VI.МАДАНИЙ ДИПЛОМАТИЯ АСПЕКТЛАРИ
Аспекты культурной дипломатии
Aspects of Cultural Diplomacy

CULTURAL CONVERGENCE IN PRISM OF SUFISM SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

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Abstract: *Cultural exchanges between nations in the same region have a long history. Moreover, in today's world, historical connections, interwoven traditions, and shared culture among people living in a larger geographical region provide the foundation of regional integration between governments. It is true that, while allowing globalization of some patterns and environmental practices in the international arena, political units have attempted to redefine their interests and identities in the regional framework alongside their neighboring nations during the last decade.*

Keywords: *Cultural Convergence, Historic Values, Integrated Traditions, Central Asia, Regionalism, Geographic Flexibility*

Cultural convergence among countries located in the same region has a long history. In fact, historical similarities, integrated traditions, and common culture among the people who live in a broader geographical region are the basis of regional integration between the governments in today's world.

It is a fact that in the past decade political units while accepting globalization of some patterns and environmental methods in the international arena have tried to redefine their interests and identities in the regional framework next to their neighboring countries. Therefore, theories of regionalism that had a place among theories of international relations in the 1960s and 1970s rushed up the steps in redefining their basic concepts from the 1990s, and following the collapse of the Soviet Union, new approaches emerged in the neo-regionalism framework.

In today's world, new regionalism has provided an appropriate ground for forming various layers of regional cooperation based on two elements of "thematic

openness" and "geographical flexibility" and sometimes claims to have provided the foundation of a new kind of co-operations at the international level.

It is also possible to define a new sphere of cooperation between countries that, according to classic definitions of the regions, we saw in different regions of Caucasus, Central Asia, South Asia, and West Asia, and according to the new definition of the concept of the region, we can do our part to build new regions based on the new common identities and interests.

However, the limited relations between neighbors, unpleasant historical memories, and desire for domination sometimes result in separated identities and neglect of common cultural and civilizational norms and values between the countries belonging to the same historical civilization. Their different perception of "self" and "other" causes extended political borders to other aspects of relations and the linguistic, religious, racial, ethnic, and cultural diversities will be redefined in a disintegrated framework.

Nevertheless, it is expected that cultural integration between the units in a region could expand economic cooperation and decrease political tensions. The European Union (EU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are two good examples of defining common identities and values, and even ideologies in a way to increase collective interests in different fields.

This pragmatic approach to cooperation for achieving collective security and providing interests for regional actors from convergence has been a first step towards regionalism as a bridge between two study levels of the micro (including political units) and macro (including international structure). In fact, regionalism has helped to increase both regional security (Kelly, 2007,198), and in the modern world order, the world has been globally regional rather than moving toward unipolar and/or multi-polar, and although powerful political units have their own roles and particular functions, regional actors have also found a stage to show themselves.

This new kind of regionalism, as informed, has constructed identities and norms within the framework of institution building have considered a new political discourse in the international era. In this new discourse, sometimes multiple identities have been defined in a geographical area and have overlapped each other. Subsequently, several layers of regionalism could be formed simultaneously with

different functions and each country defines its regional relations according to its needs and interests in one or more layers.

Consequently, a "region" is what we perceive not necessarily what is defined on the map. Therefore, although the geography is still an important factor, this element has become more flexible and can be portrayed based on the needs, identity and interests of a country, each time.

One of the functions of neo-regional cooperation is providing security based on emphasizing on common cultural models. Alexander Wendt, the author of *The Social Theory of International Politics* said: "Identities are the basis of Interests." (Wendt, 1999) From this perspective, we can say that cultural values are the basis of identities. And as the common interests can increase cooperation between the states, redefining common cultural values can decrease the animosities and security and stability will be expanded. As a result, culture-based security is the most important production of the neo-regionalism approach.

This study continues the discussion with a case study in the area of cooperation between the countries in our region based on the neo-regionalism approach and emphasis on some common cultural elements in the region.

Regional Cooperation Capacities in the Nowruz Region

A number of Central Asian countries including Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan, along with South Asian countries including Pakistan and Afghanistan as well as Caucasian countries such as Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan and some West Asian countries like Turkey and Iran, although today is geopolitically placed in separate regions, they historically share a common civilization and have mostly similar elements of identity and culture.

Although the political boundaries and the emphasis on nationalist elements (such as ethnicity) have caused people in these countries to belong themselves to areas rather than their neighboring regions, their common culture as an important identity element in many fields tie these lands to each other as well as to their other neighboring countries such as India, Iraq, Syria, West China, South Russia and so on.

Along with this, the need for economic growth and progress has stimulated these countries into boosting trade among their countries, neighboring regions as

well as other parts of the world. And of course, security and stability are one of the most important prerequisites in order to achieve a superior economic position.

Since security in the modern world is cross-boundary and is not limited to a specific territory, to achieve economic dynamism and political and social stability, the countries located in this region also have no choices but to work together. These collaborations in the current era are accomplished with two goals: first, reducing tensions among the states of this geographical area; second, establishing new conventions to confront ethnic and religious extremist militants. Achieving the two mentioned goals may help approach other goals of political and economic cooperation among these countries.

This set of countries today has to work together at least in three spheres of culture, economy, and security to promote their national interests and collective interests. Cultural similarities and the existence of common cultural elements among people of this broad geographical area have been contributing to shaping of common identities from a long time ago. Today, the revival of these common identities can not only help the cultural convergence of the people residing in these regions, but it can also form the fundamentals of stability or what can be called "culture-based security".

Not so long ago, many countries in these regions carried the legacies of the culture-based traditions in a common civilization, which for centuries had created kind of cultural convergence beyond national boundaries or even ethnical and religious divisions. To demonstrate potential capacities of our region to develop cultural, economic, political and security partnerships, among the various cultural components, such as ethnicity, language, religion, customs, art and architecture, common historical background and many more, the author has chosen Sufism as an important cultural element that has historically converged people in the region and today is still a significant part of the cultural identity of many people.

Common Regional Mystical Teachings

Mystical teachings have played a significant role in connecting the people of our region. In fact, these principles were unique moral and social schools whose functions were not limited to religiosity and led to special cultural and civilizational achievements. Khorasan School, one of the largest cultural-mystical approaches of

this geographic area includes major intellectuals and thinkers such as Ibrahim Adham, Bayazid Bastami, Abolhassan Kharghani, Abu Saeed Abu al-Khair, Khaje Abdollah Ansari, Khajeh Ahmad Yasawi, Shaghigh Balkhi, Abu Saeed Abu Nasr, Abolfazl Sarakhsi, Imam Mohammad Ghazali, Sanai Ghaznavi, Attar Neyshabouri, and Mawlana Balkhi, not only accepts the principles of the Islamic theology but have also been influenced pre-Islamic religions.

Zarrinkoob believes that "Khorasani's Sufism, rather than being related to spiritual traits and its contents, is more of a geographical aspect." (Zarrinkoob, 1379, 31) Khorasan which encompasses Marv, Balkh, Nisa, Neyshabur, Toos, Herat, Termez, Samarkand, Bukhara, Esfarayen, Bastam, Kharghan, Damghan, and other areas has been far beyond the current political boundaries.

From the 8th century, when the Khorasan School was established, until the 15th century, most of the founders of Sufism were from Khorasan territory, and Khorasan was more than anywhere else such as Aleppo, Baghdad, and Hamedan prepared to accept different ideas and opinions. (Sadri, Winter 1387)

One of the advantages of the Khorasan School is its proximity to chivalry (Ayyari). (Lavizen, 1384, 236) The result was the presence of Sufism and mysticism in the social, political, and economic spheres and the association of people with the Sufi elders was taking place in their meetings. The school of Khorasan may be mostly recognized with futuwwa (generosity) reflecting their social behavior through which "Serving others and being kind to the people" (Mohammad-ebn-Monnavar, 1366, 231) was institutionalized and spread into other areas and formed a culture. "Being responsible and kindly welcoming newcomers" were considered as duties. (Bakhezri, 1345, 177)

Indeed, this school itself originated from the cultural traditions of these societies, including generosity and chivalry, and was based on the perspectives of the individuals who were fighting against the oppressions and tyrannies of the sovereigns. The existing tolerance and sacrament in the Khorasan School are of considerable importance, which is also because other schools of thought such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Manichaeism have influenced the mystical strand of Khorasan. (Saki, 1384, 23)

Thus, considering its deep thoughts, Sufism in Khorasan School has characteristics such as combining chivalry and futuwwa, trying to establish a feeling

of world peace, contrasting oppression, and scientific efforts, and a tendency towards the elites. The above characteristics have led to the creation of important works and achievements such as the formation of mystical literature and poetry, as well as the proximity of Sufism to other religious and social movements. (Sadri and others, Autumn 1387)

Unlike the Iraqi School emphasized isolationism, asceticism, seclusion, and monasticism and urged its followers to stay away from people and to go to the monasteries (Chitik, 1386), the elites of the Khorasan School believed that they should experience and live with people. Therefore, this school broadly affected the social life of the people. Hence, scholars, writers, poets, and mystics played a special role in shaping the lifestyle the citizens of these areas chose and in building a good pattern of governance in these areas. (Sajadi, 1372) Publishing literary books with the content of moral teachings for the kings, formulating letters of policy (Siasat-Nameh), and appointing prominent scholars as ministers and secretaries of the crowns of various kingdoms, underlie the formation of a political culture based on tolerance, peace, and ethics in different societies of this part of the world during the past centuries. Therefore, culture has had social and political functions rather than literary and artistic usage and has helped establish stability and create moral traditions in this region.

On the other hand, along with the expansion of the spiritual and religious influence of the sheiks in Khorasan, we witness the expansion of Sufism schools in Azerbaijan and the emergence of genuine Sufi figures in this region. The first Sufis during the 9th–11th centuries paid more attention to Khorasan School when it came to principles and basis. Ibrahim Joynani and Abu Nasr Sharwani were the agents for transferring the persuasions existing in Khorasan to Sharwan located in the current territory of Azerbaijan. (Taheri Kosrowshahi, summer 1395)

Sufism in Azerbaijan burgeoned in Shams school during the 7th century through which it was reflected in Masnavi and the Rumi poetry, considering that Rumi's correspondences with the scholars from Termez and accustomed to the works of Sanaii and Attar represents the Khorasani's origins of his mysticism. Such perspectives later expanded throughout the Caucasus and Anatolia creating various Sufism schools.

The combination of the Muslims' mystical views and the Sufi approaches of other religions such as Hindus and Buddhists created a tendency toward tolerance and coexistence among the people living in these geographic areas. Therefore, today, recreating prevailing cultural teachings among the people of these territories helps discover approaches for new cultural convergences and gives a new identity to the old functions of these cultural elements.

Today, considering the political and social situation of these societies which are divided into separate states through political borders and each of them is striving to define an independent and separate identity, it can be truly understood that insecurity at the national and regional levels originates from the efforts to foment nationalist policies of states and to refrain from creating a joint collective identity in the region. Avoiding peaceful and tolerant attitudes and perceptions of religion has also caused religious extremism and fanatical definitions of religion to flare up the flames of anger in this region and fuel ethnic, religious, and national hostilities. This is despite the fact that the common history of this region was mostly based on peaceful and humanistic interpretations regarding religion, and religious extremism was a marginal and not-so-popular trend in this area of civilization.

Conclusion

Security is the ability of a country to parry internal and external threats against its political existence or its national interests. Based on a constructivist perspective and neo-regionalism approaches toward relations between nations a new definition of elements of security may be presented.

As mentioned in the introduction, to analyze the possibility of regional cooperation between the civil societies in our region, the author has tried to explain a theoretical framework based on neo-regionalism theories and then evaluated regional cooperation capacities with a focus on an important cultural element: common mystical teachings.

Now we can say that through the neo-regionalism approach, the attempts for cultural convergence and the emphasis on common cultural components such as language, historical background, religious similarities, and common traditions can more than ever converge these countries and develop cooperation at the regional level. In fact, although the diverging aspect of the above cultural elements is

highlighted in the classical definitions focusing on nationalism as one of the main obstacles to regional cooperation, the author believes that these elements are capable of promoting integration in the region and establishing cultural ties between these societies rather merely being pieces of evidence of divergence among the inhabitants of our societies.

In the current world where people can easily cross political boundaries to connect to each other, making plans to establish a cultural approach with the goal of regional convergence can be more possible than ever. Similar identities, shared interests, and cooperation among nations in our region based on an emphasis on the convergent cultural-civilization elements in this complex will provide a good basis for the establishment of stability and security in the region.

Under these circumstances, a focus on applying "cultural diplomacy" and the formation of a new trend called "Cultural Regional Integration" is very useful and necessary for promoting economic and political cooperation and establishing culture-based security. In fact, utilizing common cultural and social elements in these societies may help a better understanding of the inhabitants in the region, and along with the diplomatic efforts of the states, builds confidence and cooperation among nations.

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