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Diplomatic Style and Foreign Policy

A Case Study of South Korea

Reviewed by Martin Zubko

We usually understand diplomatic practice as disciplined, hierarchic, pertaining to protocol, non-emotional and elitist. These prejudices refrain us from acknowledging the virtuosity of diplomacy as a discipline of diversities. Although diplomatic practice contains universal characteristics across national representations, each country has formed its diplomacy by including a portion of culture, traditions, mentality and a way of dealing with problems. Therefore, Jeffrey Robertson inquires into the neglected importance of diplomatic style as a necessary element of the analytics of foreign policy.

We can divide Jeffrey Robertson's book into two parts. In the first one, the author guides us through the theoretical arguments of adding diplomatic style among our priorities when studying international relations. The author establishes a definition of diplomacy in chapter one, constitutes diplomatic style in chapter two, renders *ideal diplomat* and *ideal diplomatic style* in chapter three and constructs four ideal types of diplomatic style based on classic readings of international relations studies in chapter four.

The second part examines the South Korean diplomatic style by using methodology based on Weber's interpretive sociology. Implementing a narrative phenomenological inquiry, the author analyses the South Korean diplomatic practice in chapters five, six and seven. Finally, Robertson reveals his findings on South Korean diplomacy in chapter eight.

So, where does the author identify the shortcomings of proper research on the phenomenon of diplomatic style? First, many authors concentrate on diplomatic culture while not touching on the diplomatic style as a research topic. Second, scholars and diplomats, particularly in the USA, use the terms *diplomacy* and *foreign policy* interchangeably. Third, authors write about the diplomatic practice while elaborating only marginally on diplomatic style. Consequently, there is a significant deficiency in the phenomenon of diplomatic style in reputable contemporary academic literature.

One of the author's primary sources of knowledge is the work of British diplomat Harold Nicolson, who expounded on the meaning of a diplomatic profession from a practitioner's point of view. This helps Robertson to figure out that 'diplomats recognise, comprehend and adapt to the diplomatic style of their counterparts' (p. 5). Moreover, the author correlates the quality of knowledge about diplomacy between academics and diplomats; concluding that there is an enormous gap.

Thus, the first chapter develops a definition of the phenomenon of diplomatic style based on four assumptions. First, the author compares *style as categorisation* to a parallel of jazz and rock 'n' roll in music categorisation. Second, *style as communication* as a message that a musician sends to the audience by a selected music style. Third, *style as explicit knowledge* that we commonly see in forms of books, documents, various formulations or graphical aids. Fourth, *style as tacit knowledge* – not recorded or stored anywhere; essentially, this turns into mental activities, consciousness and something inside us which we cannot define with words.

Even though a German diplomat will consistently have powerful state support compared to a Moldavian one, the latter might be honoured with advanced tacit knowledge shaping the notion of negotiation. On the other hand, diplomats of more influential states might contemplate the role of tacit knowledge in the diplomatic practice of less powerful states. Thus, Robertson stresses the importance of tacit knowledge and our ability to include it in analyses of diplomatic style.

However, we should also consider convenient and inconvenient aspects influencing diplomatic style, notably technological development, information extraction and surveillance. These aspects form a DNA of national representations and negotiation practices. Thus, I would slightly question Robertson's statement in the book that 'diplomacy is built upon tacit knowledge' (p. 46). Nonetheless, he is perfectly right to include all four assumptions to support his definition.

Robertson uses an astute manoeuvre to come up with ideal types of diplomatic style by adopting Weber's four models of social action in the following readings: purposive-rational – *The Prince* by Niccolò Machiavelli; traditional – *De la Manière de Négociier* by Francois de Callières; emotional – *A Guide to Diplomatic Practice* by Ernest Satow; and value-rational – *Diplomacy* by Harold Nicolson. By this, Robertson completes his theoretical part. He endorses using those four concepts to analyse any type of diplomatic practice to determine the working style. So, where does the Republic of Korea stand in Robertson's four diplomatic styles?

Based on 64 narratives, Robertson concludes that the South Korean diplomatic practice involves an emotion-oriented diplomatic style. Asian diplomats have the reputation for being very pragmatic, rational and devoid of emotion. So, where can we see those emotions?

According to Robertson, Korean diplomatic practice has four virtues – 'status, generational change, cosmopolitanism and estrangement' (p. 164). It is the last theme, estrangement, which appears as the most interesting component influencing South Korean diplomatic style (an emotional layer of it).

Structuring on James Der Derian's text *On Diplomacy: A Genealogy of Western Estrangement*, the author explains the theoretical ground of his reasoning about estrangement. The most prominent factors causing estrangement are the geographical position and historical development of South Korea. Perpetual interactions of major powers in the region determine the former. The latter demonstrates that the history of South Korea was often modified by decisions of China, Japan and the USA. This finding points to the gravity of South Korean estrangement through diplomatic practice.

The innovative aspect of Robertson's research draws a valuable theoretical framework of diplomatic style, focusing on the understanding of the analytical insights of foreign policies. The book also delivers a message to academic and professional communities calling for

a more intense mutual partnership. In conclusion, Robertson's book presents a way to strengthen the quality of diplomatic practice by scrutinising the principles of diplomatic style.

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