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The importance of China for Iran's revival in the international community

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中国对伊朗在国际社会中复兴的重要性

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摘要: 伊朗和中国同为历史悠久的重要国度, 这两大文明间的外交和贸易关系, 将丝绸之路的盛景带回到几千年前的状态, 那时中国是东亚的重要国家, 而波斯帝国统治着中亚. 现如今, 两国的伙伴关系依然强劲. 伊朗具有丰富的矿产资源, 是中国能源需求的主要供应者之一. 同时, 伊朗所处的战略位置, 也让它成为中国“一带一路”倡议的主要受益者, 这一倡议旨在更有效地联通中国与亚洲、欧洲和非洲的全球市场. 从经济和地缘政治的角度来看, 这一倡议可以帮助伊朗摆脱目前的孤立境况, 恢复其作为连接亚洲和欧洲桥梁的历史角色. 但是, 为了达成这一目标, 我们需要在文化上践行. 中国和伊朗悠久的历史 and 璀璨的文明值得彼此深入了解, 也促进了伊朗国内汉语和汉文化及中国国内波斯语和波斯文化的学习热潮. 通过这种方式, 两国可以找到许多的共同点和相似点. 伊朗同中国的合作关系, 是伊朗在知识和对话的指引下, 发展其新的全球利益的一个方法.

关键词: 中伊关系; 知识; 波斯文化; 伊朗

0 Introduction

From antiquity to the modern era, Iran and China have influenced and traded with one another. The “Silk Road” was a turning point in the histories of both countries, as a contact channel that began with Han China and Persia’s Parthian empire and played a significant role in increasing cooperation between China and Iran. From the 2nd century B.C., the Silk Road facilitated the exchange of not only goods, such as silk, gold, spices, and various other exotic materials, but also of religions, arts, sciences, and people, enabling the forging of bonds between the two nations. In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping introduced the new “Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road” (“Belt and Road”) initiative in a bid to establish stronger logistics networks

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between Asia, Africa, and Europe^[1].

Middle Eastern markets are essential to China's New Silk Road initiative to create a network of manufacturing and logistics centers in Central Asia and Europe. The proposed route of the New Silk Road begins in western China and continues to Iran, from where it will eventually continue through Turkey into Europe. Iran has been a key part of the Silk Road since antiquity and will occupy a more important position in the new Chinese plan^[2]. This initiative has the potential to relaunch Iran in the world economy and, through cultural dialogue, can disperse the rich Persian culture throughout the world.

1 Iran-China relationship and Iran's role in the New Silk Road

China has a keen interest in Iran's geostrategic position bordering both the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf. It is, in fact, Iran's location that will allow China to realize its One Belt One Road agenda^[3]. Iran shares land borders with 15 countries and sea channels on its northern and southwestern coasts and is expected to play a crucial role as an energy hub in the Belt and Road initiative and to facilitate access to extensive delivery routes connecting the Middle East and Eurasia^[4]. It would join Iran's east-west network leading to Turkey and eastern Europe and may also facilitate access to Europe via a developing rail route from southern Iranian ports to Azerbaijan and Europe. Iran's geostrategic location has made it the key link in China's New Silk Road to Europe^[5].

The revival of the Silk Road offers a perfect opportunity for the development of the Iranian economy and can restore Iran to its historic role as a land bridge between Asia and Europe, ending its current isolation. Cooperation with China may offer a means of launching a new global interest in Iran, guided by knowledge and dialogue. In particular, the European Union has political and economic interests in promoting inter-regional dialogue and supporting projects related to the new Silk Road with the ultimate aim of stabilizing the Middle East^[6].

2 Iran-China cultural exchange at the base of the New Silk Road

The New Silk Road is founded on principles of negotiation, construction, and sharing, while education and knowledge also play key roles in the project.

Cooperation between Iran and China must begin with mutual recognition of one another as fellow heirs to great civilizations. Both China and Iran have long histories and rich cultures with which they should first acquaint one another, implementing the study of Chinese language and culture in Iran and the study of Persian language and culture in China. In this way, both cultures will recognize several commonalities and similarities, including their antiquity as civilizations, reverence for cultural heritage, filial piety, a strong sense of nationalism, tea culture, hospitality, blue and white ceramics, and gift-giving customs^[7].

The cultural knowledge and exchange between China and Iran has penetrated education. Persian has been taught in Muslim schools in China since the 1920s. The Persian language was introduced into the modern Chinese educational system in 1957, when the Center for Persian Language and Cultural Studies was established in the Department of Oriental Languages and Literatures at Beijing University. The curriculum at the Beijing Center includes an introduction to the Persian language,

spoken-language comprehension, Persian conversation, oral and written translation, composition, grammar, selected readings from literary works and from contemporary newspapers and journals, history of Persian literature, history and geography of Persia, and courses on other aspects of Persian culture. The library at Beijing University contains about 3,000 Persian works, including several rare manuscripts. Persian is also taught at the Luo-yang University of Foreign Languages. These two institutions are currently the only Chinese institutions that offer degrees in Persian; the Beijing Center, however, has also sponsored classes of varying duration in other cities throughout the country. The situation regarding the teaching and learning of Chinese language and culture in Iran is similar. However, this is insufficient, particularly in light of the strong relationship between the two countries and their drive to be pioneers of the New Silk Road initiative.

The construction of more Iranian schools in China and Chinese schools in Iran should be supplemented by the publication of more print media, including newspapers, as well as radio stations, television stations, and online media. This will facilitate enhanced exchange of communications and information, which will contribute to safeguarding the rights and interests of both countries, regulating the behavior of communities, and providing services. The enhancement of the exchange of humanities and mutual learning between civilizations, the elimination of estrangements, and increased mutual respect and trust are the foundations of the New Silk Road initiative^[8].

The necessity for more qualified education and knowledge to facilitate dialogue between the nations is clear. To facilitate this, China could establish degrees in Persian in all the country's main universities, while optional Persian classes could be offered on all BA and MA programs; Persian cultural centers could be opened both in the universities and as private entities; more young Iranian talent could be invited to study and conduct research in China. On the Iranian side, Confucius Institutes could be opened in Iran's main universities, and the Chinese curriculum could be introduced at all departments of foreign languages and cultures across Iranian universities. The two governments could establish more agreements to facilitate student mobility between the countries, as direct contact between people is generally more effective than textbook learning in fostering cultural interaction. Additionally, tourism initiatives between Iran and China, if implemented, will bring economic and social advantages to both countries. In this way, the New Silk Road will exert a greater impact, from both economic and cultural perspectives. Thanks to globalization, the diffusion of Iranian culture in China will surely promote its dissemination worldwide. The reasons for this lie in China's present role in the international community, its vast population, its economic power, and the number of countries with whom China enjoys diplomatic, economic, and cultural relationships.

3 Conclusion

The Silk Road offers a route to cultural diffusion, making the world a global village, a place in which people share, give, and take. The coming and going of people and cultures, the exchange of knowledge and talent, and the flow of richness promised by the proposed New Silk Road can break down cultural barriers and reverse false preconceptions, particularly about countries like Iran. In this way, Iran can emerge and resume its role as a land bridge between Asia and Europe. Knowledge of and respect for culture are the keys that will allow nations to engage in dialogue with one another and

to foster political, economic, and social exchange. Iran and China must each develop a proper understanding of their respective cultures to bolster cooperation. Cultural exchange and diffusion between the two countries will help to cooperate more fruitfully both economically and politically. The products manufactured under the China-Iran partnership will be supplied to Western markets, as China will help to develop Iran's transportation infrastructure, creating routes that will link it to the Western world. Iran will ultimately restore its relationship with the West—particularly with Europe—and, with China's help, will disseminate its rich culture throughout the world.

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