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SYNERGY OF CULTURES IN THE CONTEXT OF BRICS

**Conceptual framework:
conceptualizing synergy of cultures**

Constructive interaction between cultures, especially since the beginning of the third millennium, has received serious attention in international community. Significant efforts have been made for promoting mutual understanding between cultures prior to our idea of “synergy of cultures”. The first attempt was the approval of the proposal of the then President of Islamic Republic of Iran Mr. Sayed Mohammad Khatami by the United Nations to name 2001 as the year of dialogue among civilizations. In the idea of dialogue among civilizations, the priority was given to facilitating the space of mutual understanding and openness among cultures. Although this idea led to mutual recognition between civilizations and cultures, it did not go beyond the limits of interaction and dialogue and did not propose an operational approach to bring views closer together. After that, in 2005, on the initiative of Spain and Turkey, the idea of “alliance of civilizations” have been raised for international action against extremism through the realization of international, intercultural and interreligious dialogue and cooperation. This initiative, instead of trying to harmonize views while accepting the diversity and plurality of cultures, actually was trying to promote the homogenization of cultures, which actually neglects today’s diverse world with many cultures and civilizations. Among the criticisms that have been made towards this concept, we can refer to the fact that the process of unification of some civilizations may have inclusive-exclusive approach. In other words, this concept may mistakenly evoke the union of some cultures against other cultures. The third idea was “the rapprochement of cultures”, which was proposed by UNESCO in 2010 to promote the recognition and mutual understanding of nations by identifying the diversity of the world’s cultures. This idea led to the approval of the proposal of the Republic of Kazakhstan for declaring the years from 2013 to 2022 as “Decade of rapprochement of Cultures”, proposal which was approved by General Conference of UNESCO. It was emphasizing on the cooperation of na-

tions to achieve sustainable peace, but it does not propose practical mechanisms for the rapprochement of cultures and the constructive participation of cultures for peaceful coexistence of the nations in the plural human world. In addition, the idea of the rapprochement of cultures had a retro-oriented and not a future-oriented approach for human society. The fact is that these different concepts tried to convey the mother concepts of “peaceful coexistence of cultures”, “mutual understanding of cultures”, “Complementary of cultures”, “openness of cultures” as well as “constructive and effective interaction among cultures”, based on mutual respect in the international cultural arena.

The idea of “synergy of cultures” has the relative advantages of similar concepts which can once again put culture as the basis of world politics and at the top of the priorities of the world society. It realizes a common understanding of universal ideas while accepting diversity of cultures and respecting specific cultural identities. Synergy of cultures means collaborative or hybrid action that can occur when different cultures with distinct perspectives work together for the realization of a macro-cultural approach, which is more important than its constituent parts so that all cultures take steps to improve the efficiency of synthesized global culture. It is in this situation that two plus two gives a result greater than four. The synergistic situation creates a kind of cooperative atmosphere that is not enough to share and exchange the advantages of cultures. In this conjuncture, this global culture would consider diverse innovative solutions to problems that have rarely been understood or accomplished by a specific culture.

The synergy of cultures means that the collaboration of different cultures can construct a new added value and reproduce a new cultural synthesis which is distinct from the constituent cultures. Taking benefit and advantage from other cultures’ experiences through cultural contact would pave the way for collective awareness and improve cultural potentiality and creativity of humanity. Not only does it include the relative advantage of interacting cultures, but it also creates new added value. This provides a strong factor for the establishment of sustainable peace in today’s world.

In an age where time and space are intertwined and the world is constantly changing, countries must be culturally aware and capable of intercultural communication because the ability of intercultural communication as one of the resources of soft power improves the efficiency of cultures and brings a new kind of energy to global culture. Today we live in a transitional international system, whose landscape is fluid. In this context, the idea of synergy of cultures by emphasizing on the aspects of similarity and paying attention to common cultural concerns while respecting

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cultural diversity, requires a comprehensive and win-win approach to the challenges and opportunities ahead in order to find creative solutions. In this context, cultures may have understood and learned how to take advantage of diversity, how to maximize their strengths, how to use positive and proactive communication skills, how to develop and enrich human activities and how to emphasize on cooperation to achieve common interests and benefits. Relying on common values and goals can help us find common solutions, so that through this intercultural approach, we can take an important step towards changing the existing situation by emphasizing on common elements of each other's cultures in the process of dialogue.

The synergy of cultures can be found in the middle of the spectrum, the two sides of which are centralization and decentralization of world culture. Centralization may lead to the imposition of homogenizing rules and procedures in the name of universality of global norms that challenge local cultures. Decentralization may lead to protectionism, cultural identification, as well as preservation of traditional cultural or specific identities. The independence of action at the local level and excessive reliance on traditional values and norms may lead to deterioration of universal human values. In this context, instead of relying on cultural differences, it is appropriate to rely on cultural diversity, in the sense that emphasis on differences leads to some kind of confusion, while emphasis on diversity creates an order based on the compatibility between commonalities and diversities in a coherent perspective. This approach requires the synergy and complementarity of diverse cultures despite maintaining the distinctions of cultures. In other words, the synergy of cultures in the current international system, can be positioned in the middle of two contradictory currents of cultural unilateralism and cultural pluralism. Cultural unilateralism is a kind of cultural homogenization with an emphasis on cultural assimilation in the name of emphasizing on universal commonalities and universal human values, emphasizing on the alignment of cultures based on universal criteria, avoiding attention to identity distinctions. On the other hand, cultural pluralism emphasizes on cultural tolerance, relativism and "multiculturalism" in general. In this way, the two mentioned approaches, one looks at culture as a factor of homogeneity and the other as a factor of differentiation. Therefore, the idea of synergy of cultures constitutes a moderate approach between the two extremes of homogenous approach of "cultural assimilation" and heterogeneous approach of "multiculturalism" in the international community.

The idea of "synergy of cultures" has the ability to present culture as the axis of sustainable development in such a way that culture is expressed through its various components, including tangible and intangible cultural heritage, creative industries, and various forms of cultural expression such as arts, literature, traditions and behaviors. This approach is important in the sense that it considers culture as "a collection of assets, values and cultural capitals" and honors diverse cultures based on mutual respect.

The idea of the synergy of cultures is considered to be a step toward progress and sustainable global development. In the current competitive world, the idea of synergy of cultures can, while promoting the positive and constructive competitiveness of cultures, encourage cooperation and interaction among them to create a new synthetic

culture and to respond to common human needs. Although different cultures have different cultural backgrounds, beliefs and lifestyles, they want to achieve a kind of compatibility, complementarity and cooperation within the pluralistic world, as an opportunity to synergize with each other for a prosperous future. In fact, every culture in the world has a special richness to actively contribute and participate in the process of additive interaction with other cultures in the realization of global synthetic culture.

BRICS and synergy of cultures

The affinities and commonalities of BRICS member States in cultural values as well as in historical traditions such as improvement of family institution as well as the belief in religion and spirituality can serve as a basis for mutual understanding and as a platform for cultural interaction. Their opposition to the dominance of western counterculture and their attachment to the idea of "cultural independence" as well as their indigenous culture can lead to a strong cultural synergy among them.

As BRICS has brought together ancient civilizations, the dialogue among them would create a cooperative, inclusive and assertive world order. The two principles of respecting traditional values and cultural diversity have turned the BRICS organization into the most important platform for dialogue among civilizations and cultures. That can be done if they stick to the slogan of "cooperate, create and construct" and to the principle of "unity in diversity".

If BRICS member States respect their cultural diversity and consider it as the factor of strength of this organization, their efforts for promoting synergy of cultures, while respecting the difference of opinions, would make the dialogue meaningful and create a new space for a just and peaceful world order. BRICS represents a suitable platform for creating an alternative mechanism through strengthening people-to-people relations and expanding cultural cooperation, synergy and friendship of member countries against the culture of domination, unilateralism and homogenization.

In this conjuncture, the Islamic Republic of Iran that officially joined the BRICS organization on January 1, 2024, can promote the idea of cultural synergy through the promotion of favorable environment for enhancing cultural exchange programs, support for creative art industries, educational initiatives and youth participation of BRICS countries in the process of effective interaction of cultures. BRICS institutional capacities in the field of cultural and creative industries can strengthen innovative interactions of the member States.

In fact, insisting on positive and constructive role of culture in sustainable development of BRICS countries can create a new added value and lead to a comprehensive framework for mutual supportiveness as a suitable basis for synergy of cultures. It is in this context that cooperation between BRICS member states would lead to more achievements than the aggregate of their capabilities. BRICS can serve as a model of synergistic interaction of cultures to spread public awareness and to encourage sustainable development based on cultural diversity. While it provides the space to acknowledge and respect diversity and plurality of cultural norms of all member States, it also facilitates the cultural exchange among them to present a synthetic

identity of BRICS organization. That would encourage cultures to use creative methods to advance common goals while preserving their fundamental values and originalities.

Therefore, BRICS can crystallize the synergy of cultures based on institution-building spirit and appropriate mechanisms for multilateral cultural diplomacy. It can demonstrate the transition from the level of simple and linear interaction to the level of complex and synergistic interaction, as it considers cultural diversity to be a value added among member States. This approach suggests that cultural diversity would be neither ignored nor minimized, but rather viewed as a source in the development of interaction. That requires their competency in cross-cultural communication as well as their synthetic interaction through the pattern of commitment, engagement, adaptability, flexibility and empathy as well as the institutionalization of the culture of innovation and mutual trust. In fact, the result of synergy of cultures at the level of BRICS organization is wider than the set of cultures. If BRICS countries would like to realize the model of cultural synergy, they should try to synthesize tradition and modernity, insist on rationality and pragmatism, exchange intellectually in science, technology and arts and disseminate the culture of peace and moderation against violence and extremism.

We can refer to some principles of "synergy of cultures" among BRICS member States as follows:

1. The principle of institutionalization of collective cooperation: In the current interdependent world, diverse cultures should create a network of communication and interaction in such a way that each culture would take advantage of collective cooperation. In this perspective, BRICS Civil Forum which was established in 2015 with the aim of strengthening constructive dialogue among the institutions of civil society and academia in BRICS countries on a wide range of social issues can be considered as a platform for communication that can promote innovative capacities for the development of cultural interactions among member States.

2. The principle of mutual respect: the consistency and tolerance of cultures in the process of free flow of information and communication provides their behavioral flexibility, while preserving their cultural identity. In this case, mutual trust can be considered as a source that provides the free interaction of cultures to solve human problems. Mutual respect would be realized when they succeed to remove prejudices, selfishness, self-centeredness, suspicions and misunderstandings.

3. The principle of openness: the synergy of cultures depends on their ability to maintain openness in the process of cultural interaction in such a way that they can successfully adapt themselves to the environment of dialogue. The openness of cultures to each other provides the possibility of working in harmony with each other while maintaining their cultural diversity, and respecting the richness of other cultures in the changing international system.

4. The principle of effective participation in narrative-building: Cultural communication promotes participation of diverse cultures in the process of narrative-building and correcting their image with the aim of removing misunderstandings and taking advantage of the outcome of cultural interaction.

5. The principle of balance between continuity and change: The principle of balance requires continuity in

change. Continuity in the sense that different cultural systems tend to resist change and want to maintain their beliefs, values and norms. The more cultures rely on their past glory and proud background the more resistance they show to face changes. If they look at the future in the framework of synergy of cultures, this attitude would promote the flexibility and openness of cultures and increase their competitiveness.

6. Principle of adaptability: cultures should be able to increase their capacity of changeability in styles and methods while maintaining their originality and beliefs in order to improve their ability to cooperate actively and to adapt themselves to the surrounding environment. The principle of the adaptability of cultures requires that different cultures adapt themselves to the transitional and dynamic environment while preserving their native value systems.

7. The principle of interconnectedness: In order to increase their efficiency, cultures need to increase the connection and interaction with each other. The more connected the cultures are, the more information they will exchange with each other. In fact, the synergy of cultures requires the improvement of the ability of cultures to distribute information in the global community and their effectiveness in the virtual space in order to find effective solutions and initiatives for solving the problems of Global South and to transform ideals into common policies and programs.

Considering the above principles, the idea of synergy of cultures can be considered as a creative and leading idea for the multilateral cultural diplomacy of the BRICS countries, whose cultures have the vitality and effectiveness to interact positively and constructively with each other in the transitional world.

Conclusion

Based on whatever expressed in this article, we believe that the idea of synergy of cultures can serve as a platform for promoting the dialogue among BRICS countries in order to realize a just world without western and American domination. That requires the acceptance cultural diversity as the principle of effective interaction. The model of synergy of cultures seeks to optimize the interaction between cultures while preserving cultural diversity and multiculturalism. This optimal space for constructive interaction among cultures would flourish more consistency in the components of sustainable peace while respecting cultural diversity. Based on the idea of "synergy of cultures", diverse cultures act like a puzzle, which at the same time complement the BRICS common culture and remain like a rainbow that contributes to the beauty of the horizon. and are considered as colorful flowers that add beauty and freshness to the flower garden of BRICS.

Synergy of cultures is considered as a vital approach for promoting the competitiveness of cultures and their satisfactory interaction and efforts to receive mutual resources and facilities for solving complex international problems. That requires that each culture would have the openness to take positive characteristics of other cultures while maintaining its own cultural authenticity as well as accepting equal opportunity of all cultures to enrich the BRICS common culture and to promote inter-regional interactions in such a way that all cultures would be treated equally without being divided into first and second degree cultures.

We can suggest the following mechanisms for enhancing cultural synergy among BRICS countries:

- Adoption of an active and innovative approach in cultural and public diplomacy for strengthening cultural interaction network among BRICS member States;

- Creating new institutions for the development of co-operation around cultural commonalities such cultural heritage of the member countries;

- Reinforcement of scientific and academic exchange as well as joint research projects for mutual understanding of each other's cultures and enhancing innovative cooperation and creative thinking;

- Expansion of cultural tourism and people to people contact for enhancing mutual understanding of BRICS countries;

- Utilizing translation of books as a means for cross-cultural interaction among BRICS member States in order

to flourish BRICS identity and disseminate the culture of peace;

- Encouraging collaboration and building relationships in the framework of track II diplomacy through the organization of joint sessions of discussion between professors, researchers, journalists and students, in order to explore the opportunities for the improvement of cultural and scientific relations;

- The organization of cultural festivals, cultural performances (theatre, music, etc.), exhibitions, workshops, discussion groups, and networking events as the suitable mechanisms for the development of cultural and academic interactions among BRICS member States;

- Bridge building measures through sharing experiences in a collaborative environment in order to stimulate communication and relationship among peoples of BRICS countries.