# Introduction

## Visual Sources and Diplomacy

*Matthew Phillips and Naoko Shimazu*

At first glance, Fig. I.1 reveals a moment of spontaneity. Inconsequential fun shared among three leaders of newly independent nations: Burma (modern-day Myanmar), India, and Egypt. Yet elements of the scene are staged. All three are wearing the same iteration of Burmese national dress, and Burmese Prime Minister U Nu stands in the middle with a container of what looks like water. He seems poised to throw the contents into Egyptian Prime Minister Gamal Abdel Nasser's face as Indian Prime Minister Nehru looks on, but diplomatic convention suggests this won't happen. However relaxed they appear in each other's company, they stand on a stage: performing their moment of fun for their respective audiences. They might radiate friendship, but that does not necessarily make them friends. They might appear to occupy an equal standing, but that does not mean there is not rivalry. While the scene appears spontaneous, its diplomatic character paves the way for multiple readings and narratives. This volume, by taking the image as a starting point, explores how visual sources of diplomacy unlock a multiplicity of perspectives and positions otherwise obscured from the historical record.

The photograph was taken on the way to the Asian-African Conference, held in Bandung, Indonesia, between 18 and 24 April 1955. It thus resides at the intersection of two critical historical developments. The first was the wave of anti-colonial struggle and the politics of decolonisation that followed independence. The second was the emergence of a fresh global schism between the communist and capitalist blocs, associated primarily with the United States and the Soviet Union. Over the decades that followed, events connected to these transformative movements had an inexorable impact on the formation of state-to-state relations across the world, but particularly in Asia.

In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, the Allied occupation of Japan (dominated by the United States) focused on 'correcting' those responsible for the war and restructuring Japanese society into a democratic post-war nation-state. However, by 1948, US policymakers became convinced that the more pressing concern was rising tension with the Soviet Union, and the potential spread of communism. In China, the communists were gaining the upper hand against the pro-West nationalists, and in Southeast Asia the



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Figure I.1 Prime Minister Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser (Egypt), Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (India), and Prime Minister U Nu (Burma) celebrate the Burmese New Year water festival, Rangoon, 16 April 1955. Pan Asia Photo, Getty Images.

rapid collapse of the Japanese wartime occupation and the return of European imperial powers had ignited a wave of anti-colonial struggle, much drawing heavily from communist ideology but also from nationalist movements that predated the Second World War in Asia. In an effort to halt developments, the United States 'reversed course' on Japan (known as the 'reverse course

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debate') – focusing instead on establishing the country as a stalwart ally in the new era. In October 1949, the Chinese Communist Party finally took control of the Chinese mainland, forcing the nationalists to flee to Taiwan. Months later, the communist-backed Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) invaded the south of the Korean Peninsula, provoking the establishment of the Unified Command under the United Nations to effect an international intervention principally led by the United States. In Southeast Asia, meanwhile, the First Indochina War continued to escalate after the Vietnamese communists won support from the newly installed Chinese regime and the Soviet Union. In response to the dramatically shifting situation, the United States opted to shore up the French-backed Vietnamese regime of Emperor Bao Dai and renewed commitments to pay for French military operations. Now focused on containing communism globally, Vietnam became the primary focus of US officials who feared that if Vietnam was 'lost' to the communists, the dominoes (what became known as the 'domino theory') would keep falling throughout the region, and so they opted to violently halt the spread. The First Indochina War was concluded in 1954, but communist insurgencies continued to bubble, and by the end of the decade the Vietnamese communists reopened the conflict with the Republic of Vietnam in the South, ultimately leading to the US military escalation known in the West as the Vietnam War. Incisively, Wallerstein pointed out that talking about a Cold War is Eurocentric. In Europe the United States and the Soviet Union never exchanged gunfire directly, while in Asia the conflict was hot and sustained.[1]

The threat of conflict, whether from insurgency within or intervention from outside, was an ever-present reality in Asia. Yet for political elites in the region, the reports of war that occupied newspaper front pages were also peripheral to the day-to-day domestic challenges of governing, linked primarily to decolonisation and nation building. Most leaders ruled over countries with underdeveloped agrarian economies, poor standards in health and education, and deep ethnic and class differences.[2] Leaders who had emerged in an era of anti-colonial struggle now faced radical choices on matters such as land distribution, economic planning, and national security. They also had to compete with a multitude of distinct national visions proposed by rival elites who each came with their own constituency.[3] War was something to avoid, not court, and it is unsurprising that enormous energy went into achieving that end. Whether such leaders opted to align with one bloc or another, or whether they

[1] Immanuel Wallerstein, 'What Cold War in Asia? An Interpretative Essay', in Yangwen Zheng, Hong Liu, and Michael Szonyi (eds.), *The Cold War in Asia: The Battle for Hearts and Minds* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 15–24.

[2] Tuong Vu and Sean Fear, *The Republic of Vietnam, 1955–1975: Vietnamese Perspectives on Nation Building* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), p. 3.

[3] Ibid.

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sought to balance their relations with rival centres, their principal struggle was fought through diplomacy.

Diplomacy depends on at least the semblance of a level playing field. As such, it provided a unique opportunity for Asian leaders to assert their agency. In a world of collapsing empires, emerging superpowers, and global ideological struggle, the mere presence of some Asian leaders in diplomatic fora could feel like a provocation, and therefore have a far greater impact than the size of their respective countries' influence would automatically suggest. When Sukarno visited the United States on a diplomatic tour in May 1956, for example, he was invited to talk to a Joint Session of Congress, and his speech was subsequently reprinted on two full pages in the *New York Times*.[4] Simply by attending the Asian-African Conference in Bandung in 1955, Zhou Enlai was able to provoke a fundamental rethink in the American approach to the Cold War globally.[5] As the struggle in Asia intensified and the contours of the so-called Cold War became more defined, the art of hosting a president, secretary of state, business leader, or diplomat carried ever-increasing weight. In such fora, Thailand's King Bhumibol, the Philippines' Imelda Marcos, or Burma's U Nu were not peripheral actors. They took centre stage. While no doubt charismatic, their confidence and authority in diplomatic events was heightened because what they said mattered, and they spoke in the knowledge that their words carried historic significance.

Westad argues that both Soviet and US discourse during the Cold War was underpinned by criticism of European imperialism, and that propagated a deep and genuine belief in their respective visions.[6] Interventions such as that of the United States in Vietnam, he goes on, make sense only when one recognises the genuine feeling of solidarity Americans felt with the people they sought to defend. This belief no doubt furnished decision makers in Washington or Moscow with the confidence necessary to take unilateral action, but it also raised the stakes of diplomatic encounter, where an interaction offered a rare but clear opportunity for Asian leaders to challenge, or even flip, the asymmetrical nature of the exchange. Young nations, unable to wield the threat of war, could use such fora to elicit security guarantees, financial or military aid, or technical support, or simply to assert national sovereignty to bolster their own credentials at home. Given the significance of Asia as a focus of the global conflict, political elites across the region mobilised whole

[4] 'Text of President Sukarno's Address before Congress on the Aims of Indonesia', *New York Times*, 18 May 1956, p. 4.

[5] Jason Parker, 'Cold War II: The Eisenhower Administration, the Bandung Conference, and the Reperiodization of the Postwar Era', *Diplomatic History* 30:5 (2006).

[6] Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

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bureaucracies, and in some cases populations, into transforming what was perceived outside as a theatre of war into a theatre of diplomacy. This effort has left with it a vast, yet to date largely unexplored visual record that provides the subject matter of this book.

The recent re-emergence of great power competition globally has drawn attention to the importance of understanding Asian perspectives during the Cold War and fuelled a new scholarship that explores how Asian actors managed complex and, at times, contradictory local and international priorities.[7] By focusing on diplomatic activity, it is therefore critical to de-emphasise Western-centric interpretations and restore the memory of how Asian leaders shaped the conflict globally. Through a unique focus on diplomacy, all the chapters in this volume add to this trend. Collectively, they demonstrate how, by harnessing the power and importance of diplomatic exchange, Asian actors were able to actively engage and shape the international system.

## Visual Sources and Diplomatic History

The substantive work of diplomatic historians is to get behind the scenes, to better understand the complex tensions, power dynamics, personal rivalries, and geopolitical developments that ultimately determine state-to-state relations. Speeches, communiqués, and joint declarations are routinely presented as pre-prepared moments of resolution within, or disjuncture from, the unfolding of world events. The diplomatic image, meanwhile, tends to be used as shorthand for such moments, evidence that the encounter took place and a means to locate the exchange within a particular series of events. On closer reflection, however, such images provide further insights that are not only connected to but also independent of the textual record. Many of these insights derive from the inherently ambiguous character of the image. As Berger explains in reference to the photograph, the image 'isolates the appearance of a disconnected instant' and must therefore be lent a past and a future by a viewer who is disconnected from the captured instant itself.[8]

[7] Notable contributions include Albert Lau, *Southeast Asia and the Cold War* (Abington: Routledge, 2012); Malcolm H. Murfett, *Cold War Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Publications, 2012); Cheng Guan Ang, *Southeast Asia's Cold War: An Interpretative History* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018); Wen-Qing Ngoei and Anne Foster, 'Re-thinking Region: US-Southeast Asian Relations in the Twentieth Century', *Diplomatic History*, 45:2 (2021), 219–222; Wen-Qing Ngoei, *Arc of Containment: Britain, the United States, and Anti-Communism in Southeast Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019); and Tuong Vu and Wasana Wonsurawat (eds.), *Dynamics of the Cold War in Asia: Ideology, Identity, and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

[8] John Berger, *Understanding a Photograph* (London: Penguin Classics, 2013), p. 64.

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Practitioners of diplomacy, as well as those who capture and publish diplomatic images, are intimately aware of this ambiguous character, overcoming the potential for subjective readings by denoting a set of prescribed meanings. Think of the ceaseless flow of analogous images that emanate out of the various summits and meetings, in which representatives perform the same benign gestures, handshakes, and smiles to a set of cameras, whose expectant operators pass on the images to expectant editors who select and frame the image to suit their respective narratives. What is often missed is that the photograph has a specific historical and cultural context – that is, as Barthes explains, the image will have been worked on, chosen, composed, constructed, and treated according to aesthetic and ideological norms. It will have been perceived, received, and read by a public that 'consumes it to a traditional stock of signs'.[9] The diplomatic image, in other words, has its own story or stories to tell.

The collection of essays in this book aims to expand the range of source material in the study of global diplomacy by working with visual sources. In recent years others have done something similar. Proponents of the 'aesthetic turn' in international relations studies, for example, assert that images can offer alternative insights and include people and perspectives excluded from existing accounts.[10] They have identified how images encourage or even force us to see what may otherwise be absent from scholarly view, challenging normative approaches and supporting efforts to decolonise our respective interpretations.[11] From the start, however, this study has been guided primarily by methodological rather than theoretical concerns: about *how* we can use visual sources to enrich our understanding of diplomacy. Step one involves choosing an image, broadly defined. Contributors considered not only photographs, but also posters, paintings, sculptures, gifts, souvenirs, as well as representational productions such as documentaries, newsreels, feature films, or theatre productions. Most contributors spent time observing the selected visual source, applying a level of scrutiny and critical engagement that had not necessarily come instinctively. Over a series of workshops, we then established a set of questions to frame the study: What do we see in the image? Who is in the image, and what are they doing? What is the significance of the 'place' in which this diplomatic image is situated? How is the event staged and framed? Does the image fit within a series of images, or does it stand alone?

[9] Roland Barthes, *Music Image Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977), p. 19.

[10] Roland Bleiker, 'The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory', *Millennium – Journal of International Studies*, 20 (2001), p. 512. Also, Roland Bleiker, *Aesthetics and World Politics* (New York: Palgrave, 2009).

[11] Sophie Harman pays particular attention to how the visual aids efforts to bring female voices, in particular, to the fore: Sophie Harman, *Seeing Politics: Film, Visual Method, and International Relations* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019).

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Next, contributors conducted a 'deep reading' of the image, akin to Geertz's 'thick description',[12] peeling off layers of interpretation. They began thinking about what might be the surface-level reading – the most basic interpretation, and arguably the most widespread. Then, what about an intermediate level of reading – one that is perhaps more accessible to those who are literate in a common language of culture and politics? Finally, are there deeper embedded symbols that can only be unlocked by those who know their meanings? Are there potentially contested narratives, and what are the reasons for these? Overall, we read the source 'expansively', considering the connective narrative(s) to the diplomatic event and how it relates to the broader account of international diplomacy taking place.

One further guiding principle is the desire to situate global diplomacy in the everyday,[13] locating it within political, but also social and cultural terms of enquiry, and not only in the realm of high politics as has traditionally been the case. On the one hand, visual sources of global diplomacy can reveal the role of the crowd, including women and children, in the creation of a diplomatic scene. On the other, situating global diplomacy in the everyday means that visual records of global diplomatic events are consumed by the people at large.

Authors have learned to acknowledge, and even embrace, the ambiguous nature of the visual source drawn from a range of disciplines, including history, art history, cultural studies, geography, theatre studies, international relations, and photojournalism. As editors, we have not sought to bind contributions under a unified theoretical frame. Instead, by applying their distinct interpretative lens, each author demonstrates how visuals provide an opportunity to bring in individuals who are otherwise missing from the written record.[14] They have also applied their own knowledge and expertise, serving to further internationalise the collection and convey unique insights. As a result, the volume does *not* present an off-the-shelf methodology, but promotes a rich diversity of approaches and interpretations with strong historical contextualisation.

As already discussed, the backdrop to diplomacy in Southeast Asia during the Cold War charged such exchanges with potentially existential implications. For those leaders who sought entrance into the communist or capitalist bloc, journeys to and from Moscow or Washington, Beijing or New York became essential, presenting further challenge to those focused on securing legitimacy

[12] Clifford Geertz, 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture', in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 3–30.

[13] For instance, Magnus Marsden, Diana Ibañez-Tirado, and David Henig, 'Everyday Diplomacy: Introduction to the Special Issue', *Cambridge Journal of Anthropology*, 34:2 (2016), 2–22.

[14] William A. Callahan, *Sensible Politics: Visualizing International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 1.

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at home. Practically, the need to balance the receipt of foreign aid and technical support from international patrons had to be paired with the often-contradictory effort to defend sovereignty and act independently on the world stage. Asian leaders often had to harness imported universal ideologies, while projecting a strong and relevant local identity, invariably drawing from religious and cultural themes to assert their distinctive status. Underpinned domestically by potential insurgencies and fractious elite-level tensions, the fear of military intervention, whether from the United States, the communist bloc, or a historic regional foe, raised the stakes. We therefore situate our study alongside those that have elevated new voices and experiences in Cold War Asia, recognising the diverse raft of actors who shaped the period.[15] By taking the image as our starting point, we seek to re-contextualise diplomatic space as a dynamic site, into which complex and at times competing narratives intertwine and new voices emerge.

## Locating Diplomacy

During the colonial period, diplomacy in Asia was linked inexorably to legitimising the supremacy of Europe in the minds of colonial regimes. As such, diplomatic encounters took place within a system of thought and practice dominated by the effort of Europeans to 'take charge' of the world.[16] In practice, this led to encounters that emphasised Europe as the origin of a 'standard of civilisation', realised through the juxtaposition of European material culture, etiquette, and technology to those of 'the Orient', in turn cast either as 'barbarian' or merely aspirant to European norms.[17] The collapse of the European empires from the end of the Second World War transformed the geopolitical context, but diplomacy in the era that followed remained tied to discourses of civilisation.

[15] In addition to texts already mentioned, others that have been critical in expanding the range of actors who participated in the Cold War include Tony Day and Maya H. T. Liem (eds.), *Cultures at War: The Cold War and Cultural Expression in Southeast Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2010); Tuong Vu and Sean Fear (eds.), *The Republic of Vietnam, 1955–1975: Vietnamese Perspectives on Nation Building* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2019); Jeremy E. Taylor and Lanjun Xu (eds.), *Chineseness and the Cold War: Contested Cultures and Diaspora in Southeast Asia and Hong Kong* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022); Eugene Ford, *Cold War Monks: Buddhism and America's Secret Strategy in Southeast Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017); Taomo Zhou, *Migration in the Time of Revolution: China, Indonesia, and the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019); and Matthew Phillips, *Thailand in the Cold War* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).

[16] John Agnew, *Geopolitics: Revisioning World Politics* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 8.

[17] Andrew Linklater, 'The "Standard of Civilisation" in World Politics', *Social Character, Historical Process*, 5:2 (2016).

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Across the region, therefore, officials responsible for hosting VIPs from abroad focused on sites of diplomatic exchange that gave the right message, often having to overcome or obscure the material indicators of a developmental lag with the West. Motorcades depended on good roads; formal dinners required an appropriate cuisine; anthems demanded trained musicians; and summits needed hotels, plush foyers, and suitable meeting rooms. During the early 1950s, the Thai capital Bangkok hosted a rapid expansion of diplomatic activity, after key United Nations agencies, and later the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), were based in the city. As a result, Thai bureaucrats, trained to worry deeply about conforming to 'universal' (*Sakon*), 'civilised' (*Siwili*), or 'modern' (*Than samai*) standards of hospitality, put enormous energy into the construction of a 'five-star' hotel to cope with the influx.[18] Similarly, in anticipation of the Bandung Conference, the Local Committee of the conference made sure the West Javanese city was renovated to send out the right messages to foreign delegates, local populations, and the global media.[19] In this context, colonial-era architecture may have provided spectacular backdrops, but they also showcased contradiction in an era of independence. Alternatively, once maligned sites of traditional power such as temples or palaces were reconfigured into post-colonial sources of national pride and identity. Overall, post-colonial politics imbued national spaces with new meanings that contested the European-derived order, and could be activated through diplomatic exchange.

As a site of vanguard post-colonial politics, scripted diplomatic activities in Southeast Asia raised questions about existing hierarchies and drew attention to the status of guests from the 'old' world. In Chapter 5, Christian Goeschel reflects on the anxieties of the West German leader President Lübke, who in 1963 opted to visit Indonesia on his tour of the region, but remained tied to an outdated, asymmetrical view of the encounter. By focusing on a particularly remarkable image, of the president paying respect at the Kalibata Heroes Cemetery just outside Jakarta, Goeschel raises a host of questions about the power dynamics on display. The heat of the sun, beating down onto a black-clad, white-skinned leader, becomes an active part of the scene, as does the unremarkable wall he stands in front of. Adding to the complexity, Goeschel points out how the West Germans had a particular sensitivity about the Nazi past in their post-war diplomacy, but one in which the Indonesians had little or no interest, adding another element of asymmetricality to our interpretation of

[18] Matthew Phillips, 'Making a "Free World" City: Urban Space and Social Order in Cold War Bangkok', in Richard Brook, Martin Dodge, and Jonathan Hogg (eds.), *Cold War Cities: Politics, Culture and Atomic Urbanism, 1945–1965* (London: Routledge, 2020), pp. 281–300.

[19] Naoko Shimazu, 'Diplomacy as Theatre: Staging the Bandung Conference of 1955', *Modern Asian Studies,* 48:1 (January 2014), 238–239.

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the image. Through Goeschel's sensitive eye, a seemingly unremarkable stock image of a state visit begins to produce discomfort and ambivalence, revealing a web of underlying emotions about West Germany's position vis-à-vis Indonesia.

In most cases, capital cities and other urban centres remained ubiquitous, but diplomatic activity was also forced to attend to new locations of international importance. As local governments and global powers struggled to win the hearts and minds of Southeast Asian populations, rural areas were a particular priority. The rice field loomed large as a potential site of insurgency, and thus became a charged ideological space, within which new technologies, social practices, or political actions could help integrate whole communities into a respective vision for the future. In Chapter 2, Patrick Flores demonstrates how the Filipina first lady, Imelda Marcos, skilfully embodied historical and contemporary themes to assert herself in the diplomatic space. His image, of a pastoral scene, shows Imelda inspecting rice field in Los Banos with President Lyndon Johnson and Lady Bird Johnson. The site was home of the International Rice Research Institute, where 'miracle rice' had been cultivated. Portrayed as a key tool in the struggle to mollify the villages of Southeast Asia, the field thus formed a key part of the American presidential visit to the Philippines in 1966.

At first sight, we are struck by the incongruity of the composition, centred on the elegantly clad Imelda with the distinguished presidential party. Yet the president looks visibly flustered with heat and humidity, standing on an elevated plank. Under Flores' richly poetic deep reading of the image, he juxtaposes multiple narratives. Specifically, he demonstrates how Imelda was able to present a coherent overarching narrative associated to being the Philippine First Lady, exploiting American anxieties about race and gender relations at home to carve out a form of 'liberal recognition' for her distinctive aesthetic and character. Charming and disarming leaders abroad, Imelda and her husband also cultivated a domestic image that evoked the Filipino cosmogonic legend that tells the story of the first woman and first man to walk on earth. In other words, Flores shows that the many public images of Imelda in circulation in the Cold War years is a composite narrative site of its own. At the risk of stating the obvious, her beauty was a sine qua non constituent of her charismatic power, which she used adroitly in politics and the 'not quite official' sites of 'surrogate' diplomacy.

## Narrating Diplomacy

At the heart of the diplomatic encounter lies the relationship between states, leaders, and people. Images can be successfully used to capture such dynamics, particularly the non-verbal forms of communication not easily grasped in

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textual sources. In the cauldron of the Cold War, nations invariably framed their sense of relationship through the prism of distinct ideological positions. State-to-state ties within the communist, free, or non-aligned worlds were generally expressed through the language of friendship or shared brotherly bonds. Yet this did not mean they did not mask more problematic associations. In all diplomatic encounters, closeness can mean historic enmity, competition, and contestation – regardless of the smiles, toasts, and gift-giving. Distance, on the other hand, can be overcome through attention to key details and carefully crafted performances. One persistent observation, therefore, is how the ambiguity of diplomatic images can be used to indicate a specific narrative interpretation, transplanting new, unspoken meanings, often laced with ideological significance, onto otherwise highly formalised exchanges.[20] In Chapter 1, on diplomatic encounters between Tito and Sukarno, key figures in the non-aligned movement, Dejan Djokić shows how both used the meetings to successfully boost their respective charismatic status. Despite representing nations on opposite sides of the world, images of the two betray a genuine sense of commonality and mutual respect. Some reveal such a symmetrical synchronicity that we observe a near 'mimicry' of dress and gesture between them. Djokić concludes that these bonds of comradeship helped activate a sense of common purpose, furnishing the non-aligned movement with character and appeal. In so doing, he demonstrates how the performative value of this friendship between state officials can be interpreted as a barometer for the health of the diplomatic relationship between those states.[21]

In Chapter 8, Gerard Sasges explores how a unique set of actors emerged as diplomats in his study of Soyuz 37, the 1980 Soviet mission to space that doubled as an example of Soviet friendship with Vietnam – five years out from having won the Second Indochina War. For his images, Sasges explores a panel of photographs intended for popular dissemination in Vietnam, each of which illustrates a distinct set of messages. Phạm Tuân was the first Asian man in space, and as a citizen of a developing nation, his trip demonstrated a degree of dependency on Soviet engineers and officials, contributing to the celebration of Soviet technological prowess. At the same time, the images of Phạm Tuân evoke Vietnamese envoys who, in previous centuries, were glorified at home in view of their forthcoming journeys to pay tribute to China. Just as they were bestowed with high ranks and provided with lavish gifts, so Phạm Tuân was elevated to a model citizen and national hero before travelling into

[20] Mieke Bal notes the importance of reflexivity in the interpretation of images, emphasising how the act of interpretating images itself requires a necessary process of narrativisation, whereby the space between the image and interpretation is 'filled in'. Mieke Bal, *Double Exposure: The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 1–12.

[21] Christian Goeschel, *Hitler and Mussolini: The Forging of the Fascist Alliance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).

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space – a journey itself imbued with transformative power. In all, the images reveal 'poetically' the Soviet use of soft power to foster the sense of a socialist future for the Vietnamese people, through a familiar trope of Confucian social dynamics. Such examples identify how diplomatic images tend to serve as vehicles for several narratives, ones that align with the well-established flow of international events, but also carry special and precise meanings for local audiences.

Chapter 6, by Naoko Shimazu, challenges the conventional understanding of a 'diplomatic image' by de-centring the gaze away from state leaders, and instead situating it in the everyday. Her choice of photograph is of the local Chinese women in Bandung during the Asian-African Conference of 1955 (commonly known as the Bandung Conference), who break out into rapturous smiles as they excitedly point at some leader (most likely the Chinese premier Zhou Enlai). She finds this image 'charismatic' because it is imbued with powerful emotions, giving centre-stage to these local women who would otherwise be marginalised figures in the history of the conference, as well as in post-war Indonesian history. Shimazu uses the photo as a starting point to explore how the photographer, Lisa Larson, propels these neglected subjects into a new set of narratives onto the pages of *LIFE* magazine. In this way, these women play an integral role as audience in the theatre of Asian-African diplomacy unfolding in front of their eyes on the streets of Bandung, just as much as their demonstrable 'Chineseness' reminds us of the history of the overseas Chinese communities in Indonesia and elsewhere in Southeast Asia. Above all, her essay is a reflection on how women can have greater agency in diplomacy, as both protagonists and image-makers, using visual representations.

In Chapter 4, on King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit's 1960 trip to Burma, Matthew Phillips explores how a Thai public relations film presented the monarch as a superior world conqueror in the Buddhist tradition. By drawing subtle associations between images from the tour and well-known cosmological tropes, the film suggests the king's ability to subdue the leadership of a weaker regional rival. His chapter reads like a scroll painting unfolding with the journey, replete with Buddhist symbolisms, powerfully resonant to those who appreciate their significance. Phillips' unpeeling of the complex layers awakens our senses to the possibilities of visual symbols, ranging from the choice of colours to material culture, and the overall choreography. At the same time, his skilful rendering through a 'thick description' reading of the film reminds us of how ambiguous visual symbols can be, as the astonishing insights that unravel before our eyes are only made visible and meaningful to those in the know and, in this case, are only possible through an interlocutor like himself. Like Imelda Marcos, Queen Sirikit plays a central role, transforming herself into a globally recognisable 'First Lady' while simultaneously evoking the mythical Gem Queen of Buddhism. Once again, his chapter underlines the importance of

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visual sources in enabling the visibility of women in diplomacy. In all, Phillips' reading demonstrates a superabundance of rich visual material, yet to be tapped into, that will inevitably deepen our understanding of the symbolic in Buddhist diplomacy.

## Afterlife of Images

While many images in this volume restore lost moments or perspectives, others caught the attention of the authors due to their assumed ubiquity. In Chapter 3, for example, Jirayudh Sinthupan explores a famous image, also of Queen Sirikit and King Bhumibol, meeting with Elvis Presley, popularly known as the 'King' (of rock and roll), in Hollywood's Paramount Studios. The couple met Elvis there in 1960 during their world tour, when he was filming the movie *G.I. Blues*. Sinthupan's account offers a rare insight into the tour, through his access to royal sources and insights. But he also notes how the image, by Nat Dallinger, has grown in importance within Thailand and is now widely displayed across the kingdom. In fact, the meeting was far from unique. As part of Hollywood's own cultural diplomacy, Elvis met many prominent figures, including the Danish and Nepalese royal families, while on set. Moreover, at the time of the meeting, domestic audiences in Thailand were unsure how to respond to the meeting. In 1960, Elvis remained morally ambiguous in Thailand, associated with a rebellious youth culture rather than a new world aristocracy. All this would change over the following decade, as Thailand became more integrated into the American-centred world and Elvis grew in the Thai public consciousness. Over time, this appealing photograph of the 'two Kings' acquired new meanings and significance, giving it a successful afterlife as visual documentation and artefact.

Similarly, in his study of the signing of the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) declaration in 1967, Deepak Nair in Chapter 9 shows how a relatively mundane photograph of the moment has since become emblematic of the ASEAN story.[22] Nair traces the process by which the non-descript 1967 photograph became the blueprint for the 'ASEAN mural' – a specially commissioned painting of the image that formed the central plank of the fiftieth anniversary event of ASEAN in 2017. Unveiled with great fanfare as leaders gathered in Manila, the painting was later transferred to the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta, where it remains today. What becomes clear is that the original black and white photograph gains potency as the preferred representation of the moment, not so much because it is a great image, but as a visual mnemonic – a site of multiple narratives. The image 'bided its time', Nair

[22] ASEAN currently has ten member states: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. The secretariat is in Jakarta.

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explains, 'waiting for ASEAN as a body to consolidate during the Cold War', before re-emerging as the stock image of ASEAN in the era of social media. Notwithstanding the irony of men in grey suits 'giving birth', the artist Peter Paul Blanco undertook a whole year of research into the 1967 photograph, only for his painting to acquire a distinct 'aura' of authenticity as *the* legitimate depiction of that founding moment.

In Chapter 7, Paul Rae directs our attention to an unlikely diplomatic image, a 'Madam Tussauds of sorts' waxwork depiction of the Japanese surrender to British officials in Singapore in 1945. In 1974, the said waxwork was displayed in the City Hall Chambers in Singapore, and was later transferred to Fort Siloso on Sentosa Island where it currently sits in the Surrender Chambers. As a theatre studies specialist and a performance artist, Rae sees a performative potential in the waxwork and extrapolates on several hidden stories that its making entailed. By focusing on the materiality of wax, Rae's story questions the surrender as having a more ambivalent afterlife, ex post facto, as embodied in the waxwork itself. His historical research further traces the contemporary diplomatic concerns in Singapore-Japan relations in the mid-1970s, when Japan had become Singapore's most important trading partner. Intriguingly, the waxwork was supposedly created as a tourist attraction to cater to increased Japanese visitors to Singapore, though part of the intention was possibly to remind the Japanese of their shameful past. Exploring how the waxwork was researched, crafted, and ultimately displayed in different ways over time, Rae reminds us that the meaning of images is in constant flux. While a representation of the surrender meant one thing in 1945, it came to mean quite another once Singapore was an independent state. Placing the material culture frontstage invites us to explore alternative scenarios, sparking curiosity into the potential insights non-textual sources can help illuminate.

We end our volume with Chapter 10, by the photojournalist Tom White, whose insights have been invaluable to our collective intellectual endeavour. White's astute observations as a practitioner provide an account into how images are made and used – exposing the fascinating goings-on 'behind the scenes' – in Goffman's sense of 'front stage' and 'back stage'. White does this through three stories that each illustrate the behind-the-scenes workings of diplomatic reporting as a photojournalist on the diplomatic media circuit, and in so doing, he unpicks the meticulous staging and choreographing involved in making famous pictures. He finishes with what became one of the most iconic Cold War encounters between the United States and the USSR, Erwin Elliot's famous photograph of Nixon and Khrushchev at the American Exhibition in Moscow in 1959. By tracing contact sheets, White explores how the picture was selected, revealing in the process how the image was constructed to retell a distorted but nevertheless powerful 'reality'.

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Separately, White explores the media circus surrounding the much-hyped summit between former President Donald Trump and North Korean Chairman Kim Jong-Un in Singapore in 2018, a staged performance of the most outlandish kind – but one that, told from the perspective of a journalist chasing for an image from behind the scenes, afforded him enticing insights into how the event was staged. The cover image of the volume of the Trump and Kim impersonators is one such striking photograph taken by White on the summit circuit. The funeral of Lee Kwan Yew (the founding father of Singapore) in 2015, on the other hand, was an event of a different order. White's photo of the Padang (the large open green space in the Central Business District) where Singaporeans queued, drenched in a tropical downpour to pay their final respects, struck an unexpected chord with *New York Times* editors, capturing the mood of the occasion in a way unforeseen by the photographer himself. Finally, White takes us behind the lens to his experience of capturing two images of Aung San Suu Kyi, one of which was not selected for publication by any editor, but which for him is particularly poignant, considering later events. Overall, White's photojournalistic experiences reveal insights into not only how diplomatic moments are staged, but how such stages might be subverted or re-imagined at any moment. White's chapter is about the reflections of a practitioner on the afterlife of the diplomatic moments that he was partly responsible for creating.

## Conclusion

By embracing both the ambiguous nature of images along with their respective subjectivities, the contributors to this book have not sought to provide a definitive take on a given moment or diplomatic encounter. Rather, they have expanded the view. In this regard, context remains key. While the styles and approaches of the individual contributors are all unique, each contribution is equally concerned with matters of substantiation, although not always in the same way. At times it has meant returning to well-perused national collections with new eyes, or efforts to seek out new materials from private collections or cultural organisations. At others it has meant talking with family or revisiting galleries or museums with a fresh perspective. By opening such terrains, our volume aims to enliven the study of diplomacy, to welcome new scholars into the field, and to shed new light onto historical moments in all their full dramatic complexity.

Even this cursory introduction to the chapters has given rise to several prominent thematic insights that demonstrate how visual sources enrich the field. For one, visual sources contribute to a more sophisticated understanding of the power dynamics in play during diplomacy events. Goeschel's discussion of Lübke in Indonesia, like Flores' image of Imelda serenely observing the rice

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fields alongside a sweltering Johnson, reminds us that power is not always where the diplomatic record might suggest. On the other hand, the near-comical symmetricality evident in the dress and gesture of Tito and Sukarno betray a charismatic competition between autocratic leaders, while Nair's discussion of the painting symbolising the birth of ASEAN emphasises the, albeit contrived, symmetricality of relations within ASEAN. The waxwork depicting the Japanese surrender in 1945 in Rae's chapter appears at least in part to be about Singapore retaining some power over an ascendent Japan in the bilateral relationship. Sasges' discussion of the Vietnamese cosmonaut situates asymmetrical power dynamics vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, while Phillips' chapter shows how the Thais used Buddhist cosmological symbolism to affect the narrative of the Thai conquest over a traditional regional rival, Burma.

The images in this volume also expose the complex racial politics that dominated diplomatic encounters at the time. Asian leaders often were able to actively exploit the racial politics to further assert their position, particularly when engaging with white Western representatives. At other times, the reference to race was more subtle. Shimazu's essay, focusing on the image of ethnic Chinese women at the Bandung conference and taken by a white American female photographer, identifies how gender links photographer and subject. Yet this moment of intersection is transient and contingent. The female photographer's background links her directly to the influential *LIFE* magazine, while her image alludes to a community with a rich and complex back-story from across a vast social, political – and critically racial – divide. Elsewhere, the images in this volume also reveal, or allude to, the at times fraught nature of intra-regional racial dynamics, or indeed the effort to overcome or flatten differences or inherited hierarchies. Perhaps most notable here is the revelation in Nair's chapter that the artist who portrayed ASEAN's five founding fathers actively chose to give all those depicted the same tone of skin colour, emphasising racial unity as a way to signpost the common political agenda. By situating diplomatic settings in Asia, Asian diplomatic actors are operating in their more familiar milieu. Instead, it is the 'foreignness' of the non-Asian actors that stands out through the simple visible cue of race.

Another pertinent theme to have emerged is the central importance of visual sources in understanding the role and impact of gender in diplomacy, particularly as it pertains to the role of women. Shimazu's chapter highlights the place of women both as the subject of photography and as the image-creator. Flores', Phillips', and Sinthupan's chapters would not have the same impact without visual evidence of the charismatic women leaders they portray. Elsewhere, contributors have drawn attention to the role played by masculinity in diplomacy. King Bhumibol, Tito, Sukarno, and Elvis Presley in different ways display their masculinity through the images. Even the non-charismatic

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painting of the birth of ASEAN retells a foundation myth that co-opts gender in its rendition of men giving birth. Images thus reveal the subtext of gender power dynamics that cannot be expressed explicitly in words, though are silently visible. More broadly, there is no denying that visual sources do give more agency to women in diplomacy, far more than traditional textual sources.

Another fascinating outcome is that images reveal emotions effortlessly, and critically, without the beholder having to understand the social, cultural, or political context of the situation. Examples of how an outburst of emotions can encapsulate the mood of the diplomatic moment can be found in the delightful expressions of Queen Sirikit in meeting Elvis Presley, the confidence exuded by the two dictators pictured in Djokić's chapter, or the seething emotions under the midday sun in the image in Goeschel's chapter. Even in the stillness that dominates Goeschel's photograph of the West German president, there is evident oppressiveness from the heat and discomfort. Finally, images draw greater attention to the enduring role played by symbols and symbolism in diplomacy, features that have not tended to be embraced in scholarly accounts of modern and contemporary diplomacy. This is less true of medieval and early modern historians, who have been better attuned to the importance of cultural symbols in their work on diplomacy and are generally more used to fully exploiting the value of images in their analysis.

Overall, the chapters in this volume challenge scholars of diplomacy to consider more seriously the use of visual sources because they enable us to appreciate the myriad layers of meaning, new voices, and fresh perspectives that may be better understood visually. In all, our understanding of global diplomacy will be richer for it. The volume forms part of the burgeoning field of the cultural history of global diplomacy. In so doing, we hope it encourages further interdisciplinary collaborations and spurs new creative endeavours.[23]

[23] Some of the contributors to this volume are involved in the *Oxford Handbook on the Cultural History of Global Diplomacy, c1750 to present (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming)*, edited by Christian Goeschel and Naoko Shimazu.

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