

BRICS and Outside World: Perceived VS Designed Images¹

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“It is time for the world to build better global economic BRICs”, argued by Jim O’Neill in 2001. From then on, BRICs began to be a buzzword in the field of academic research. Since 2008, against the background of financial and economic crises broken out in the western countries, the BRICs was regarded as a new framework for emerging economies to engage in global governance. As a result, BRICs as a group instead of just a concept came true in 2009. Two years later, South Africa was invited to join the summit, and BRICS finally became a cooperative regime composed of five members. So far, in terms of BRICS’ power, influence, and initiatives, it is not a choice for the other part of the world to pay attention, but an necessity to care this emerging giant not only in global economy, but also in global politics.

Then what they care? From the author’s point of view, for the outside world, three questions would be asked about BRICS image, i.e. what BRICS is, what BRICS does, and what BRICS has. The first one refers to the nature of BRICS, e.g. when it comes to BRICS, we are talking about a bloc or individual members? The second one means the goals of BRICS, e.g. what BRICS would like to do? It would be a challenge or a complement to the current system and

¹ This is a draft paper, the author’s final opinions will be showed on PPT.

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order? The last one is related to the tools of BRICS, e.g. what could be used or depended on to achieve its goals. Therefore, this paper would be divided into three parts. Firstly, the author would like to give some examples about the opinions of the outside world on BRICS image. Secondly, the author would compare these images with BRICS self-image and try to explain why the gaps appear. Finally, the author would try to propose some policy advice.

BRICS image in others' eyes

For BRICS, the so-called outside world, according to their levels of development, could be divided into three groups. The first one is developed countries, such as U.S., EU, and other G7 members. The second one is other emerging countries except BRICS, such as Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Korea, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Turkey and Vietnam (Next Eleven, N-11).¹ The third one is developing countries, such as those nations belonging to the Group of 77.

After browsing the website of U.S. Department of State, the author finds that questions about BRICS from mass media mainly refer to three aspects. 1. BRICS is a single power or not in U.S. foreign policies? 2. BRICS new initiatives towards international system are challenges or not to the U.S. dominated international order? 3. U.S. should be worried about BRICS or not?

¹ Goldman Sachs Global Economics Group, BRICs and Beyond, 2007, p. 131.

U.S. officials answered these questions like this: “I don’t think we see BRICs as a single entity in any way. I don’t think the BRICs would believe that they are a single entity. They have many common interests but they also have a lot of differences in so many ways. So I think that would be not just premature, but a misreading of the situation to imagine that BRICs should be treated as a single entity.”¹ On the contrary, U.S. “enjoys good relations with all the countries within the BRIC. We have ongoing bilateral dialogues with all of them.”² In addition, comments on the Assad’s appeal to BRICS showed that U.S. never and would not keep in touch with BRICS as a bloc, but “obviously have relationships with those countries individually”.³

When it comes to the BRICS development bank, U.S. doesn’t “view it as an alternative to the World Bank or the IMF. It’s a different means of expressing the goal of achieving the same objectives.” However, they also reminded that “it’s important that any new institutions that develop not look backwards and go through the process of having to re-learn lessons that were learned decades ago.”⁴ Meanwhile, U.S. would like to wait and see until “many of the important details, including its governance and any relationships with the established

¹ Philip H. Gordon, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, Published March 1, 2012, Moscow, Russia, February 17, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/2012/185053.htm>.

² Mark C. Toner, Deputy Spokesperson, Daily Press Briefing, Washington, DC, March 30, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2012/03/187213.htm>.

³ U.S. Department of State, On-Camera Daily Press Briefing Index, Wednesday, March 27, 2013, <http://translations.state.gov/st/english/texttrans/2013/03/20130327144885.html#axzz3YwusI84M>

⁴ A Discussion with U.S. Secretary of Treasury, Mr. Jacob J. Lew, Moderated by Mr. Godfrey Mutizwa of CNBC Africa, October 29, 2014, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ime/africamediahub/releases/233644.htm>.

international financial institutions are clear”.¹ Of course, similar situations also appeared in the fields of international politics and security. Although U.S. welcomed BRICS engagement in global issues and regional affairs, it is not hard for Americans to find BRICS different goals and different ways.

In U.S. eyes, it is not worried about BRICS at all. Not only because U.S. has good relations with all the BRICS countries, but also because it is natural for BRICS to have their own dialogue. Therefore, U.S. does not see BRICS as a threat.² However, in view of U.S. strong support to current multilateral institutions with its leading role for a long time, U.S. thinks BRICS “is something we’re going to have to take a look at”.³

Compared with U.S., EU seems to have a clearer foreign policy towards BRICS. In Europeans’ opinions, the BRICS “does not constitute or comprise a formal grouping of countries designed to play a specific role in international affairs”, so “EU should develop a relationship with each one of those countries, taking note of their singularity and specific foreign policy objectives and aims”. In other words, “EU should invest in strategic partnerships with each BRICS country”.⁴ Europeans are aware that “there are major differences (among

¹ Jen Psaki, Spokesperson, Daily Press Briefing, Washington, DC, July 16, 2014, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2014/07/229360.htm>.

² Press Conference, Robert O. Blake, Jr., Assistant Secretary, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, Beijing, China, March 18, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/p/sca/rls/rmks/2011/158583.htm>.

³ Patrick Ventrell, Acting Deputy Spokesperson, Daily Press Briefing, Washington, DC, March 26, 2013, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2013/03/206703.htm>.

⁴ Report on the EU foreign policy towards the BRICS and other emerging powers: objectives and strategies, Committee on Foreign Affairs, 10.1.2012, p. 5. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=REPORT&reference=A7-2012-0010&language=EN>

BRICS) economically and politically and socially and anyone looking at those countries would see how significantly different they are”.¹ However, taking into account of BRICS’s “attempt to act as a group in foreign policy terms”, EU should also “focuses on the BRICS as a potentially cohesive group of States”.²

In addition, Catherine Ashton, the former EU high representative for foreign affairs and security policy and vice President of the European Commission, pointed out that Europeans “ know the economic statistics that have brought about the phenomenal rise of the emerging powers, but for me the essence of this is about the politics. What matters is that the economic clout is translated into political clout, into self confidence and ambition for the role that can be played. ”³ In this sense, “a multi-polar system has emerged”, which “entails a progressive shift in global economic power to the BRICS and other emerging economies and may further entail a shift of leadership and positive leverage in foreign policy terms from established powers to emerging powers”.⁴

Europeans continued to argue that even though what BRICS did in the UN Security Council in certain instances, most notably at the onset of the Libyan and Syrian crises and, additionally, by deferring the vote on the role of the EU

¹ Catherine Ashton, Speech on EU foreign policy towards the BRICS and other emerging powers, European Parliament, Bruxelles, 01 February 2012. http://eeas.europa.eu/images/top_stories/020212_brics.pdf

² Report on the EU foreign policy towards the BRICS and other emerging powers: objectives and strategies, Committee on Foreign Affairs, 10.1.2012, p. 8.

³ Catherine Ashton, Speech on EU foreign policy towards the BRICS and other emerging powers, European Parliament, Bruxelles, 01 February 2012.

⁴ Report on the EU foreign policy towards the BRICS and other emerging powers: objectives and strategies, Committee on Foreign Affairs, 10.1.2012, p. 4.

in the UNGA and by adopting coinciding positions on Côte d'Ivoire and Sudan, showed that “BRICS may seem to be challenging the current system of international governance, but that democratic dialogue, political engagement, including on an individual basis, and true partnership may bring to the fore positive synergies and facilitate a new inclusive system of global governance.”¹ Therefore, EU “insists that the challenges posed by the rise of the BRICS should be seen as an opportunity rather than a problem”.²

However, some member states like Denmark still tended to emphasize that with BRICS playing a larger role in international relations, “Western values will be challenged in ways hitherto unseen. International cooperation will become more complicated and will challenge the role of established institutions – notably the UN, WTO and the International Monetary Fund.”³ The good news may be, from South Korean perspective, “in any case, it would be unrealistic to expect that the BRICs countries' rise to global economic power will be linear”, and more importantly, “there is little solidarity of the BRICs as a geopolitical coalition.”⁴

Besides official institutions, scholars are also interested in BRICS image. They would like to clarify the specific role BRICS will play in relation to more

¹ Report on the EU foreign policy towards the BRICS and other emerging powers: objectives and strategies, Committee on Foreign Affairs, 10.1.2012, p. 8.

² Report on the EU foreign policy towards the BRICS and other emerging powers: objectives and strategies, Committee on Foreign Affairs, 10.1.2012, p. 9.

³ Mette skak, The BRICS and Denmark—Economics & High Politics, Danish Foreign Policy Facebook 2013.

⁴ Wang Hwi Lee, Sang Yoon Ma and Kun Young Park, Korean Foreign Policy and the Rise of the BRICS Countries, Asian Perspective, Vol. 31, No. 4, Special Issue on "The BRICs Countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) in the Global System" (2007), pp. 221-222.

industrialized countries and how they will cooperate among themselves. On the one hand, it is argued that “investment in emerging economies, such as the BRICS, is the main chance the EU and the US have to create growth. It is time for G-20 leaders to grab this opportunity as a powerful driver for global growth”.¹ On the other hand, it is assumed that BRICS would not be “an organization capable of changing the international system as long as BRICS members have different kinds of expectations when it comes to the future world order”.²

Therefore, “BRICS is actually a heterogeneous group”, and “the group will fail to achieve any degree of homogeneity or consistency in their actions with visible results as stated in BRICS summits so far”.³ Of course, it is not to say that BRICS is useless. “It is safe to assert that the BRICS members do the following: stabilize the international environment and prevent encirclement; exchange ideas and experiences; coordinate common positions and improve their bargaining positions with Western countries; hide in a group to avoid negative attention while advancing their agenda; help other developing countries; strengthen their identity as developing countries; restrain American hegemony and revisionism; and minimize dependence on the U.S. By exploring other options.” In this sense, BRICS could be “conceptualized as an ‘international regime’ operating relatively well in a specific field of

¹ Peter Drysdale, *The BRICS, the G-7 and Deploying New Global Economic Power*, *European View*, 2011, (10): 159–164.

² Jyrki Kakonen, *BRICS As A New Power in International Relations? Geopolitics, History, and International Relations*, 2014, Vol. 6(2): 85-104.

³ Alexandra Sarcinschi, *BRICS— A Homogeneous Group or Just Some Common Interests? Strategic Impact*. 2013, (3): 22.

international relations, nothing more”.¹

Well, if BRICS wants to do and does do something on world stage, then what would be its basis? According to Jeffrey D. Wilson, BRICS could be regarded as “resource powers”, which means that “all the BRICS are well endowed with mineral and energy reserves”, and “contributes to the international status of the BRICS through two mechanisms: the use of resource industries as a base for economic development programmes; and the use of ‘resources diplomacy’ as a tool for international influence”.² But he also pointed that BRICS “resource diplomacy efforts could sometimes have the unintended consequence of straining rather than augmenting diplomatic relationships”, which would label BRICS as neo-liberalism or offensiveness.³

BRICS self-image designed

On June 16, 2009, leaders from BRIC countries stated for their first summit in Russia that “ we have agreed upon steps to promote dialogue and cooperation among our countries in an incremental, proactive, pragmatic, open and transparent way.”⁴ Since then, BRIC began to be an interactive platform for Brazil, Russia, India and China. This approach was repeated during Summit 2,

¹ Sadik Unay, Reality or Mirage?: BRICS and the Making of Multipolarity in the Global Political Economy, Insight Turkey, 2013, Vol. 15 (3): 77-94.

² Jeffrey D. Wilson, Resource Powers? Minerals, Energy and the Rise of the BRICS, Third World Quarterly, 2015, Vol. 36 (2): 224–225.

³ Jeffrey D. Wilson, Resource Powers? Minerals, Energy and the Rise of the BRICS, Third World Quarterly, 2015, Vol. 36 (2): 234.

⁴ Joint Statement of the BRIC Countries Leaders, Yekaterinburg, Russia, June 16, 2009.

held in the next year in Brazil. On Summit 3, BRICS leaders declared that “in the economic, financial and development fields, BRICS serves as a major platform for dialogue and cooperation. We are determined to continue strengthening the BRICS partnership for common development and advance BRICS cooperation in a gradual and pragmatic manner, reflecting the principles of openness, solidarity and mutual assistance.”¹

In addition, Sanya Declaration stated that the progress of the BRICS cooperation in various fields had been “enriching and mutually beneficial and that there is a great scope for closer cooperation among the BRICS”. BRICS will be “focused on the consolidation of BRICS cooperation and the further development of its own agenda”. BRICS countries “are determined to translate their political vision into concrete actions and endorse the attached Action Plan, which will serve as the foundation for future cooperation”. According to the action plan, BRICS would strengthen their cooperation by holding a series of meetings, such as the meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs during the 66th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, the old sherpas/sous-sherpas meeting in due time, the meeting of representatives to international organizations based in New York and Geneva in an informal manner, and the meeting of Ministers of Finance and Governors of Central Banks under the G20 framework and during the annual meetings of the World Bank and International

¹ Sanya Declaration, BRICS Leaders Meeting, Sanya, Hainan, China, April 14, 2011.

Monetary Fund.¹

Summit 4 reiterated that “BRICS is a platform for dialogue and cooperation amongst countries that represent 43% of the world’s population, for the promotion of peace, security and development in a multi-polar, inter-dependent and increasingly complex, globalising world.” In addition to what had been mentioned on last summit about BRICS coordination on various occasions, its Delhi Action Plan added another two cases to the list, i.e. meetings of BRICS Trade Ministers on the margins of multilateral events, or stand-alone meetings, as required, and consultative meeting of BRICS Senior Officials on the margins of relevant environment and climate related international fora, as necessary.²

Summit 5 claimed that member states would “aim at progressively developing BRICS into a full-fledged mechanism of current and long-term coordination on a wide range of key issues of the world economy and politics”,³ while Summit 6 further “pledge to deepen BRICS partnership with a renewed vision, based on openness, inclusiveness and mutually beneficial cooperation”, and “to explore new areas towards a comprehensive cooperation and a closer economic partnership to facilitate market inter-linkages, financial integration, infrastructure connectivity as well as people-to-people contacts”. Leaders were also committed to raise their economic cooperation to a qualitatively new level

¹ Sanya Declaration, BRICS Leaders Meeting, Sanya, Hainan, China, 14 April, 2011.

² Delhi Declaration, fourth BRICS Summit, New Delhi, 29 Mar, 2012.

³ Durban Declaration, fifth BRICS Summit, Durban, 27 March 2013.

and emphasized the importance of establishing a road map for intra-BRICS economic cooperation. In this regard, they welcomed the proposals for a “BRICS Economic Cooperation Strategy”, a “Framework of BRICS Closer Economic Partnership”, and a Long-term Strategy for BRICS recommended by the BTTC. What is more important, Fortaleza Action Plan pointed out one of the new areas of cooperation which could be explored was foreign policy plan dialogue.¹

Judging from the above summits and their declarations as well as action plans, it is safe to say that with the deepening of cooperation, BRICS countries are trying to be a group with more coordination, more cooperation, common strategies, common positions, and common actions, so that they could benefit from BRICS as a whole both within this group and in international society. The prospect is attractive, but the process is really hard. One of the reasons why the outside world does not believe that BRICS could become a coherent group, and prefers to interact with them on individual basis, is due to the big diversity among BRICS countries “in terms of history, culture, political systems, economic structures, resource endowment, and levels of development”. Although BRICS “members view these as a demonstration of the diversity of the world’s civilizations”,² they have to look for some solutions to avoid conflicts while making full of their comparative advantages.

¹ Fortaleza Declaration, sixth BRICS Summit, Fortaleza, 15 July 2014.

² Towards a Long-term Strategy for BRICS—Recommendations by the BTTC, http://orfonline.org/cms/export/orfonline/documents/long_term_strategy.pdf

Just as what the author mentioned above, it is reasonable for BRICS countries to cooperate as a whole, in particular when they appear in international relations. Perhaps they could achieve their own goals separately in the name of BRICS, but it is absolutely, at least in general, better for them to act together as BRICS, if their external goals are taken into account. So, what BRICS countries plan to do in international affairs? The summits also give us clues to find the answer.

Since Summit 1, BRICS leaders had been underlining their support “for a more democratic and just multi-polar world order based on the rule of international law, equality, mutual respect, cooperation, coordinated action and collective decision-making of all states”,¹ which was iterated on Summit 2. Summit 3 declared that “it is the overarching objective and strong shared desire for peace, security, development and cooperation that brought together BRICS countries with a total population of nearly 3 billion from different continents. BRICS aims at contributing significantly to the development of humanity and establishing a more equitable and fair world.”²

But how to achieve it? BRICS leaders shared the perception that “the world is undergoing major and swift changes that highlight the need for corresponding

¹ Joint Statement of the BRIC Countries Leaders, Yekaterinburg, Russia, June 16, 2009.

² Sanya Declaration, BRICS Leaders Meeting, Sanya, Hainan, China, 14 April, 2011.

transformations in global governance in all relevant areas”.¹ Then where to start? Taking into account of the origin of the BRIC as a concept and the background of BRICS leaders’ first meeting, it is obvious that economic governance, especially in the field of financial governance becomes the most important subject. In this sense, at the very beginning, BRICS leaders “are committed to advance the reform of international financial institutions, so as to reflect changes in the world economy. The emerging and developing economies must have greater voice and representation in international financial institutions, and their heads and senior leadership should be appointed through an open, transparent, and merit-based selection process”. They also believe that “there is a strong need for a stable, predictable and more diversified international monetary system”.²

Summit 2 showed that BRICS “will strive to achieve an ambitious conclusion to the ongoing and long overdue reforms of the Bretton Woods institutions. The IMF and the World Bank urgently need to address their legitimacy deficits. Reforming these institutions’ governance structures requires first and foremost a substantial shift in voting power in favor of emerging market economies and developing countries to bring their participation in decision making in line with their relative weight in the world economy”,³ while Summit 4 clarified the concrete requirements, e.g. the candidatures for the

¹ II BRIC Summit—Joint Statement, Brasilia, April 16, 2010.

² Joint Statement of the BRIC Countries Leaders, Yekaterinburg, Russia, June 16, 2009.

³ II BRIC Summit—Joint Statement, Brasilia, April 16, 2010.

position of the President of the World Bank should be from developing world, the Heads of IMF and World Bank be selected through an open and merit-based process. “Furthermore, the new World Bank leadership must commit to transform the Bank into a multilateral institution that truly reflects the vision of all its members, including the governance structure that reflects current economic and political reality.”¹

However, changes always come too late. On the one hand, BRICS leaders expressed their “concerns at the slow pace of quota and governance reforms in the International Monetary Fund”² and disappointment and serious concerns with the current non-implementation of the 2010 International Monetary Fund (IMF) reforms,³ meanwhile criticized “international governance structures designed within a different power configuration show increasingly evident signs of losing legitimacy and effectiveness, as transitional and ad hoc arrangements become increasingly prevalent, often at the expense of multilateralism”. On the other hand, BRICS leaders argued that “the BRICS are an important force for incremental change and reform of current institutions towards more representative and equitable governance, capable of generating more inclusive global growth and fostering a stable, peaceful and prosperous world.”⁴ As a result, Summit 6 declared the emergence of the New Development Bank (NDB) as well as the BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA).

¹ Delhi Declaration, fourth BRICS Summit, New Delhi, 29 Mar, 2012.

² Delhi Declaration, fourth BRICS Summit, New Delhi, 29 Mar, 2012.

³ Fortaleza Declaration, sixth BRICS Summit, Fortaleza, 15 July 2014.

⁴ Fortaleza Declaration, sixth BRICS Summit, Fortaleza, 15 July 2014.

Although Fortaleza Declaration explained that “the NDB will strengthen the cooperation among our countries and will supplement the efforts of multilateral and regional financial institutions for global development”, and “this (Contingent Reserve) arrangement will have a positive precautionary effect, help countries forestall short-term liquidity pressures, promote further BRICS cooperation, strengthen the global financial safety net and complement existing international arrangements”,¹ and in general reiterated that BRICS cooperation is “inclusive and non-confrontational” and “open to increasing engagement and cooperation with non-BRICS countries”,² it is easier for the outside world, in particular those who play dominant roles in existing international frameworks, to consider BRICS to be a challenger or at least a competitor. Anyway, the rise of BRICS as leading emerging economies leads to the changes in terms of balance of power. What is more, BRICS always choose to stand with emerging market economies and developing countries, and be proactive to safeguard the interests of developing world in many issue-areas, which is impressed by the developed world about the traditional south-north confrontation. Of course, this is also the reason why the other emerging economies and many developing countries would hold a relatively positive image of BRICS.

If the above discussion is mainly related to the willing of BRICS, the

¹ Fortaleza Declaration, sixth BRICS Summit, Fortaleza, 15 July 2014.

² Sanya Declaration, BRICS Leaders Meeting, Sanya, Hainan, China, 14 April, 2011.

subsequent question is about its ability to do so. As we all know, economic growth is the seed for the emergence of BRICS and also the source of its influence in international system. In recent years, with the decline of growth rate for some BRICS members, the outside world starts to be skeptical of or worried about the future of BRICS as a group, but BRICS leaders on the latest summit argued that “during the first cycle of BRICS Summits, collectively our economies have consolidated their position as the main engines for sustaining the pace of the international economy as it recovers from the recent economic and financial global crisis. The BRICS continue to contribute significantly to global growth and to the reduction of poverty in our own and other countries.” BRICS leader were also confident that, against the background of significant downside risks to world economy recovery as well as the unemployment and debt levels remaining weak in many advanced economies, “emerging market economies and developing countries (EMDCs) continue to contribute significantly to global growth and will do so in the years to come”.¹ For the outside world, worries mainly originate from the possible loss of investment and assistance, while doubts maybe aim to destroy the basis of BRICS, and further defer its development as a bloc.

Manage BRICS image

Image is constructed during the process of interaction. To manage BRICS image require to do well and express appropriately. When it comes to the above

¹ Fortaleza Declaration, sixth BRICS Summit, Fortaleza, 15 July 2014.

three images of BRICS, actions could be taken as follows:

Firstly, BRICS countries themselves need to make it clear whether they would like to form a cohesive group. To what extent the BRICS could be institutionalized as possible as it can? BTTC would not only be concerned about the enlargement issue, but also pay much more attention to the ongoing deepening as well as efficient and effective operation of this regime. In addition, BRICS members had better learn something from the notion and practice of “united in diversity”, and transform their differences into source of power. In addition, in order to better achieve BRICS global goals, intra-coordination with disputes could be acceptable, but the tactics in front of the outside world should show the greatest common divisor among BRICS members.

Secondly, for BRICS, it is absolutely right to stand together with other emerging economies and developing countries, but it does not follow that BRICS should choose a road against the West. In theory, we are going to construct BRICS own roles in international system. Challenger is too offensive while competitor tends to mean zero-sum game. Constructive cooperator for global governance may be a choice. In practice, we have to balance the degrees between cooperation and competition, and try to build the Community of Common Destiny with the others. In terms of the list of affairs, BRICS seems to cover more and more issues, but the more, the better? To some extent,

large-scale dialogues usually go in the opposite direction of result-oriented cooperation. After all, the time and the resource are both limited. Therefore, the comparative advantages of BRICS, compared with other regimes and institutions, need to be explored carefully.

Finally, BRICS ought to accept and adapt to the economic new normal, then look for the new ways to keep sustainable growth. Meanwhile, what BRICS wants to do is not only about economy. To promote peace and development needs much more elements. Therefore, when the concept “resource power ”is mentioned, resource, here, could be perceived in broader sense. That is to say, BRICS’ role and influence in the world depend upon not only their economic achievements and natural resources, but also their special values, historical heritages, and rich civilizations. In this sense, on the one hand, public diplomacy towards the outside world is a necessity for BRICS governments, on the other hand, BRICS citizens need to strengthen their mutual communication and further contacts with other countries. Public opinions are always the final say about inter-state relations.