor of Byzantium, China is an heir of Turkic Khaganate, Arabia is a successor of the Umayyads. It seems as if BRICS+ group is rediscovering more or less deliberately the very distant history that the North Sea sailors and Japan have never known.

¹ Лихачев Д. С. Два типа границ между культурами.

² Meena K. BRICS: an explanation in critical geography. URL: <https://www.scielo.br/j/cint/a/zQFgTjPCLDjbTgR3p5PzQ5R/> (accessed: 18.04.2024).