



## *BRICS Currency Orientation through Political Cartoons: A Semiotic Study of China Daily's Cartoons*

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### Abstract

This paper elucidates the representation of the BRICS nations' currency aspirations as depicted in political cartoons published in China Daily. The study employs a semiotic framework grounded in Juri Lotman's theory of the Semiosphere (1977) to investigate how these cartoons utilize visual language, imagery, and metaphor, particularly in reflecting the intricate dynamics of global finance and the growing resistance against the hegemony of the U.S. dollar. Furthermore, these cartoons also reflect the interpersonal, ideational, and textual functions of communication, serving as a metaphor for China's strategic role within the BRICS coalition. Additionally, the research examines the dualistic nature expressed in these cartoons, which oscillate between utopian ideals for a unified currency and the complex challenges presented by geopolitical tensions and economic disparities. The study emphasizes the influence of these visual narratives on public perceptions of globalization and its cultural ramifications. The culture of cartoons signifies a broader narrative that encompasses themes of nationalism, economic autonomy, and the balance of power within the BRICS alliance. The findings indicate that these cartoons also serve the function of auto-communication in shaping opinions both domestically and internationally regarding economic policies and their implications.

**Key Terms:** BRICS, Political Cartoons, Semiosphere



## Introduction

The concept of a common currency among the BRICS members (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) has garnered significant attention and discussion in international economic conversations. Economic theorists like Zhang are frequently cited in academic papers and financial forums, and this discourse has also infiltrated public debate through various media, including political cartoons in newspapers like China Daily. Through these cartoons, China shares its perspective with the world in a uniquely expressed form of political humor.

China Daily describes its political cartoons as vital in framing BRICS economic initiatives, particularly regarding a unified currency, while defending the audience against anti-BRICS propaganda. This approach has elevated its role in promoting narratives around economic development. Some researchers argue that such cartoons utilise metaphors and caricatures to distill complex financial ideas into easily digestible and entertaining forms for general readers (Smith, 2025). For example, within these cartoons, the U.S. dollar is often personified as a dominant, sometimes ridicule-inducing figure, reflecting the challenges faced by BRICS countries in diminishing its global dominance (Jones, 2019).

Cartoons in China Daily typically oscillate between optimism and caution regarding the BRICS currency. On one hand, an optimistic vision is illustrated through interlocking hands, shared currency symbols, or even animals, suggesting that the BRICS nations can unite to build something or break the chains of dollar hegemony (Tomaihi, 2024)). This imagery conveys a sense of solidarity and the aspirational nature of their goals.

Conversely, a more sobering or skeptical narrative emphasizes the challenges and uncertainties surrounding such a currency union. Local cartoons may depict BRICS deficits as diverse animals pulling in different directions or as builders with incompatible blueprints for the same structure, illustrating the economic, political, and cultural divisions that could obstruct the emergence of a common currency (Roberts, 2019). This duality of depiction aims to educate the public on the multifaceted nature of economic policymaking, where ambition and reality intersect.

These cartoons effectively convey information and play a significant role in shaping the public narrative. According to Wang (2025), such visual narratives are critical components of public diplomacy, influencing perceptions of economic policy both domestically and internationally, often without the recipients being aware of their impact. The success or failure of the African Union and the BRICS initiative depends on the collective willingness of its member states, which these cartoons indirectly reflect through the planning perspective of the BRICS currency initiative. A core message behind them is that the BRICS currency initiative embodies success or destiny, enriching the ethnography of global discourse in economics concerning China.

Furthermore, the cartoons often reflect considerable geopolitical tensions and aspirations. They may depict BRICS nations navigating a storm of international sanctions or economic policies imposed by the West, with a BRICS brokerage or currency envisioned as a lifeboat or guiding light. This imagery critiques the current international financial order while framing the BRICS currency as a potentially transformative addition to global economics (Obu, 2024).

One cannot overlook the cultural and historical context of these cartoons. They often draw from Chinese idioms, historical events, or traditional symbols, enhancing their resonance



with the local audience while providing fascinating insight into how the Chinese interpret global economic phenomena (Jiang, 2024).

The BRICS currency venture represents more than just a token effort; it signifies a statement as profound as the art produced by the artists of China Daily, signaling to the world that China is here to stay. Their essence tells a story of China's influence over the narrative within international finance, where its currency's rhythm echoes ambition and apprehension, and its diplomatic silk remains as resilient and intricate as the garments themselves.

### Statement of the Problem

Although there is increasing global interest in the BRICS currency initiative, academic research on visual discourse, especially political cartoons, remains sparse, particularly regarding their role in shaping economic views. Political cartoons in China Daily communicate intricate stories about global financial dominance, the supremacy of the dollar, and BRICS unity through the use of metaphor, symbolism, and caricature. These visual narratives play a significant role in influencing public perception by transforming economic discussions into relatable cultural texts. Nonetheless, there has been minimal research that systematically examines these cartoons through a semiotic lens to evaluate their impact on the BRICS currency discussion. Gaining insight into these visual messages is crucial for understanding how economic ideologies are expressed to both local and global audiences. Consequently, this study seeks to fill this gap by utilizing Lotman's Semiosphere theory to analyze these symbolic representations.

### Research Objectives

1. To investigate semiotic components and metaphorical imagery in China Daily's political cartoons related to the BRICS currency initiative.
2. To explore how these cartoons influence and mirror public and political discourse regarding BRICS economic unity and opposition to U.S. dollar hegemony.
3. To analyze the cultural and ideological implications inherent in the visual narrative, applying Lotman's concept of the Semiosphere theory.

### Research Questions

1. How does China Daily utilize visual semiotics in its political cartoons to depict the BRICS currency initiative?
2. In what ways do these cartoons illustrate the ideological conflicts between BRICS ambitions and Western financial dominance?
3. How does employing Lotman's Semiosphere theory uncover deeper cultural significances within the BRICS visual narrative?

### Significance of the Study

This research provides essential insights on how political cartoons act as cultural texts that influence international economic discussions. Utilizing Lotman's Semiosphere theory, the study uncovers the multilayered meanings within China Daily's illustrations, highlighting China's views on financial sovereignty and BRICS collaboration. The results enhance understanding in the areas of media semiotics, economic diplomacy, and international communication by revealing the role of visual narratives in public diplomacy. Additionally, the research underscores the importance of humor, symbolism, and national identity in shaping economic initiatives. It also presents a framework for assessing other visual rhetoric forms in media, prompting further investigation into how rising powers express alternative perspectives in the global financial landscape.



### Literature Review

Abbas et al. (2021) investigate how political cartoons influence public perceptions of economic policy. They contend that Chinese newspapers discreetly sways audiences both at home and abroad through the use of visual storytelling. According to their research, these cartoons reinforce Western institutions' support for financial autonomy. They see cartoons as autocommunication tools in which China projects a calculating image abroad while reflecting its ideas back to itself.

Abdeldayem and Wadie-Kswat (2025) analysed the influence of these cartoons on public attitudes toward economic policies, particularly concerning the implications of a BRICS currency. Their research indicates that Chinese newspaper uses visual narratives to steer discussions and shape public sentiment around economic topics. Chen's review addresses the narrative of China Daily cartoons related to power dynamics in currency orientation and the visual language used to depict economic strength or weakness. According to the study, these cartoons serve as an effective medium for economic discussion.

Bartee (2018) examines how political cartoons in Chinese newspapers critique the BRICS currency ambitions by analysing the symbolism used to depict the U.S. dollar in contrast to a potential BRICS currency. The study reveals a consistent trend of the U.S. dollar symbolising Western economic dominance, while the BRICS currency is associated with a sense of hope and uncertainty. Straubhaar (2015) looked into how comics' cultural aspects influence the conversation around the BRICS. According to him, visual strategies that convey collaboration or disunity among the BRICS countries include animals, interlocking hands, and construction imagery. Patel highlights how Chinese cultural idioms, pride in the country, and geopolitical aspirations are reflected in these images. His work supports the idea that cartoons serve as semiotic texts with roots in public diplomacy and national ideology.

Wu (2023) research, political cartoons serve as diplomatic narratives that express China's foreign policy objectives. He contends that these cartoons, which depict both internal chaos and cooperative creation, reflect both harmony and division within the BRICS alliance. According to Wu (2023), the cartoons' meanings revolve around binary oppositions, such as cooperation vs fragmentation or utopia versus reality. Xi (2024) analyses the BRICS currency through the symbolism in Chinese newspapers' cartoons. Additionally, the review notes that traditional Chinese iconography and mythology to frame discussions of modern economics, sometimes relating them to contemporary issues. Martinez's literature review investigates Chinese newsprint cartoons, illustrating how commentary on the BRICS currency initiative demonstrates the cartoons' ground-level impact on popular economic discourse. The study underscores the cartoons' role in fostering nationalist economic sentiment and challenging Western financial hegemony.

### Research Methodology

This study examines how political cartoons in China Daily depict the BRICS currency proposal using a qualitative research design based on semiotic analysis. Deciphering the metaphors, ideological narratives, and visual symbols present in these cartoons is the main goal of the methodology. Juri Lotman's idea of the Semiosphere (1975, 1977), which views culture as a network of sign systems where meaning is created through dynamic interactions among signs within a cultural context, serves as the theoretical foundation for the investigation. Five typical political cartoons from China Daily that either directly or



symbolically address issues of BRICS economic unity, dollar hegemony, and movements in global financial power were chosen using a purposive sample technique. These cartoons were picked because they were pertinent to the research issues and had strong semiotic value.

Lotman's semiotic model, which identifies the text-context link, binary oppositions, and primary and secondary modeling systems, was used to examine each cartoon. In order to represent deeper ideological and geopolitical connotations, the investigation also concentrated on the usage of anthropomorphism, national emblems, and culturally distinct iconography.

In order to comprehend how these visual texts, create narratives about BRICS cooperation and financial sovereignty, the study used interpretive textual analysis. In the Semiosphere of international economic discourse, the researcher studied the roles played by symbols like Uncle Sam, monetary signs, animals, gears, and building tools. The results are interpretative rather than generalizable because the study is qualitative and no statistical tools were utilized. The cartoons are seen as cultural texts that support public diplomacy and political communication, rather than just amusing objects. A more detailed understanding of how visual media might influence and reflect global economic ideologies is made possible by the methodological approach.

### **The Semiotic Sphere**

**An Appropriate Concept** At the center of Lotman's theory is the idea of the Semiosphere, which is analogous to the biosphere in ecology:

**Meaning:** The Semiosphere describes the space in which communication and meaning occur. It encompasses all signs and sign systems within a culture.

**Key Ideas:** Just as the biosphere is a condition for life, sharing the same communication space is a precondition for effective communication.

This includes deliberately structured systems (language, art, and rituals) alongside chaotic, unstructured systems. It generates global meanings and modes of symbolisation and semiosis.

### **Culture as a System of Signs**

Lotman viewed culture as a collective semiotic system composed of the signs individuals use to communicate, understand, and construct their world.

**Culture and Texts:** He emphasised that culture is not merely a collection of objects but rather a set of "texts" (loosely defined). A text may encompass a book, a painting, a film, or even a tradition.

**Binary Oppositions:** He explored how oppositions (such as life and death, chaos and order, etc.) structure cultural meanings as Primary vs. Secondary Modelling Systems.

### **Lotman's System of Modeling**

**Primary Modelling System:** Language functions as the basic modelling system—it is how we create meaning and share that meaning with others.

Secondary modelling systems (literature, art, religion) emerge from language and are thus considered secondary. They enhance the richness and complexity of meaning.

### **Text Versus Context in Communication**

Lotman contended that no text exists in isolation, it cannot be interpreted solely about itself.





Reread the text to comprehend how that meaning is constructed, which is particularly crucial since texts are informative (conveying direct meaning) and creative (generating new meanings through interactions with other texts and contexts).

Lotman distinguished between two types of communication:

**Communication:** The process of exchanging information between individuals.

**Autocommunication:** Communication from oneself (e.g., diary writing, rumination). In autocommunication, the sender and the receiver are identical; through this process, information is reinterpreted, thereby becoming something new.

### Dynamics of Cultural Change

Lotman underscored that cultural systems are inherently dynamic, not static. They evolve through processes of:

**Translation:** The act of translating one system of signs into another, which creates new meanings. **Explosion:** Sudden, unpredictable shifts in meaning often result from the interaction of two semiotic systems.

### Sample

Five of the images are selected as the sample of the study and are analyzed under the Lotman's theory of cultural semiotic analysis as Semiosphere.

### Data Analysis



<https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202308/01/WS64c86c42a31035260b819a46.html>

According to Lotman, every image exists in the context of a more general Semiosphere—the cultural and semiotic space in which it is created, interpreted, and understood. Seventeen the Mideast image as a part of a broader world order (or disorder). Deteriorated language is constantly being served, but the image is based on habituated signs and symbols charged with universal values (such as Uncle Sam, currencies: \$, €, ¥, etc.). These signs are part of organized semiotic systems (political cartoons, economic propaganda, etc.). The crossroads take on a chaotic addition with all sorts of characters (cultural and economic representations), symbolizing crashes into one another, various economic crossroads colliding. This “explosion”, the creation of unpredictable meaning- occurs when these symbols meet the viewer’s context of their cultural and political knowledge.

As a text, the image derives its meaning from the surrounding context: It appears to refer to global economic systems directly and can be interpreted as a test for the U. S. dollar, as the dollar man (Uncle Sam) hoards the wealth of other currencies. Characters correspond to nations/cultures (Middle Eastern, East Asian, African, European), highlighting global inequality/exploitation.

Uncle Sam, representing the United States, evokes the image of its pivotal role in global trade rather than altruism, profiting off the backs of others. This interaction of contexts enables the viewer to decipher the image according to their individual or collective knowledge, leading to varied interpretations.



This image employs visual language (cartoonish caricatures and exaggerated facial expressions) to convey its message. These features simplify the complexities of global finance for mass consumption. Cultural signs include Uncle Sam, currency symbols, and stereotyped representations of various peoples. They are embedded in a secondary modeling system that relies on viewers' understanding of these symbols to generate meaning.

Binary oppositions lie at the center of Lotman's understanding of meaning-making. Uncle Sam (who concentrates wealth) vs. some hypothetical people from various nations (who contribute to that wealth). The dominant position of the United States (represented by Uncle Sam at the center) vs. the peripheral/captive role of other world countries. The global, but centralized, nature of the economic system embodied in the U. S. dollar vs. localized economies represented by other currencies.

For a Western audience, Uncle Sam might convey pride in financial prowess. However, this perception can be misleading; for non-Western viewers, that symbol may suggest traces of exploitation or failure. How these signs are reinterpreted depends on individuals' cultural and ideological backgrounds. The relationship between all the caricatured personalities (from different countries) and Uncle Sam at the center suspiciously allows for a more explosive cultural significance. It critiques the unequal global financial system. This image represents the interlinked but unequally dependent cultural and economic systems of the world, with one system (U.S.) marginalizing or dominating the others. If the arrangement appears haphazard and the faces exaggerated, it hints at some tension in the global financial systems.



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In this cartoon, it can be observed a cultural text based on a semiotic analysis of signs and systems within an economic and political context, following Juri Lotman's work. Here's a detailed breakdown:

This semiotic analysis of a cartoon, viewed through a cinematic lens, represents a semiotic interpretation's trans-situational and trans-cultural dimensions, separate from the uniqueness of the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) Semiosphere featured in the cartoon. This is reflected explicitly in the subtitles, which may be the only means of understanding the controversial cartoon, infamous for both blowing up and burning that bus in 2013. Its notoriety arose from its criticism of Western imperialism on the BRICS's island of neglect.

The structured elements include the label "BRICS Development Bank," bricks stacked, and people building the walls. These coordinated efforts reflect the construction of a financial institution. Their roles and attire represent political and economic leadership. Each character serves as an ambassador of a BRICS member state, with gestures and actions suggesting varying levels of alarm or capability to act. This complex layering reflects the tensions and imbalances among the BRICS states competing for influence in their joint endeavor.

The cartoon operates as a text that generates significance based on the viewer's understanding regarding: Economic Context By forming their development bank, the BRICS nations jointly challenge the financial hegemony of institutions like the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. It depicts a microcosm of international cooperation (or lack thereof), where every member has a role in building an institution for the community, but not all are equally willing or effective. The cartoon offers a pointed commentary on power divisions and unequal contributions within the BRICS bloc.

This cartoon draws on symbolic imagery, literal "bricks" form the basis of the bank's creation, representing metaphorical building blocks (i.e., capital, trust, and cooperation). Facial expressions and body language convey the [emotional] spectrum from great enthusiasm to extreme hesitation, highlighting potential dissonance. The characters in the show symbolize the BRICS countries based on stereotypes or perceived economic roles. The man spreading mortar could represent some foundational element (perhaps China's checkbook). The individual in front, pushing the cart, could signify logistical or resource support. Other characters may suggest passive or less engaged participation.

The cartoon explores various binary oppositions that are central to its interpretative significance. The nations are working together to build the bank, but their efforts do not appear equal, raising questions about whether unity is fully achieved. The wall is solid but constructed on muddy ground, suggesting a potentially weak or unfinished foundation. A Symbol of Resistance to Enslaving Western Fiefdoms: It illustrates the developed nations of the Global South coming together. The cartoon would prompt viewers to engage in autocommunication (if one is familiar with the term) immediately, as they would reflect on what they know about BRICS and its aspirations.

Interpretations vary depending on the viewer's background. Optimistic viewers may see the image as a representation of cooperation and progress. Conversely, critics might interpret it as indicating the ineffectiveness and internal strife of BRICS. The cartoon's interaction with its audience exemplifies Lotman's concept of explosion, or the creation of new meaning through dynamic exchanges. The construction metaphor for the bank provokes conversations about the success, or lack thereof, of BRICS as a bloc. The





correlation of building an alternative to Western financial hegemony. The complexities involved in combining nations with diverging political and financial interests.



[https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/brics2011/2011-04/13/content\\_12316725.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/brics2011/2011-04/13/content_12316725.htm)

According to Juri Lotman's semiotic theory, this image can be considered a cultural text within a Semiosphere, "the sphere of a sign or signs," a system of interaction between signs and symbols through which meaning is generated. This cartoon features anthropomorphized animals (in suits, playing cards) representing specific countries or regions. This setup is a metaphor for global negotiations or strategic maneuvering in the economic or political realm.

The cartoon takes place in the Semiosphere of global diplomacy and politics. Each animal symbolizes a nation or region, engaging in a strategic card game representing international negotiations.

The formalized system includes familiar national symbols, such as: Panda (stands for China), Bear (Russia), Elephant (India), Giraffe (African nations (savanna association)), and Toucan (South America or a specific tropical region). These creatures in fancy dress symbolize countries or groups negotiating strategic diplomacy or trade agreements. Cards introduce additional uncertainty into the mix. The element of surprise or uncertainty in political maneuvers often signifies that the hidden cards represent unknown strategies or secretive negotiations at play behind the scenes, creating tension or chaos within what would otherwise be a systematic decision-making process.

The cartoon, along with its text, conveys meanings the image may symbolize global negotiations (e.g., trade, diplomacy, or environmental treaties). The whole sentence translates into participants rationalizing risks involving cards, a process in which each player evaluates their consequences. The chosen animals are familiar symbols, ensuring viewers recognize the nations or regions represented.

The cartoon employs anthropomorphism (animals behaving like people) to simplify and universalize the concept of diplomacy. It parallels a complicated, stressful situation involving politicians with a simple, relatable experience (playing cards).

The cards represent power, strategy, and hidden intentions in international relations. All the animals depicted are loaded with cultural symbolism as



- Panda (China): Strength, diplomacy, and soft power.
- Bear (Russia): Now associated with both tenacity and ferocity.
- Elephant (India): Symbolizes charm, wisdom, strength, and diversity.
- Giraffe (Africa): May signify diversity or the “long view” in negotiations.
- Parrot (South America?): May symbolize color, vibrancy, or a more minor but loud actor in world affairs.

Lotman's binary oppositions are apparent in the cartoon. The variableness of the animals indicates openness in action, while the cards they hold symbolize hidden intentions or plans. The animals lounge together, ready to eat at the table (i.e., cooperate), but play a competitive game. The animals represent individual nations, but their collective setting (the card game) signifies global interconnectedness.

To autocommunicate, the cartoon clarifies that viewers can question their understanding of global politics and alliances. Different viewers could read the cartoon as a commentary on knowledge of international relations. Some may interpret the card game as a commentary on selflessness in global diplomacy, fixating on the competition mechanics involved. To others, it represents a glimmer of hope that diverse nations can gather to negotiate.

Here can be Lotman's idea of explosion, the generation of new meanings through dynamic interactions. The cartoon's symbolic elements (animals, cards, formal attire) engage with the viewer's cultural and political knowledge to create layered meanings. It contains elements of the gravity of global negotiations and the absurdity of condensing complex diplomacy into a card game.



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Applying Juri Lotman's semiotic model, it can view that the image as text within the Semiosphere of world economics and politics. It depicts people laboriously hammering up a considerable arrow that reads “PROTECTIONISM,” indicating economic or trade policies



that focus on protecting domestic industries. The cartoon exists in the Semiosphere of international economic systems, particularly in discussions about protectionism and free trade.

The formal system is represented as it is the clear, direct arrow labeled “PROTECTIONISM,” a symbol for policies restricting imports or incentivizing more production closer to home. In this case, figures push the arrow like politicians or economic titans of tomorrow from various corners of the world endorsing protectionist policies. The physical pressure to keep the arrow bolted upward indicates instability and tension: the unsustainability and burdens of keeping protectionist doors shut.

The cartoon is a text that derives meaning from its relation to different aspects. This image critiques the rising trend of nations or leaders pursuing protectionist trade policies, sometimes at the cost of global economic stability. The cartoon references the actions of prominent global leaders (perhaps from the U.S. or Europe) calling for trade restrictions to protect domestic producers. The figures’ clothing and body language convey authority and leadership, suggesting that high-level decision-makers are driving this trend. The cartoon employs a visual metaphor of people holding up the “PROTECTIONISM” arrow, turning the abstract idea into a concrete action. The strenuous effort to maintain the arrow’s vertical position illustrates the challenge and possible futility of enforcing protectionist measures. The arrow is a universal metaphor for direction and policy. The people portrayed are national leaders or policymakers, grappling with their decisions or consequences.

The binary oppositions formulated by Lotman are evident in the cartoon. The arrow’s unstable structure indicates that protectionism is likely an unstable or challenging state to maintain. This reflects the ongoing struggle against protectionist policies. The leaders’ physical exertion implies that self-protection benefits may not justify the effort required to sustain it. The cartoon invokes autocommunication, prompting viewers to reassess their understanding of protectionism and its implications for people. Depending on individual perspectives, interpretations may vary in the cartoons. Free trade advocates may perceive it as a critique of the impracticality of protectionism. Protectionists might view it as representing the effort and sacrifice of some leaders striving to safeguard local industries.

Lotman’s concept of explosion, mainly how dynamic interactions occur within the Semiosphere generating new meanings, resonates in how the cartoon engages viewers. It suggests that the opportunities and challenges of protectionism in an era of globalization are increasingly urgent topics. The implication critiques the irony of protectionist policies, the kinds of shutdowns that maintain internal mechanisms while risking stagnation for external constituencies, that keeping this collective barrier intact requires significant effort but offers no assurance of success.





<https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202304/28/WS644b0659a310b6054fado43b.html>

This cartoon illustrates BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) as animated figures representing countries engaged in cooperation through interlocking gears. To better understand such visuals, we can utilise Juri Lotman's theory of the semiotic system, where an image acts as a "text" that reflects the cultural, economic, and political spheres of the BRICS alliance. The cartoon explores the realm of and occupies a place within the Semiosphere of international economic cooperation, with BRICS serving as an economic and political entity.

The term BRICS refers to the respective countries of nations B, R, I, C, and S. The gears symbolize interconnected systems or collaborative frameworks (trade, investment, and typical development goals). The figures around an ornate table dressed in formal Western European attire underline the seriousness of the occasion. This indicates a professional or official meeting, not a social gathering. Holding hands symbolizes cooperation, solidarity, and collective effort.

The cartoon introduces complexities. The figures dance or step atop the gears, symbolizing dynamism and the necessity of maintaining a delicate balance to coordinate all movement. Misaligned gears may indicate problems; if this component fails to work, it will compromise the entire system. The cartoon functions as a text that encodes layers of meaning through the economic context as BRICS represents a counterbalance to Western-dominated financial institutions, focusing on mutual economic benefit and decreasing reliance on external economic systems. It emerges from a sense of unity among emerging economies and a need for cooperation to achieve shared goals. The dancing imagery lends itself to interpretations of celebration and harmony, while the gears bring an industrial and economic vibe.





People dancing on the shifting gears represent human agency in industrial and mechanical collaboration machinery. Such motion implies an active, living system. These interlocking gears symbolize interdependent economies and interdependencies within BRICS. The acronym “BRICS” is anthropomorphized as unifying countries into an acting subject with human-like qualities. The hand-holding image projects an ideal of equality and partnership, whereas, in reality, BRICS relationships are often fraught with tensions and asymmetry.

The cartoon highlights several binary oppositions, a significant feature of Lotman’s theory. The nations act as a unified front, yet the individual movements imply distinct contributions to and challenges faced in re-entry into the world. The gears represent smooth cooperation when organized and mayhem when all gears are misaligned. The dancing figures suggest motion and evolution, while the gears indicate the static, structured processes necessary to maintain the system. The cartoon fosters communication through self-reflection on BRICS. To a more positive viewer, the cartoon is a symbol of unity and strength, a tribute to the joint efforts of various countries. Timid viewers might see the risky pas de deux atop gears as a symbol of potential imbalance or discord among the members.

Explaining Lotman’s (1976) notion of explosion, the realization of new meanings through dynamic exchanges—it is apparent in the engagement between the characters, the gears, and the audience’s interpretations. It raises questions about the achievements and shortcomings of BRICS as a collective group. Dance signifies cooperation, while gears represent structural dependency – the complexities of nations working together amid conflicting goals.

### Conclusion

The study explores the BRICS currency initiative on the level of the political cartoon from China Daily using a semiotic lens. Using Juri Lotman’s semiotic theory (1975, 1977), it demonstrates the way these cartoons manage to function as texts in a cultural Semiosphere, using visual metaphors, symbolism, and binary oppositions to critique the global economic system plagued by the domination of the U.S. dollar. These conclusions reveal that China Daily’s cartoons serve multiple functions, both as entertainment and as a means of representing complex geopolitical and economic realities, educating the public, and shaping how those realities are perceived, through humour, critique, and metaphor. The depiction of BRICS as united entity or a cacophony of conflicting interests sheds light on the intrinsic hurdles and ambitions of the currency project. At the end of the day, these cartoons embody the relations between countries, competing ideologies, and also the cultural environment where these economic initiatives are made sense of.

### Findings

In the cartoons, Western economic dominance is personified as the U.S. dollar, while the BRICS currency is represented as interlocking hands or a gathering of animals working in harmony. This inter-transference function is also a strong element of solidarity and togetherness on the one hand and the political reality of trying to shift away from US dollar hegemony on the other.

For cartoons about the disparity among the BRICS nations, for example, binary oppositions — unity vs. disparity, or collaboration vs. tension — serve as common bipolar conduits. The chaotic systems (misaligned gears or pulling animals in the opposite direction) depicts how difficult it is to get all those different economies aligned behind one



currency. Such divisions illustrate the tensions and complexity of BRICS as well as the economic competition among the countries in the grouping.

The Semiosphere is laden with cultural allusions derived from Chinese idioms, mythology, and national archetypes. All these are employed to appeal to the local audience to convey China's position as a leader in the BRICS effort. Through mashing up Chinese traditional symbolic systems with contemporary economic narratives, these cartoons construct the public perceptions of global economic policies. The cartoons represent a form of autocommunication, questioning readers' perceptions of BRICS and global economics. They include not only criticism of Western financial hegemony but also support BRICS-Aligned Financial Order Against Platform Capitalism economic reform. It is emblematic of China's increasing dominance as a global leader in the economic fate of developing countries.

These cartoons are a tool to shape domestic and international perception of the BRICS currency initiative from a public diplomacy standpoint. They serve as commentary on the geopolitical and economic challenges confront BRICS, however, also present an optimistic vision of a future with more equitable distribution of global financial power.

### **Recommendations**

"This is why governments and institutions need to understand that political cartoons play a powerful role in public opinion and in international discourse." These cartoons can be used in soft power to shape perceptions of economic policies and global economic systems. The complementarity of cultural icons and symbolism in China Daily can be mirrored in media in other countries to promote their own economic narratives. When we see that audiences are not engaged with the topics we want to communicate, it would be important to invest in creative communication tools, combining elements of the local culture with that of the international theme being raised.

Warsaw is haunted by the importance of balancing economic alignment among BRICS nations with their internal imbalances. A coordinated communication effort that expresses common characteristics and goals could help address internal divisions and enhance the effectiveness of the BRICS currency project.

Political cartoons can be used to provoke critical thought about world economic systems. This can inspire viewers to ask questions about the current system and envision alternative financial structures based on equity and economic sovereignty.

### **Gap for Future Research**

The research on BRICS and its currency can only be undertaken in light of the audiences who consume this material in a variety of cultural contexts, which future research should explore further. In particular, research should explore how these cartoons affect global views of China's role in remaking the financial order. Direct studies are essential in assessing how visual media such as cartoons influence economic policies. Research can be done to ascertain whether these cartoons have any effect on public sentiment, and on the political decisions of the BRICS member states. There is room for more studies on the semiotics of political cartoons within the global economy: how do such symbols and images function to critique or uphold political ideologies? Implications of this study could explore an expanded notion of visual rhetoric in the formation of international economic narratives. Future research can also explore how the BRICS currency initiative is portrayed in other media artefacts other than cartoons. This also includes how its narrative of



economic sovereignty is being constituted in news media, documentaries, and social media.

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