



The Role of Culture on Development of Iran International Relations from Viewpoint of ECO

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Abstract

Culture is the most important factor related to identity. Individuals and groups are identified through different cultural components. The reason is that these cultural components have the ability of providing human needs to be both together and distinguished from one another simultaneously. Determining the role and position of culture in theories of international relations is very important; moreover, with planning recent theories in international relations the role of culture as a basis to analyze international issues has been emphasized. Though some scientists and thinkers emphasize the role of international relations in clarifying international issues such as political, financial and security issues, another group of scientists and thinkers believe that international relations are more spread than including only the mentioned issues. The present paper is a descriptive- analytic study which studies the role of culture in developing international relations of Islamic republic of Iran, the most fundamental attitude in this paper is related to Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). The aim of this paper is introducing ECO, cultural identity of Iran; Turkey and Azerbaijan and finally analyzing international relations among them.

Keywords: Culture, international relations, isolationism.

Introduction

In 1985, Iran, Turkey and Pakistan decided to continue their previous cooperation in a new frameworks, this new framework was called ECO. In fact, ECO was the rebirth of previous cooperation under the title "R.C.D". In the beginning, ECO had only four specific committees; however, today it has a noticeable organizational structure. ECO reveals the role of culture in developing international relations. In fact, cultural, social, financial and political needs of these countries to one another brought about the necessity of founding ECO.

It is obvious that globalization has led to paying attention to the issue of national identity. Development of transnational social spaces via new communicative tools that help immigrants keep their national culture and language in the foreign country, increase of transactional speed, development of communication among societies and in a nutshell, increase of societies mutual influence on one another in the process of globalization has made some challenges for the modern national identity. It is true that there have never been a time for absolute domination of a government over its territory. However, in modern period, regarding certain temporal- special limitations; each government controls its boundaries. The necessity of this event is to plan and perform policies especially cultural policies in a country to facilitate social intercourse and international transactions among boundaries¹.

Creation of a national identity is a complicated process. In fact, geographical and tribal factors, language, beliefs, life style, historical background, customs, and traditions all over centuries

are gathered together to create a national identity, later this national identity or better to call it "culture" is transferred to next generations through educational planning. Therefore, Iranian art, Persian language, Islamic mysticism, traditions and holidays are all components of Iranians' national identity formed during the history and appeared in the form of literature, moralities, unity, and empathy². Based on viewpoint of thinkers, an international society is a group of governments or independent political societies that make an organization, and then make common rules and entities via negotiations and agreements in order to keep their relations and interested resulted from them³.

International system is more widespread than national system and it has norms and rules and rights or better to say diplomatic and business cultures accepted by all people who are active in the international system environment. Moreover, analyses related to identity of international relations shows that culture has a constant presence in these analyses³.

Business relations between Iran and Turkey arrived at one milliard and a hundred million in 2001. This amount arrived at five milliard dollars in 2008 and now this amount has arrived at eight milliard dollars and it has been predicted that this amount will arrive at twenty milliard dollars in 2011. Moreover, Iran would be able to transfer gas to Europe via Turkey, at the present time, Europe gas is provided by Russia, Aljazeera and Norway, however, European states try to find an alternative for Russia, because this country has proved that if security problems occur, it will stop transferring gas to Europe⁴. On the other hand, Johann Gottfried von Herder as an eminent German

philosopher who represented the term “cultures” instead of culture, moreover, he integrated the concept of culture with the concept of nation.

He believed that each nation has its own unique culture, development of this thought in 19th century brought about nationalism flourishing period⁵.

Main body

Culture is a concept in social and human sciences for which there are many different definitions. Sometimes theorists’ or researchers’ definitions of culture are opposite of one another. Generally, all various meanings of culture are rooted in the Latin word “cultivate” which means growth and nourishment⁶.

In an article titled “international political economy as competition culture”, Inay Tallah and Blaney believed that “culture includes human activities and creative abilities and it is related to human ability to create life. In fact, culture considers both unity and variation at the same time. Unity or having things in common brings about a specific culture in the heart of a group, while variation distinguishes groups from one another.

International relations: this term is used to specify all state-based actors’ communications beyond governments’ boundaries. It is possible to compare this term with international policy, however, international relations is broader than international policies. In fact, international policy is a fundamental branch of international relations, from the very beginning; international relations have been related to making policies.

Max Weber believed that all social changes are results of cultural changes, and then he emphasized the role of founder of culture-orientation. He defined a state as a group in a specific territory having monopoly on the legitimate use of physical violence. Based on this definition, he was considered as an individual who interpreted policy as a comprehensive power⁷.

Marx and Angles did not pay much attention to cultural phenomena. To them, productive relations and forces make a society’s economic foundation in which culture and ideology help to maintain dominant social groups. Marx and Engels considered substructure pattern (civil society) and superstructure pattern (state) as the foundation of a society. In other words, cultural, political and civil forms are considered as superstructure resulted from economic foundation and at the service of reproduction. Generally, based on Marx approach, cultural forms always appeared in specific historical situations and provided specific social and economic benefits and also had important social effects. Marx and Angles believed that cultural thoughts of each period served benefits of ruling class; therefore they provided ideologies to legitimate hierarchical domination⁸.

Neo-Marxists especially Walter Einstein believed that modern

global system has formed a specific culture. During historical evolutions of this system and regarding growth of new beliefs, this global system confronted issues such as legitimization of political changes, legitimization of people’s governance and calling these beliefs dangerous in the process of bringing about democracy. This system had emerged in three domains:

Creating ideologies, Victory of science orientation, Controlling social movements against global system. Social movements are movements formed based on contrastive coexistence against global system. This a global culture within which a global system works, however, this culture is hidden and other components of system can work even without it⁹.

Theories of regionalism, divergence and convergence in international relations: Regionalism in international relations: Theories provide the field of analysis of international issues; moreover, in today’s developed world that mass media have gathered people of the world and their interests together, non-political and private section of the society has also a tendency to understand international issues and transactions. Therefore, with the increase of power of theories to explain evolutions happening in international relations, they would be more likely to turn into dominant theories. Evolutions of international environment are considered as one of the main reasons of emergence of dominant theories. For example, occurrence of cold war between two super powers of the world and the importance of security issues in this period led to realism theory as a dominant theory; furthermore, regionalism was one of the dominant theories in years after cold war¹⁰.

Regionalism is a concept that has kept its position in foreign policies of countries and in the international relations for such a long time. Regionalism is based on this idea that universalism ideal could be achieved via integration of all regional factors. However, regionalists do not have a unity in defining means of achieving this purpose. Some of them believe that federal pattern is the best possible way to achieve regional convergence; some others believe that a proper pattern is based on doing duties without making a transnational state; this group relies on mutual common cooperation of certain states¹¹.

Since regionalism has a great position in international level, majority of modern political ideologies have a tendency to it. For instance, at the time of codifying charter of the United Nations, world planners considered regionalism. Charter of the united nations have emphasized the role of regional organizations in solving international problems through article, 51, part 11 of article 33, parts 2 and 3 of article 52, article 24, 25, 39, 42 and finally 53. As a result, cooperation of united nations and regional organizations have gone beyond the relation between two factors, it has changed into organized vast relations¹².

Divergence and convergence in theories of international relations: Traditionally, study of regionalism in international

political and economic relations is limited to international cooperation among world industrial countries. As a result of recent evolutions in international political economy, the importance of new forms of regionalism has increased among developing countries as well as developed and industrial countries¹³.

ECO; motivations and creation causes: Regional Cooperation for Development (R.C.D) was founded as a small organization with the membership of Iran, Pakistan and Turkey with the aim of maintaining interests of the member countries. After the foundation of development and business conference dependent on United Nations organization in March 23rd, 1964 and determination of 1960 decade as decade of developing countries development, the cooperation process found a speed and then regional development cooperation organization was founded in June of 1964 with the membership of mentioned countries¹⁴. (Economic Cooperation Organization, A Guide Book, Secretariat of Economic, Cooperation Organization, Tehran-Iran 123: 3) These three countries aimed to perform industrialization plans based on western methods, some issues such as limitation of foreign exchange reserves, need to perform industrial plans, receiving technology and finally applying regional available facilities led to the notion of making a regional cooperation organization for development in the form of a multilateral cooperation organization. Moreover, sharing common historical, cultural and traditional interests among the three countries and being located in an important strategic region reveals the necessity of creating such an organization¹⁵.

This process continued up to Islamic revolution victory, this victory slowed down the speed of process and then stopped it. Iran revolutionary government existed from R.C.D, because it was guided by America. In 1980, R.C.D was completely disbanded. In fact, R.C.D was founded in January 1964 in Istanbul based on a conference held among Iran, Pakistan and Turkey, this organization was led by America's support and its attempt to control it, moreover, its activities were done based on treaty of Izmir. This treaty was ratified in 1976¹⁶.

Results and Discussion

Study of ECO position and function in developing relations of member countries. ECO has many capacities, however, the maintenance of multilateral peace and security and cooperation is a fundamental condition for using this capacity¹⁶. Therefore, to achieve this purpose, it is a positive action to make an organization such as ECO. It is true that development of regional organizations facilitates direct negotiations among states, but it does not mean that regionalism is achieved. In fact, the quality of activities related to regional organizations and type of their agreements determines amount of convergence in region. This point is true about ECO as well. Therefore, to assess success of ECO in entering regionalism process, ECO function must be assessed. For instance, ECO has vast sources of oil and gas in countries such as Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan,

and Kyrgyzstan. The collection of oil reserves of this region without considering Iran oil reserves has been estimated more than 60 to 200 milliard tanks. This amount is enough to provide Europe need for about twenty years¹⁷. In other words, it is very difficult to find another region in the world with this amount of providing oil and gas for world market.

ECO is located near to three energy centers of the world: Russian federation, Caspian region and Persian gulf, the members of ECO do activities in three domains: business, energy and transportation. ECO has important efficient elements in the field of energy, for example it tries to facilitate the usage and consumption of energy resources in region and providing possibility of accessing world markets for countries restricted by land (Central Asia, Caucasus). What matters is that Iran is a well-known diplomatic country. Iran, before the emergence of Islam was one of the greatest powers of the world for a period of 600 years and Persian kingdom was influential on international fields. Moreover, even after emergence of Islam and the presence of a looting period, Iran showed a high authority and capability. In the modern period, Iran has had a noticeable effect on world powers such as Russia and England. After World War II, Iran foreign policy has always experienced different policies such as hostile relation with western powers, neutral policies and even confronting policies. During cold war, it has experienced changes from cooperation with united nations to hostility toward Washington. Before 1950s, Iran was America's strategic ally and America was hopeful that Iran would stop Soviet Union intervention in Middle East. Finally, this cooperation ended with the fall of Shah Regime and establishment of Islamic republic of Iran.

Ideological factors affecting foreign policies of Islamic republic of Iran: The main principle governing foreign policies of Islamic republic of Iran is the principle of neither western nor eastern policies, just Islamic republic- based policies "since Islamic revolution was formed based on a religious notion and since there is a famous rule aiming to limit non- Muslims' intervention in Muslims' affairs, following results were achieved.

Not giving infidels a chance to govern Muslims. Not allowing infidels to own properties related to Iran. Not allowing infidels find ownership toward Muslims, Not allowing Muslim women get married non- Muslim men, Not punishing a Muslim person hurting a non- Muslim person, Not allowing infidels take responsibilities related to Islamic countries such as presidency. Respecting hiring foreign consultants in security issues¹⁸.

Foreign policy of Islamic republic of Iran: Generally, foreign policy of Islamic republic of Iran based on the constitution of Iran is summarizes in the following issues: Human salvation (rule 154), "protecting independence of country"(rule 152), "fighting against cruelty, seeking for justice, rejecting tyrannical powers in the world, supporting rightful fights"(rule 154),"brotherly agreements with all Muslims, the unity of world of

Islam, defending world Muslims' rights"(rule 11), " rejecting every kind of cruelty"(rule 2)," rejecting making agreements with cruel powers of the world"(rule 152), " absolute rejection of foreigners intervention in domestic affairs"(rule 3)," avoiding making contracts that allow foreigners to have dominance over Iran natural resources, culture and even army"(rule 43), "peaceful relations with states not fighting against Iran"(rule 152)

Some analysts believe that foreign policies of Islamic republic of Iran are getting more logical and move toward providing national interests. In years after victory of Islamic revolution and during presidency of previous presidents, a logical process was visible in order to protect Islamic system; however, it was not based on a predetermined strategy in foreign policy of Islamic republic of Iran.

The role of culture in developing foreign relations of Iran:

Development is a financial- social phenomenon, however, in contrast with growth, it has a complicated and multidimensional process which is not simply measured by quantitative indexes such as per capita income, investing, transferring developed technology from industrial countries to non- developed countries and so forth. In order to achieve "development", qualitative changes in social, political and cultural structures are needed as well. Development is a process of analyzing all aspects of social life as well as a deep evolution in perception, knowledge, skills and relations among people. Unfortunately, today, development has lost its special meaning and it is considered as a synonym for qualitative growth. Based on this attitude, development encompasses criteria such as increase of production or technological change, however, development is beyond these issues. In fact, development process is the contrast of old civilization with thoughts of new civilization. Therefore, development includes thoroughness of a society. These infrastructures related to development and even financial development is based on an attitude called "development culture". Today, thinkers of Iran have some concerns defining the real position of "development", these concerns are summarized here:

Considering financial and political developments and rejecting cultural and environmental developments. The issue of development priorities and the order of importance of financial and political developments. Development patterns, Ambiguity in culture of development and scientific-cultural infrastructures of development. The role of Islam in the process of development. Passing modernism through process of development.

Though these factors are important in the process of development, constant development is the most fundamental element in multilateral development. In ECO, Iran tries to make ties with this organization in order to integrate itself with this structure and play its role as an important regional center¹⁹. The function of Iran foreign policy showed that because of some

features, this country cannot make successful regional unions. Neither from ideological perspective (as a result of being shia in the world of Islam), nor from strategic perspective (as a result of being forbidden from membership in regional military agreement mentioned in the constitution) is Iran allowed to be a member of such organizations. Moreover, Islamic ideology is another cause of limitation that forbids Iran from getting a member of regional organization; however, all foreign policies of Iran are analyzed based on Islamic ideology²⁰.

Development of business agreements, supporting intellectual ownership rights, development of common investments in interesting affairs related to member countries are some affairs that increase the importance of ECO position in the world through creating a regional convergence. The achievement of this purpose relies on actions of member countries both in national and regional levels, it also depends on taking advantage of available chances to develop efficiency of regional convergence of ECO members, and consequently to establish financial growth of member countries in the future²¹.

Conclusion

Primary hypothesis: as a result of following isolationism and ignoring common cultural elements in developing its relation with neighbors, Islamic republic of Iran has not been able to take advantage of its capacity in order to increase relations with regional countries such as Caucasus, central Asia, and Turkey to cooperate in ECO. Secondary hypothesis: not considering the element of culture in development of international relations in region, Iran has allowed great powers of the world such as Russia and United States to intervene in affairs related to Caucasus, central Asia, and Middle East, therefore Iran is not allowed to play its regional role.

Alternative hypothesis: Islamic republic of Iran has increased its relation with neighbors via emphasizing cultural elements and therefore, it has increased its influence on ECO.

In order to prove these research hypotheses, it is needed to rely on evidences. In fact, people of Iran are not familiar with cultural common elements. For instance, based on a research in Tehran, less than 20 percent of people being interviewed were aware that Persian language is common between Iranians and Afghans. Iranians' limited information about the language of a neighbor country reveals that their knowledge toward other members of ECO is more limited. Moreover, there is a cultural feature among six republics separated from Soviet Union and this feature is identity crisis. Also, there is a hidden competition or better to say contrastive relation between Iran and Turkey which is the result of two different tendencies toward issues. In fact, Iran has a kind of Islamic ideology toward issues, while Turkey has a kind of Pan- Turkism view toward issues, this difference has led to some conflicts between these countries and both countries try to be a paradigm for recently founded countries. Moreover, if conflicts between Iran and Turkey,

between Pakistan and Afghanistan, between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, between Georgia and Uzbekistan and to some extent between Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan continued, cultural communication among members of ECO would face crucial difficulties. According to discussed issues, it is true to say that the main hypothesis of this research is not proved, however, its alternative hypothesis is proved.

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