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An Unfinished 'Diplomacy of Encounter' – Asia and the West 1500–2015

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Abstract

Asian diplomatic practices consistently frustrate western policymakers. This, I argue, is due in large part to cultural factors and the differences in interpreting political modernization. I will identify the features that contribute to a 'diplomacy of encounter' by, firstly, performing a historical reading of early indigenous annals that treat diplomacy in Asia, as well as of Jesuit and Portuguese encounters with Asia in the 1500s and 1600s; secondly, by reading a sample of nationalist tracts from Asia between the late 1800s and 1960s; and, thirdly, by reading the practices of ASEAN and wider Asia-Pacific regionalism between the 1990s and 2000s. It is only through discourse analysis of the Foucaultian variety that one can tease out the cultural and modernization-related road bumps in so-called 'modern Asian diplomacy'. This study hopes to contribute to enhancing appreciation of the ongoing procedural and substantive tensions between Asian states and their western, and mostly developed, dialogue partners.

In an exchange typical of twenty-first century diplomatic encounters in Asia, on 31 May 2014 US Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel accused Beijing, at the annual security-centered Shangri-La Dialogue, of 'destabilizing, unilateral actions' due to its territorial disputes with the Philippines and Vietnam in the South China Sea. This triggered a withering response from Lieutenant-General Wang Guanzhong, the Head of the People's Liberation Army delegation: 'I felt that Secretary Hagel's speech is full of hegemonism, threat and intimidation' (Chua, 2014). Aside from its theatrical drama, this episode revealed multiple gaps between the diplomatic mindsets of the United States of America, representing the foremost western power in the Asia-Pacific region, and those of China representing the front ranks of the emerging Asian powers. In this article, I propose that these gaps can be reduced to two: *differences in culture*, and *differences in interpreting political modernization*. These are the characteristics of a diplomacy of encounter. Relations between a developmental and prospering Asia and a *status quo* western-influenced world order are an encounter in the sense that the two 'worlds' may appear to officially embrace the characteristics and international legal status of a modern

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diplomacy, but in reality both run into dissonance due to differences in historically derived intellectual contexts in producing their respective meanings of what diplomatic practice is. Given the constraints of word length, and the near universal penetration of Westphalia-influenced diplomatic norms, I shall not be discussing what and how western diplomacy came to be mainstream through the Congress of Vienna 1815, the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, or the consequences of the interwar Geneva conventions and the inauguration of the United Nations in 1945. It suffices that we treat mainstream, universal, western-influenced modern diplomacy to mean 'the conduct of international relations by negotiation rather than by force, propaganda, or recourse to law, and by other peaceful means (such as gathering information or engendering goodwill) which are either directly or indirectly designed to promote negotiation' (Berridge, 1995: 1). In ideal situations, diplomacy is expected to convey clarity of intentions, or to affect behaviour in a positive manner, although diplomatic communication for deception is increasingly also common (Berridge, 1995: 39–40). However, professional diplomacy is not intended to deceive. It should instead exhibit honesty, calm temperament, a spirit of inquiry, tact, an attitude of constructive bargaining, and, even where temporizing and secrecy is justified for decision-making, ultimately to seek a solution to a problem that results in amicable outcomes for the participating states (Nicolson, 1969). States are expected to honour their word by deed and *vice versa*. But in the Asian experience, diplomacy is not clear cut. It is highly filtered by contexts of culture and degrees of modernization. In this regard, the Asian experience calls attention to some forgotten aspects in the study of diplomacy's efficacy and its relationship to local specificities.

Treating culture and modernization as insights into diplomacy actually recalls some aspects of the western narrative of the origins of the practice. In fact, diplomacy is hinted at in Plato's discussion of the distinctions between war and civilized relations between the Greeks:

> When Greek fights barbarian or barbarian Greek we shall say they are at war and are natural enemies, and that their quarrel is properly called a 'war'; but when Greek fights Greek we shall say they are naturally friends, but that Greece is sick and torn by faction, and that the quarrel shall be called 'civil strife' . . . [Within the latter,] if the two sides ravage each other's land and burn each other's houses, we think it an outrage, and regard two parties who dare to lay waste the country which bore and bred them as lacking in all patriotism. But we think it reasonable, if the victors merely carry off their opponents' crops, and remember that they can't go on fighting for ever but must come to terms some time.
>
> Yes, because the last frame of mind is the more civilized . . .
>
> Then they will love their fellow-Greeks, and think of Greece as their own land, in whose common religion they share. (Plato, 1987: 198–9, Part 6 Bk V)

In this excerpt, community, derived from a common civilizational standard, matters in deciding the difference, firstly, between defining war and civil strife and,

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secondly, between unrestrained violence and limited violence. There is the insinuation that a common language of communication bound by values – patriotism, religion, and being civilized – matters to how disputes between fellow adherents ought to be handled. Harold Nicolson, one of the most widely cited scholar–diplomats of the twentieth century, commented that it fell to the Romans to formalize peaceful contact between nations and their boundaries through the institution of international law. Subsequently, 'Anglo-Saxon writers on diplomatic theory' elaborate the civilizing influence of international law and commerce upon the evolution of diplomacy. In Nicolson's words, the Anglo-Saxons 'contend that the advance of diplomatic theory is to be measured, not only by an increase in the conception of a community of human interests, but also by the gradual approximation of public to private morality' (Nicolson, 1969: 23). The purportedly neoclassical realist of our time, Henry Kissinger, even espoused similar views in his particular reading of the lessons of eighteenth-century power politics for the twenty-first century:

> Power is too difficult to assess, and the willingness to vindicate it too various, to permit treating it as a reliable guide to international order. Equilibrium works best if it is buttressed by an agreement on common values. The balance of power inhibits the capacity to overthrow the international order; agreement on shared values inhibits the desire to overthrow the international order. Power without legitimacy tempts tests of strength; legitimacy without power tempts empty posturing. (Kissinger, 1994: 77)

How then might one deconstruct and analyse the operation of culture and modernization factors in diplomacy? Since the practice of diplomacy is fundamentally about constructing systems of meaning and acting upon them through protocol, reporting, and other forms of messaging – both in word and deed – we can helpfully turn to discourse analysis to make this article's argument. Foucaultian discursive deconstruction offers one such handle:

> Mechanisms of power in general have never been much studied by history. History has studied those who held power – anecdotal histories of kings and generals; contrasted with this there has been the history of economic processes and infrastructures. Again, distinct from this, we have had histories of institutions, of what has been viewed as a superstructural level in relation to the economy. But power in its strategies, at once general and detailed, and its mechanisms, has never been studied. What has been studied even less is the relation between power and knowledge, the articulation of each on the other . . . The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power. (Foucault, 1980: 51–2)

This is Foucault's frequently cited power–knowledge nexus, which is thoroughly applicable if one takes seriously the earlier mentioned roots of contemporary diplomatic practice in ancient Greco-Roman and Enlightenment era Anglo-Saxon and continental thought. Modern diplomacy was cumulatively derived from the reproduction of philosophy from the realms of the clergymen, philosophers, political leaders, and so on

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of their era and the socio-political contexts. Moreover, when we treat the diplomacy of the encounter between Asia and the West, we also need to deal with the embeddedness of hegemonic forms of diplomatic expectations enhanced from its Westphalian and Greco-Roman origins as practiced by western states in Asia since the first colonial contacts right up to the present. In today's terms, we see security regionalism manifested artificially in the ASEAN Regional Forum, the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus, and the East Asia Summit. In these multilateral forums, both Asian and Western states from the Pacific Rim appear to be meeting on a common frequency, replete with decorum, formal equality, and other protocol for delivering speeches and policy statements, but in reality the process of participation reveals cultural and developmental differences dating back several centuries. The modernizing sovereign states of the Asia-Pacific appear to be a carbon copy of their western counterparts' foreign ministries, while the latter attend these Asian intergovernmental forums with the heady anticipation that they are dealing with comparable modernizing entities that have reproduced the Westphalian, post-Enlightenment, neo-Weberian power-knowledge nexus of rational government. Asian states, like their western counterparts, are imputed to exercise their choices on tangible calculations of cost–benefit analyses and consolidated national interests (Colbert, 1977; Friedberg, 1993/94; Clemens, 1999; Foot, 2001; Foot and Walter, 2010; Ahrari, 2011; Rapkin and Thompson, 2013). The reality, I argue, is radically divergent. This is a point sadly missed by recent critical scholarship on ASEAN-driven diplomacy (Ball *et al.*, 2006; Eaton and Stubbs, 2006; Ganesan and Amer, 2010; Katsumata, 2010; Capie, 2013). Therefore, discursive analysis of selected Asian texts produced from three different eras is necessary for illuminating the diplomacy of encounter in Asia.

This article will proceed as follows. In the first section, I will refer to a sample of three texts from pre-modern Southeast Asia to establish the idea of cultural difference in Asian diplomacy. The first text is from the fifteenth-century Malay World, the second from the sixteenth-century Portuguese exploration of Asia, and the third from the nineteenth-century world of British Malaya. Through these texts, we can glean a sense of dissonance and comparisons of superiority in Asia's pre-modern and early modern pasts. In the second section, the article deals with the subject of Asians adjusting to political independence. Nationalism, revolutionary temptations, and diplomatic communication were joined in a complex aspiration by the newly constituted leaderships to improve the lot of their peoples. This complex equation ensured that the notion of diplomatic equality, enshrined in the legacies of the diplomatic conventions, stemming from Westphalia, Vienna, and Geneva, could only be interpreted through a normative angle. The third and final phase of this diplomatic encounter would be the strategic decompression of the end of the international Cold War to the present. Excerpts sampled from the transition from the Cold War to the post-Cold War eras reveal a significant 'Asian return' to pre-modern values in diplomacy. This is evident from ASEAN's founding documents, the ASEAN Regional Forum, and excerpts from Chinese statements on a harmonious world order applied to the Asia-Pacific. The conclusion will attempt to suggest lessons from this discursive

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nexus between international exercises of power and displaying one's knowledge about values.

Dissonance and comparisons of superiority in Asia's pre-modern and early modern pasts

Pre-modern Asia has thrown up multiple texts asserting highly pluralistic, yet culturally distinct patterns of diplomatic styles. Collectively, these patterns privilege borderlessness in 'inter-societal relations'; respect for or insulation of cultural differences as a primary objective of cross-border relationships; and the respect for market relationships allied to demonstrations of piety. Clearly, defending a national interest was an alien concept.

Firstly, the *Sejarah Melayu* draws the curtain on the Malay World of the 1300s through to the early 1500s even though its various chapters and passages represent a spotty and tendentious piece of hagiographic myth history. Most importantly, this myth history is a reasonable insight into the diplomatic mentalities of the era because it was meant to burnish the reputations of reigning and expired dynasties. As an historical category, the Malay world stretched from the island of Penang and the present-day southern Thai province of Pattani in its northwestern extremity to large parts of Kalimantan, the Moluccas, and Mindanao in the southeast. It also encompassed the entire Malay Peninsula, the island of Sumatra, and Java. Both archaeological artefacts, and references in the *Sejarah*, indicate that Malay political entities interacted with kingdoms in South Asia (the lands of Kalinga), Arabia, Siam, China, and, from the late fifteenth century, the Portuguese, Dutch, and English. It was characteristic of the period that references to these entities in the *Sejarah* identified them as the collective 'other' conducting intercourse with the Malay polities on a broad continuum ranging from voluntary assimilation, to friendship, and to extreme hostility. Furthermore, the Malay world was constructed with a unique blend of Hindu–Buddhist cultural styles, layered more recently with thick Islamic associations in matters of piety, education, and diplomacy (Chong, 2012: 89).

Through tales of noble explorations, dalliances between spirits, angels, beautiful maidens, and warrior kings, war and gracious surrender, and the rise and fall of dynasties, the thematic dissection of the *Sejarah* suggests that relations of noble prowess, of knowledge quests, and of justice, operate on both intra- and inter-societal levels. Noble prowess cannot be sufficiently regarded as such if it remains hidden from others throughout the lands where human communication occurs. Furthermore, noble prowess allowed its wielders to bring glory to their kingdoms of domicile. It also allowed monarchs to fashion moral compacts for governing their subjects, albeit not without some sanction of violence (Chong, 2012: 99). One recalls a familiar maxim from the narrator of the *Sejarah*: 'Malay rulers . . . shall never put their subjects to shame, and that those subjects however gravely they offend shall never be bound or hanged or disgraced with evil words. If any ruler puts a single one of his subjects to shame, that shall be a sign that his kingdom will be destroyed by Almighty God' (Brown, 1970: 16).

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Reciprocally, the subjects are expected to observe scrupulously obedience to monarchic paternalism even if it should assume the hue of despotism. Wars cannot enhance prowess unless some enlightening outcome can be produced from it; even humiliation ought to be treated as a learning process. There is a clear privileging of a political power–knowledge nexus. Kingdoms cannot be founded, or subsist, on greatness of prestige if they do not contribute in some substantive way to the furthering of knowledge about the world. Both Raja Chulan's famed city of Bijnager and Melaka's grandeur are premised upon their ability to organize nature into decorative and leisurely forms, signifying a higher level of cultural achievement than what had hitherto been practiced.

In like manner, justice is ideally transcendental of borders, with Melaka setting the standards as its cultural center. Justice in the *Sejarah* emerges as a complex social construct of noble prowess and knowledge accumulation. It is even inclusive of Islam, but this is never declared in a neat aphorism. This nebulous notion of justice makes a disturbing allowance for controlled violence on the basis of 'an eye for an eye' in some instances, but in others it illuminates errors through references to good breeding and pre-existing norms of noble behaviour. In sum, the picture of relations across borders is one that emphasizes significant hierarchies of human dignity and achievement over fixed territoriality. The rajas of the Malay world appear desirous of extending their norms to non-Malay kingdoms, though not consistently by peaceful means. Despite recurring wars, Melaka found it in its culture to extend a hand to its erstwhile enemy, Siam, and further afield to the rival kingdom of China. In contrast, the arrival of the first westerners into the Malay World was depicted as a case of cultural non-communication and a callous rejection of intercultural communication:

> The [Frangi] capitan then went to the bandahara Sri Maha Raja, and the bandahara adopted him as his son; and the capitan presented the bandahara with two hundred chains of gold set with gems of extreme beauty, and Manilla workmanship, and he threw it over the neck of the bandahara. The [Malay] peoples present were going to be in a passion with that Frangi, but the bandahara would not let them, saying, 'Do not mal-treat peoples who are ignorant of the language'; so kind was he to them, and the capitan adopted the bandahara as his father. (Leyden, 2001: 324)

Cultural non-communication alone would not have constituted a sufficient *casus belli* between very diverse diplomatic cultures. The violence broke out, according to the narrative of the *Sejarah*, because of avarice on the part of the Portuguese/'Frangis'. The latter's initial contacts reported the wealth of the greatest Malay trading kingdom, Melaka, to Portugal's colonial viceroy in Goa who sought to add that wealth to his nation's intercontinental trading empire by acquiring it through force of arms. The difference between the Malay and the Portuguese lay in the latter's ascribed impatience, and penchant for violence, and rapid wealth acquisition.

From one significant Portuguese perspective of the early 1500s, there was ironically much to admire of the pluralistic Asian styles of governance and their conduct of interactions amongst kingdoms. In fact, kingdoms earned their greatness on the basis

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of their attainment of four qualities: demographic pluralism, military prowess, piety and indulgence, and the visibility of a junction for exchange. The authorship of Tomé Pires of *Suma Oriental: An Account of the East, from the Red Sea to Japan, written in Malacca and India in 1512–1515* stands as a work describing and parsing an incipiently globalizing Asia with a few qualifications. Firstly, Pires wrote in the service of Portuguese imperialism, albeit from the position of earnestly seeking enlightenment about the customs and politics of Asia. This might be construed by some as a tainted text, authored from the position of a would-be exploiter and a temporal victor in the opening chapter of the western colonization of Asia. But for our purposes, this text serves as a balance to perspectives like the aforementioned *Sejarah* speaking from within Southeast Asia. Secondly, Pires wrote as an ethnic 'outsider' to Asia epitomizing the idea of western eyes looking at Asia. But these issues matter less intellectually, and culturally, if we revalue the critical roles played by otherness in both producing and reproducing Asian uniqueness. Pires indeed ranged over a wide swath of maritime Asia, which few have recorded before in such extensive depth prior to 1515. Armando Cortesão's introduction to his translation of the *Suma* acknowledges that while little is known of Pires' background, he found enough fragmentary evidence through the private letters written by Pires to his family and various officials that he trained a watchful eye over the state of Portuguese colonies in Asia, stemming from his duties as a responsible apothecary both at the India and Malacca stations he had occasion to visit (Cortesão, 1944). Subsequently, his painstaking reports of his travels had certainly earned him sufficient royal favour to be appointed Portugal's first ambassador to the kingdom of China. Pires' narrative should therefore be considered as a work of colonial intelligence gathering, covering an Asia awaiting its turn as a regional theatre for western penetration. Moreover, the style of moderated observation, and the occasionally normative orientation, in the tone of the *Suma* supports its value as a text worth its intellectual weight amongst many rival contributions to our understanding of an early Asia that was already contributing to diplomatic discourse the idea of mercantile civilization. In the observation of Pires, it is trade 'that ennobles kingdoms and makes their people great, that ennobles cities, that brings war and peace'. Moreover, in Asia trade 'is held in such high esteem that the great lords here do not do anything else but trade. It is pleasant, necessary and convenient, although it brings reverses, which make it more esteemed' (Pires, 1944a: 4).

Pires firstly admired demographic pluralism. This quality of Asian governance was to be understood as a population comprising many creeds, races, and divergent social practices. A pluralistic population was observed to be both a symptom of trading prosperity and a source of threat against that very prosperity. For instance, Pires greatly admired the religious tolerance between Arabs and non-Arabs as he observed it in the province of Suez:

> In this province and also among the Arabs there are many Christians – some of them circumcised and some of them not. The circumcised are called Jacobites and the others Melchites. They have two Lents, one at Christmas and the

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> other the same as ours [the Portuguese].[1] They do not marry one another (i.e. Jacobites do not marry Melchites) and many of them are hermits and men of holy life, and some of them are men of property and they are numerous. They are found in Jidda, in Tor and in Mecca. They are considered by these people to be good men.
>
> The merchandise which these people take to India comes from Venice in Italy. It comes to Alexandria, and from the Alexandria warehouses it comes by river to the factors in Cairo, and from Cairo it comes in caravans with many armed people. It comes to Tor, but this is not often, because on account of the nomad robbers they need many armed people to guard the merchandise. But at the time of the Jubilee [i.e. most likely, the Islamic Haj], which is held every year in Mecca on the first day of February, when many people come, (the merchandise) is sent to Mecca with them. And from there it comes to Jidda and from Jidda it comes to the warehouses they have in Aden. (Pires,1944a: 12–13)

It is also evident that Pires' much admired second feature of Asia, piety and material indulgence, could be harmonized provided one did not pursue either trait to extremes, to the detriment of stable government. Trade, interpreted as the distribution of variety and other wares that local merchants and craftsmen could not produce on their own, enriched civilization and constituted its own universal language for interaction between cultures that were not even states in the modern sense. Trade was instead an integral part of social and political life. Pires admired much of the cities of Arabia, South Asia, and the many coastal ports of maritime Southeast Asia where the rich pattern of daily intercourse of a mercantile civilization endured. Consider for instance Pires' admiration of Goa as the quintessential good balance of piety and indulgence:

> There are a great many heathens in this kingdom of Goa, more than in the kingdom of the Deccan. Some of them are very honoured men with large fortunes; and almost the whole kingdom lies in their hands, because they are natives and possess the land and they pay the taxes. Some of them are noblemen with many followers and lands of their own, and are persons of great repute, and wealthy, and they live on their estates, which are very gay and fresh. The heathens of the kingdom of Goa surpass those of Cambay. They have beautiful temples of their own in this kingdom; they have priests or Brahmans of many kinds. There are some very honoured stocks among these Brahmans. Some of them will not eat anything which has contained blood or anything prepared by the hand of another. These Brahmans are greatly revered throughout the country, particularly among the heathen. Like those of Cambay, the poor ones serve to take merchandise and letters safely through the land, because the rich

[1] Fragments in square brackets indicate the author's own notes of illumination, while those placed in normal round brackets are direct reproductions in Armando Cortesão's translation of the *Suma*.

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> ones rank as great lords. They are clever, prudent, learned in their religion. A Brahman would not become a Mohammedan (even) if he were made a king. (Pires, 1944a: 59)

In fact, one might add that Pires developed his travelogue-like narrative with the idea that all great cities, *qua* civilizations *qua* empires, should achieve the status of a visible junction of material exchange. With trade in material goods flourishing, intellectual, spiritual and other exchanges would come in train. Malacca, on the Malay Peninsula, was one such magnet, but he attributed the Portuguese military takeover of it in 1511 as a bold act of positive enterprise in the spirit of mercantile civilization. The Malacca Sultanate could not have sustained the prosperity and peace of Malacca for they lacked the philosophical wherewithal, military judiciousness, and diplomatic moderation to lift the people's potential to a higher plane of material and ideological greatness:

> Great affairs cannot be managed with few people. Malacca should be well equipped with people, sending some and bringing back others. It should be provided with excellent officials, expert traders, lovers of peace, not arrogant, quick-tempered, undisciplined, dissolute, but sober and elderly, for Malacca has no white-haired official. Courteous youth and business life do not go together; and since this cannot be had in any other way, at least let us have years, for the rest cannot be found. Men cannot estimate the worth of Malacca, on account of its greatness and profit. Malacca is a city that is made for merchandise, fitter than any other in the world; the end of monsoons and the beginning of others. Malacca is surrounded and lies in the middle, and the trade and commerce between the different nations for a thousand leagues on every hand must come to Malacca. Wherefore a thing of such magnitude and of such great wealth, which never in the world could decline, if it were moderately governed and favoured, should be supplied, looked after, praised and favoured, and not neglected; for Malacca is surrounded by Mohammedans who cannot be friends with us unless Malacca is strong, and the Moors will not be faithful to us except by force, because they are always on the look-out, and when they see any part exposed they shoot at it. And since it is known how profitable Malacca is in temporal affairs, how much more is it in spiritual (affairs), as Mohammed is cornered and cannot go farther, and flees as much as he can. And let people favour one side, while merchandise favours our faith . . . Whoever is lord of Malacca has his hand on the throat of Venice. As far as from Malacca, and from Malacca to China, and from China to the Moluccas, and from the Moluccas to Java, and from Java to Malacca (and) Sumatra, (all) is in our power. (Pires, 1944b: 286–7)

It was, of course, all very ironic that Pires blamed the Sultan of Malacca for mismanagement and for pushing an aggressive form of militant Islam that failed to comprehend how trade demanded prudence and moderation in relations with multiple Others of different faiths. Portugal, as the successor to the rulership of Malacca and

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Goa in subsequent years, fell into the temptation of avarice defended largely by force of arms. Had Pires lived out the natural course of his life he would have been greatly dismayed at his comrades' miscomprehension of Asian mercantile civilization. In fact, Pires' *Suma Oriental* posited a fourth caveat to his reading of the polyglot harmony in Asian commerce at the time: warlike cultures were detrimental to commercial greatness since the negative reputation of seeking violence as a form of acquiring livelihoods would drive good and learned peoples away from one's realm. On the other hand, a well-guarded centre of commerce would prove hospitable for serving as a political, intellectual, and commercial hub, insulated from the wilder ways of misruled populations who had brought geographical marginalization upon themselves. To illustrate this point, Pires admired the prudence of Aden's defences but criticized Siam's incessant wars with its neighbours in Indochina (Pires, 1944a: 15–16).

The aforementioned two texts from the 1400s and the early 1500s clearly raise to prominence the role of culture as either a common frequency or a gulf of dissonance between Asia and the West in diplomatic discourse. This is confirmed by several other accounts where religious and scholarly interlocutors between the two imply that culture had to be bridged if diplomacy were to progress beyond the initial encounter. The role of Matteo Ricci and the Jesuits in China in the period between the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries are illustrative. One can take the observations of the Jesuits seriously for they were dedicated towards advancing the Word of the Christian God by unlocking the physical and human geographies of Asia so that Christian spirituality could penetrate them (Laven, 2011: 10–12). European secular knowledge could be utilized to entice the heathens of Asia to convert towards a superior civilizational standard cloaked in Christianity. One Jesuit missionary, Michele Ruggieri discovered that the language of 'contracambio' was a necessary adjustment to Chinese medieval conditions both inside and outside the Court of the Celestial Kingdom. 'Contracambio' was Jesuit code for the exchange of gifts of comparable intellectual and artistic value that were intended to facilitate cross-cultural relationships (Laven, 2011: 85). As a result, Ruggieri is reported to have paid close attention to trade routes within China, the obsession with producing and pricing porcelain, the fascination with temples as objects of admiration, and Chinese attention to embroidered finery and rituals. China was understood as 'a civilization that was defined as much by technology as by belief, a civilization in which objects were as meaningful as words' (Laven, 2011: 86). Matteo Ricci himself attracted converts and Chinese friends by imparting western arithmetic, astrology, and systems of measuring time to the Chinese. In one of his letters to the Pope in Rome, he beseeched his superior to dispatch missionaries trained in astrology since knowledge of the possible worlds beyond Earth could reinforce imperial superiority and legitimacy in the eyes of the general population (Laven, 2011: 129–31). In this regard, Ricci was absolutely correct: the Chinese state would, by the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, place a huge premium on the acquisition of western (read modern) science.

Early Asian intellectuals schooled by western institutions on Asian soil, or intellectually affected by the arrival of western knowledge, revealed a deep ambivalence

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about embracing western norms as the ideal standard of modernity. On the one hand, these early intellectuals perceived an attractive universality in western methods of law and administration and respected the mode of rational thought grounded in a belief in common humanity. On the other hand, this western modernity could only be interpreted as 'desirable' through local cultural lenses. The result was a steep political awkwardness, as illustrated by Rammohan Roy's attempts in the mid-1820s to argue against British colonial authority for nativist representation in local judicial processes on the basis of universal equality and the familiarity of native representatives with their immediate social contexts. Historian Chris Bayly thus observed that Rammohan Roy was clearly influenced by Edmund Burke when:

> [He,] Rammohan [,] and his group, along with his learned Madras and Bombay contemporaries, argued strongly for a change in the Indian regulations to permit their countrymen to serve. The argument was, first, that respectable Indians were morally fully capable of taking oaths and that Hindu religion abominated lying. Second, an ancient system of jury, the panchayat (literally, a body of five men) had always existed in India. Finally, by taking part in judgment, Hindus and Muslims would be contributing their essential local knowledge to the proceedings, while at the same time learning to participate in a growing civil society. (Bayly, 2007: 35)

Amidst the British colonial penetration into Malaya around this time, a native Malay, Munshi Abdullah pleaded with his father to allow him to learn English and gain access to the knowledge brought by the British. It is worth quoting this excerpt from Abdullah's own memoirs cum annals of his encounters with colonialism, since it reveals how the advance towards western modernity was still framed within a traditional process of negotiating the terms of embracing the other:

> 'What is the reason, father, that you forbid me to study?' He said 'Because many people have told me that you will certainly come to harm by learning English and following the white man's teaching.' I replied 'Is it not right that we should adopt good customs and renounce bad ones? If a man passes from ignorance to enlightenment is his reputation damaged? Do not listen to the tales of fools for they bear me a grudge because I have urged their children to study. It is not better to study than to dwell in empty idleness?' My father replied 'These days you are glib of tongue and I cannot argue with you. When you were small it was I who taught you, now it is you who wish to teach me. You think I am afraid of you.' And I said 'To say nothing of my present station in life, even if I were a prince, you my father will still have the right to cane me.' When he heard this he went into his room to fetch his whip to thrash me. When I saw my father's anger I at once ran and fell at his feet. For it was an idiosyncrasy of my father that however angry he might be, if I fell at his feet begging his pardon his passion would subside. (Abdullah, 1970: 127)

Munshi Abdullah satiated his father's anger but tried to gently eradicate his resistance by seeking the intervention of two of his English friends who assured

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Abdullah's father that Munshi would be well looked after and that he was the most promising amongst the Malay youth they had met in Malacca – the former seat of the greatest of ancient Malay kingdoms. In Abdullah's mind, the question of access to western education was a choice between ignorance and a healthy pre-occupation with bridging cultural divides and adapting modern knowledge for his people. Abdullah's parting commentary about those sections of so-called backward Malay society may still rankle in some quarters but it encapsulates the psychological difficulty of deciding how much of culture, as tradition, ought to be discarded in Asia's embrace of modernity in diplomacy and other political ways:

> The people who had come worrying my father wore sullen faces and were at their wits' end because their schemes had failed. Besides, they did nothing but eat and sleep all day having not proper work, while Allah had granted me profitable employment which brought me in money and opportunities for study. The grudge these people bore me grew and grew because I was teaching Malay to all the missionaries and Englishmen, and because I could understand English ... They reviled me because I stood in well with the white people, and considered it a sin that I should teach these men our language. (Abdullah, 1970: 127–8)

This is an echo we will find in Rizal, Sukarno, Lee, and Mahathir in the next section. What this section's discursive analysis is already suggesting is that Asia's pre-modern and early modern pasts have constituted a considerable power-knowledge nexus that has translated into 'baggage' for the imminent modernizing postcolonial Asian nation-states.

Adjusting to independence: nationalism, revolutionary temptations and diplomatic communication

Chronologically, Asia was inevitably affected by the gravitational pulls of the nationalist, liberal, and communist revolutions that emanated from the European continent. This was also to be Asia's ideological entry point into the world of modern diplomacy. This circumlocutory introduction to Asian diplomacy is necessary for comprehending late twentieth-century Asian diplomatic instruments manifested by ASEAN, the ASEAN Regional Forum, the East Asia Summit, or CSCAP Track Two. The intellectual umbrage embodied in the aspiration for a new anti-colonial and post-colonial domestic order extended also into normative commentary on how a new international order ought to accommodate the new Asia of self-determining Asian states, as it is evidenced in this excerpt of a fictitious dialogue between a naïve young nationalist and a seasoned, closet revolutionary from Filipino, Jose Rizal's politically charged novel *El Filibusterismo*:

> 'Science is more eternal, more humane, more universal', replied the young man in a burst of enthusiasm. 'Within a few centuries, when humanity shall have been redeemed and enlightened; when there shall no longer be races; when all peoples shall have become free; when there are no longer tyrants,

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> nor slaves, colonies nor empires; when one justice reigns and man becomes a citizen of the world, only the cult of Science will remain; the word patriotism will sound as fanaticism, and whosoever will take pride in patriotic values will surely be locked up as a dangerous maniac, as a disturber of the social harmony.'
>
> Simoun [the revolution plotter masquerading as jeweler] smiled sadly.
>
> 'Yes, yes', he said shaking his head, 'but to reach that condition it is necessary that there should be neither tyrants nor enslaved people; it is necessary that man should be where he goes free; *he should know how to respect in the rights of others that of his own person, and to achieve this, much blood should first be shed; it demands the struggle as necessary . . . To vanquish the ancient fanaticism which oppressed consciences it is expedient that many perish on the stakes so that the conscience of society, horrified, would set free the conscience of the individual. It is also necessary that all answer the question which every day the nation asks them when she lifts up her shackled hands.* Patriotism can only be a crime in the oppressor nations, because then it will be rapacity baptized with a beautiful name, but no matter how perfect humanity may become, patriotism will always be a virtue among the oppressed peoples because it will signify for all time love of justice, freedom and self-dignity . . . The greatness of man lies not in being ahead of his times, something impossible anyway, but in divining his wants, responding to his needs and guiding himself to march forward.'[2] (Rizal, 1996: 55–6)

In this excerpt authored in 1891, Rizal expresses pre-emptive solidarity with the aspirations of the Peace Lobbies prior to the First World War, the 'Fourteen Points' of Woodrow Wilson in 1918, and, consequently, the Charter of the League of Nations, with a huge caveat, namely that Asia's new nation-states cannot truly be the equal of their erstwhile colonizers and other decolonized states until a revolution in mindsets and political justice occurs. It is therefore no surprise that nationalism, construed as both the process and demonstration of building a community of sentiment, required a forcible conversion of native mindsets and concomitantly legitimized tutelary education policies. Virtually all the anti-colonial agitators called for tutelage of their peoples through a mixture of violence and suasion guided by improvised ideological contraptions, including politically influential intellectuals in Japan (Aydin, 2007; Matsuura, 2010). Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh recalled the gusto with which he embraced Lenin's thesis on national and colonial questions as a translation of the original Marxism into a concrete political plan relevant for Asia: 'Dead martyrs, compatriots! This is what we need, this is the path to our liberation!' (Christie, 1998: 75). In a more detailed reflection, Ho wrote:

[2] Italics mine, for emphasis.

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> At first, patriotism, not yet communism, led me to have confidence in Lenin, in the Third International. Step by step, along the struggle, by studying Marxism–Leninism parallel with participation in practical activities, I gradually came upon the fact that only Socialism and Communism can liberate the oppressed nations and the working people throughout the world from slavery. (Christie, 1998: 76)

In this regard, one detects a strong continuity with Ho's contemporaries, and their later successors up until the present, in practicing an ideological synthesis that called for a modernizing nationalism that was unafraid to take liberties with, and 'shock', the conventions of diplomatic practice. Revolution, not diplomatic convention seemed the more urgent priority. Of course, diplomatic convention could be transformed in the hands of an Indonesian nationalist like Sukarno to serve the ends of revolutionary freedom and modernization.

Southeast Asia was not immune from the wider throes of the developing 'Afro-Asian' world's ideological barricades during the Cold War. For Ho Chi Minh, Lee Kuan Yew, Prince Sihanouk, Sukarno, Pandit Nehru, and Zhou En Lai, the 1950s and 1960s presented both opportunity and necessity for persisting with a sequel to the struggle for decolonization on the domestic front. The Cold War between the US and its allies, on the one hand, and the erstwhile USSR, China, and their allies, on the other, was relevant and possible to mobilize for nationalistic diplomacy insofar as it was rendered as an anti-imperialist struggle. In relation to diplomacy, this meant that the norms governing state-to-state relations were subordinate to the principles of struggling for independence, justice, and substantive national self-determination. In this regard, all politics, at every level from the state to the international system had to be aligned towards the revolutionary needs of the newly assertive Asia of decolonized and anti-imperialist states. Sukarno's rhetoric from the 1920s and 1960s captured this well in terms of its essential relevance to how we currently understand peculiarly Asian emphases on culture and differences over modernization today. Indonesia's Sukarno saw diplomacy primarily through racial alliances:

> We can say that the whites wish to work for fraternal relations, for mutual appreciation between brown and white. Or we can explain that attitude in this way: it is felt that one would be weakening oneself by the very fact of consolidating and forming a white front; it is felt that the forming of a white front would give irretrievable grounds for the existence of a brown front, in which case the brown front could throw its weight of numbers into the scales, a weight that could not possibly be offset by solidity of organization of the white side alone. (Sukarno, 1966a: 33)

One might perceive this as a naked attempt at deliberately 'othering' the departing colonial power's racial superiority policies, or it can be construed as a crude attempt at principled protest against an unjust world order obscured by liberal experiments in international institutionalism. In any case, this suited Sukarno's frequent alignment

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with what is retrospectively known as the neo-Marxist dependency and world systems approach:

> Because the imperialism which is now entangling everything in our country and which drags our peoples into a morass of misery, is not Dutch imperialism alone, it is not borne by Dutch capital only, but it is international in character: more than 30% of the capital which now does as it likes in our country and amongst our people, is in the hands of other foreigners, mainly the British . . . That is the reason why we of the Indonesian movement must extend our hands to our brothers, the Asian nations. That is the reason why we must stand on the principle of pan-Asianism. British imperialism (for instance) is the enemy of Egypt; it is the enemy of India! It is also the enemy of China . . . but it is also our enemy! . . .
>
> Our nationalism is not a narrow nationalism: it is not a nationalism which was born from mere national arrogance; it is a nationalism which is broad – a nationalism which was born on the basis of a knowledge of the structure of the world and its history; it is not a 'jingo-nationalism' or chauvinism, and it is not a copy of Western nationalism. Our nationalism is a nationalism which accepts the sense of existence as an inspiration and expresses that sense of existence as a service. (Sukarno, 1966b: 69)

Most of the Asian nationalists-cum-heads of governments in the first three decades of independence rarely address diplomacy directly. They prefer to address their discourse to a normative correction of international relations. One finds echoes of this aspiration in the statements of Mao Zedong, Pandit Nehru, and Ho Chi Minh. In their statements, one finds a recurring charge that their postcolonial status was being trapped into an unjust international economic and political order that has produced dependency as a masquerade for genuine modernization. Socialism and its extreme variation, communism, seemed the more enlightened road to take for these three, given its premises of seeking revolution against a structurally imperialist *status quo*. Mao had of course, with the help of his erstwhile allies from the first generation of the Chinese Communist Party, treated diplomacy as an instrument meant to further the theory of the three worlds. The latter was a scenario whereby the vast majority of agrarian and underdeveloped states and their populations would reverse their material and political fortunes by coercing the political and economic core of the North American and European states by staging revolutions that would transform their economically dependent allied states into socialist ones within the so-called periphery and semi-periphery zones of the capitalist world economy. One finds continuing echoes of this ideal in the frequent Asian attempts to modify American plans to initiate a trans-Pacific free trade zone on liberal premises. The Asian developmental state model, even though officially pro-capitalist, remains alert to the need to make compromises in economic diplomacy for the cause of national development under local conditions.

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Other Asian statesmen such as Lee Kuan Yew and Mahathir bin Mohamad are also determined to assure their respective national states' diplomatic autonomy by selectively practicing foreign policies of iconoclasm that put developed states on notice that economic and technological dependency is not totally translatable into political fetters. Both Singapore and Malaysia depend on foreign capital investing funds or sunk costs into the physical infrastructure, but even then these conditions still allow a large measure of freedom to 'talk back' at the developed world on various matters, such as human rights, financial stewardship of the world economy, good governance and on the Group of Seven's management of world crises. In Mahathir's blunt words for instance, circa 2004, 'our [Malaysian] past experience of dealing with ethnic Europeans is not very assuring. We fear that free trade will not be fair trade. Frankly we fear our commerce being monopolized again, and maybe we will again be colonized' (Mahathir, 2006: 311). For Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew, the best guarantee of diplomatic autonomy is ironically a strategy of entrenching great power stakes in the island's economy:

> The foreign policy for Singapore must be one as to encourage first, the major powers in this world to find it – if not in their interests to help us – at least in their interests not to have us go worse: 'If you do not like me as I am, then just think of what a nasty business it could be if I am not what I am.'
>
> The second point is that we must always offer to the rest of the world a continuing interest in the type of society we project. If we can identify ourselves with the mass of new nations that have emerged with their ideals and their ideas of what a new modern forward-looking nation of the twentieth century should be, then the risk we run of being used as a pawn and destroyed is that much diminished. But in the last resort, it is power which decides what happens and, therefore, it behoves us to ensure that we always have overwhelming power on our side. (Lee, 1968: 87–8)

For Malaysia and Singapore, continually successful modernization built upon economic dependency, notwithstanding severe hiccups such as the 1973–5 oil shocks, the 1983–5 world recession, and the 1997–8 Asian financial crisis, has meant that their so-called iconoclastic foreign policies are based in large part on the popular support of a burgeoning middle class that can look forward to a consumerist lifestyle delivered by their particular developmental states. One might add that even Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan, the rare Asian G7 member, entertain publicly from time to time diplomatic aspirations to be free of dependency upon the post-1945 American liberal hegemony that has offered their developmental states a military umbrella for sustained economic growth. Across Asia, one might find there are deep intellectual commonalities in subordinating diplomatic practice and general foreign policy behaviour to nationalism and the philosophical need to modernize their populations through revolutionary policies in one way or another. By revolution, we cannot assume that there is only one Asian socialist revolution that has taken place, there are far more revolutions in nationalist pride and cultural autonomy that accompany the difficulties of modernizing

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economies and mindsets of the peoples involved. This is a complex and incompletely modern power-knowledge nexus that is quite distinct from the Westphalian, post-Atlantic Charter, post-Cold War mentalities of most western foreign policies.

The end of the cold war to the present multipolar regional security architecture: the centrality of pluralistic comfort levels for diplomacy

The 'present' Asian postures towards diplomacy had in fact been manifested vividly in the principles accompanying the formation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) amidst the Cold War. After several failed attempts at forming a sustainable regional organization in the early 1960s, and hobbled by several low intensity conflicts bilaterally and trilaterally between Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, and Singapore, the latter four states, plus Thailand, took it upon themselves to forge an Asian regional organization according to Asian norms following a thorny but empathetic exercise in negotiating what was essentially a self-administered code of conduct amongst 'new neighbours' freed of colonial rule. In the account published on ASEAN's official website, Malaysia, represented by its Deputy Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak, summed up ASEAN's 'Asian diplomatic autonomy' in these words in August 1967:

> 'We the nations and peoples of Southeast Asia', Tun Abdul Razak said, 'must get together and form by ourselves a new perspective and a new framework for our region. It is important that individually and jointly we should create a deep awareness that we cannot survive for long as independent but isolated peoples unless we also think and act together and unless we prove by deeds that we belong to a family of Southeast Asian nations bound together by ties of friendship and goodwill and imbued with our own ideals and aspirations and determined to shape our own destiny'. He added that, 'with the establishment of ASEAN, we have taken a firm and a bold step on that road'. (ASEAN Secretariat, 2014)

Not surprisingly, ASEAN's intramural Treaty of Amity and Cooperation signed in February 1976, struck a chord with pan-Asianism and wider Afro-Asian non-alignment, whilst retaining some vague sense of an Asian diplomatic 'core':

> [The High Contracting Parties:]
>
> **ANXIOUS** to promote regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law and enhancing regional resilience in their relations;
>
> **DESIRING** to enhance peace, friendship and mutual cooperation on matters affecting Southeast Asia consistent with the spirit and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the Ten Principles adopted by the Asian–African Conference in Bandung on 25 April 1955, the Declaration of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations signed in Bangkok on 8 August 1967, and the

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> Declaration signed in Kuala Lumpur on 27 November 1971 . . . [**SOLEMNLY AGREE** to enter into a Treaty of Amity and Cooperation as follows:]
>
> Article 11
>
> The High Contracting Parties shall *endeavour to strengthen their respective national resilience in their political, economic, socio-cultural as well as security fields in conformity with their respective ideals and aspirations, free from external interference as well as internal subversive activities in order to preserve their respective national identities.*
>
> Article 12
>
> The High Contracting Parties *in their efforts to achieve regional prosperity and security, shall endeavour to cooperate in all fields for the promotion of regional resilience, based on the principles of self-confidence, self-reliance, mutual respect, cooperation and solidarity which will constitute the foundation for a strong and viable community of nations* in Southeast Asia. (ASEAN, 1976)

The italicized portions of the famous Treaty of Amity and Cooperation suggest that ASEAN governments have retained echoes of their pre-modern social pasts in terms of emphasizing through indirect language, localized self understandings of good governance, the protection of a fluid notion of policy and nationalistic autonomy, and the acknowledgement of a plurality of self-governing entities that ought to serve as a bedrock of a 'viable community' of ideologically diverse nations. These statements are an incontrovertible nod to the cultural mores of Southeast Asia's past, and more broadly Asia's pre-modern past where the proto-states enjoyed fluid relationships with one another on the basis of mutual respect and competitive relationships confined to contests of judicial prestige, court elegance, and governing prowess. Moreover, the much-vaunted ASEAN Way derives from the need to preserve this 'unity in diversity' as the foundation for peace. The ASEAN Way thus privileges, firstly, the informal understanding of quiet consultation and consensus, including the need to allow 'dissenting' member states to opt out of a joint communiqué agreed to by the rest of the ASEAN members following the so-called '10-x' consensus principle, the need to minimize open disagreements amongst members, and the preservation of 'face' through the use of indirect language.

The hallmarks contained within this ASEAN statement of diplomatic style has been extended to the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which was created in 1994 as a direct response to the multipolar fluidity that arose directly after the end of the Cold War. ASEAN members sought to enmesh the Asian great powers in a pan-regional forum whereby both the emerging Asian powers of China, India, and Japan would join the 'western' powers of the US, Russia, and Australia in habituating their diplomacy to the ASEAN Way of regionalism. In this regard, it is necessary to acknowledge that the ARF Concept Paper, which was fully endorsed by the ARF Ministerial meeting in 1995,

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contained the following language that hinted at the adoption of ASEAN norms, and, by extension, Asia's pre-modern diplomatic characteristics:

> 20. The rules of procedure of ARF meetings shall be based on prevailing ASEAN norms and practices. Decisions should be made by consensus after careful and extensive consultations. No voting will take place. In accordance with prevailing ASEAN practices, the Chairman of the ASEAN Standing Committee shall provide the secretarial support and coordinate ARF activities.
> 21. *The ARF should also progress at a pace comfortable to all participants. The ARF should not move 'too fast for those who want to go slow and not too slow for those who want to go fast'* . . .
>
> 23. The ARF must be accepted as a 'sui generis' organization. It has no established precedents to follow. A great deal of innovation and ingenuity will be required to keep the ARF moving forward while at the same time ensure that it enjoys the support of its diverse participants. This is a major challenge both for the ASEAN countries and other ARF participants. The UN Secretary-General's 'Agenda for Peace' has recognized that 'just as no two regions or situations are the same, so the design of cooperative work and its division of labour must adjust to the realities of each case with flexibility and creativity'. (ARF, 1995: 17)

Surely, the italicized statement above would raise the diplomatic eyebrows of governments more inclined towards open and forthright multilateral negotiations designed explicitly with 'milestone goals' in mind for a process of regionalism. Mainstream diplomacy strives for clarity and its compatibility with declared interests. Asian diplomacy, sampled through ASEAN and the ARF, privileges instead form over substance as an end in itself, building towards regional interstate peace. One will therefore expect to find similar phraseology in the documents pertaining to the procedures of the ASEAN Plus Three and East Asia Summits.

To illustrate how 'Asianness' has melded with 'Chineseness' in diplomatic culture, our final piece of discourse analysis samples Chinese General Xiong Guangkai's elaboration of a Chinese understanding of 'common security' in the future. This is relevant insofar as serious scholars of Asia-Pacific diplomacy treat Chinese attitudes as a proxy for Asian diplomatic styles writ large, in contrast with 'mainstream western' styles. General Xiong is a representative mouthpiece for Beijing's diplomacy since he once held the appointment of Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the People's Liberation Army, served as an Alternate Member of the 16th Communist Party of China Central Committee, and remains head of the China Institute for International Strategic Studies at the time of writing. In this excerpt, Xiong elaborates then Chinese President Hu Jintao's notion of a harmonious world order starting in the Asia-Pacific:

> Firstly, respect the world's diversity and build a harmonious Asia-Pacific. Diversity is a fundamental feature of the human society and it finds wide

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> representation in the Asia-Pacific. The scores of countries in this region differ from one another in cultural background, ideology and level of development. There are socialist and capitalist states, as well as constitutional monarchies. There are countries with a market economy and very advanced modern science and technology, and emerging industrialized countries, as well as countries still underdeveloped economically and technologically. Their civilizations range from Confucian, Buddhist and Islamic to Christian and Hindu ...
> Secondly, advocate multilateralism and seek common security. 'Do not do to others what you would not have others do to you.' This admonition by the great Chinese thinker, Confucius, over 2,500 years ago has been lauded as the golden rule in international relations. Its essence lies in honouring cultural diversity, advocating consultation on an equal footing and opposition to imposing one's own ideas onto others ...
>
> Thirdly, persist in dialogue and cooperation and reinforce mechanisms for that purpose. There exist a good number of security problems and contradictions in the Asia-Pacific region. We should work for the adoption of the new security concept featuring mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and coordination among the Asia-Pacific countries. We should encourage and support the settlement of international disputes or conflicts peacefully and through consultations and negotiations. (Xiong, 2009: 231–2)

There are two ways of reading this excerpt. One would be to treat these statements as a propaganda smokescreen for Chinese realism. The other, more sensitive reading would be to treat this as a sample of a newly rediscovered Chinese embrace of pluralistic Asian values in diplomacy, preserving face in disputes, and honouring the peaceable nature of coexisting differences in ideology and material development. Additionally within the Foucaultian frame of this article, one might also criticize the Chinese for also building their own rival 'hegemonic diplomacy' by articulating cultural inclusiveness towards their fellow Asian states while throwing the cudgels of nationalism at rival claims on so-called 'Chinese territory' in the South China Sea and along its contested land borders with India to the west and Russia to the north. Leaving this aside, there still exist deep differences between Asia and the West in diplomatic mentalities, circa 2015.

Conclusion: what is the diplomacy of encounter from the Asian perspective?

This article has adopted an unusual tack in attempting to uncover Asia's diplomatic dissonances *vis-a-vis* their western partners by reading a sample of historical and contemporary tracts that illustrate the curious baggage that the so-called modern Asian state carries: cultural yearnings and differing degrees of political modernization. After five centuries, Asia is still philosophically different from western mindsets of what diplomacy should be about. This article will not claim that it has definitively measured

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the pulse of diplomatic divisions across the Pacific Ocean, but it has attempted, in tandem with other participant-observation studies of informal Asia-Pacific diplomacies (Chong, 2014; Lee and Milner, 2014) to identify three characteristics of this diplomacy of unresolved encounter. It is in every sense an ambiguous encounter comprising several facets for three reasons. Firstly, the tempo and political climate of Asian modernization appears to be simultaneously looking backwards and forwards at the same time. The pre-modern historical tracts exhibit an idealization of traditional ways of mediating neutral and negative relationships between proto-states and their peoples, yet there are voices that admire western attitudes and systems as improvements over indigenous tradition. Likewise, nationalism and its struggle against a post-independence structural imperialism demonstrate a need to seek autonomy by returning to some aspects of the pre-colonial past while arguing the need for reforming the inherited western-dominated existing world order in both its economic and diplomatic aspects. Revolution and nationalist assertiveness appear to be prioritized in whatever constitutes diplomacy from the governmental perspective of the supposedly postcolonial Asian state.

Secondly, Asian states appear to be harkening back to qualities of celebrating plurality, informality, and inclusiveness as conflict mitigation characteristics that amount to an Asian form of diplomacy. The object of diplomacy remains as the pursuit of peace, but it need not be arrived at through clarity and consistent positions. Instead, plurality, informality, and inclusiveness become strengths in pacifying an aggrieved state and its population. Amitav Acharya has of course creatively labelled this as 'norm localization' (Acharya, 2010).

This leads on to a third possible observation in the Asian encounter with the western standards of diplomacy: states can coexist and reap the benefits of interstate harmony *without* fixed and clearly defined alliances. The idea of hospitality to difference becomes the key to amity. If one can aim to build 'comfort levels' in the discourse of the ARF and the Chinese state, then it would surely mean tolerating less than democratic governments and their treatment of dissidents, along with their attempts at engaging in arms dynamics and competitive territorial ambitions short of triggering all out conventional war. Such then is how the Pacific Rim peace may be kept by reconciling the cultural and modernization-related inconsistencies of Asian diplomatic preferences.

Finally, it would be logical to ask if the aforementioned diplomacy of encounter can be ameliorated and transformed into a bridge between Asia and the West. Based on the preceding reading of the discursive baggage of pre-modern and transitional nationalist cultures, and the struggle with modernization, it is unlikely that a common diplomatic standard can be built between Asia and the West. An Asian diplomatic modernity is extremely unlikely to fully replicate the legacies of Westphalia and the European experiences with industrialization and the wars of nationalism. In his latest reflection in 2015, the controversial ex-premier of Australia, Kevin Rudd wisely observed that 'the evolution of American conceptualizations of the China relationship has been complex. Chinese conceptualizations of the US relationship have also evolved over time. But my core points remain – very few of these conceptualizations of the

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bilateral relationship have been conjoint' (Rudd, 2015: 17). Rudd clearly acknowledges that an awkward diplomacy of encounter exists between Beijing and Washington but continually misses many nuances in his attempts to interpret 'How Ancient Chinese Thought Applies Today' – the title of his journal entry. For instance, Rudd misreads a popular ancient Chinese political text – Sun Tzu's *Art of War* – by arguing it 'was not intended as a comprehensive political philosophy of the state, nor was it intended as a text of moral philosophy' (Rudd, 2015: 10). War, politics, society, and moral government are ambiguously intertwined in Chinese philosophy as a cultural given (Ping and Bloodworth, 1976). Rudd finally loses his grip on pluralistic nuances in the Asian diplomatic mentalities when he attempts to define what must be done to bridge the two Asia-Pacific superpowers: 'The core concepts here are being "realistic" about strategic commonalities and differences; being "constructive" about areas of strategic cooperation; and being cautiously open to the possibility of using constructive engagement to build strategic trust that in turn may begin to "transform" the relationship over time' (Rudd, 2015: 18). Rudd is clearly employing the unilinear logic of modernization in his advocacy. In this regard, he returns us to the problem lamented on by Munshi Abdullah in the 1800s when he attempted to open the eyes of his indigenous elders and contemporaries to the need to learn from the West. Asians will resist learning new ways if the mode of instruction is foisted from a presumptively superior modernizer who casts improvement in terms of the 'realistic', the 'constructive', and the 'transformative'. Prior to Abdullah, the Portuguese emissary Tomé Pires had admired the demographic pluralism and non-judgmental political and social toleration within many prosperous Asian kingdoms that exhibited what he viewed as mercantile civilization in the 1500s. This fluid political culture of accepting diversity without a commensurate impulse in transforming it is resonant in the norms of ASEAN and Chinese diplomatic rhetoric today. Perhaps Asian diplomatic community will never approximate the European Union or NATO, but culturally inflected ambiguity and toleration are more likely to serve as the historically continuous basis of a peaceful diplomatic community across the Pacific.

About the author

Alan Chong is Associate Professor at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore. He has published widely on the notion of soft power and the role of ideas in constructing the international relations of Singapore and Asia. His publications have appeared in *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*; the *Review of International Studies; Alternatives: Global, Local, Political; Armed Forces and Society;* the *Cambridge Review of International Affairs,* and *Global Change, Peace and Security.* He is also the author of *Foreign Policy in Global Information Space: Actualizing Soft Power* (Palgrave, 2007). His interest in soft power has also led to inquiry into the sociological and philosophical foundations of international communication. Alan Chong has frequently been interviewed in the Asian media and consulted in think-tank networks in the region.

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