

A New Era of “Greater BRICS Cooperation”: The Future of the World and China’s Role

Wen Wang¹, Chen Long¹

¹ *Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies at Renmin University of China, Beijing, China*

Corresponding author: Chen Long (longcw2021@gmail.com)

Academic editor: Sheresheva M. | Received 12 June 2024 | Accepted 28 November 2024 | Published 20 December 2024

Citation: Wang, W., & Long, C. (2024). A New Era of “Greater BRICS Cooperation”: The Future of the World and China’s Role. *BRICS Journal of Economics*, 5(4), 37–54. <https://doi.org/10.3897/brics-econ.5.e129530>

Abstract

After the expansion of BRICS, its cooperation mechanism has officially transitioned to a new phase termed “Greater BRICS Cooperation”. This paper explores methods to enhance collaboration among the greater BRICS nations from the perspective of China. Employing textual and empirical analysis, this study observes that the developmental disparities between the global North and South have gradually diminished, amplifying the eagerness and capacity of developing nations to engage in global governance. Simultaneously, the original BRICS cooperation framework faces pressure to adapt alongside changes in its member composition. As a prominent BRICS member, China is urged to leverage its developmental expertise to drive standardized expansion protocols and foster internal and external cooperation. Internally, the association needs to standardize expansion procedures, enhance the institutional framework, and boost professionalism. Externally, it should establish a BRICS regional cooperation committee and strengthen ties with international organizations. These efforts aim to propel high-quality development and comprehensive advancement within the BRICS cooperation mechanism.

Keywords

BRICS cooperation mechanism, BRICS expansion, Global South, international order, China’s position.

Аннотация

После расширения БРИКС механизм сотрудничества официально перешел на новый этап, получивший название «Расширение сотрудничества БРИКС». В данной статье рас-

сма­три­ва­ют­ся ме­то­ды ук­ре­п­ле­ния со­труд­ни­че­ства ме­жду стра­на­ми БРИКС с точ­ки зре­ния Ки­тая. Ис­поль­зуя тек­сто­вый и эм­пи­ри­че­ский ана­лиз, в дан­ном ис­сле­до­ва­нии от­ме­ча­ет­ся, что в но­вую эпо­ху со­труд­ни­че­ства БРИКС раз­ли­чия в уров­не раз­ви­тия ме­жду Се­ве­ром и Ю­гом по­сте­пен­но умень­ша­ют­ся, что уси­ли­ва­ет стрем­ле­ние и спо­соб­ность раз­ви­ва­ю­щих­ся стран уча­сто­вать в гло­баль­ном управ­ле­нии. Од­но­вре­мен­но с этим пер­во­на­чаль­ная струк­ту­ра со­труд­ни­че­ства БРИКС ста­лк­и­ва­ет­ся с не­об­хо­ди­мостью адап­та­ции в свя­зи с из­ме­не­ния­ми в со­ста­ве ее чле­нов. Как важ­ный член БРИКС, Ки­тай дол­жен ис­поль­зо­вать свой опыт в об­ла­сти раз­ви­тия для вне­де­ния стан­дар­ти­зи­ро­ван­ных про­то­ко­лов рас­ши­ре­ния и раз­ви­тия внут­рен­не­го и внеш­не­го со­труд­ни­че­ства. Внут­ри ор­га­ни­за­ции не­об­хо­ди­мо стан­дар­ти­зи­ро­вать про­це­ду­ры рас­ши­ре­ния, ук­ре­пить ин­сти­ту­ци­о­наль­ную ба­зу и по­вы­сить про­фес­си­о­на­лизм. На внеш­нем уров­не сле­ду­ет соз­дать ко­ми­тет ре­ги­о­наль­но­го со­труд­ни­че­ства БРИКС и ук­ре­пить свя­зи с ме­жду­на­род­ны­ми ор­га­ни­за­ция­ми. Эти ус­и­лия на­прав­ле­ны на обес­пе­че­ние вы­со­ко­ка­че­ствен­но­го раз­ви­тия и все­сторон­не­го про­дви­же­ния в рам­ках ме­ха­низ­ма со­труд­ни­че­ства БРИКС.

Ключевые слова

Ме­ха­низ­м со­труд­ни­че­ства БРИКС, рас­ши­ре­ние БРИКС, Гло­баль­ный Юг, ме­жду­на­род­ный по­ря­док, по­зи­ция Ки­тая.

JEL: F02, G18.

Introduction**Background**

In the world where the developed countries dominate the global economic system and international order, the interests of developing countries have long been ignored. However, driven by globalization, the joint strength of the developing world represented by the BRICS countries has increased considerably, and the “political awakening” of developing nations based on economic progress has become increasingly obvious. Against this background, in 2006, the foreign ministers of Brazil, Russia, India and China held their first meeting during the UN General Assembly, marking the beginning of cooperation among BRICS countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs PRC, 2024).

The development and evolution of the cooperation mechanism of BRICS, the world’s most influential and iconic South-South cooperation platform have become a microcosm of the rise of the Global South countries that is now reshaping the traditional Western-dominated world landscape. Some Western scholars see the purpose of establishing the BRICS association simply as a way of cooperation adopted by developing countries to counter the developed ones. Zaki Laidi, for example, believed that the core goal of BRICS cooperation was to overthrow the liberal consensus on global governance and its value foundation (Laidi, 2012). Many scholars, Pant H. V. among them, have been pessimistic about the prospects of BRICS, argued that although the BRICS countries

have common goals, cooperation between them remains only verbal (Pant, 2013). After years of development, however, there are reasons to hope that, as Zhu Jiejun, Associate Professor with Center for BRICS Studies, School of IR and PA, Fudan University puts it, the BRICS cooperation mechanism is transforming from a “dialogue forum” that “focuses on economic governance and is mainly theoretical” to a “full-fledged mechanism” that “gives equal emphasis to political and economic governance and combines theories with practical work. (Zhu, 2014). The BRICS cooperation mechanism as an innovative form of cooperation has actually become a new paradigm of South-South cooperation (Huang, 2014).

After its successful expansion, BRICS cooperation has entered a new “Greater BRICS Cooperation” era and the differences between the BRICS members have become even larger. How the BRICS countries can integrate resources from all parties, balance the goals of the member states, optimize cooperation mechanisms, and achieve high-quality common development is now the most pressing practical issue. Experts and scholars around the world have sought to assess the possible changes in the international order caused by the expansion of BRICS. Some of them do not expect that such a discordant bloc could be able to create a new world order; yet, the very existence of this strange combination of countries shows there is an appetite for non-Western-led multilateral alignments (Bhatt, 2023). Others believe that, to some extent, the expansion of BRICS means that instead of a rivalry between certain political or economic blocs we are moving towards a global South-North confrontation (Boillot, 2024). Stewart Patrick points out that the grouping’s increasing diversity may make it even harder for BRICS+ to formulate, adopt, and pursue unified policy positions; at the same time, the BRICS+ initial five-country composition may complicate its aspirations to speak for the Global South, further blunting its impact on the global order (Patrick, 2024). C. Raja Mohan suggests that the expansion of BRICS does not mean that the world will enter a post-Western global order as the struggle for global leadership among the BRICS members may outweigh their willingness to work together (Raja Mohan, 2023).

Men Honghua assumes that China attaches great importance to cooperation among the BRICS countries and so it has made strengthening BRICS cooperation a diplomatic priority (Men, 2016). China has long played a constructive role in promoting the development and growth of the BRICS cooperation mechanism. It is therefore essential to answer the question of how China views the “Greater BRICS Cooperation” and new plans for the BRICS+ mechanism design: this is not only related to the long-term development of the association, but also determines whether China can achieve its diplomatic goals.

The discussions about the development of BRICS show that the Chinese and Western scholars seem to have completely different views about the future of BRICS development: Chinese scholars are optimistic, while Western scholars are rather skeptical or, at best, neutral. It is certainly true that the BRICS future will involve both risks and opportunities; the greatest challenge the organization is going to face is how to turn the former into the latter.

Research questions

The paper seeks to explore two major questions. First, what problems and opportunities will the BRICS countries face after the expansion? Second, as an important participant and advocate for the BRICS, how should China adjust or improve the existing framework to promote further cooperation among the BRICS countries?

Methods

This study employs a historical research approach to make a comprehensive review of literature pertaining to BRICS cooperation and its expansion and then delve into the contemporary context of BRICS collaboration and post-expansion challenges.

The paper furnishes a robust analytical framework for evaluating the future trajectory of BRICS cooperation and outlining possible strategies for its further development. In scrutinizing the new opportunities and challenges within the BRICS association, this study predominantly relies on empirical research methods and textual analysis. Drawing upon data and reports sourced from official websites of the International Monetary Fund, governments of the nine BRICS nations and the United Nations organization, these findings serve as pivotal evidence to substantiate the thesis of the paper. As the economic power of developing countries continues to grow, the institutional influence of the BRICS cooperation mechanism that involves major developing countries, is also increasing.

The study provides theoretical basis and empirical evidence needed to make realistic projections for the future course of BRICS cooperation and strategies for its advancement.

Results: Summary of the Opportunities and Challenges of BRICS Expansion

“Greater BRICS Cooperation” era means a new period in which the North-South “development gap” continues to narrow and economic power and international influence of the Global South is growing. This enabled the developing countries, represented by BRICS, to take the initiative and become active in promoting a more just and rational international order.

The Global South countries have become main contributors to global economic growth. Since the beginning of the new century, driven by a new round of scientific, technological and industrial revolution, emerging markets and developing countries represented by China, India, and Brazil have significantly enhanced their role in the global economy and their contribution to the world GDP keeps increasing. As shown in Table 1, the share of the emerging markets and developing countries in the world’s GDP surpassed that of the developed world in 2007 according to the statistics from the

International Monetary Fund (IMF). In 2023, the pattern “60% South and 40% North” took shape. The IMF predicts that by 2028, the “Development Gap” between the North and the South will be further reduced. The emerging markets and developing countries will account for 61.49% of the global GDP, while the share of the developed countries will be 38.51% (International Monetary Fund, 2024).

Table 1. Share of the global GDP by emerging markets/developing countries and developed countries (2007-2023)

YEAR	Share of world GDP by emerging markets/developing countries (%)	Share of world GDP by developed countries (%)
2007	50.18	49.83
2008	51.44	48.56
2009	52.89	47.11
2010	53.85	46.16
2011	54.82	45.18
2012	55.79	44.21
2013	56.13	43.87
2014	56.33	43.67
2015	55.79	44.21
2016	55.82	44.18
2017	56.13	43.88
2018	56.67	43.33
2019	57.08	42.92
2020	57.61	42.39
2021	57.9	42.1
2022	58.21	41.79
2023	58.82	41.18

Source: based on the IMF statistics.

During the decade from 2014 to 2023, the gap between the emerging markets/developing countries and developed countries in GDP at current prices is also increasing. As shown in Table 2, in 2014 it was only US\$13.9 trillion; in 2023, the difference was as high as US\$31.01 trillion. On the whole, emerging economies and developing countries have become the major contributors to the world economic growth.

Table 2. Gap between the emerging markets/ developing countries and developed countries in GDP at current price (2014-2023)

YEAR	GDP of emerging markets/ developing countries (in US\$ trillion)	GDP of developed countries (in US\$ trillion)	Gap between emerging markets/ developing countries and developed countries (in US\$ trillion)
2014	61.89	47.99	13.9
2015	62.59	49.59	13
2016	65.03	51.47	13.56
2017	68.87	53.83	15.04
2018	73.67	56.32	17.35
2019	77.53	58.29	19.24
2020	76.98	56.65	20.33
2021	86.09	62.61	23.48
2022	95.76	68.76	27
2023	103.4	72.39	31.01

Source: based on the IMF statistics.

The growing economic strength has given developing countries a greater capacity to attempt reforming the international order, and their willingness to have a just and rational international order has been increasing.

Developing countries no longer take the standards set by the developed countries for granted, which can be illustrated by the example of Russia-Ukraine conflict. After the conflict broke out, most developing countries did not confront Russia as it was expected by the Western countries. In contrast, most developing countries chose a neutral stance. On March 2, 2022, in the draft resolution titled “Aggression against Ukraine”, 40 countries voted against it or refrained from voting, including China, India, South Africa, Cuba, Kazakhstan and other major “southern” countries (UN News, 2022). Similarly, regarding Palestine’s conflict, most developing countries have also made choices very different from those of the United States. In May 2024, the 10th Emergency Special Session of the UN General Assembly passed a resolution giving more rights to Palestine proposed by the United Arab Emirates’ representatives with 143 countries in favor, 9 against (including the US and Israel) and 25 abstaining. The resolution determines that the State of Palestine is qualified for full UN membership in line with the UN Charter, and recommends that the Security Council reconsider its application to join the UN (UN News, 2024).

Today, the developing countries are primarily concerned with participating in cooperation mechanisms established in the interests of their own. In 2009, the leaders of the four BRIC countries held the first official meeting in Russia, at which they launched the BRICS cooperation mechanism. South Africa officially joined the group in 2010 and the BRICS Summit mechanism officially took shape. With the formation of the BRICS Summit mechanism, the way of selectively inviting the five major developing countries by the G8 to their summits was no longer workable (Zha, 2018). The original intention of the BRICS cooperation mechanism was to enhance representation and voice of developing countries in international financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank, and to promote the diversification the international monetary system. The concept of BRICS cooperation actively advocates for multilateralism and peaceful cooperation; it emphasizes that international disputes ought to be resolved through equal dialogue and collaboration (Zhao, 2023). This is highly consistent with the aspirations of the developing world, so the BRICS cooperation has a strong appeal to emerging and development countries. According to the rough statistics from Reuters released in 2023, more than 40 countries such as Algeria, Bolivia, Indonesia, Egypt, Cuba, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Corporal, Gabon, Kazakhstan and many others have expressed interest in joining the BRICS (Reuteurs, 2023). Developing countries have gradually transformed themselves from mere followers into promoters of international affairs.

The agenda-setting capability of developing countries has also increased, expanding the space for South-South cooperation. It has been most prominent at the United Nations level. About a quarter century ago, the “United Nations Millennium Development Goals” (MDG) adopted in September 2000 provided guidelines for South-South cooperation and broadened the cooperation space of southern countries (Zha, 2023); the process of designing the MDG, however, was one in which the developed countries set the development goals for the South countries, and the South had to accept assistance from the North passively (Cui, 2016). This situation changed during the process of formulating “The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (“2030 Agenda”) in September 2015. Although developed countries still had the discourse power during the formulation of the 2030 Agenda, and the resulting 17 SDGs were also based on the EU’s proposal (European Commission, 2014), the participation of South countries was much greater and influenced the final text of the 2030 Agenda. Of the 17 SDGs proposed by the European Union, the 16th goal was originally “human rights, the rule of law, good governance and effective institution”. But both India and China believed that the development agenda should not be a governance agenda; although human rights and governance issues are related to global development, they cannot be the focus or goals of the development agenda. So this goal was not included in the final text passed by the UN General Assembly (Cui, 2016). The will of the South countries was reflected and respected.

The expansion of the South-South cooperation is mirrored in the continuous expansion of the BRICS association and its enhanced influence. The four new members

who joined in 2023 are all Asian or African countries: Iran and the UAE are Asian countries; Egypt and Ethiopia are African countries with strong representation. As a result, out of the nine BRICS+ countries together with Saudi Arabia, two member states are permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, eight are the members of the World Trade Organization, two are the observers of the World Trade Organization, six are the G20 members, eight are the members of the G77 and seven are the members of G24. The space for South-South cooperation has been increased.

Problems Facing the New Era of “Greater BRICS Cooperation”

Although the new era of “Greater BRICS Cooperation” has created a more favorable external environment for cooperation among the BRICS countries, the subsequent difficulties in upgrading the BRICS mechanism after the expansion, competition among countries outside the region, and lack of depth in existing cooperation have all posed new obstacles to “Greater BRICS Cooperation”.

One difficulty is that not only the number of BRICS members has expanded; the differences between them have also multiplied, and the pressure to coordinate new BRICS policies increased sharply. The BRICS cooperation mechanism is a traditional decision-making model based on consensus, and the basis for policy implementation, too, lies in the consensus reached among its members. The greater the number of the BRICS members, the more difficult it becomes to coordinate policy. An example is the digital economy, one of the three key areas of cooperation among BRICS. Although the BRICS countries have fully realized the strategic importance of the digital economy and successively formulated their own digital development strategies, they still face severe challenges because of differences in conditions and willingness to cooperate. Looking back at the contents of the declarations issued at the six BRICS summits since 2023, one may notice that the emphasis on digital economy at summits held in different countries varied, with the number of words ranging from less than 100 to more than 400 and the number of mentions of digital economy ranging from 1 to 4 times. The biggest contrast is presented by the New Delhi Summit in India, where the final meeting declaration did not mention the digital economy at all. The difference in views on the same issue between the previous and the next rotating presidency reflects the levels of importance that different BRICS countries attach to this issue. The conditions of cooperation are shown in Table 3. Among the nine BRICS countries, the United Arab Emirates have the highest Internet penetration rates, reaching 99%; the Internet penetration rates in China, Russia, Brazil, South Africa and other countries are also over 70%, which is a relatively high level. However, among the new BRICS members, Ethiopia’s Internet penetration rate is only 16.7%, far below the global average of 59.7%. The differences among the BRICS countries in areas such as the “digital divide” limit their actual capability to take joint action.

Table 3. Internet penetration rate of BRICS countries in 2023

Country	Internet penetration rate
China	77.5%
Russia	88.2%
India	51.5%
Brazil	84.3%
South Africa	72.3%
Egypt	72.2%
United Arab Emirates	99.0%
Iran	78.6%
Ethiopia	16.7%

Source: based on the governments' official websites.

Second, the informality of the BRICS cooperation mechanism and adversarial efforts of the United States and the Western countries have increased internal and external pressures on BRICS cooperation. The institutional building of the BRICS depends on the gradual growth of political and economic interdependence among the BRICS countries, but the key lies in the consensus of the members on pursuit of their interests. This consensus can transcend the differences between the countries, thereby generating trust in the alliance organization and driving the BRICS rules and regulations (Ren & Yin, 2015). Today, cooperation among the BRICS countries is based on the “non-entity mechanism” dialogue forum model. However, this mechanism of cooperation is actually in a “Three-No” state: no permanent secretariat, no dedicated office and administrative employees, and no specific execution or supervision management entity. In the absence of a comprehensive coordinating and executive agency, the cooperation agenda agreed upon by the BRICS countries can be seriously affected by the differences in willingness and capabilities of its members. An example is cultural and educational exchanges. The BRICS member states, during their respective term of rotating presidency, can organize special activities on their own according to their areas of focus, or create different themes for institutionalized activities. Since the BRICS association adopts a traditional decision-making model based on consensus, the policy implementation cannot be supervised and evaluated effectively. Therefore, when faced with the same issue, the level of implementation depends on the degree of importance that different member states attach to the issue. This kind of informal cooperation has seriously limited the effective actions of the BRICS countries as a whole.

At the same time, institutional competition pressure from the United States and the Western countries is mounting. As shown in Table 4, both the old BRICS countries and the new member states have extensive cooperation with the United States or participate in multilateral arrangements led by the United States. The United States, European and other developed countries continue to pay more attention to Global South countries, strengthening their unilateral cooperation with the BRICS members or increasing

participation of the BRICS members in multilateral cooperation mechanisms led by the Western countries, which seek to divide and thus weaken the BRICS grouping.

Table 4. Cooperation between BRICS countries, excluding China, and the United States and the multilateral mechanisms led by the United States

Country	Cooperation
Russia	Member of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)
India	In July 2005, India and the United States announced that the two countries were global partners; In 2016, India and the United States signed the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement and became defensive partners; In 2020, India and the United States announced the establishment of a strategic partnership; In 2022, India joined the US-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (except the trade part); India became the observer of the Organization of American States (OAS); and the member of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD)
Brazil	Member of the Partnership for Atlantic Cooperation; Member of the Organization of American States (OAS); Member of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB); In July 2019, Brazil became the main non-NATO allies of the United States.
South Africa	South Africa is a strategic partner of the United States and the two have close cooperation in the fields of health, education, environment, and digital economy; The United States is the second-largest trading partner of and the largest investor in South Africa. The two parties also signed a defense mutual aid treaty and other military agreements. They also keep normalized military trade relations. South Africa and the United States have signed a tariff treaty, under which the United States opens the agricultural product market to South Africa, and South Africa supports the <i>African Growth and Opportunity Act</i> proposed by the US. South Africa is a member of the Southern African Customs Union. In 2008, the Union signed the Trade, Investment and Development Cooperation Agreement (TIDCA) with the United States; South Africa is the second-largest receiver of US foreign aid after Nigeria.
Egypt	In 1989, Egypt became the main non-NATO ally of the United States; Egypt is a partner of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE); The observer of the Organization of American States (OAS).
United Arab Emirates	The UAE is the most capable and reliable military partner of the US in the Arab world: the UAE has deployed joint anti-terrorism, stability and peacekeeping tasks with the United States six times. In addition, the UAE also provides important support for the US army, aircraft and naval ships in the Middle East; Since 2009, the UAE has been the largest export market of the United States in the Middle East.
Iran	Nowadays, Iran and the United States have no formal diplomatic relations.
Ethiopia	The United States is Ethiopia's the largest bilateral donation country. Since 2020, the United States has provided about \$3.16 billion in humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia; Ethiopia is one of the target countries of the U.S. government's global hunger and food security flagship initiative of "Feeding the Future" (FTF); Ethiopia is a strategic partner of the US global anti-terrorism war.

Source: based on the governments' official websites.

Third, the BRICS cooperation mechanism lacks horizontal communication and substantial cooperation with developing countries, which will affect the legality and representativeness of the BRICS organizations. The legality and representativeness of the BRICS cooperation mechanism is built on the exchanges and cooperation with developing countries. However, the current content and progress of foreign cooperation in the BRICS countries is still lacking horizontal communication and substantial cooperation with developing countries. As of 2021, a total of 460 international investment agreements have been concluded before the expansion, of which 355 have been signed or entered into force, including 150 with China (128 have entered into force), 85 with Russia (69 have entered into force), 49 with South Africa (19 have entered into force), 46 with Brazil (17 have entered into force), and 25 with India (17 have entered into force). Although an investment network covering the world has been created (Ministry of Commerce PRC, 2023), from the perspective of the countries that China has concluded international investment agreements with, most of the cooperation targets are still developed countries such as the United States, and cooperation with developing countries is limited.

Discussion

The evolving directions of the “Greater BRICS Cooperation” in the new era

It can be seen from the above analysis that, after the expansion of BRICS membership, the development of BRICS has seen a situation in which advantages and disadvantages coexist.

On the positive side, the improvement of the overall economic strength of developing countries and their increasing willingness and ability to participate in international governance have brought potential development opportunities to the BRICS cooperation mechanism, which mainly targets developing countries in its expansion. At the same time, increased diversity of the BRICS membership, the appeal of international mechanisms established by the U.S. and Western countries, and the shortcomings in the construction of the BRICS mechanisms, have all posed great challenges to the future of BRICS cooperation. In the new era, the BRICS cooperation mechanism has three evolving directions in the foreseeable future: standardization of the BRICS expansion, avoidance of the “spaghetti bowl” effect, and close interaction between new BRICS and other international organizations.

Standardization of the BRICS expansion involves steps to improve the criteria for joining BRICS and strengthen the circle of friends within the BRICS group. In the context of the increasing competition among great powers, joining the BRICS has long been regarded as a signal of standing with China against the United States and other Western countries, while rejecting or exiting the BRICS has also become the best way

to show submission to the United States and other Western countries. In the process of this round of BRICS expansion, Argentina pulled out of plans to enter into the expanding BRICS club of nations. This action of Argentina was closely related to the Milei government's attempt to move closer to the United States ideologically to win its favor. However, reflecting on the BRICS' handling of the Argentine incident, from the selection of Argentina as the target of expansion, to the signal of Argentine President Milei to withdraw from the BRICS, and then to Argentina's formal rejection, there are obvious deficiencies in the BRICS countries both in terms of the risk prediction and the response to public opinion after the incident, resulting in an unnecessary negative impact on the international influence and international confidence in the BRICS, and the BRICS urgently needs a set of scientific criteria and procedures for its expansion. However, due to a lack of clear rules and legal procedures, the current procedure of admitting new members can only be carried out through consultation and interaction among all the BRICS member states, and no scientific evaluation criteria are in place for reference (Kipgen & Chakrabarti, 2022). After this incident, the BRICS countries are bound to launch a new round of dialogues and consultations to discuss BRICS members' entry and exit mechanism and to create a more mature BRICS expansion mechanism.

The second direction is avoiding the "spaghetti bowl" effect and enhancing the coordination and consistency of BRICS cooperation. The so-called "spaghetti bowl" effect originally refers to the different preferential treatment and rules of origin in bilateral free trade agreements (FTAs) and regional trade agreements (RTAs), which calls to mind the image of the tangling spaghetti in a bowl (Bhagwati, 1995). It was later used by academia to describe the phenomenon of governance failure caused by the overlap of international policies and rules (Zhou, 2022). The "spaghetti bowl" phenomenon has also existed for a long time in BRICS cooperation. One example is the "Third Pillar" of BRICS cooperation - cultural and educational exchanges. In 2003, Brazil, India and South Africa established the India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Forum to promote cooperation and exchanges among them. In terms of areas of cooperation, the IBSA Forum mainly focuses on higher vocational education, gender equality, AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria prevention and control, nanotechnology, biotechnology and marine science and technology. However, the IBSA Forum actually has a high degree of overlap with the BRICS, and even competes with it, in terms of the number of member countries and areas of cooperation, adding unnecessary artificial obstacles to the BRICS cultural and educational exchange mechanism (Pu, 2017). As the BRICS cooperation becomes more complex after the expansion, the likelihood of such occurrences will further increase. How to prevent those and improve the overall coordination and consistency of the BRICS mechanism will become an important part of the work of the new BRICS.

The third direction is enhancing BRICS' international influence and exploring ways to cooperate with other international organizations. The BRICS was initially established to find ways to reform international financial institutions such as the IMF and the WB, with a focus on the economic sphere. After years of development and evolution,

BRICS cooperation has long gone beyond the economic sphere. The BRICS countries expand their cooperation in areas such as climate change, non-traditional security, and global governance, and their influence in other fields is constantly increasing. After this round of expansion, the new BRICS has achieved a qualitative improvement in structural powers with security, production, knowledge and finance as its core, and the comprehensive international influence of BRICS has been substantially enhanced. This ever-increasing comprehensive international influence will greatly expand the scope of BRICS cooperation in the world affairs. As a model of diversified and cross-sector cooperation, BRICS can serve as a bridge connecting the global and regional communities. Each BRICS member as an important economy in its own region, can also actively promote regional integration (Lagutina, 2019). How to closely interact with other international organizations and comprehensively enhance the international influence of BRICS has become a new task facing BRICS.

The stance and propositions of Chinese academia in the new era of “Greater BRICS Cooperation”

The new era of “Greater BRICS Cooperation” has attracted widespread attention from the Chinese academic community. Regarding how to advance the Greater BRICS cooperation, Chinese academics have put forward a number of ideas, from emphasizing rule building for BRICS cooperation and improving the efficiency of BRICS cooperation decision-making at the macro level, to deepening cooperation in new areas at the micro level. Following the propositions of Chinese scholars on BRICS cooperation and combining the above analysis of the new era of “Greater BRICS Cooperation”, this paper maintains that China should promote “Greater BRICS Cooperation” in the following ways:

First, the BRICS “Three-wheel Drive” cooperation framework, guided by the “Three Global Initiatives” ought to be upgraded. From the perspective of Global Development Initiative, financial cooperation should be used to enhance the role of economic, trade and financial sectors. The BRICS cooperation is deep-rooted in the areas of economy, trade, and finance, with financial cooperation being the foundation for BRICS countries to expand trade and investment. The BRICS countries should make full use of existing conditions to facilitate trade and investment activities, reduce trade and investment barriers, provide financial support for infrastructure building in member states, and restart trade and investment as the two major engines of economic growth (Wang & Liu, 2017). The role of political and security cooperation as a springboard for greater influence on hot international issues should be strengthened. With reference to the BRICS economic cooperation mechanism, building a stronger BRICS political and security cooperation mechanism, support of the establishment of the BRICS working group on international hot issues, the collective participation of BRICS countries in major geopolitical events should be increased, the collective influence of BRICS countries in political security should be enhanced. BRICS ought to play a touchstone role of cultural and educational exchange and cooperation. All the BRICS countries need to cooperate

to streamline the relationship between bilateral and multilateral cultural exchanges and cooperation mechanisms among BRICS countries in order to prevent the overlapping and contradictions in exchange mechanisms. It is also necessary to increase the binding force of the BRICS cultural and educational exchange mechanism, further substantiate resource coordination and responsibility sharing, and define the rights, responsibilities and interests of the member countries. It will be crucial to identify priority areas of cooperation, create demonstration projects and invest resources in cultural and educational exchange projects that are effective in consolidating public opinion.

Secondly, the BRICS organization needs to establish criteria for its expansion based on the principles of gradualism, functionality and balance. Gradual expansion should be implemented through phased local cooperation. For countries applying to join the BRICS, a limited probation period can be set up to carry out phased cooperation with them in certain areas. The inspection period will help applicant countries understand the BRICS operation model in advance and also give both sides enough time for the research and analysis necessary to avoid incidents like Argentina's withdrawal. Functional expansion will be promoted based on whether cooperation benefits can be generated. In the new era of "Greater BRICS Cooperation", the institutional competition pressure from the United States and other Western countries is increasing. Only when the countries applying to join are in line with the functional positioning and key areas of cooperation of BRICS, can they better leverage the scale and synergy effects of the members, find common interests and generate more cooperation benefits (Xu, 2024), promoting the long-term development of the BRICS cooperation mechanism. No less important will be insisting on balanced expansion based on representativeness. Comprehensive strength is a good criterion for evaluating applicant countries, but the legality of BRICS as a cooperation mechanism representing the interests of developing countries is based on the broad participation of these countries. Therefore, when selecting the new members, it is essential to take into account factors such as geography, economic complementarity and cultural exchange.

Thirdly, the BRICS entity mechanism should be developed internally, and the joint review session of the "last+next rotating presidency" is to be added. The construction of the BRICS entity mechanism should involve establishing the BRICS Cooperation Council of Ministers and Special Advisory Committee. On the one hand, the BRICS Cooperation Council of Ministers will be heading the consulting committee, responsible for submitting relevant policy suggestions to the BRICS Summit for discussion and for executing the resolutions passed by the Summit. On the other hand, the Special Advisory Committee and its subordinate working groups will provide professional policy suggestions for the BRICS Cooperation Ministers Council. The BRICS Cooperation Council of Ministers and the Special Advisory Committee shall take the responsibility for organization and coordination to ensure the smooth implementation of policies (Ding, 2022). The last rotating presidency will be responsible for reporting the situation of the BRICS member states according to the previous agenda to help the current rotating presidency understand the interests of all parties and the details of specific agenda implementation. At the same time, the last rotating presidency will

also participate in evaluating the relevant agenda proposed by the current rotating presidency, and give its modification opinion to prevent excessive bias towards the current rotating presidency and maximize the interests of all parties.

Fourthly, the BRICS organization requires establishment of a Regional Cooperation Committee to carry out exchanges and cooperation with other international organizations through the “BRICS+” model. The “BRICS+” model proposed by China in 2017 has become an important way of cooperation between the BRICS and non-BRICS countries. By setting up the BRICS Regional Cooperation Committee, the successful experience of “BRICS+” can be used to expand the cooperation between the BRICS and international organizations. The main role of the BRICS Regional Cooperation Committee is to foster cooperation between the BRICS countries and international organizations in specific regions. The BRICS Regional Cooperation Committee should consist of representatives from the BRICS countries of a specific area. For example, Brazil, as a member of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, can represent the BRICS countries in Latin America and look after the exchanges and cooperation between the BRICS countries and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. As a representative of South Asia, India can oversee the contacts and negotiations between the BRICS countries and the South Asian Association For Regional Cooperation. As a BRICS country with extensive participation in various international organizations around the world, China should use its strong economic influence to explore the ways of establishing or enhancing cooperation between BRICS and major East Asian countries. The BRICS Regional Cooperation Committee can build a bridge for communication between the BRICS countries and other international organizations.

Conclusion

With the BRICS expansion, future cooperation among member countries has become a critical issue. It is necessary to note that the depth of BRICS as a platform representing emerging markets and developing nations is not solely shaped by global circumstances but also intricately tied to the design of its cooperation mechanism.

Viewed through the lens of contemporary opportunities, the advent of “Greater BRICS Cooperation” in this new era is marked by the swift ascendance of the global South’s economic influence. Formerly deferential Southern nations are now vying for their own international standing, thus amplifying the Southern hemisphere’s involvement in global governance. This dynamic fortifies the BRICS mechanism that serves as a pivotal platform for Southern cooperation. However, post-expansion, the BRICS Cooperation Mechanism confronts internal and external pressures. External competition from non-BRICS entities and the need for internal mechanism upgrades pose significant hurdles to future Greater BRICS cooperation.

Given the expressed intentions of several BRICS nations to expand membership and deepen ties with the world, especially with developing nations, promoting

standardized expansion, averting the “spaghetti bowl” effect, and fostering close collaboration with international organizations emerge as pivotal directions for the BRICS cooperation mechanism. Chinese academia has shown keen interest in this new era of BRICS cooperation. Suggestions range from macro-level establishment of cooperation rules and enhanced decision-making efficiency to micro-level proposals for expanding cooperation in novel domains.

In line with its scholarly discourse on BRICS cooperation and synthesizing the aforementioned opportunities and challenges, China should leverage its practical experiences and champion the three major global initiatives as the guiding principles. From a global development perspective, China should bolster BRICS cooperation through strengthened financial collaboration. Under the Global Security Initiative, China should amplify collective BRICS influence on international hot-button issues and broaden cooperation in political security realms. The Global Civilization Initiative calls for diverse cultural exchanges to bolster the public opinion foundation of BRICS cooperation. Progressivity, functionality, and balance should serve as standard principles for future BRICS expansion.

Internally, it is imperative to advance the construction of the BRICS entity mechanism and introduce joint reviews of previous and current BRICS presidencies. Externally, establishing the BRICS Regional Cooperation Committee to engage in “BRICS+” mode exchanges with other international bodies is essential. These strategies aim to seize existing opportunities and elevate BRICS cooperation to new heights.

References

- Bhagwati, J. N. (1995). US trade policy: The infatuation with FTAs (Discussion Paper Series No. 726). *Columbia University*.
- Bhatt, A. (2023). *No One Knows What BRICS Expansion Means*. *The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2023/10/no-one-knows-what-brics-expansion-means/>.
- Boillot, J. J. (2024). *BRICS+: Towards a New International Order?* IRIS. <https://www.iris-france.org/186913-brics-towards-a-new-international-order/>.
- Cui, W. (2016). The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and China’s South-South Cooperation. *Global Review*, 1(41), 201601003. <https://doi.org/10.13851/j.cnki.gjzw.201601003>
- Ding, G. (2022). A Study on the Relationship between BRICS Development Direction and China’s Strategic Role. *South and Southeast Asian Studies*, 5, 8.
- European Commission (2014). *A Decent Life for All: From Vision to Collective Action* Brussels. European Commission. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:441ba0c0-eb02-11e3-8cd4-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC_1&format=PDF.
- Huang, W. (2014). Review on the cooperation of the BRICS countries: basis, Impetus, and development. *International Economic Trade Reseach*, 30, 46-59. <https://doi.org/10.13687/j.cnki.gjjmts.2014.12.004>.
- International Monetary Fund (2024). *GDP Based on PPP, Share of World*. <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/PPPSH@WEO/MAE>.

- Kipgen, K. T., & Chakrabarti, S. (2022). The politics underpinning the BRICS expansion. *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs*, 8(3), 445-458.
- Lagutina, M. L. (2019). BRICS in a world of regions. *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal*, 4(6), 442-458. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23802014.2019.1643781>.
- Laidi, Z. (2012). BRICS: Sovereignty power and weakness. *International Politics*, 49, 614-632. <https://doi.org/10.1057/ip.2012.17>.
- Men, H. (2016). Building a new type of international relations: China's responsibility and undertakings. *World Economics and Politics*, 3, 4-25. (in Chinese).
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs PRC (2024). *Introduction On BRICS*. https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/jzgj_682158/jbqk_682160/.
- Ministry of Commerce PRC (2023). *International investment promotes common prosperity among BRICS countries*. <http://12335.mofcom.gov.cn/articledwmy/zcxx/yjwz/202307/19378881.html>.
- Pant, H. V. (2013). The BRICS fallacy. *The Washington Quarterly*, 36(3), 91-105. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2013.825552>.
- Patrick, S. (2024). *BRICS Expansion, the G20, and the Future of World Order*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/10/brics-summit-emerging-middle-powers-g7-g20?lang=en>.
- Pu, G. (2017). Analysis on the Mechanism of People-to-People and Cultural Exchanges in BRICS Countries. *Russian, East European & Central Asian Studies*. 4, 55. (in Chinese).
- Raja Mohan, C. (2023). *BRICS Expansion Is No Triumph for China*. Foreign Policy. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/08/29/brics-expansion-china-russia-global-south-us-geopolitics-alliances/>
- Ren, L., & Yin, J. (2015). The Origin of the Cooperation of the BRICs: a Theoretical Explanation. *The Journal of International Studies*, 5, 102-128. (in Chinese).
- Reuters (2023). *What is BRICS, which countries want to join and why?* <https://www.reuters.com/world/what-is-brics-who-are-its-members-2023-08-21/>.
- UN News (2022). *General Assembly Overwhelmingly Adopts Resolution Demanding Russian Federation Immediately End Illegal Use of Force in Ukraine, Withdraw All Troops*. <https://press.un.org/en/2022/ga12407.doc.htm>.
- UN News (2024). *UN General Assembly presses Security Council to give 'favourable consideration' to full Palestinian membership*. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/05/1149596>.
- Wang, W. & Liu, Y. (2017). *BRICS The Engine for New Globalization*. New World Press.
- Xu, X. (2024). Expansion of BRICS: Facts, Challenges and Prospects. *Journal of International Economic Cooperation*, 40(2). <https://doi.org/10.20090/j.cnki.gjjh.2024.2.2>
- Zha, D. (2018). The History of South-South Cooperation Movement: Implications for the Belt and Road Initiative. *China International Strategy Review*. 3. <https://doi.org/10.16556/j.cnki.kfxjr.2018.03.001>
- Zha, D. (2023). South-South Cooperation: Historical Evolution and China's Role. *Office Administration*, 5, 77-78. (in Chinese).
- Zhao, Zh. (2023). The important contribution of the BRICS cooperation mechanism to the world. *Red Flag Manuscript*, 17, 15. (in Chinese).

- Zhou, Zh. (2022). "Spaghetti Bowl" Effect: Overlap and Failure of International Institutions in Central Asia. *Russian, East European & Central Asian Studies*, 4, 75. <https://doi.org/10.20018/j.cnki.reecas.2022.04.005>
- Zhu, J. (2014). Transformation of the BRICS Cooperation Mechanism. *International Review*, 3, 59-73. (in Chinese).