



Edited by: Bernardo Pohl and Sarah M. Straub

Recommended Citation: Pang, Y. H. (2024). Deciphering the South China Sea leviathan: A reflexive response. *Journal of Social Studies and History Education*, 8(1), 1-21.

Deciphering the South China Sea Leviathan: A Reflexive Response

PANG Yang Huei

Abstract: This essay is a reflexive rumination on how an educator can approach one of the most contentious geopolitical issues in Asia – the South China Sea. The approach is to recognize a set of “inherently asymmetric” relationships between China and the smaller Asian countries from a historical perspective. Drawing upon the resources from my Modern China and East Asia Nexus undergraduate electives courses, we start with the early modern period from which there are documentary records of Ming China’s assertion of power in its contacts with its East Asia and Southeast Asian nations. We then examine the *longue durée* of the 20th century, with considerations for the Japanese imperium interregnum, which acts as a foil for our discussion about Chinese power in this region. Finally, we will consider contemporary Chinese nationalism and Chinese strategies for the South China Sea. Notwithstanding the focus on China, this reflection will also delve into the implications for Singapore.

One striking event, which I never fail to mention in my Modern China undergraduate classes, whenever I teach about South China Sea disputes, happened more than a decade ago. It was a singular uncharacteristic moment in September 2010 when a Chinese diplomatic spokesperson bluntly stated, “The disputes were a matter only for China and the countries directly involved. Countries without claims in the region should stay out” (AP, 2010, Sept 22). It was jarring, because the general public had heard

China’s “Peaceful Rise” rhetoric for much of the 1990s to the 2000s (Lampton, 2019, p. 73). Indeed, it was just a few years ago prior to that inopportune outburst, when Singapore’s former ambassador to the United States Chan Heng Chee said, “[Historically] It was China’s economic power and cultural superiority that drew these countries into its orbit and was the magnet for their cultivation of relations” (2006, Feb 3).

What was the context behind this

extraordinary flare-up? For one, the Chinese reacted adversely against then United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's announcement in July that year that the US had a national interest in the peaceful resolution of Southeast Asia's territorial sea disputes. Following this, China's public altercation with Japan over Diaoyu/Senkaku islands in September 2010 only added to the general unease amongst China's smaller neighbours (Ito, 2010, Sep 23). Following China's surprising outburst, the release of the Joint Statement of the Second ASEAN-US Leaders' Meeting on 24 September 2010 weakly called for "a peaceful resolution to territorial disputes in the South China Sea" (Reuters, 2010, Sep 26).

Seemingly catching onto the weakness of ASEAN, it appeared that Chinese machinations were behind ASEAN's embarrassing inability to address the thorny South China Sea issue in July 2012 (Barta, 2012, Jul 23). Undoubtedly, the furore and impasse at the July 2012 ASEAN ministerial meeting at Phnom Penh over the South China Sea issue did not displease China. One astute observer at that time, wrote that it was a setback which ASEAN could ill afford (Choong, 2012, July 21).

How can one approach the historical theme of China's regional power apropos of the South China Sea with sensitivity

coupled with the necessary nuance in Asian classrooms? What could be some useful interpretative angles? The aim of this discussion is to avoid the shrill alarmism of Gordon G. Chang's infamous 2001 thesis; at the same time, to engage in a pedagogic rumination on how an educator can approach one of the most contentious issues in Asia [1]. In Churchill's climactic speech to the British House of the Commons on 18 June 1940, he memorably quipped, "If we open a quarrel between the past and the present, we shall find that we have lost the future." While the future is certainly not lost, yet given the current tensions, it is perhaps worth relooking at the South China Sea issue by recognising a set of "inherently asymmetrical" relationships between China and the smaller Asian countries from a historical perspective (Reid, 2009, p.3). Drawing upon the resources from my *Modern China* and *East Asia Nexus* undergraduate electives, the outlook of this limited discussion is necessarily pedagogic in its coverage, and my selection eclectic.

Chronologically, this discussion will start off with the early modern period whereby there are documentary records of Ming China's assertion of power in its contacts with its East Asia and Southeast Asian nations. One then covers the long 20th century, with considerations for the Japanese imperium interregnum, which

[1] I am inspired by two similar critiques punctuated with pedagogic insights from two very different fields. Catherine Bell covers her teaching experiences in "Religion through Ritual," in *Teaching Ritual* (2007). Benjamin Elman likewise reflects on his exchanges with students in "The 'Rise' Of Japan and The 'Fall' Of China After 1895," in *The Chinese Chameleon Revisited* (2014).

acts as a foil for our discussion about Chinese power in this region. Finally, this essay will consider contemporary Chinese nationalism and Chinese strategies for the South China Sea. Notwithstanding the focus on China, this reflection will also delve a little into the implications for Singapore.

Early Modern Period (1500-1700)

Arguably, a good class discussion of China's maritime role in Asia could start from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). Three issues animate small group discussions: silver, maritime trade, and diffusion of military technologies. To the extent that China was a global "silver sink" and accordingly may have contributed to the "commercial boom of the late sixteenth and seventeenth century" makes this period an ideal place from which one can deliberate about China's complex political relationship with its Asian neighbours as well (Flynn, 2002, p. 404). Scholars have also taken note that Ming could be considered as "the world's first gunpowder empire" (Swope, 2005, p.13). The complexity in historical causality in so many areas in the early modern period of East Asia belies simplistic notions of broad binary dismissal of Chinese claims in the South China Sea. At the same time, the labyrinthine ties complicate, and allow the students to interrogate the basis of Chinese claims, without which it might deprive "students from intellectual encounters with their world that would sharpen their critical abilities" (Griffen & Marciano, 1979, 163). Ideally, the instructor might strive to cultivate in their

students the ability to perceive "the world in terms of analogies to historical situations that [they] had studied, and of the lessons one can draw from them" (Lord, 2019, p. 15).

If one looks at how Asian powers historically in the early modern period perceived their regional world order, three points can be made. First, the prohibitive cost of being a hegemon; second, the creativity of vassal states in asserting their sovereignty vis-à-vis China; and finally, the utility of symbolic means of legitimacy.

One finds that in East Asia, which includes Korea, Japan and Vietnam, as well as in Southeast Asia, creativity in adapting to the existing Sinocentric order for their purposes was the rule. This was possible as "a loose system of rule was constructed over East and Southeast Asia with tributary and 'imperial title awarding' relations as its central institution" (Hamashita, 1997, p. 115). As the Ming dynasty's perennial security concern lay in the North, albeit with the aberration of Yongle Emperor's maritime activism (1402-1424), it generally sought the cheaper option of ritualized symbolic power – rhetorical flourishes of cosmological legitimacy (Wang, 1998, p. 303, 311, 320, 322). Such ritualization underscores, nevertheless, "a particular relationship of domination" (Bell, 1992, p. 206).

Under the traditional, Sinocentric tributary system presided by Ming dynasty and later Qing China, Korea sought for a more "integrationist" approach, achieving

international status accorded in the traditional Sinocentric order. Japan, on the other hand, had always preferred a looser arrangement, whereby isolation from its international neighbors would guarantee its sovereignty. With the dawn of the Westphalian system in the mid-1600s, Korea still pursued autonomy within a dependent framework, but Japan sought to enter into the international system by modernization (Seo-Hyun Park, 2009).

Though the Vietnamese court was “loyal” to China in relative terms, in reality, Vietnam and China constructed their relationship through different world views. If there was ever a shared view between the two countries, they served at best mere “myths that functioned as interface” (Alexander Vuving, 2009, p. 89). For Dai Viet’s southern rival, China maintained a similar “enlightened” policy towards Champa. When the perennial Vietnam-Champa conflict ensued, both vassals ignored their hegemon’s mediation efforts. Ming was caught in an unenviable position of placating the two vassals, which were at each other’s throats. Faced with Champa’s appeals for arms, the Ming emperor exhorted for peace as its vassals’ actions simply “show failure in the duty of serving the Emperor and failure in properly handling relations with neighbours.” While the Chinese court hurriedly dispatched an emissary to Annam trying vainly to assert an “cessation of hostilities”, it denied Champa arms as it would inevitably “assist you in attacking them” (Hong-wu: Year 4, Month 7, Day 25 (5 Sep 1371), Wade, 1994/ 2005). As it was unwilling to intervene in this acrimonious conflict,

China’s admonishments went unheeded; the belligerents took matters into their own hands. For example, Champa even sacked Hanoi in 1371 (Wang, 1998, p. 309; Whitmore, 2011, 190; Taylor, 1992, 155).

In Southeast Asia, on the other hand, Siam tried to hold China off at arm’s length by employing time tested methods such as ambiguity or simply stalling for time (Junko Koizumi, 2009). At suitable junctures, Siam pressed Beijing to accept its aid in the ongoing Imjin War (1592-1598). Rhetorically sounding loyal “to the Emperor by assisting the state”, the Siamese actually incurred very little cost. Chances of Siamese troops entering the fray were decidedly slim. “[...] considering the length of the sea journey,” Censor-in-Chief Xiao Yan intoned, “and the unpredictable nature of the yi, the request should be denied.” The Chinese were once again cost conscious of the potential bill they would run up by hosting the Siamese (Wan-li: Year 21, Month 1, Day 6 -6 Feb 1593, Wade, 1994/ 2005).

This cost consciousness operated further afield; as Java was not in Nanjing’s immediate orbit, also known as the “Sinic zone”, as stated by John K. Fairbank (1968, p.3), the royal gifts to Java were correspondingly sparse. Champa, in contrast, was given “40 bolts of fine silks and silk gauzes interwoven with gold thread.” It was even rewarded with “a special messenger to escort your envoy on his return and to instruct you in the Way” (14 Mar 1369). The Chinese had to maintain and demonstrate their international position as a regional

hegemon to Champa via material and symbolic commodities. Elsewhere, non-Sinic zone representatives were even advised of the benefits of infrequent diplomatic visits to the Chinese court. Economising appeared to be the key feature, for it was hard work maintaining the façade of hegemony. If a few copies of *Da Tong Li* (Ming Dynasty Official Almanac), for Java, appeared to adequately stamp the imperial seal of approval, with suitable formulaic admonishments such as “you will long maintain your position and your prosperity will be handed down to your sons and grandsons”, all the better (Hong-wu: Year 2, Month 2, Day 6 (14 Mar 1369), Wade, 1994/ 2005).

Nonetheless, the act of extraordinary rendition appeared to be the practical reality of being a regional hegemon. Stated in unambiguous terms, subjugation was one of the key features of hegemony, as depicted on the Fujian stele.

“III. In the seventh year of Yongle (1409) commanding the fleet we went to the countries (visited) before and took our route by the country of Xilanshan (Ceylon Sri Lanka). Its king Yaliekunaier (Alagakkonara) was guilty of a gross lack of respect and plotted against the fleet. Owing to the manifest answer to prayer of the goddess (the plot) was discovered and thereupon that king was captured alive. In the ninth

year (1411) on our return the king was presented (to the throne) (as a prisoner); subsequently he received the Imperial favour of returning to his own country.”

IV. In the eleventh year of Yongle (1413) commanding the fleet we went to Hulumosi (Ormuz between Oman and Iran) and other countries. In the country of Sumendala, Indonesia) there was a false king who was marauding and invading his country. Its king had sent an envoy to the Palace Gates in order to lodge a complaint. We went thither with the official troops under our command and exterminated some and arrested (other rebels), and owing to the silent aid of the goddess we captured the false king alive. In the thirteenth year (1415) on our return he was presented (to the Emperor as a prisoner). In that year the king of the country of Manlajia (Malacca) came in person with his wife and son to present tribute (Files, 1972)[2].

To younger readers today, Admiral Zheng He’s maritime feats, as depicted on the Ming dynasty stele, are refreshingly modern. One can easily recall similar tactics by a global hegemon in the post-Cold War period - the 1990 US invasion of Panama quickly comes to mind (Chomsky, 1992). Even more egregious was the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Blix, 2013). However, the *political* impact of

[2] This inscription was carved on a stele erected at a temple to the goddess the Celestial Spouse at Changle in Fujian province in 1431.

Zheng He's expeditions, similar to its modern variants, proved ephemeral, or in the words of a critic, were "isolated tours de force, mere exploits" (Wang, 1998, p. 321).

Interestingly, the modern Xinhua interpretation is at variance with the stele. 15th century stone inscriptions were no longer deemed politically correct. The sanitised version depicts China's relations with Ceylon in glowing terms. One Sri Lanka historian Lorna Dewaraja was quoted extensively by Xinhua as saying the contact was "a great thing at that time". "After Zheng He's visit, Dewaraja opined, "China and Sri Lanka had very good relations for about a century." Nothing was said about Vira Alakesvara's capture by the Chinese in 1411 (de Silva, 1981/ 2016, Chapter 8). Instead Dewaraja recounted 16th century's "intolerance, violence and extermination of existing cultures with the arrival of the Europeans" (Xinhua, 2005, July 12). Such a narrative sleight of hand is not uncommon. One scholar Prasenjit Duara (2009) perceptively mentioned how in the wake of decolonization both India and China offered leadership in Asia through their "civilizational narratives." In addition, educators could highlight to their students how the Xinhua piece is a good example of "civilizational narrative," albeit garbed in the "Peaceful Rise" soft power oeuvre promoted by China (Lampton, 2019, p. 73). This connection allows them to understand the intricate link of how history and present concerns interacted.

At the Turn of the Long 20th Century

One fundamental historical concept concerns continuity and change. Bearing this in mind, an opportune moment presents itself when the instructor covers the tumultuous changes wrought at the close of the 19th century, alternatively viewed as the *longue durée* of the 20th century (Schroeder, 2000, p. 258). It was Japan's embrace of modernity, Pan-Asianism, and imperialism which would eventually constitute an actual challenge to China's traditional international order (Iriye, 1992, p. 9, 15). Yet, in face of this challenge, the Qing court's initial responses to the implications of modernity were hesitant. Feng Guifen (1809-74), an advisor to modernisers such as Zeng Guofan and Li Hongzhang, hedged his counsel. "We need not bother about rare skills or cunning arts (奇淫巧计)," Feng advised, "What could be better than to take Chinese ethical principles of human relations and Confucian teachings as the foundation, and supplement them with the techniques of wealth and power of the various nations?" (1860/ 1977, p. 71) Here, we still witness a kind of rationalizing which prioritized cultural legitimacy, and superiority rather than brute military force.

Cultural superiority aside, willy nilly, the Chinese were on their way establishing a modern army by the 1890s. Historian Akira Iriye has noted that Chinese leaders were starting to "view China's existence in the world in military terms and were

willing to use force to demonstrate that the country would strengthen itself militarily in order to ensure its survival and preservation” (p. 12). Yet, fuelled by arrogance, albeit shielding a sense of inferiority complex, Qing China spared no effort in parading their newly bought military ships at Nagasaki (1886), Kobe (1889), and once again in July 1890 (Elman, 2004, p. 318). Yi Shunding, an advisor to the Viceroy of Liangjiang, Liu Kunyi, initially opined that Japan was “a mouse and not a tiger . . . her funds all borrowed, her ships made of wood, her troops mere civilians, her accomplishments meagre, her national strength hollow, and her people hopelessly divided . . . Japan cannot stand up even against one or two of our provinces” (Chu, 1980, p. 81).

Even after losing the naval engagement to Japan on September 17, 1894, an internal memo dated November 1894, offered by advisor Yi, displayed breath-taking denial,

The island barbarian Japanese have inscrutable temperaments and petty dispositions. Their hearts are like those of jackals and wolves, and they possess poison like the bees and scorpions. . . . Like the barbarian Yeh-langs of old, who vainly compare themselves with the barbarian king of the greater Yueh-chih, they, not having any Buddhas to worship, dare to title their emperor as the son of heaven in the land of rising sun. It took them 48,000 years before they made contact with China, while in 3,600 years they still have not accepted our celestial calendar . . . illegitimately assuming

the reign title of Meiji (Enlightened Rule), they in reality abandon themselves all the more to debauchery and indolence. Falsely calling their new administration a "reformation" they only defile themselves so much the more . . . Previously Japan impudently swallowed the Ryukyus, following up with plotting an abrupt invasion to take advantage of Taiwan's isolated position. They annexed the land of Taiwan and had further designs on our frontiers. . . . However, we always bent over backwards to show our broadmindedness and tolerance, in the hopes of living in peace with them. As for Korea, all the world knows that it is a vassal of China. And yet Japan took military actions there without reason. Is this not deliberately provocative? . . . How can we tolerate this willingness to act like "the dog of ancient tyrant Chieh barking at the sage-king Yao!" Both the immortals and human kind are angry, the entire world takes offense . . . (Chu 1980, p.75-76).

By contrast, Meiji Reformer Fukuzawa Yukichi heralded the arrival of Japan amongst the society of modernized nations. “With this, public and the private sectors alike, everyone in our country accepted the modern Western civilization. Not only were we able to cast aside Japan's old conventions, but we also succeeded in creating a new axle toward progress in Asia,” Yukichi proudly proclaimed, “Our basic assumptions could be summarized in two words: ‘Good-bye Asia (Datsu-a)’” (1885/ 1997, p. 351). Iriye advances the suggestion that as

former samurais (the warrior class), the Meiji Reformers, relatively speaking as compared to the gentry elites of China, were better placed to understand the demands of “military strengthening” (1992, p. 13). Another attending cultural perception, “strong Japan and stagnant China,” became locked into common Japanese consciousness for the better part of a century (Lam, 2006, p.3; Elman, 2014, p.153).

Historian Kawashima Shin perceptively outlines the keen contest for the leadership for Asia. Qing China’s tributary relations were painted as outdated, whereas Japan’s Pan-Asianism, inspired by like-minded habitués such as Miyazaki Torazo, and Ōi Kentarō, was depicted as a harbinger of the future (2009, p. 147-149; Duara, 1996, p. 163). Therefore, the Okuma government (1898; 1914–16) was effusive about Pan-Asianism. It only proved circumspect when others waved the flag (Saaler, 2007, pp.1282-1286). However, Japan was prepared to make an exception for one progressive Chinese revolutionary – Sun Yat-sen. It was true that Prime Minister Okuma Shigenobu took special care of Sun Yat-sen, but it was just as well as to keep an eye on him. Cynically speaking, what caught Okuma’s attention was Sun Yat-sen’s flexible Pan-Asianism, which was especially attractive to the Japanese. After all, Sun even agreed to cede Manchuria to Japan for 20 million yen in 1913, at the height of his desperate attempts to overthrow Yuan Shikai (Dreyer, 2016, p. 61).

From the perspective of economic development, Japan’s grandiose

Pan-Asianism encompassed an envisioned transnational integrated industrial production system. Imperial Japan saw Taiwan, Korea, and Manchuria as integral parts of its major agrarian and industrial strategies of 1920s & 1930s. To maintain Japan’s premier position as a great power in Asia, “Japanese Asianism calling for solidarity metamorphosed into an ideology of Asian conquest in the late 1930s” (Shin, 2009, p. 152). Nevertheless, Japanese industrial methods and influence inadvertently imprinted on its former colonies in the post-war period. For Korea and Taiwan, as former Japanese colonies, noted a pair of developmental historians, “there is no doubt that their post-1960 industrial development policies and the nature of the associated supporting institutions were influenced by the Japanese experience” (Perkins & Tang, 2017, p. 270). Explicitly emphasizing this line of continuity to students, helps them to understand the post-war economic miracles of the Four Asian Tigers. Rather than tethering themselves hopelessly to Asian Values debate, and wrongly essentializing such cultural principles as immutable, students are better off with understanding the big power competition and cupidity in East Asia (Zakaria, 1994; Lamb, 1998).

The Cold War Period

Mao Zedong’s sense of mission - being the beacon of revolution in Asia was rooted in his division of labour with Stalin in the aftermath of CCP’s victory in the Chinese Civil war (Hunt, 1996, p. 220). In other words, Mao’s Internationalist leadership, sanctioned by Stalin as early

as July 1949, would be an enduring theme for the entire region and beyond (Goncharov, 1993, p. 72 & 208). In the aftermath of Stalin's death, Mao's desire for more international space burnt brighter (Snow, 2023, pp. 382-386). Instructors could do well to underscore Mao's Internationalism in China's armed interventions in the Korean War and the Vietnam war for their students (Sheng, 1997, p. 191). While critics may brand China's economic contributions to Africa as peddling influence on the cheap, there was no denying its Internationalist roots (Taylor, 2015).

In fact, so eager was China to emerge from its pariah status, and taking on the mantle of Asian leadership, in the aftermath of the Korean War, it engaged in a whole series of charm offensives. For a fleeting moment, pragmatism triumphed over ideology; Communist China utilized the charms of its "feudal" culture during the 1954 Geneva Conference to a resounding success. How was that possible? "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please;" Marx once perceptively opined, "they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past" (1852/ 1978, p. 595). Still it was instructive that the neighbouring countries were circumspect. For example, Myanmar has always carefully and shrewdly balanced its ties with China with friendships with other countries. Maung Aung Myoe (2009, pg. 95) scrutinizes how the relationship between "unequal *Pauk-Phaw* (kinfolk)" is played out.

In another instance, in his first meeting with U Nu on 1 December 1954, Chairman Mao Zedong freely endorsed Sino-Burmese trade agreements and even invited the Burmese to inspect Yunnan [3]. Mao supported the Burmese role in organizing the 1955 Bandung Conference. In a subtle *quid pro quo*, Mao requested: "We hope to attend this conference, if that is agreeable to the other countries." Presented with such generous hospitality, U Nu formally extended the Bandung invitation to the PRC the next day. Zhou "heartily" accepted, echoing that: "This meeting will facilitate a common meeting place for countries with hitherto no relations with each other. This will build up mutual appreciation and remove misunderstandings and estrangements" (Xiong, 2002, p. 7; Wen, 1998, p. 609).

Mao intuitively understood that Beijing's reassurances to Yangôn were a clear statement about the reality of the PRC's burgeoning hegemonic status in Asia (Buckley, 2002, p. 161). To U Nu's verbal posturing that "I shall listen to their suggestions with the humbleness of a younger brother toward his elder brothers," Mao waved this aside and insisted that the PRC and Burma were "brothers born in the same year." This "strategy of condescension," a term which is coined by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, is especially prevalent in the IR arena of communist fraternal brothers or in the *contact zone* of the former hegemon and its vassals. "The dominant," observed Bourdieu, "profits from this relation of domination, which continues to exist, by denying it" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 143; Levine, 1984, p. 114). Indeed, Mao

[3] Concerned that the Burmese were "afraid our Yunnan Province will be harmful to you," Mao went to reassure U Nu that he could "take a look at Yunan, to observe what is going on there." Mao further stated that "we have issued strict orders to our people in the border areas to confine themselves to defensive measures and never take even one step across the boundary." (Mao, 1954, Dec 1/1998, p. 136-142)

pressed home the anti-imperialist rhetoric: “Countries in Asia and Africa have for many years been bullied by imperialist powers, mainly Britain, the US, France, Germany and Japan ... The day will come when we shall have genuine independence ...” (Mao, 1954, Dec 11/ 1998, p. 143-150).

Ironically, it was China’s closest fraternal ally – North Vietnam, which caused China the most heartburn. The Chinese were incensed that Hanoi refused to take their side in the Sino-Soviet dispute. Similarly, China found it distasteful that Hanoi chose only to inform Beijing only two hours before the signing of the Paris Peace Agreement in January 1973. Ostensibly, Beijing was defending its claims on Paracel Island against South Vietnam, when the latter began exploring for oil in the area in late 1973. Subsequently, China delivered a *fait accompli* to both Vietnams, two days after agreeing to negotiating with Hanoi over maritime boundaries in the Gulf of Tonkin. It unilaterally took over the Paracel Islands militarily on 20 February 1974 (Khoo, 2011, 64). By now a Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, officially announced America’s hands-off policy. U.S. Pacific Commander in Chief Admiral Noel Gayler reiterated the US official neutral stance vis-à-vis Paracel Island on 25 March 1974 (Chang, 1991, p. 414). To his unhappy guests from Hanoi, Deng Xiaoping patiently explained that the South China Sea “... belonged to China since ancient times” (Hayton, 2014, p. 28). Territorial perspectives like Deng’s have an inner logic missed by outsiders. “What the Mongol and Manchu ruling Families of the

Yuan and Qing Great state wrought,” Timothy Brook quite rightly observes, “the Chinese ruling families of the Ming, the Republic, and the People’s Republic have chosen to perpetuate” (Brook, 2020, p. 379). The latter perspective is invaluable to illustrate in class the concept of *irredentism*, which according to Merriam-Webster dictionary is “a political principle or policy directed toward the incorporation of irredentas within the boundaries of their historically or ethnically related political unit.” Having come into its own as a “revisionist power” in the region, China was less sensitive to the counterclaims of others and more willing to press its demands (Tang, 2020, p. 35).

Nationalism

The irredentist streak which runs through all South China Sea claims is of course from the well spring of Chinese nationalism (Chang, 2001, p. 218). Among all the themes covered so far, perhaps the most accessible and colourful which one could cover in a class is Chinese nationalism. Examples abound to be used in the class most of which are loud and visually arresting. The entry point could be an opinion piece in *The Economist* “The East is Pink” (2016, Aug 13). In contemporary China, the narrative of a “century of unequal treaties” and “national humiliation” as depicted nowadays in schools in Chinese textbooks has become *de rigueur* since the Patriotic Education Campaign of 1992 (Vogel, 2019, pp. 366-369). A sense of victimhood amongst Chinese students is reinforced by a nationwide curriculum emphasising

historical memories of humiliation by foreign powers (Zheng, 2009). While one can debate the wisdom of such national curricula in history, a parochial *zeitgeist* has indeed emerged (Economist, 2016, Aug 13). Instructors could arrange for students to bring in examples of runaway nationalism in China for discussion. One of the best examples will be the MIT ‘Visualizing Cultures’ incident in April 2006 (Perdue, 2006; Elman, 2014, pp. 143-171).

Perhaps the late Chinese ambassador Wu Jianmin (2016) said it best about the potential cost that runaway nationalism might incur: “Narrow-minded nationalists often tend to tout military confrontation when dealing with territorial disputes, as opposed to Deng Xiaoping’s advice to ‘set aside differences and pursue joint development.’” Writing at the turn of the 20th century, Weber would have recognised its sinicized progeny as no less than a “mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance” (Weber, 1905/ 2005, p. 124). Informed by a popular praxis of “humiliation” and “patriotic” literature about China’s one hundred years of national suffering, the Chinese education system is suffused with nationalistic ardour. Zheng Wang’s *Never Forget National Humiliation* (2012) incisively underscores such a phenomenon, which can degenerate easily into a spectacle.

It is small wonder that China obdurately pounds away on its legitimate claims in the South China Sea, and feels genuinely aggrieved at any Southeast Asian counter-claims. As early as 1938, China’s

textbooks made a bid for the avenging of national humiliation in avowing the recovery of Taiwan, Siam, Myanmar, Korea, and Ryukyu (Shin, 2009, p. 152). As a commentator perceptively noted, Beijing had “a sense of spiritual superiority which made it difficult to look at issues from the perspective of other countries. China found it especially difficult to convince other countries on issues of security” (Yew, 2016). Ironically, China only began to reconsider the South China Sea as its bailiwick in the aftermath of Imperial Japanese armies’ aggressive claims from the mid-1930s onwards (Tønneson, 2001). In a prominent op-ed, Professor Wang Gungwu also underscored the same point (2012). Here, the instructor may point out to the students, another related concept of revanchism, especially when there is a perceived need to avenge a past wrong. In this case, China’s troubled history with the rapaciousness of colonialism means assuaging old injuries is especially salient (Rozman, 2022, pp. 27-28).

On a side note, the same Chinese exceptionalism is seemingly extended to the Diaoyu/ Senkaku islands via Japan. It is interesting to note Japan’s assiduous efforts to link its interests with ASEAN whenever its relations with China sour. In other words, it would be erroneous to underestimate Japan’s influence in ASEAN, and China’s monumental task of countering it. After all, according to Professor Kiichi Fujiwara, Japan blithely considers ASEAN to be its backyard. “ASEAN is a mega-market and supportive of Japan. When voting at the UN, it can be expected that ASEAN countries will vote

the same way as Japan.” Fujiwara wryly noted, “Former Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa once said, ‘ASEAN is an electoral district of Japan,’ which I thought described very well what ASEAN was for Japan” (2018, Oct 4). Curiously, nothing is said about the presumptuousness of the Japanese sanguine assumptions. That is because the Japanese is ready to compete with China dollar for dollar in Southeast Asia. For instance, when Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte obtained \$24 million pledge in Chinese loans and investments in the aftermath of his October 2016 China visit, Japan had already pumped in \$24.4 billion (Jennings, 2019, Aug 16). In hindsight, perhaps the late Lee Kuan Yew accurately nailed Tokyo’s latent ambitions; he believed that Japan “won’t allow grass to grow under (its) feet and let the Chinese and Europeans take over Southeast Asia” (Ang, 2016).

Realpolitik in the South China Sea

Another invaluable skill which is indispensable for students and historians alike is historical comparison or the usage of comparative data. Issues could be compared on a linear timeline or similar experiences could be measured against one another across space (Vogel, 1979, p. 130). Likewise, the class could discuss themes such as realpolitik in the South China Sea region by a utilization of historical comparison with alacrity. Generally, the political ability to project control over the periphery is a power barometer for the Chinese government. At the same time, its national strength is

edifying to its increasing nationalistic and vocal citizenry. The manner in which power projection is carried out nonetheless depends very much on China’s relative strategic position and perceptions of the region.

For instance, towards the Central Asian Republics, according to Hassan H. Karrar (2009), China is necessarily flexible and amenable. As there are more geographical and strategic challenges there, these relationships seem to call for careful multilateralism. Moreover, Russia has permanent strategic interests in that part of the world which China tacitly acknowledges. So long as Xinjiang is firmly within China’s territorial control, it is willing to play second fiddle to Moscow on issues pertaining to the Central Asian Republics. Belatedly, however, there are indications that China’s Belt and Road Initiative do compete with Russia’s Eurasian Economic Union in Central Asia (Rozman, 2022, p.19; Saich, 2021, p. 425). (Developments in the ongoing war in Ukraine, and their repercussions may further complicate the picture.)

In contrast, China’s actions appear conflicted in the South China Sea. It wishes to project a picture of national self-confidence albeit via its “peaceful rise.” Beijing engages in a whole slew of reassurances and confidence-building schemes with Southeast Asian countries. Yet it has to contend with a gaggle of nervous Southeast Asian neighbours who literally jump at every sneeze. To Beijing, it seems that the seeds of Chinese “sincerity” are cast on barren ground. As

the former Chinese foreign minister Yang Jiechi imperiously intoned during the 17th ASEAN Regional forum in July 2010, “China is a big country and the other countries are small countries, and that’s just a fact” (Strangio, 2020, p. 25.)

Why does China not transfer its knowledge and enterprise in multilateral engagement elsewhere? Simply put, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is a plan designed by one who has a weaker hand in Central Asia. Moreover, the situation in the South China Sea is different according to China’s self-perception. It sees itself as having a paramount strategic interest in this region (Hayton, 2018). This accounts for the Kafkaesque phenomenon of running in place despite numerous efforts by ASEAN such as the ASEAN+3, East Asian Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum and Track Two, Beijing’s stance is alarmingly consistent with its earlier positions of Chinese claims in the South China Sea.

As popular historian Michael Schuman has perceptively pointed out, “Most states in the region accepted China’s superior stature and participated in its diplomatic order willingly, to a great degree not out of fear of China, but because doing so offered real benefits” (Goh, Apr 21, 2020). But what Professor Peter J. Katzenstein had discerned, in a 2018 symposium organized by Yale, University of Tokyo and Nanyang Technological University, is how China recently seemed to plunge headlong into a number of diplomatic missteps, which belied its reputation for shrewdness. This author’s observations are that China’s myopic

safeguard of its short-term interests via “wolf-warrior” diplomacy has greatly curtailed China’s adroitness in foreign affairs (Saich, 2021, p. 445). The key, as elaborated by Singapore former PM Lee Hsien Loong in his state visit to China in April 2023, might appear to be “giving these smaller countries space, enabling them to have their interests respected and preserved, which would make it easier for these South-east Asian countries to pursue trade with China” (Tan, 2023, Apr 2).

Implications for Singapore Domestic Politics

The recognition of the critical symbiotic relationship between foreign policies and domestic politics was well established by Leopold von Ranke in the 1830s. He averred to it:

But since these aspects of society are never present separately but always together – indeed, determining each other – and since, for instance, the attitudes of science often influence foreign policy and especially domestic politics, equal interest must be devoted to all of these factors (1830s/ 2011, p.12).

But just how relevant are the observations of a 19th century German historian? Ranke’s points are surprisingly salient for contemporary events. Historian John Lewis Gaddis comments on the domestic imperatives of US Cold War strategy of containment which “has been the product, not so much of what the Russians have done, or what has happened elsewhere in the world, but of internal forces operating

within the United States” (1982, p. 357). International Relations scholar Stephen Walt even proposes the primacy of doing right by the domestic populace first, for it is “possible for the country to survive and recover after completely and disastrously mishandling its relations with others” (2020). In terms of sensitizing students to the nuances of historical causality, this insight about the paramountcy of domestic issues is crucial.

Likewise, the present uncertainties in the geopolitical sphere in the wake of Chinese international assertions, will inadvertently spill over to Singapore's domestic arena. Increasingly, there are grounds on which to argue that Singapore might tighten its version of “governmentality” on its citizens (Foucault, 1982, p. 789). One prominent Singaporean establishment figure, roundly fingered certain groups of people for abuse in one of his harangues:

“Our more complex domestic politics is a complication. I see still faint but distinct signs that some section of our population – how large, I do not know – either for transactional economic reasons, or unthinking ethnic sympathies, or sheer chauvinism, is beginning to look at the current US-China tensions through a racial lens. / As US-China competition heats up, this tendency may be accentuated. This is the greatest danger to Singapore in this new phase of US-China competition. It is still at a nascent stage and must be checked, if necessary by the prophylactic exercise of the coercive powers that are the legitimate monopoly of the state,

before external and internal forces act and react with each other in a vicious spiral downwards (Kausikan, May 30, 2019).

Inevitably, a recent report that has shown 64% of Singaporeans viewing China positively will heighten awareness of potential divided loyalties in the island nation (Ong, 2022, Mar 20).

Another attending issue is the potential space/ place for small nations like Singapore to make known its views on the international stage. The Chinese foreign policy stance prefers Singapore, according to a French report, to be “a small country that can’t afford to be arrogant or make an enemy out of the Chinese juggernaut” (Charon and Vilmer, 2021, p. 515). When one former Singapore ambassador to the UN, Kishore Mahbubani published his 2017 op-ed “Qatar: Big lessons from a small country”, the domestic blowback from the establishment was fierce. Mahbubani argues that Singapore should be conservative (but not timid) in dealing with large nations. Otherwise, Mahbubani warned, Singapore would end up being like Qatar which was blockaded by its Arabic neighbours (2017, Jul 1). So intense was the public debate that a full cabinet minister, a former senior civil servant, and another ambassador-at-large openly castigated a hapless Mahbubani (Salleh, 2017, Jul 03). In exercising a mechanical regimentation of a country’s foreign policy choices, one is reminded of Weber’s lament, whereby rationalization in general breeds a “specialist without spirit, sensualist without heart” (Weber, 1905/ 2005, p. 124). Perhaps, the silencing

of another “loving critic” might ensure the task of consolidating solidarity amongst Singapore citizenry easier, but the nation is all the poorer for it (Koh, 2019, Oct 3).

Undoubtedly, for any instructors of International Relations or contemporary history, the axiom of domestic / external axis should be a familiar one. Singapore is a very useful case study to map out such concerns. For example, the aforementioned French assessment about Singapore’s perceived role could be a teaching moment for local teachers. A wide variety of themes could be discussed; basically, the instructor is spoilt for choice. For instance, the Westphalia system of equal nations versus a Chinese perception of regional hegemony; the misguided notions that Singapore could disregard its own national interest, and to be led by the nose. After all, even Deng Xiaoping in his first state visit to Singapore in November 1978 stressed that “Singapore and China had different destinies” (Suryadinata, 1985, pg. 112). The spectre of foreign pressure is by no means a monopoly of China, however, when one considers regional reactions to Lee Hsien Loong’s attendance of the Nikkei conference in 2013. One prominent South Korean believed that Singapore should also follow (presumably S. Korea) and loudly display annoyance with Japanese textbook WWII atrocities denials (Toh, 2013, Jun 03). Likewise, US reacted with “shock, dismay, and even ... a measure incredulity” when Lee Hsien Loong warned in his 2019 Shangri-La Dialogue that Washington should not expect Asian nations’ automatic backing in future Sino-US confrontations (White,

2019, Jun 22).

Conclusion - Or, the Way Forward

This discussion makes no claims to explicating the twist and turns of the South China Sea issue, especially in the wake of the recent UNCLOS Annex VII arbitration ruling awarding the Philippines a notable victory over China. A more modest attempt is demonstrated here – how can one discuss with our students about the South China Sea, and China’s global role? For Marx, the modern state is beset with contradictions. “Instead of society having conquered a new content for itself,” Marx averred, “it seems the state only returned to its oldest form, to the shamelessly simple domination of the sabre and the cowl” (Marx, 1852/ 1978, p. 597). Evidently, even the international relations of the modern state may be cut from the same cloth.

To the contrary, by adopting a longer perspective, and one which recognises the inherently asymmetrical relations between China and her smaller Asian neighbours, this discussion advances the debate on the South China Sea. By studying Ming China’s maritime relations, one is constantly impressed with the creativity displayed by smaller countries in managing their regional hegemon in history. At the same time, the long 20th century underscores how the conceptual ownership of the big idea of Pan-Asianism was an idea at once being negotiated within China, and contested by its neighbours, then carried out by Japan in its colonies. Ironically, Japan saw itself as the rightful inheritor of Chinese cultural

values because it successfully modernized (Dreyer, 2016, p. 42; Yahuda, 1996, p. 242). In contemporary China, one witnesses a sort of vulgar Weberian rationalization cum realpolitik at work, an amalgam whose origins could be traced back to three decades of Maoist revolutionary experimentation, and followed by Deng's "Reform and Opening" since 1978. Presently, as befitting its political and economic clout, the PRC has pushed forth its Belt and Road Initiative (Liu, Fan & Lim, 2021), which for all intents and purposes, arguably seems like an upgraded version of Pan-Asianism (Starrs, 2018, p. 296). So what does the future hold?

By highlighting how China views the term "family of nations", a quote from Wang Gungwu, the doyen of Chinese studies, can round off this discussion. Professor Wang succinctly outlines China's challenges:

Thus the stronger China becomes, the more fearful its neighbours. If that strength were accompanied by nationalism, China would find it difficult to convince them of its best intentions. Chinese leaders have protested that they have eschewed nationalism and have no intention to expand in any direction. Their credibility depends on their ability to convince all concerned that China encourages economic growth only to satisfy the people's needs and arms itself only for defence. With consistent displays of friendship and family feeling expressed through self-control, strong civic discipline and respect for

other people's values, a powerful China may actually help strengthen the international system that it has so cautiously embraced (2009, p. 227).

Undoubtedly, the present wrangle around China's regional waters has darkened the mood surrounding China's intentions; the probable trajectory of China's relationships with her smaller neighbours is bleak. In retrospect, such an outcome seems at odds with China's earlier rhetoric of "Harmonious Society" (Xinhua, 2005, Jun 27) and the current "Chinese Dream" (Economist, 2013, May 4). At worst, China is perceived as a global bully which fights tooth and nail with its smaller neighbours over diminishing resources. But just as the grand King of Chu had learnt that humiliating a smaller country was neither wise, nor dignified from Yanzi 晏子 (578-500 BCE), the statesman from the smaller kingdom of Qi, Beijing should similarly refrain from forcing its neighbours to use the proverbial "small side door" to interface with China (Milburn, 2016, p. 348). The logic of the aforementioned historical example from the Spring and Autumn Annals is familiar to most Chinese students and politicians. At best, countries in Asia would ideally adroitly, over the next few decades, ritualized a set of "balanced" diplomatic engagements with Beijing that will ameliorate diplomatic tensions [4], reaffirm the nexus of ideas and commerce between China and its neighbours, and rationalize China's regional presence (Strangio, 2020, p. 283)[5]. This is seemingly borne out, whereby President Xi Jinping recently adeptly transformed Singapore former PM Lee's state visit to China in April 2023,

[4] Footnote 4 is lengthy and will be included at the end of the manuscript.

[5] PM Anwar Ibrahim secured Chinese investments worth S\$51.2 billion in his recent visit to China, see (Ng, Apr 3, 2023); Indonesia likewise is not far behind. Former Indonesian investment minister Tom Lembong pointed out that, "Many Indonesian business and political elites believe that China is the relevant superpower," (Perlez, et al., Feb 4-5, 2023).

which was lauded as “special” relationship, into a general push establishing “a benchmark for others in the region” (Tan, 2023, Apr 1). It stands to reason that a “win-win” solution for China, *sans* any form of “hegemonic bullying” however interpreted, is to resolve the South China Sea issue with its Southeast Asian neighbours, which will in turn benefit everyone (Raghu, Apr 2, 2023).

Acknowledgement

This author would like to give heartfelt thanks to the following: Prof Yow Wei Quin for suggesting a pedagogic reflection exercise; Julia Lau, editor of Fulcrum, ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute for her encouragement, and editorial comments and other suggestions for earlier formats of this essay. A couple of early portions appeared in East Asia Integration Studies (Hanns Seidel Stiftung Korea). My undergraduate students of Modern China and The Modern East Asian Nexus: A History also contributed to the vim and vigour which the classes had dissected numerous contentious issues raised in this essay.

References

Ang, C. G. (2016, Feb 19). Lee Kuan Yew and Japan. Nikkei Asia. <https://asia.nikkei.com/NAR/Articles/Lee-Kuan-Yew-and-Japan>

Barta, P. (2012, Jul 23). SEA dispute Upends Asian Summit. The Wall Street Journal.

Bell, C. (1992). *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. Oxford University Press.

(2007). *Religion through Ritual*. In *Teaching Ritual*. Oxford University Press.

Blix, H. (2013). Hans Blix: Iraq War was a terrible mistake and violation of U.N. charter. CNN. <https://edition.cnn.com/2013/03/18/opinion/iraq-war-hans-blix/index.html>

Bodeen, C. (2010, Sep 22). China Attacks US-Asean Interference in South China Sea Dispute. AP.

Bourdieu, P. & Loic Wacquant (1992). *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Polity Press.

Brook, T. (2020). *Great State: China and the World*. HaperCollins.

Buckley, R. (2002). *The United States in the Asia-Pacific since 1945*. Cambridge University Press.

Building harmonious society crucial for China's progress: Hu. (2005, Jun 27). Xinhua.

Chan, H.C. (2006, Feb 3). China and ASEAN: A Growing Relationship. Speech. Asia Society Texas Annual Ambassadors' Forum and Corporate Conference. Houston. http://app.mfa.gov.sg/pr/read_content.asp?View,4416

Chang, M. H. (2001). *Return of the Dragon: China's wounded nationalism*. Westview Press.

Chang, T.K. (1991). China's Claim of Sovereignty over Spratly and Paracel Islands: A Historical and Legal Perspective, *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law* 23 (3): 399-420.

Charon, P. & Vilmer, J. J. (2021). *Chinese influence operations – A Machiavellian moment*. Ministry for the Armed Forces.

Chomsky, N. (1992). *The Invasion of Panama. In What Uncle Sam Really Wants*. Berkeley: Odonian Press. <https://chomsky.info/unclesam06/>

- Choong, W. (2012, July 21). Healing the rifts in Asean. *The Straits Times*, pp. A40.
- Chu, S. C. (1980). China's Attitudes toward Japan at the Time of the Sino-Japanese War. In A. Iriye (Ed.), *The Chinese and the Japanese: Essays in Political and Cultural Interactions* (pp. 74-95). Princeton University Press.
- Churchill, W. (1940, Jun 18). War Situation. Commons Sitting. Series 5 Vol. 362, cc51-64, Hansard 1803-2005. <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/sittings/1940/jun/18#commons>
- De Silva, K. M. (1981/ 2016). *A History of Sri Lanka*. Penguin Books.
- Dreyer, J. T. (2016). *Middle kingdom and empire of the rising sun: Sino-Japanese relations, past and present*. Oxford University Press.
- Duara, P. (1996). Historicizing National Identity, or Who Imagines What and When. In Edited by G. Eley & R. G. Suny (Eds.), *Becoming National – A Reader* (pp. 150-177). Oxford University Press.
- _____. (2009). Visions of History, Trajectories of Power. In A. Reid & Y. Zheng (Eds.), *Negotiating Asymmetry: China's Place in Asia* (pp.119-138). NUS Press. (hereafter cited as *Negotiating Asymmetry*)
- Elman, B. A. (2004). Naval Warfare and the Refraction of China's Self-Strengthening Reforms into Scientific and Technological Failure, 1865-1895. *Modern Asian Studies* 38 (2), pp. 283-326.
- _____. (2014). The "Rise" Of Japan and The "Fall" Of China After 1895. In Y. Zheng (Ed.), *The Chinese Chameleon Revisited: From the Jesuits to Zhang Yimou* (pp.143-171). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Fairbank, J. K. (1968). *The Chinese World Order*. Harvard University Press.
- Feng, G. F. (1860/ 1977). On the Adoption of Western Learning. In J. M. Gentzler (Ed.), *Changing China: Readings in the History of China from the Opium War to the Present* (pp. 70-71). Praeger Publishers.
- Filesi, T. (1972). *China and Africa in the Middle Ages*. Trans. D. Morison. Frank Cass.
- Flynn, D. O. (2002). Cycles of Silver: Global Economic Unity through the Mid-Eighteenth Century. *Journal of World History* 13 (2): 391-427.
- Fujiwara, K. (2018, Oct 4). Interview. Hitachi Research Institute. <https://www.hitachi-hri.com/english/reciprocal/i044.html>
- Gaddis, J. L. (1982). *Strategies of Containment*. Oxford University Press.
- Goh, S. N. (2020, April 21). South China Sea: Lessons in magnanimity from Qing emperors. *The Straits Times*, pp. A14.
- Goncharov, S. N. & Lewis, J. W. & Xue, L.. (1993). *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao and the Korean War*. Stanford University Press.
- Griffen, W. L. & Marciano, J. (1979). *Teaching the Vietnam War*. Osun & Co. Publishers.
- Hall, D.G.E. (1994). *A History of South East Asia*. (4th ed.). Macmillian.
- Hamashita, T. (1997). The Intra-regional System in East Asia in Modern Times. In P. J. Katzenstein & T. Shiraishi (Eds.), *Network Power: Japan and Asia* (pp. 113-135). Cornell University Press.
- Hayton, B. (2014). *The South China Sea*. Yale University Press.
- _____. (2018). Why China Built Its New Islands: From Abstract Claim to Concrete Assets. In A. Corr (Ed.), *Great powers, grand strategies: the new game in the South China Sea* (pp. 41-73). Naval Institute Press.

- Hunt, M. H. (1996). *The Genesis of the Chinese Communist Foreign Policy*. Columbia Univ. Press.
- Iriye, A. (1992). *China and Japan in the Global Setting*. Harvard University Press.
- Ito, M. (2010, Sep 23). Japan-China island tensions rise. *The Japan Times*.
- Jennings, R. (2019, Aug 16). Observers See Duterte Making a Play for More Chinese Aid. VOA. <https://www.voanews.com/a/east-asia-pacific-observers-see-duterte-making-play-more-chinese-aid/6173927.html>
- Kausikan, B. (2019, May 30). No Sweet Spot for S'pore in US-China Tensions. *The Straits Times*, pp. A23.
- Kertzer, D. I. (1988). *Ritual, Politics, and Power*. Yale University Press.
- Koh, T. (2019, Oct 3). Singapore does not need sycophants. It needs loving critics. *The Straits Times*.
- Koizumi, J. (2009). *Between Tribute and Treaty. Negotiating Asymmetry* (pp. 47-72).
- Khoo, N. (2011). *Collateral damage: Sino-Soviet rivalry and the termination of the Sino-Vietnamese alliance*. Columbia University Press.
- Lam, P. E. (2006). Introduction. In P. E. Lam (Ed.), *Japan's Relations with China* (pp. 1-20). Routledge.
- Lamb, D. (1998, Jul 15). 'Asian Values' Concept Crumbles with Economies. *Los Angeles Times*.
- Lampton, D. M. (2019). *Following the Leader: Ruling China, From Deng Xiaoping to Xi Jinping*. University of California Press.
- Liu, H., Fan, X. & Lim, G. (2021). Singapore Engages the Belt and Road Initiative: Perceptions, Policies, And Institutions. *The Singapore Economic Review* 66 (1): 219-241.
- Lord, W. (2019). *Kissinger on Kissinger: Reflections on Diplomacy, Grand Strategy, and Leadership*. All Point Books.
- Mahbubani, K. (2017, Jul 1). Qatar: Big lessons from a small country. *The Straits Times*.
- Mao, Z. D. (1954, Dec 1/ 1998). "We should Promote Understanding in the course of Cooperation." Mao with U Nu. Record of conversation. In PRC MFA & Party Literature Research Center (Eds.), *Mao Zedong on Diplomacy*. Foreign Languages Press. (hereafter cited as MD)
- _____. (1954, Dec 11/ 1998). Mao with U Nu, record of conversation. MD.
- Marx, K. (1851/ 1972). *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. In R. Tucker (Ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader* (pp. 594-617). W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.
- Maung, A. M. (2009). *Dealing with the Dragon. Negotiating Asymmetry* (pp. 94-118).
- Milburn, O. Ed. (2016). *The Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Yan*. Brill.
- Ng, E. (Apr 3, 2023). Anwar's visit to China paves way for more Chinese investments, say Malaysia business groups. *The Straits Times*.
- Obama, Asian leaders discuss South China Sea. (2010, Sep 26). Reuters.
- Ong, J. (2022, Mar 20). The rise of pro-China Singaporeans and what it means for Singapore. *The Straits Times*.
- Park, S.H. (2009). *Small States and the Search for Sovereignty in Sinocentric Asia. Negotiating Asymmetry* (pp. 29-46).
- Perdue, P. C. (2006, Jun) Reflections on the "Visualizing Cultures Incident." <http://web.mit.edu/fnl/volume/185/perdue.html>

- Perkins, D. H. and Tang, J. P. (2017). East Asian Industrial Pioneers. In K. H. O'Rourke & J. G. Williamson (Eds.), *The Spread of Modern Industry to the Periphery since 1871* (pp. 169-196). Oxford University Press.
- Perlez, J. & Schmit, E, & Wee, S. L. (Feb 4-5, 2023). Indonesia is courted by world's superpowers. *New York Times*.
- Ranke, L. (2011). *The Theory and Practice of History*. G. G. Iggers (Ed.). Routledge.
- Raghu, A. (Apr 2, 2023). China Ready to Speed Up Talks with Asean Over South China Sea. *Bloomberg*.
- Rozman, G. (2022). *Strategic Triangles Reshaping International Relations in East Asia*. Routledge.
- Saaler, S. (2007). The Construction of Regionalism in Modern Japan: Koderu Kenkichi and His "Treatise on Greater Asianism" (1916) *Modern Asian Studies* 41 (6): 1261-1294.
- Saich, T. (2021). *From Rebel to Ruler: One Hundred Years of the Chinese Communist Party*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Salleh, N.A.M. (2017, Jul 03). Shanmugam: We didn't get where we are by 'thinking small'. *The New Paper*.
- Schroeder, P.W. (2000). The Cold War and Its Ending in "Long-Duration" International History. In J. Muller (Ed.), *Peace, Prosperity and Politics* (pp. 257-282). Westview Press.
- Sheng, M. (1997). *Battling Western Imperialism: Mao, Stalin, and the United States*. Princeton University Press.
- Shin, K. (2009). China's Re-interpretation of the Chinese "World Order", 1900-40s. *Negotiating Asymmetry* (pp. 139-158).
- Starrs, R. (2018). The Fortunes of Asian Regionalism: Past, Present, and Future. *Journal of World History* 29 (2): 296-310.
- Snow, P. (2023). *China and Russia: Four Centuries of Conflict and Concord*. Yale University Press.
- Strangio, S. (2020). *In the Dragon's Shadow: Southeast Asia in the Chinese Century*. Yale University Press.
- Suryadinata, L. (1985). *China and the ASEAN States: The Ethnic Chinese dimension*. Singapore University Press.
- Swope, K. M. (2005). Crouching Tigers, Secret Weapons: Military Technology Employed during the Sino-Japanese-Korean War. *The Journal of Military History* 69 (1): 11-41.
- Tan, D. W. (2023, Apr 1). Singapore, China to elevate ties following PM Lee-Xi meeting. *The Straits Times*.
- _____. (2023, Apr 2). New Ground Rules needed for global trade in divided world: PM Lee. *The Straits Times*.
- Tang, S. M. et al. (2020). *The State of Southeast Asia: 2020*. ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.
- Taylor, I. (2015). Review of Chau, Donovan C., *Exploiting Africa: The Influence of Maoist China in Algeria, Ghana, and Tanzania*. H-Asia, N-Net Reviews. <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=41770>
- Taylor, K. W. (1992). The Early Kingdoms. In N. Tarling (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia: Volume 1* (pp. 137-182). Cambridge University Press.
- The East is Pink. (2016, Aug 13). *The Economist*.
- Toh, E. (2013, Jun 03). Some time the hating has to stop. *The Straits Times*.
- Tønneson, S. (2001). *An International History of the Dispute in The South China Sea*. EAI Working Paper No. 71.
- Vuving, A. L. (2009). Operated by World News and Interfaced by World Orders. In *Negotiating Asymmetry* (pp. 73-92).

Vogel, E. F. (2019). *China and Japan: Facing History*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019.

Wade, G. (1994/ 2005). *Southeast Asia in the Ming Shi-lu: An open access Resource*. Asian Research Institute.

Walt, S. M. (2020, Aug 24). All Great-Power Politics Is Local. *Foreign Policy*.
<https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/08/24/all-great-power-politics-is-local/>

Wang, G.W. (2012, July 11). China and the Map of Nine dotted lines. *The Straits Times*, pp. A23.

_____. (2009). Family and Friends: China in Changing Asia. In *Negotiating Asymmetry* (pp. 214-231).

_____. (1998). Ming foreign relations: Southeast Asia. In D. C. Twitchett & J. K. Fairbank (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of China: Volume 8, The Ming Dynasty* (pp. 301-332). Cambridge University Press.

White, H. (2019, Jun 22). The US and its Shangri-La Myths. *The Straits Times*.

Whitmore, J. K. (2011). The Last Great King of Classical Southeast Asia: “Chế Bồng Nga” and Fourteenth-century Champa. In K. P. Tran & B. M. Lockhart (Eds.), *The Cham of Vietnam* (pp.168-203). NUS Press.

Weber, M. (1905/ 2001) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Trans. T. Parsons. Routledge.

Wen, Y. Ed. (1998). *Zhou Enlai Dashi Benmo 周恩来大事本末 [A complete account of Zhou Enlai's activities]*. Jiangsu Jiaoyu chubanshe.

Wu, J.M. (2016, Apr. 22). Reject Parochial Nationalism for Sake of Continued Progress.
<https://uscnpm.org/2016/04/22/reject-parochial-nationalism-for-sake-of-continued-progress/>

Xi Jinping and the Chinese Dream. (2013, 4 May). *The Economist*

Xiong H. Y. (2002). *Zhou Enlai Wanlong zhi Xing 周恩来万隆之行 [Zhou Enlai in Bandung]*. Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe.

Yuhuda, M. (1996). *The International Politics of the Asia-Pacific, 1945-1995*. Routledge.

Yukichi, F. (1885/ 1997). Good-bye Asia (Datsu-a). In D. J. Lu (Ed.), *Japan: A Documentary History* (pp. 351-353). ME Sharpe, Inc.

Zakaria, F. (1994). Culture Is Destiny: A Conversation with Lee Kuan Yew. *Foreign Affairs* 73 (2): 109-126.

Zheng He: A Peaceful Mariner and Diplomat. (2005, Jul 12). Xinhua News Agency.
<http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/zhenhe/134661.htm>

Zheng, Y. W. (2009). The Peaceful Rise of China after the Century of Unequal Treaties: Will History Matter? In *Negotiating Asymmetry* (pp. 159-191).

Footnote Addendum

[4] Catherine Bell observes, “Specific relations of domination and subordination are generated and orchestrated by the participants themselves simply by participating. Within the intricacies of this objectification and embodiment lies the ability of ritualization to create social bodies in the image of relationships of power, social bodies that are these very relationships of power. If it is at all accurate to say that ritualization controls— by modeling, defining, molding, and so on—it is this type of control that must be understood.” Naturally, the same processes can function for nations in a collective or regional sense. (1992, p. 207); Kertzer goes even further. “[...] the citizen of the modern state identifies with larger forces that can only be seen in symbolic form. And through political ritual, we are given a way to understand what is going on in the world, for we live in a world that must be drastically simplified if it is to be understood at all.” (1988, p.1-2)