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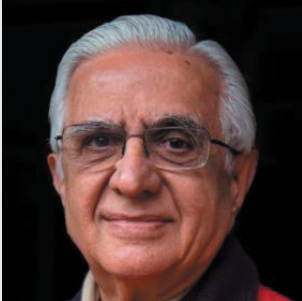
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Asian Diplomacy: Harmony and Contrast

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Executive Summary

- ◇ East, South East and South Asia spans what could be called 'cultural Asia' (while other parts of Asia have different identities of their own). The mix gets richer with an appendage, the greatly dispersed Pacific Ocean island states – plus Australia and New Zealand, which represent the 'West', but also seek an Asia identity. Their 'Asian-ness' is amplified by inward migration from Asia.
- ◇ Asia's ancient civilisations have had many centuries of mutual engagement. Their identities blend borrowed and indigenous ethno-cultural-linguistic elements. This is the varied face of 'Asian diplomacy'.
- ◇ Old Asia, not just China, India and Japan, but also the small states, have sought to modernise since their very first encounters with the West. Globalisation has accentuated that process. Unlike the other continents, the rubric of 'unity' is missing in Asia. No recent effort has been made in this direction. Their joint identities are framed narrowly, and yet, a sense of Asia persists.
- ◇ This Insight focuses on diplomatic practices. It includes the foreign ministries' priorities in policy delivery, training, human resource management, and on a wider canvas, the balance between political, economic, and public diplomacy tasks. It stresses that the region's practices – some unique, others shared – are understudied. It also argues that in some cases diplomatic systems are weak at emulation and mutual learning.
- ◇ The Insight identifies some common diplomatic traits, partly due to post-colonial experiences, and also due to Asian ways of doing things.
- ◇ In doing so, it poses a question: What might we expect in the future? And, in terms of forecasting future scenarios, the Insight draws a tentative conclusion: the gap is widening between the practitioners of 'smart' diplomacy and those that use more old school methods in diplomacy, i.e. formal styles like communication with foreign embassies via 'third person' notes, and insistence that other ministries communicate with foreign states through the ministry of foreign affairs.
- ◇ This problem is not unique to Asia; it is common to the Global South. But in Asia there are sharper differences in diplomacy practices than elsewhere. This merits more research.

The Issue

What are the features of Asian diplomacy that are striking, unique and relevant for other countries? This subject has attracted very little academic work, perhaps because examining the practice of diplomacy requires familiarity with the working of foreign ministries.

Does 'Asian diplomacy' exist?

A renowned Japanese scholar, Hajime Nakamura, in his definitive work first published in 1964, says: "There exists no single 'Eastern' feature but rather there exist several diverse ways of thinking in East Asia, characteristic of certain peoples but not the whole of Asia." Nakamura adds that looking to China, India and Japan (and South East Asia),¹ "...there is a *certain logical and human connection* among these characteristics."² Obviously, these countries do not conform to a single template, but exhibit related cultural features.

The question then is: Should not diplomatic systems engage in mutual learning?

It is perplexing that foreign ministries find it so hard to learn from one another. It is not that officials and systems do not trust one another. I served twice at the Indian Embassy in Beijing (1963-65, 1970-72), under charismatic envoys, designated chargé d'affaires (both countries withdrew ambassadors in 1961; ambassadors were reinstated in 1976).

Each chargé d'affaires enjoyed close ties with other ambassadors, exchanging mutual visits for discussions.³ If the other ambassador had received a major delegation from home, the Indian chargé d'affaires was sometimes shown the cipher telegram sent by that envoy.

What this means is that the real problem in mutual learning is inertia and institutional distance. Unlike in Europe and North America, the method of exchanging a few diplomats to work in one another's foreign ministries is not known in Asia or Africa.

Asian Vignettes

Asia is as varied as any other continent. Each country's diplomatic system is true to its own tradition, historic evolution and circumstances, molded by its founding leaders. We have to examine individual systems in their own context. Direct identification of 'Asian-ness' is a chimera. And yet, if we look to South East Asia, there is an 'Asian way of doing things'. Here, we could substitute 'ASEAN' for 'Asian'.

Japan and Thailand remained beyond the domination of external powers or colonisation. Each has nurtured a system that autonomously engages the world on its terms.

Japan sees itself as both Western and Asian. After years of internal debate over 'Asian-ness', Japan now identifies itself much more strongly with Asia, and has taken initiatives that affirm these connections. For many years, Japan treated South Asia as 'too complicated' and conceptually outside its Asia frame. That began to change in the late 1990s. With characteristic thoroughness, Japan carried out a full three-year study of South Asian countries from political, economic and social perspectives.

The result is visible in a dramatic change in the quality of Tokyo-New Delhi relations, essentially led by Japan, which responded to long-existing Indian expectations. For example: Japan has given a 50-year loan on highly concessional terms (0.5% interest, repayment commencing after 20 years), for the first 'bullet train' to connect the cities of Ahmedabad and Mumbai. This is a new politico-economic connect.

For Tokyo, the management of its relationship with Beijing is its biggest diplomatic challenge, not only because of China's economic-political surge, overtaking Japan as the world's second most powerful economy, but also because of the legacy of 50 years of Japanese colonisation and exploitation of China from 1895 to 1945. Japan was deeply shocked at the United States opening up to the People's Republic of China in 1971. It then moved with alacrity to craft a new relationship with Beijing. Since then, notwithstanding many bilateral issues, including a territorial dispute over small Japan Sea islands, Tokyo has astutely managed that relationship.

Thailand never fell victim to colonisation. It cherishes the legacy of Prince Devawongse, foreign minister from 1888 to 1923 and the father of Thai diplomacy. He established the foreign ministry and protected Thai sovereignty via treaties with dominant world powers. Other Thai characteristics include: low-key and supple diplomatic style; innovative, adept at regional cooperation; sticks to mainstream; and abhors isolation.

During his premiership (2001-06), Thaksin Shinawatra gave momentum to Thai diplomacy. A 'CEO Ambassador' law was passed giving ambassadors the authority over all the offices of state agencies located at the assignment country, to ensure a 'whole of government' approach.

All ministries were required to cooperate with the foreign ministry to draw up a forward-looking five-year action plan on bilateral activities to be pursued with

Thailand's 25 principal partners. This is a simple idea that hinged on unified actions across the government. This is worth emulating.

Asian Small States

Are small Asian states innovative?

Take the example of Bhutan. Its happiness index is taken very seriously in the mountain kingdom of barely 700,000. It has encouraged greater innovation. An absolute kingship has progressively transformed into an elected parliament led by a prime minister. And despite many blandishments, it has resisted opening more than five embassies abroad and only three countries – Bangladesh, India and Kuwait – have embassies in Thimpu.

The Maldives, the scene of political upheaval in the past five years, has become a leader in the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), championing the perspective of tiny countries that confront an existential challenge owing to rising sea levels.

Fiji in the South Pacific is innovative in 'image marketing'. Its tourism slogan 'Fiji me' is catchy. 'Fiji' is also the brand name of its mineral water, marketed widely.

Since the 1980s, South Korea has effectively mobilised its embassies to support its business internationalisation drive. Retired ambassadors formed a group to advise companies with hard information on foreign markets. The foreign ministry has also been innovative in applying corporate practices to its human resource management, including '360-degree evaluations' where staff evaluate their line manager. China follows that same practice.

Befitting its ambitions, China operates the world's second largest diplomatic system, with 166 bilateral embassies (the United States had 167 in 2017),⁴ partly a response to its diplomatic 'competition' with Taiwan.⁵ China has carried out continuous reform since the mid-1990s, consciously looking to good practices elsewhere.⁶

The Chinese foreign ministry's human resource management methods, especially the assessment and promotion of officials shows interesting parallels with the German system: for the first 10 years, each entry cohort moves up in lockstep through the junior grades; by then those deemed fit for high rank are identified and then move upwards very rapidly. The promotion system is viewed as sufficiently transparent and objective to be accepted by the rank and file.⁷

Another point of China-German similarity is that both

countries attach the internal ranks of their ambassadors to specific overseas capitals. Thus, China only sends vice-minister rank envoys to some 10 foreign capitals (including New York; New Delhi was added to that list in 2005).

A new and daunting responsibility that the Chinese Foreign Ministry and embassies confront is helping to manage the Belt and Road Initiative projects, already totalling several hundred billion dollars. Handling the local environment when huge projects are at stake has been a challenge in the past year in Malaysia, the Maldives and Sri Lanka.

Post-Colonial Asia

Asian states share elements that owe to their pre-independence history. As colonies that wrested freedom from European powers – including China that was a colonial victim of multiple powers, including Japan – Asian countries are strong defendants of sovereignty, and committed to domestic socio-economic growth. Typically, they do not buy into Western 'value promotion diplomacy', be it in support of human rights or promotion of democracy in foreign countries.

In their aid programmes, China, India and other Asian countries mostly do not support the norms that Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development espouses; Japan quietly ignores these in some situations (like in Myanmar). Asians are strongly orientated towards economic diplomacy, as also the welfare of their diaspora and citizens that work and reside in foreign countries.

On the negative side, Asian states are often mired in bureaucracy. Is this a colonial legacy or a self-inflicted impediment? Innovation in Asian diplomacy is a fairly weak force; Singapore is an exception (for example, the practice of appointing 'non-resident ambassadors').⁸ Even the smallest Asia states are endowed with soft power, especially an ability to attract outsiders, but they do not always develop this into a diplomatic instrument, with the exceptions of Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. "India is variously described as a model soft power or a country that makes remarkably poor use of it."⁹

Diplomatic Experiments

Australia has carried out a fair degree of diplomatic experiments, not all of them successful. Towards the end of the 1990s, staff at embassies was drastically

cut back, to the point where an independent think tank, the Lowy Institute, produced a report in 2009, written by a blue-ribbon or expert panel, titled 'Australia's Diplomatic Deficit'.¹⁰ Overall, it has been innovative in its pursuit of bilateral relations, and now invests effort in deepening its Asia linkages.

New Zealand has been a pioneer in the performance management methods it has applied. It also uses a neat concept for managing embassy offices and ambassador residences abroad, which other governments could borrow. These properties are valued at the current market prices, not the historical purchase price. Financial regulations require that each year 2% of that be spent on maintenance. If the ministry does not have funds for this, it must sell the property.

Pakistan ranks 29 on the Lowy Index (2017), with 85 resident embassies and 29 consulates. Compare this with Bangladesh, which has a larger population, but ranks 46, managing with 55 resident embassies and 15 consulates. Pakistan faces a fraught political environment, partly because of its competition with India. This underscores the importance it gives to its diplomatic presence.

Vietnam has reinvented its political affiliations after the end of the bitter Vietnam War. It has also confronted difficulties in dealing with China, exemplified in their border wars of 1979 and 1986. It faces a maritime dispute over China's expansive South China Sea claims, though both committed in 2011 to solving this through negotiations. It is now seen as an astute manager of that complex relationship. Vietnam has also focused on developing its Asian and global economic outreach, and building new political connections with the United States and the West.

Novel Practices

The following are some distinct diplomatic activities in Asia.

Political Actions

Across Asia, as elsewhere, bilateral engagement is more dynamic and leader-driven than before. For example, the prime ministers of India and Japan now meet annually, a practice common to other countries engaged in intensive cultivation of mutual relations.

In 2018, China and India embarked on annual 'informal summits', held outside capitals, stripped of formalities for intense personal dialogue. This seems to work well. Many countries use 'strategic partnerships' to

describe their relations. China and India use a novel notion of 'development partnership'. For example, their state (province) chief ministers and governors meet periodically, broadening the conversation to cover eco-social development.

China and Japan use a similar 'informal meeting' format for their executive vice-foreign ministers to meet annually for unstructured discussions. These two foreign ministries have the unenviable task of managing one of the historically most complex bilateral relationships.

German and Indian leaders meet annually, each accompanied by six cabinet ministers to improve cooperation implementation. And then there is the 2+2 mechanism, where foreign and defence ministers from both sides join to discuss foreign and security affairs in a holistic fashion; India holds such meetings with Japan and the United States. These are new variations.

Across Asia there are innovative Track Two groups composed of academics, businesspeople, civil society leaders, think tanks, and others discussing and producing new ideas, problem solving and building mutual confidence.

Bangladesh, China, India, Japan also use bilateral 'Track 1.5' groups where non-state actors are joined by a few officials who keep a low profile.¹¹ They identify new action areas, and give recommendations to leaders. Sometimes such groups are wound up, through mutual agreement, if they do not deliver, or re-launched in a different incarnation, as with India and China in the 2000s.

Regional Diplomacy

The past two decades have seen innovative Asian actions in regional diplomacy. The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) is well established. It has expanded dialogue, via ASEAN+3 (bringing in China, Japan and South Korea), and the East Asia Summit (ASEAN+3, plus Australia, India and New Zealand, and then bringing in Russia and the United States). In all these, ASEAN insists on retaining the 'driving seat'.

These groups, including the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), stretch their footprint via political dialogue, economic cooperation, and even a kind of 'preventive diplomacy', plus confidence building. But critics say that ASEAN is in a rut, and still far from its goal of economic integration among the 10 member states.

In South Asia, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is moribund. An unending India-Pakistan dispute holds back real cooperative actions, much to the exasperation of the other members. But

a cluster of four contiguous countries – Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal (BBIN) has now come together to work on transport, river water and power grid projects.

For India this is a substantial step forward, after resisting collective actions, preferring bilateral arrangements. An expanded ‘South Asia Sub-Regional Economic Cooperation’ programme (SASEC) adds to BBIN, Maldives, Myanmar and Sri Lanka for project-based actions, with the Asian Development Bank as its secretariat. In spite of this, what is still missing is a spark of new ideas to catch the public eye and win their support.

At his second inauguration in May 2019, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi invited the leaders of the BIMSTEC countries – namely Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand – it gave rise to an expectation that the group will become the regional entity of choice for future actions. But hard actions are awaited.

However, Asia is still missing a grouping that can be compared, in innovation and boldness, with the 2011 four-member Pacific Alliance (Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru, with 59 observer states). All four are part of the Pacific Ocean littoral, but not all are neighbours. Their binding glue is a shared economic cooperation vision. These four countries have elected not to establish a secretariat and have taken practical actions like sharing consular services abroad and co-locating their embassies at distant capitals in order to reduce working costs.

Asian Trilaterals

Some new trilaterals are interesting. One is RIC, which brings together Russia, India and China, each outside the charmed Western conclaves. They hold some points of common interest and affinities, without constituting a bloc. This began as a think tank group, which continues to work in parallel.

Another trilateral arrangement covers China, Japan and South Korea. They are the three external members of ASEAN+3. Each carries historical baggage vis-a-vis the others. Yet, as direct neighbours and strong powers, they have shared interests. They hold annual summits, with a permanent Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat in Seoul. This exemplifies the law of unintended consequences.

Another putative trilateral covers the United States, Japan and India. They met on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Japan in 2019. They share affinities in Asia

and are likely to become another usable platform.

Then there is the Quad or Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, consisting of Australia, India, Japan and the United States, which meets from time to time, in a low-key fashion. Its political impulse is an avowed democracy orientation, plus an implicit focus on China. But each Quad country has a different agenda, with India being the most cautious of the group.

Economic Diplomacy

Bangladesh, Nepal, Vietnam are among the many treating trade and foreign direct investment (FDI) mobilisation as a major task for embassies. Between 1998 and 2013, South Korea had a single Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Trade. Currently, Australia and New Zealand have such unified ministries.

Asian countries have long realised that promotion of trade, FDI and other investment inflows, technology acquisition, and inward foreign tourists are vital for the development of the home country. India learnt that lesson after the first 1973 surge in oil prices; it promptly opened embassies in all the Gulf countries, some headed by very young diplomats who made up in enthusiasm what they lacked in experience.

Japan and South Korea have been equally agile. In comparison, China is a relatively late mover; its embassies became fully involved with promoting interests only in the 2000s, but they are now fully engaged. For small Asian states economic work is the priority for embassies.

Assessing Foreign Ministries

How can foreign ministries be compared? Many strive for excellence, but who is better? One method might be to compare economic diplomacy performance since this has become a priority. Another is to look at proxy indicators, such as the range, methods and relevance of diplomatic training programmes, on the premise that the training function is at the core of modern institutions. For example, few Asian foreign ministries use distance learning via the internet, unlike Canada, Mexico, the United Kingdom and the United States which run their own distance programmes.

Public Diplomacy

China is estimated to be spending US\$ 10 billion per year on the China Global Television Network, with six multi-language channels; 500 Confucius Institutes embedded in foreign universities, mainly teaching Chinese; and

nearly 50 China Cultural Centres.¹² It has ramped up the number of foreign students studying in China from 70,000 in 2000 to 442,000 in 2018.

In comparison, India's official public diplomacy budget is barely \$6 million; but it has a big following on the social media. In early 2019, Prime Minister Modi had 45 million followers and former foreign minister Sushma Swaraj had 12 million.¹³ It has innovatively used the social media in crises situations in Libya and Yemen, communicating with nationals and organising their evacuation. Soft power is pursued by many, but it is not amenable to quick fixes. Some, notably China, have resorted to expensive consultants, with limited result.

Consular and Diaspora Work

The Philippines treats consular work as one of its principal work pillars, and has been at the forefront in defending the interests of its workers in Hong Kong, Singapore and in the Gulf region. Every Asian country that sends workers to the Gulf and other countries, and also has a growing, vocal diaspora, now treats consular work as a strategic work area. India has greatly expanded and rationalised its passport issue outlets across the country, engaging one of its star information technology companies, the Tata Consultancy Services.

Each South Asian country treats diaspora outreach as vital, using methods that are both intensive and innovative. This is one area in which Global South countries are ahead of the West, which has been playing catch up, using their resident diaspora of other countries, as connectors for political links.

Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan have taken a pioneering lead in outreach to their diaspora the world over. Others emulate them. For example, The Indus Entrepreneurs¹⁴ represents volunteer action initiated by Indian and other South Asian business leaders in the Silicon Valley, which has spread globally. They work on technology entrepreneurship, i.e. venture capital, mentoring, and reconnecting with homelands.

Diplomacy Networks

The Lowy Diplomacy Index places China at 2nd rank in the spread of its network of embassies and consulates, immediately behind the US. Japan is at 5th place (behind France and Russia). India is at 12th, followed by South Korea (13th), Indonesia (21st), Pakistan (29th), Australia (30th) and Malaysia (35th).

India: Paradox of Numbers

In 2007, India had 550 in its executive IFS (A Branch), a woeful number in relation to needs both at its headquarters, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), and at its embassies. It announced that the numbers would be doubled in 10 years. The 2019 strength is 795. Singapore has a similar number; China has 7500. Yet, low numbers have other consequences:

1. against past practice, the MEA now takes officials from other ministries, also deploying some to embassies;
2. small embassies act with greater initiative, especially given loose oversight from the MEA; and
3. young diplomats, some of counsellor rank, win ambassador assignments, getting an early chance to shine.

Negotiation Styles

Referring to China, India, Japan, Singapore and Thailand, I wrote in *Asian Diplomacy*:¹⁵

"All the five Asian countries are home to high-context cultures, though the individualism/collectivist tendencies vary (it might be interesting to examine the link between these two traits). But if we can add to this 'individual-collective' binary the element of 'interdependence', we may then see that while Indian and Chinese societies are relatively individualist, they also show considerable correlation among their members."

According to Raymond Cohen, author of *Negotiating Across Cultures*: "A high context culture communicates allusively rather than directly".¹⁶

Empirical evidence indicates this to be true of China, Japan, Singapore, and Thailand, but less so in the case of India. One difficulty that Indian negotiators face in East and South East Asia is their frequent inability to pick up the allusive, non-verbal signals emanating from the other side. India also works very hard at negotiations for immediate result, as many will affirm; this is partly owing to a bureaucratic culture that demands quick result. India is also an exception in its relatively limited focus on long-term relationship building; for instance, its core problem in dealing with a neighbour such as Nepal has been its preoccupation with gaining immediate advantage, neglecting the long-term relationship.

The result is that not a single hydro energy project has moved forward in 50 years of intermittent negotiations, though the power generation potential of the India-Nepal rivers is in excess of 80,000 MW.

Japan's style involves prolonged internal consultation, an inability to respond to unexpected actions from the other side, close attention to detail, allusive actions. China's method of building and using connections and the notion of 'manipulate the foreigner to contain the foreigner' has long been a fine art.¹⁷

State and Non-State Actors

Asian foreign ministries have not been agile in finding effective inter-ministry communication methods or in dialogue with non-state actors. China carried out major institutional changes in March 2018, creating a Central Foreign Affairs Commission, and a China International Development Cooperation Agency, pushing the foreign and the Commerce ministries into working better together. Results are awaited.

Singapore is the shining exception where 'whole of nation' mindset is a norm. Almost everywhere else, turf battles prevail, where foreign ministries are vulnerable, as their domestic remit and authority are small. Regular dialogue mechanism to work with non-state actors is rare.

Training

China was forced into early training actions; it began with a blank diplomatic slate. It started training courses for ambassadors, usually military generals, in the early 1950s. Even today, every ambassador-designate must attend a training course. Each year, the Chinese foreign ministry selects 140 diplomats to attend a one-year programme at a major foreign university. This is an extraordinary commitment to skill enhancement.

In India, ambassador training does not exist, but across the entire civil service system three-week courses are mandatory for those promoted to the three top levels. Its Foreign Service Institute became operational only in 1986 but maintains a high standard.¹⁸

Malaysia uses an innovative method; new recruits spend just a few weeks at basic orientation, but after three years of deskwork at *Wisama Putra* (the foreign ministry), they spend four intensive months at a Posted Officers Course. Coming after hands-on work, this gives them deeper understanding and grasp, compared with the usual practice of training new entrants, who lack work context.¹⁹

The Maldives has a small training unit in its foreign ministry. Malaysia's training centre also offers MA courses for regular students. It is one of the few to offer negotiation training for foreign diplomats. Japan's training academy concentrates on English language skills for its incoming cohorts.

Inadequate mastery over English is a common weakness in several South East Asian countries. Their diplomats, for all their abilities, are handicapped owing to poor proficiency at this language of international communication, which is crucial for multilateral and regional work.

Benchmarking and Experience Sharing

One would think that since foreign ministries are engaged in essentially the same business, using near-identical methods and working with similar kinds of partners, they would exchange experiences and learn from one another. In fact, such sharing of experiences is more the exception than the rule. There exist no such mechanisms in Asia.²⁰ With nearly 100 groups of officials and experts from different ministries that meet periodically, it is strange that ASEAN does not do this either.

At Brussels, the EU foreign ministry administration heads meet once or twice a year to compare notes. Canada took an initiative around 2000, reaching out to Western foreign ministry heads of human resources and meeting annually in different capitals. There also exist special arrangements between pairs of countries with special affinity. For example, officials of the Austrian and Swiss foreign ministries meet regularly. There probably exists a similar mechanism among Scandinavian countries, given their strong connections.

Another method is benchmarking. A foreign ministry team visits select capitals with a detailed questionnaire to collect data. Australia did this two decades back. A foreign ministry that cooperated and was assured that the collected data would be shared, felt that all they received was a bland, anodyne summary, averaging the results, which did not give them much insight.

As far as the author is aware, there is no other Asian country that has carried out such benchmarking, but Chinese foreign ministry officials have spent time in Singapore (and perhaps some other countries as well) looking into working methods of foreign ministries. At end of the 1990s, Australia funded a small programme for Chinese finance ministry officials to visit Asian capitals to collect information on how they worked with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Foreign Ministry Conferences

The DiploFoundation organised two conferences of foreign ministries in Geneva in 2006 and in Bangkok in 2007. Each drew representatives from between 30 and 40 foreign ministries. A book of proceedings was also

published.²¹ At the Bangkok event one or two countries showed interest in organising a similar conference, but nothing materialised. This is an idea that awaits a godfather.

Work Methods and Human Resources

It is interesting to compare the working methods of foreign ministries, especially human resource management practices.

Thailand (and Turkey too) sends out all ambassadors in a single rank, that of director general. In terms of high-level personnel management, this produces inflexibility; it becomes especially difficult to find placements for these officials at the headquarters.

Singapore combines efficiency and deft management; this is visible at the foreign ministry. A few special features:

1. For over 20 years it has frozen the number of resident embassies to under 40, while over 69 foreign countries maintain resident embassies in this city-state. Singapore compensates for this mismatch with 'non-resident ambassadors'.
2. Singapore's ministries and entities, like the legendary Economic Development Board (handling inward FDI) and 'Enterprise Singapore' (trade promotion work) use the 'Team Singapore' formula, setting aside institutional rivalries for common purpose. This works remarkably well.
3. Singapore's system of promoting diplomats is extraordinary. Officials (with a minimum of five years experience) are rated in terms of their future capabilities. Their careers are then managed on the basis of that judgment. Called 'current evaluated potential' this is draconian, even elitist. Yet, it effectively selects the very best, from what is already an outstanding collection. A consequence is that officials rise to the highest ranks in their 40s or early 50s. They must exit these jobs after 10 or 15 years, after which they are given other jobs.²²
4. Finally, Singapore's civil servants, including its diplomats, are paid extremely well – annual emoluments are indexed with the corporate world and average around the equivalent of US\$1 million per annum for a ministry permanent secretary, with bonuses that average around one to three months' salary.²³

Performance Monitoring

This is mostly in infancy in Asia. One notes among Asian

foreign ministries a reluctance to experiment with such methods, in relation to what is a very inexact science-cum-art. China is one of the few Asian users of 'Key Performance Indicators' (KPIs); Singapore has long been adept at applying corporate work methods, as is South Korea. They probably use KPIs in some form. Australia and New Zealand make extensive use of annual plans and related methods.

In a different example, the method of sharing embassies and co-location of diplomatic representation in foreign capitals is alien to Asia. There is nothing like a single joint embassy for small states (as with the Organisation of East Caribbean States at Brussels), or co-located embassies, sharing services (as with the Pacific Alliance and European country clusters like the Visegrad states), or implanting an ambassador or diplomat in a friendly embassy (as with Scandinavians), usually for a finite period. Shared consular services is another concept that awaits action in Asia.

Conclusion: Trends and Outcomes

Diplomatic practices everywhere have more in common than differences. Overall, Asian diplomacy is in a flux, undergoing slow change. But it is their differences that set them apart, and offer potential for improvement. Some Asian features include:

1. Professionalism reigns in most systems, getting stronger with time. Most countries send career officials as ambassadors. But after domestic upheavals, political appointees are often sent out, as in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
2. Training is gaining salience in all countries, even in small states, which create nucleus training units, when training academies are not viable.
3. The gulf between those that apply modern human resource management and the old school methods is widening. But even those stuck in the old mode manage to throw up outstanding diplomatic talent. But overall, the gap between the smart diplomacies and the others is getting larger.
4. Inadequate experience sharing remains a major lacuna, as also a reluctance in some foreign ministers to borrow ideas from other systems.

In Asia, as elsewhere, countries that do not innovate and borrow external methods, adapted to their own needs, pay high opportunity cost. But not all of them realise this.

Endnotes

1. Hajime Nakamura, *Ways of thinking of Eastern Peoples: India, China, Tibet, Japan* (Kegan Paul, London, 1964; revised English edition, 1997), p. 21.
2. *Ibid*, p. 38.
3. In strict protocol terms, an ambassador would not return a call by a Chargé d’Affaires. In Beijing, such regular conversations among embassy officials at all levels is an essential practice.
4. See Lowy Index <https://globaldiplomacyindex.lowyinstitute.org/>.
5. Taiwan is now down to just about 15 countries that give it diplomatic recognition as a state.
6. Researching my book *Asian Diplomacy*, while on annual teaching visits to Beijing, I regularly met the head of the Chinese foreign ministry reform unit; at the end of one long session I asked how he could spend so much time to respond to queries on their system, he told me: “I also learn about other systems from our conversation.”
7. One aspect of promotions is unusual: a provisional list is given out within the foreign ministry; those that object are allowed to send in their comments, and unsigned comments are also seen but are given little weight.
8. These are typically eminent personalities based in the home country who taken on part-time responsibility of representation in a foreign capital, travelling there a couple of times a year, usually accompanied by a foreign ministry official. It works far better than the system of ‘concurrent accreditation’ where one envoy serves also in one or more neighboring capitals. I have always thought that concurrent representation builds up one’s frequent flyer miles, but adds limited value; no authentic survey of efficacy exists.
9. Jaishankar, Dhruva, ‘Soft Power 30’, USC, 2019, See: <https://softpower30.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/The-Soft-Power-30-Report-2018.pdf> [accessed 21 July 2019].
10. See: <https://www.diplomacy.edu/australias-diplomatic-deficit-reinvesting-our-instruments-international-policy>
11. Such groups typically have eminent personalities from different walks of life, including academic, business, cultural, media and scientific sector leaders. They pursue all these themes, but with a special focus on economic cooperation. See: ‘Building Relations Through Multi-Dialogue Formats: Trends in Bilateral Diplomacy’, *Journal of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations*, Kuala Lumpur, Vol. 10, No. 1 December 2008.
12. David Shambaugh, *China’s Future*, 2016.
13. Sushma Swaraj demitted office in May 2019; her successor, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar had 316,000 Twitter followers by September 2019.
14. See: <https://tie.org/>
15. Rana, *Asian Diplomacy*.
16. Cohen, Raymond, *Negotiating Across Cultures*, p. 31.
17. Anne Marie Brady, ‘Treat Insiders and Outsiders Differently: The Use and Control of Foreigners in China’, *China Quarterly*, December 2000, No. 164, pp. 943-64.
18. This Institute was a personal initiative of prime minister Indira Gandhi (see: *Diplomacy at the Cutting Edge*, 2016, p. 238, <https://www.diplomacy.edu/resources/books/diplomacy-cutting-edge>).
19. Some years back, a young Indian second secretary at the start of her second assignment, told me: “I wish we had our training now; we would better understand all you tried to teach us.”
20. In 2005, I was invited as a resource person at an ASEAN meeting of heads of diplomatic training institutions, held in Kuala Lumpur. I suggested to that group of 10 that they could recommend to their governments a similar mechanism for sharing experiences among heads of administration or personnel management. I also thought it might be useful to bring into their group other Asian countries, in the same way that training entities of the entire Latin and Caribbean meet regularly. Nothing came of that.
21. Rana, Kishan S, and Kurbalija, Jovan, *Foreign Ministries: Managing Diplomatic Networks and Delivering Value*, (DiploFoundation, Malta and Geneva, 2007).
22. This method was borrowed from the oil company Shell.
23. Singapore ministers receive slightly higher salaries. But highest paid of all are members of the ‘Singapore Administrative Service’, who work across the entire government system, always in key jobs. Very unusually, the two permanent secretaries in the foreign ministry are always from this service and not from the diplomatic service; foreign ministry officials accept this.

