

Civilisations and harm: the politics of civilising processes between the West and the non-West

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Abstract

Andrew Linklater's *Violence and Civilization in the Western States-System* is to be both praised and critiqued for opening spaces for discussing civilisational standards in the era of a globalising world. It offers a healthy provocation for inquiry into how non-Western states ought to comprehend the legacies of Western political evolution colouring existing 'IR' as a discipline. Linklater's book inspires three thematic reactions: globalisation does bring harm; the notion of a universal civilisation remains open to debate; and the possibilities of civilising patterns in premodern Southeast Asia serving as supplementary mirrors and extensions of the relationship between violence and civilisation. It is suggested that Linklater's sequel must consider the trajectory of non-Western sociologies of IR.

Keywords

Critical Theory; Historical Sociology; Asian IR; Premodern International Formations; Global IR

As a graduate student in the much-storied introductory 'International Politics' Master level seminar at the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1998–9, I was first introduced to Andrew Linklater's writings under the label 'Critical IR Theory'. This skein of theory appealed immediately to my non-Western sensibilities. Linklater's books *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations* (1990) and *Beyond Realism and Marxism* (1990) offered a transversal path away from the increasingly staid schools of Realism, Liberalism, and their associated Neorealist and Neoliberal variants. Moreover, it was almost a Constructivism equipped with a conscience in reimagining humanity as a consciousness that invited individuals to shed their nationalist blinkers to connect as human beings. As a financially strapped graduate student, I photocopied chunks of *Men and Citizens* for examination preparation and as base material for a course I knew I would be expected to teach as a future university professor. By the end of my doctoral training four years later, I decided to acquire *The Transformation of Political Community* (1998) for my professional bookshelf. This book supplied a narrative that was cast in the idiom of critiquing globalisation while also extending its promise. Better still, Linklater wrote that 'Critical theory is to be judged not only by its contribution to ethics and sociology but by the extent to which it sheds light on existing political possibilities.'¹ He added that

engaging the systematically excluded in dialogue about the ways in which social practices and policies harm their interests is a key ethical commitment for any society which embarks on this process of change. Most members of such a society may share many cultural traits and

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¹ Andrew Linklater, *The Transformation of Political Community: Ethical Foundations of the Post-Westphalian Era* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press and Polity Press, 1998), p. 5.

traditions, but the bond which unites them can owe as much to the ethical commitment to open dialogue as to a sense of primordial attachments.²

In *Violence and Civilisation in the Western States-System*, Linklater has demonstrated not only continuity with the cause of Critical Theory, but also a great deal of humanity in aspiring to ‘analyse the extent to which agreed standards of self-restraint that were linked with shared conceptions of civility or civilization have shaped the development of Western states-systems’.³ In doing so, Linklater aims to advance English School IR theorist Martin Wight’s examination of states-systems via the approach of process sociology associated with Norbert Elias. The latter is of course associated in turn with the idea that human evolution and its teleology are characterised by a ‘civilising’ process. Civilising is taken to be the cumulative embrace of rational restraints on the use of violence against the human race by its own members. It could also, in my view, be extended to the systematic and rule-governed treatment of government, economics, and the whole gamut of human needs within contractual community. Men (and women) learn to live with their fellow beings in a voluntarily regulated condition of peaceful coexistence. However, the permanent termination of conflict is not yet in sight. It is, however, regarded as tolerable that violence may be regulated or confined within acceptable boundaries. The whole theme of violence threads itself across the entire book. Linklater’s genealogical treatment of Western political history is intended to reveal that ‘the West’ has mostly succeeded in civilising itself, and in tandem the ‘Western states-system’, into accepting restraints on the use of international violence. Although Linklater does not specify how he scopes the notion of violence, it is amply clear that he is completely focused upon bodily harm. This focus on physical harm ‘that may shorten or disfigure’ human lives has in fact been articulated as the primary basis for his immediately preceding book, the prequel as it were, *The Problem of Harm in World Politics: Theoretical Investigations*.⁴

There is certainly a great deal to admire on this score alone. When one scrutinises the more conventional agendas of the IR-related field known as security studies after the end of the Cold War, international law and the full panoply of issues stemming from ‘human security’ have tended to eclipse the dominance of the study of strategy for armed conflict. Linklater’s mastery of the trajectory of international warfare *qua* history of international relations amply defends this perspective. However, there is a distinct lacuna in a work of such magnitude: it neglects the category of inconvenience in IR, which I will refer to in shorthand as ‘the non-West’. The evolution of the Western states-system cannot be divorced from the fate of the non-Western equivalents.

Any objective history of Western imperialism from the late 1400s to the present must reveal that the fates of both the West and the non-West are both benignly *and* cruelly intertwined. In this narrative of the objective history of international relations, violence ought also to be examined in its multifarious incarnations. The body may be physically harmed, but it is probably more pernicious where violence is recurrently administered to the psyche in plain sight.

Linklater’s earlier book briefly referred to the form of ‘structural harm’ that is ‘no less dependent on high levels of institutionalization that make people vulnerable to the ways in which they are tied together in lengthening social interconnections’.⁵ This is a helpful opening for understanding how

² Linklater, *Transformation of Political Community*, p. 7.

³ Andrew Linklater, *Violence and Civilization in the Western States-Systems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. xi.

⁴ Andrew Linklater, *The Problem of Harm in World Politics: Theoretical Investigations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

harms can be wrought by Western originated civilising processes. Yet, in the *Problem of Harm*, Linklater continues to allow his intellectual horizons to be limited by Marxist and neo-Marxist conceptions of structural harm. To Linklater, this is attested to by the very typical political economy problem of explaining why Global South companies continue to sell increasing amounts of their products at low prices for sheer survival even though they do not earn any profit from doing so. Yet another neo-Marxist description of structural harm is borrowed from Immanuel Wallerstein: hegemonic economic powers have reinforced their position by initiating free trade regimes that constrain new challengers with rules against dumping or non-profit protections, while ending up exacerbating global poverty.⁶ Linklater claims only in passing that liberal perspectives on structural harm may consider 'indifference or thoughtlessness adequately characterizes the harm caused by global regimes'.⁷ This is surely inadequate when one considers how China's 2013 One Belt One Road vision might intellectually challenge a neoliberal vision of international economic order with its state-centric model of paternalistic benevolence, or how Japanese and South Korean citizens rallied to show solidarity with their compatriots through symbolic donations and open displays of collective mourning following natural disasters and extreme economic recession. Likewise, one should critically inquire as to why Westphalian-derived international law is treated with deep suspicion, or at best, with great ambivalence, in territorial and resource disputes in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Surely one has to acknowledge that the non-West was inducted into the 'modern world [without borders]' through the coercive force of globalisation. Entire modes of legal existence, capitalist economic rationality, and 'scientific' demarcation of political boundaries were foisted upon the non-West in the name of Western civilising processes dubbed variously as 'establishing law and order', 'tutoring the noble savage', and 'introducing science and rationality' to seemingly chaotic non-Western polities. This surely merits a critical treatment of the unfolding of globalisation as harm, and requires the questioning of whether global civilising processes emanating from the West have truly set the *only* standard for a homogenous peaceful civilisation for today. This conceit within Western civilising processes is amply documented in some of the recent global histories authored by subaltern authors, many of whom attribute characteristics of fear and imperialism to the coming of Western civilisation.⁸ In this regard, the 1905 Japanese military victory over Czarist Russia has been treated as a watershed towards a more equitable political dimension to globalisation since it demonstrated that an Asian nation could muster science and technology despite retaining a considerably Asian core of political values.⁹

Writing history, let alone the historical sociology of civilising processes, is always coloured by one's political vantage point. The Asian nationalist regard for Japan's 1905 military victory over a 'white power' is not without its controversies. This being the case, Linklater's treatment of *Violence and Civilization* is therefore a healthy provocation in examining the problem of harm in its many subtler manifestations in the non-West. His argument principally looks *within* Western civilising processes for explanations as to why international relations in the twenty-first century is generally more peaceful than at any time in modern world history. This in turn poses disturbing implications for this current era of global governance as to whether its imperial origins may still be oppressing humanity in areas outside the original core of the Western states-system. In the first two sections of this article,

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ See, for instance, Cemil Aydin, *Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007) and Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire: The Revolt against the West and the Remaking of Asia* (New York: Picador, 2012).

⁹ Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire*, pp. 1–9.

I shall therefore illuminate this omission about the dark side of Western civilising processes by first scrutinising two linked themes: globalisation brings harm through social encounters between the West and the non-West; and the questionable assumption, which Linklater embeds in his latest book, that violence has been tamed throughout the world because Western civilisation has triumphed as *the universal civilisation* through the spread of its intrinsic civilising processes such as the diffusion of modern technology.

Finally, I intend to challenge Linklater to respond to the corresponding, but not necessarily parallel, treatment of ‘violence and civilization’ in non-Western proto states-systems and recently modernising ones. I do this by offering illustrations from my own work and others on premodern Southeast Asian intersocietal relations. In short, there exists untapped potential for studying violence and civilisation as the politics of International Relations as a discipline between the West and the non-West. This ‘politics’ represents both a deep methodological challenge as well as an ideological one within the social science of IR as to whether we can attempt to democratise it. This is in fact entirely consistent with Linklater’s humanistic aspirations in writing *Critical Theory* and should therefore be pursued with vigour on both academic and moral grounds.

Globalisation brings harm in social encounters

In almost any work that invokes historical sociology, one is offering an account of globalisation. *Violence and Civilization* is no different and can be constructively criticised on this front. Although Linklater commences with deep appreciation of the Greco-Roman historical practices of taming violence and limiting such rules to their own race, there are ample illustrations that civilising processes in governance are simultaneously posing expansionary challenges geographically towards other Europeans and non-Western peoples. There is rich discussion of ancient Greek attitudes towards ‘barbarians’, and the regard for the rise of Macedon as a major “scaling up” of social and political organization that was accompanied by the development of new conceptions of civilization.¹⁰ The succeeding *Pax Romana* was treated as having learned the ways of coexisting with diverse and potentially hostile elements, along with other nearly ungovernable populations within its borders or along the peripheries of the Roman imperium. The ‘International Relations of Latin Christendom’ was an entire chapter of expanding civilising processes accommodating quasi-kingdoms and empires. Linked to this was the Spanish empire’s dilemmatic and selectively brutal treatment of natives in the New World within the socio-legal tutelage of *encomienda*. The latter was meant to ‘care in trust’ for underdeveloped and uncivilised peoples. Subsequently, Linklater highlights very thoughtfully Kantian prospects for cosmopolitan peace and the problem of distance and social connection. In Linklater’s indirect language, this was the problem posed by globalisation: ‘The reality was that the global interdependencies that distinguished the modern era required a revolution in moral and political thinking as well as parallel changes in the relative power of national, international and cosmopolitan legal and moral responsibilities ... As Kant well knew, the prospects for moving in that direction depended largely on levels of co-dependence that existed between many European societies but were largely absent from their relations with the world’s vulnerable peoples.’¹¹

This thread of reading history squares completely with the mainstream definitions of globalisation by sociologists. Malcolm Waters defined globalisation as ‘a social process in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly

¹⁰ Linklater, *Violence and Civilization*, p. 59.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

aware that they are receding'.¹² Anthony Giddens describes globalisation as 'the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa'.¹³ When peoples of differing jurisdictions, habits of rule-making and rule-following encounter one another, the temptation and psychological disposition to do harm to the other is magnified through proximity of contact. By extension, 'We' or the Other must render the other more familiar or less hostile, presumably through the creation of a power relationship. This was precisely how the 'Indians' of the New World were either killed, placed in slavery or 'Christianised' to be servile to their new overlords from Spain. Even today, globalisation in functional matters such as airport customs procedures, food safety standards for imports and exports, and in the field of university education, a large degree of standardisation is imposed by some all-seeing, all-modern, and usually Western body. It is notable that passenger air travel clearance procedures in the post-9/11 era take their cues from the US Transportation Safety Agency and Department of Homeland Security, as well as the European Union border controls. In yet another instance of the globalisation of Westernisation, the globalisation of university curricula in the social sciences and humanities began as far back as the end of the Second World War when the United States imperium began in earnest piggybacking upon a British imperium that was already entering an indefinitely prolonged sunset. Indeed, A. P. Thornton, the perceptive scholar of twentieth-century imperialism, analysed higher education as 'a structure of ideas [that] argues the presence of a builder with a blueprint. The doctrine of development therefore has to include educational progress. How fast it goes depends on the definition of progress laid down by the developing agency.'¹⁴ Although Thornton believed that the British had actually seeded the mindsets of young highly educated non-Western nationalists in the direction of revolutionary independence throughout the Empire to the detriment of London's interests, he failed to accurately predict the enduring hegemony of civilised Western 'curricula' as a benchmark for all modern higher education far beyond the formal arenas of political contest. A certain canon of texts, for instance, *had* to be taught in any mainstream philosophy class at a reputable varsity. In the 1960s, this provoked Ghana's founding president, Kwame Nkrumah to react:

I was introduced to Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Marx and other immortals,¹⁵ to whom I should like to refer as the university philosophers. But these titans were expounded in such a way that a student from a colony could easily find his breast agitated by conflicting attitudes. These attitudes can have effects, which spread out over a whole society, should such a student finally pursue a political life.

A colonial student does not by origin belong to the intellectual history in which the university philosophers are such impressive landmarks. The colonial students can be so seduced by these attempts to give a philosophical account of the universe, that he surrenders his whole personality to them. When he does this, he loses sight of the fundamental social fact that he is a colonial subject. In this way, he omits to draw from his education and from the concern displayed by the great philosophers for human problems, anything which he might relate to the very real problem of colonial domination, which, as it happens, conditions the immediate life of every colonized African.¹⁶

¹² Malcolm Waters, *Globalization* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 3.

¹³ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 64.

¹⁴ A. P. Thornton, *Imperialism in the Twentieth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 62.

¹⁵ One wonders if Nkrumah had intended this to be a sharp pun!

¹⁶ Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonization and Development with Particular Reference to the African Revolution* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1964), p. 2.

Is this not the case even in most IR introductions today? Many varsity students simply lap up the canon of mostly three main Schools of IR without even bothering to probe at the subtler and more challenging Critical Theory, Postmodern, and Feminist Approaches, let alone embryonic non-Western theorising. It is therefore no surprise that critical sociologists have targeted the imperialistic uniformity of ‘global standardisation’ through the metaphor of ‘McDonaldisation’ or even institutionalised Eurocentrism.¹⁷ For instance, in George Ritzer’s analysis, the McDonaldisation of global society celebrates the lifestyle and managerial values of efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control.¹⁸ Upon deeper reflection, are these not the values also associated with the so-called Realists, Neorealists, Liberals, Neoliberals, and some versions of Constructivism?

Although McDonaldisation has mainly served as a frame for criticising the global circulation of a homogenising consumerist society and capitalism, it could serve just as potently as a description of the effects of Western colonialism in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. This bloody violence of imposing uniformity has at least been analogously documented by Linklater in the quotation from General Lothar von Trotha, German military commander in South West Africa, and a veteran of wars in China and East Africa: ‘I know enough tribes in Africa. They all have the same mentality insofar as they yield only to force. It was and remains my policy to apply this force with unmitigated terrorism and even cruelty. I shall destroy rebellious tribes by shedding rivers of blood’.¹⁹ Linklater rightly points out that the savagery of colonial wars was in itself a frontier of deadly encounters between rival civilisational standards, with one – the Western – claiming the right to be superior and compelling the rest to submit to its standards. Sadly therefore, there exist some grains of merit in the argument of non-Western authoritarian regimes of the likes of China, North Korea, Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Myanmar when these claim that liberal democracy ought never to be foisted upon them as a new form of global imperialism. It is this further development of the *problématique* of global standards that any historical sociology dealing with civilisation must also reckon with: is this not more of Western imperialism? Can a liberal globalisation be genuinely accommodating to the non-West according to some version of the Lockean spirit of toleration?

Universal civilisation open to debate: Technology as revelation

The question of a universal civilisation in the twenty-first century therefore remains wide open. While Linklater has captured the uneven culmination of a liberal *zeitgeist* centred upon Western governance and their elites habituating themselves to restraints on violence within and between states, he stops short of positing what a globalising world might mean when it accommodates

¹⁷ John Hobson, ‘The postcolonial paradox of Eastern agency’, in Pinar Bilgin and L. H. M. Ling (eds), *Asia in International Relations: Unlearning Imperial Power Relations* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), pp. 109–20. The thesis of globalisation containing within it disguised strategies of power relations has only been examined in piecemeal fashion. These are some examples of this angle of critical inquiry: Tony Spiby, *Globalization and World Society* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1996); Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (Oxford: Polity, 1998); Richard Falk, *Predatory Globalization: A Critique* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1999); David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt, and Jonathan Perraton, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1999); Luc Julliet, ‘Domestic institutions and non-state actors in international governance’, in Theodore H. Cohn, Stephen McBride, and John Wiseman (eds), *Power in the Global Era: Grounding Globalization* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 125–38; Sandra Halperin and Ronen Palan (eds), *Legacies of Empire: Imperial Roots of the Contemporary Global Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

¹⁸ George Ritzer, *The McDonaldisation of Society* (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 2000), chs 3–6.

¹⁹ Quoted in Linklater, *Violence and Civilization*, p. 261.

non-Western notions of governance. For instance, while there is a rich discussion of Clausewitzian thought on warning against modern, total warfare as opposed to savage wars,²⁰ Linklater does not go far enough in illuminating the role of technology in civilising the world. In sociological works treating technology in the production of world civilisation and incipient global governance, it is noted that technological ideas travel quite freely, but their adaptations make all the difference. Arnold Pacey argues that the technology of spinning silk and cotton did not originate organically in the European heartlands of the industrial revolution – it was born in Asia. The latter believed in the manual operation of garment production since the painstaking processes were meant to create art. The Europeans, however, improved on Asian ‘manual’ technologies through superior organisational intervention.²¹

Similarly, European shipbuilding in the centuries of sail was not decisively superior to those of their South Asian, Southeast Asian, and Chinese counterparts. The warmer waters of tropical Asia affected different types of wood in their rates of water resistance and deterioration. Hence vessels built in Asia for local tropical waters proved more durable and cost-effective than comparable vessels constructed in Europe with oak. Likewise, iron nails used in European construction rusted rapidly and disintegrated unpredictably in the equatorial regions. Like the Chinese, the Europeans learned to contract local tropical shipbuilders to construct both merchant and war vessels, or to have Southeast Asian merchant companies conduct an intermediary trade using the latter’s own ships carrying cargo from Europe and northeastern Asia.²² Ultimately, the Europeans learnt faster than their Asian counterparts in fusing better hull constructions with firepower to facilitate maritime empire building on a massive scale. This is how the history of imperialism turned decisively in European favour by the 1800s through an organisational revolution synthesised by the West.

Yet the point remains that rival visions of technology have persisted in world history for a very long time. Some of these are culturally filtered. For instance, there has in fact been a thriving trade in guns and gunpowder between China, Japan, Korea, Siam, and the kingdoms of South Asia right up until the Ottoman. This predated the rise of European industrialised firepower for mass destruction on the battlefield in the manner anticipating Clausewitz’s ‘total war’ or Moltke’s notions of swift envelopment through armoured formations. Yet, Chinese guns in the 1200s and 1300s were labelled as ‘overawing wind-fire cannon[s]’ and translated into several versions of ‘thunder-fire cannon’ reflecting a cosmological symbolism to these weapons. Frequently, they were also described as ‘magically efficient’.²³ This indulgence in narrating guns through superlatively spiritual extremes confined them to symbolic uses on the battlefield, much in the manner of drums, flags, heralds, and charismatic leadership. They were meant to stiffen the resolve of one’s soldiers while intimidating the enemy. In Arnold Pacey’s opinion, the noise of the cannons at the start and end of a battle conveyed far more than their actual destructive effects.²⁴ Actual fighting and killing was enabled by the crossbow, along with lances and swords. In contrast, when one examines the use of cannon and gunpowder during the Crusades and the Hundred Years’ War in Europe, firepower was deployed to maim and destroy. Between the 1500s and the late 1800s, China and its strategic mindsets turned

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 313–16.

²¹ Arnold Pacey, *Technology in World Civilization: A Thousand-Year History* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991), pp. 101–7.

²² Ibid., pp. 64–8.

²³ Ibid., p. 53.

²⁴ Ibid.

inwards while the Napoleonic Wars and the subsequent consolidation of the European nation-states tuned firepower towards ever more destructive uses in imperial ventures. Such are the cultural contrasts when we speak of the sociological evolution of universal civilisation in just one dimension – technology.

Before I turn to the final section where I discuss a sample of historical sociological analysis from premodern Southeast Asia, one final colourful quote needs to be surfaced to illustrate how cultural differences might supply profound consequences for any attempt at a truly global historical sociology. This is excerpted from Daniel Headrick's account of the history of Western imperialism from 1400 to the present, where the West's 'power over nature' through science, translates almost inexorably into 'power over peoples'.²⁵ In appraising European mastery of automated steam power, Headrick cites a Persian holy man's interpretation of nineteenth-century 'steamboat imperialism' as evidence that the Western use of the new seaborne technology invited a philosophical condemnation from the moral high ground of a universal notion of mankind:

He supplicated the Almighty to grant that the means of ocean travel might soon be speedily improved, that its hardships might be reduced, and its perils be entirely eliminated. Within a short space of time, since that prayer was offered, the evidences of a remarkable improvement in all forms of maritime transport have greatly multiplied, and the Persian Gulf, which in those days hardly possessed a single steam-driven vessel, now boasts a fleet of ocean liners that can, within the range of a few days and in the utmost comfort, carry the people of Fárs on their annual pilgrimage to the Hijáz.

The people of the West, among whom the first evidences of this great Industrial Revolution have appeared, are, alas, as yet wholly unaware of the Source whence this mighty stream, this great motive power, proceeds – a force that has revolutionised every aspect of their material life ... In their concern for the details of the working and adjustments of this newly conceived machinery, they have gradually lost sight of the Source and object of this tremendous power which the Almighty has committed to their charge. They seem to have sorely misused this power and misunderstood its function. Designed to confer upon the peoples of the West the blessings of peace and of happiness, it has been utilised by them to promote the interests of destruction and war.²⁶

This form of condemnation from one section of the non-West against the West over the moral opprobrium of doctrines of technological use is not meant to be decisively regarded as an impenetrable gulf. This is illustrative of the *politics* of struggle of meaning over what a desirable world civilisation might mean when one considers thoroughly producing a global historical sociology of IR.²⁷ The struggles over the proper use of technology in relation to humane sensibilities must surely be an important chapter when one ponders the relationship between violence and civilisation.

²⁵ Daniel Headrick, *Power over Peoples: Technology, Environments, and Western Imperialism, 1400 to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

²⁶ Nabil-i-Azam, *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Baha'i Revelation*, trans. and ed. Shoghi Effendi (New York: Baha'i Publishing Committee, 1932), p. 131, quoted in Headrick, *Power over Peoples*, pp. 178–9.

²⁷ Jens Bartelson, 'Towards a genealogy of "society" in International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 41:4 (2015), pp. 657–92; Martin Weber, 'On the history and politics of the social turn', *Review of International Studies*, 41:4 (2015), pp. 693–714.

The possibilities of civilising patterns in precolonial Southeast Asia as a contrast: the prioritisation of culture over harm

If one is to improve upon Linklater's historical sociology, one ought to envisage comparison and contrast with the *evolutions* of non-Western international relations, even if one can only treat the latter as proto-international relations that precede modernity. Linklater's narrative of the Western states-system attributes the taming of violence to a self-conscious need to become civilised across time. This is evident in how ancient Greek notions of permissible violence against non-Greeks self-reflexively gave way to the Roman need to reconcile the practical need to admit the legal status of newly incorporated populations of non-Romans while retaining the civic essence of *Romanness* centred upon Rome as the imperial capital. The evolution of Medieval Europe going into the Enlightenment repeated the same civilising impulse – to tame violence against members of a common civilisation. Southeast Asia's past offers a completely different civilising causation – cultural assimilation and adaptation through volition, example, and familiarity. Culture is not a mere descriptive label; it is an aspirational standard of refinement. The problem arises when Linklater assumes this is a linear logic of civilising societies applicable to the world. Sample this statement in his Introduction:

The problem of controlling violence is not the same for modern humans as it was for their distant ancestors, but their respective challenges are part of one interconnected chain of events. Early humans were steadily freed from the genetic constraints on aggression and compelled to develop substitutes in the form of internal and external restraints on violent and aggressive impulses. They protected themselves from some forms of violent harm in the process, but many became exposed to new dangers as a result of success in creating strong intra-societal restraints on violence. The greater collective power that those agreements made possible could be turned against opponents in the same society and used against external enemies. Societies have not succeeded in solving the problem of violent harm that emerged as early humans became emancipated from the genetic constraints on violence that determine the behaviour of other species. Perhaps they never will. *However, the idea of a global civilizing process in the technical sense of the term can be used to describe the extent to which there have been such achievements in relations between the societies into which the species is divided.*²⁸

Linklater is entitled to this universalist prescription as any social scientist or humanities scholar should. But he appears to have misinterpreted Norbert Elias's own careful invocation of civilisation. Elias mentions a variety of possible meanings to the word civilisation in his opening paragraphs to *The Civilizing Process*: level of technological achievement, categories of manners, the standard of scientific knowledge, to even religious ideas and practices.²⁹ But he corrects this purported universalism of the term by declaring that when one begins to earnestly examine its various usages, the concept connotes the 'self-consciousness of the West'. Let me now quote how Elias elaborates this Western bias in order to lend credence to my ensuing need to offer premodern Southeast Asia as a particularist exemplar of a civilising process:

One could even say [that civilisation means]: the national consciousness. It sums up everything in which Western society of the last two or three centuries believes itself superior to earlier societies or 'more primitive' contemporary ones. By this term Western society seeks to describe what constitutes its special character and what it is proud of: the level of *its* technology, the

²⁸ Linklater, *Violence and Civilization*, p. 9, emphasis added.

²⁹ Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, eds Eric Dunning, Johan Goudsblom, and Stephen Mennell (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), p. 5.

nature of *its* manners, the development of *its* scientific knowledge or view of the world, and much more.³⁰

In a highly laudable attempt to exercise objectivity in distinguishing civilisation and civilising, Elias invokes the German understanding of *Kultur* and its adjective *kulturell*, as referring not necessarily to material or spiritual progress, but to human behaviour in the form of a person's conduct and 'mere existence'. *Kulturell* in particular 'describes the value and character of particular human products rather than the intrinsic value of a person'.³¹ This is why in examining historical sociology today, one cannot assume a totalising basis to civilisation and the taming of violence encompassed by it. I am suggesting in the ensuing discourse that culture in parts of the non-West, such as Southeast Asia, is much more akin to *kultur* and *kulturell* than Linklater cares to admit. In Southeast Asia, and I would not be surprised if it is deemed by others to be applicable to East Asia (that is, China, Japan, and the two Koreas), South Asia (that is, India, Pakistan, and Nepal, etc.), Africa and Latin America, culture is taken seriously as an article of faith, a vision of a righteous life, and socialised normative performance, even if culture were ultimately a construction.

Moreover, as opposed to Andrew Linklater's open assumption that human rights for universal human beings are located *a priori* in the civilising process, the example of Southeast Asia highlights culture as the primary motivator for creating civilisation or improving it. In so many sociological, anthropological, and historical texts, Southeast Asia is described as that motley blend of flexible territorial Asian cultures that lies under the gravitational orientation of the dominant influences of China to the north and northeast, and collectively, India to the west and northwest. Given that the physical environment of maritime Southeast Asia is mostly dissected by water bodies such as seas, straits, bays, gulfs, and multiple riverine passages, seaborne trade emerges historically as a distinct source of almost all cultural transfusions including Islam from the Arab lands and Christianity from Palestine and the Mediterranean. Merchants, pilgrims, monks, migrants and itinerant travellers were primary agents of transmitting ideas and artefacts. Additionally, the mountains that separate present-day Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam have not enforced significant insularity in the subregion known as Indochina. Mountainous barriers have, at most, imposed some obstacles to trade and isolated some highland communities from the lowland ones that invariably have access to trade from the seas and straits filtering into the downstream and upstream trading zones of rivers and their deltas.³² This geographical and anthropological sketch is meant to orientate the student of historical sociology to the possibility that managing a physical and lived environment that is open to all sorts of cultures-cum-material transactions implies that warfare cannot be the primary mode of interaction between peoples. Cultural grafting, flexible syncretisation, and demonstrations of cultural superiority became the most significant modes of civilisational change between AD 200 and the coming of European imperialism around the 1500s.

What follows are quick thumbnail sketches of how this was achieved: for instance, in how military violence was conducted with significant restraint; how 'Indianisation' arrived in the Southeast Asian political and social landscape without major war; the heterogeneous pacific coexistence between Islam and Hindu-Buddhist and indigenous animistic practices; and the culmination of competition between societies, rather than states, on the political playing fields of court prowess, ceremonial prestige, and transnational relations of justice as recorded in the most detailed premodern Malay

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5, emphasis added.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³² Anthony Reid, *Charting the Shape of Early Modern Southeast Asia* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1999), pp. 1–7.

politico-historical literary tract, the *Sejarah Melayu*. Threading through all these examples is the fact that ‘culture’ rather than taming physical violence to the human being, drove incremental progress in Southeast Asia’s pluralistic premodern civilisation without sovereign states. Ironically, one might note ruefully that only after decolonisation had taken place following the Second World War that armed insurgencies such as those in Malaya, Burma, the Philippines, and Vietnam broke out, targeting the ‘modern’ sovereign states that succeeded the respective European empires. Likewise, the Vietnam wars pitting the Vietnamese communists against the French, and then the Americans in the 1945–54 and 1964–75 periods, along with the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1978, and the low intensity armed confrontation between Indonesia and the newly-minted Malaysian Federation between 1963 and 1966, were all in the main derived from discontent with Westernised notions of sovereign permanent borders and imported ideologies of nationalism, communism, and democratic capitalism. Linklater’s account of violence and civilisation surely cannot be dismissive of the historical possibility that the ‘civilized western sovereign state’ exported more violence to the non-West via colonialism and decolonisation before it can be argued to have produced an interstate peace by modern standards. In what follows, I can do no more than offer a snapshot of a potentially very rich and complex Asian chapter to historical sociology primarily by treating the entire subregion of Southeast Asia as a whole case study. In this regard, I will not distinguish the subtle differences between the two possible geocultural categories of ‘maritime’ and ‘mainland’ Southeast Asia, for to discuss these minute differences is to neglect the broad cumulative intercultural transfusions that have taken place over several centuries that did not fit into the modern sovereign categories some have labelled the ‘Southeast Asia Command’ during the Second World War or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) after 1967.³³

Self-restraint on military violence among premodern monarchies in Southeast Asia

Incidentally, if one attempts to read an Asian military history of violence in Asia, not just in Southeast Asia, but in China, India, Korea, and Japan, one is likely to be mystified by Asia’s seemingly ‘laggard status’ vis-à-vis the Western military revolution centred upon figures such as Gustavus Adolphus, Niccolo Machiavelli, Frederic Vauban, Antoine Henri Jomini, Karl von Clausewitz, and Helmuth von Moltke. The difference lies in the cultural adaptation of military technologies such as siegecraft, gunpowder, artillery, and arquebuses.³⁴ As I have suggested earlier in the rumination on technological standards of civilisation, the ancient Chinese empires preferred the employment of gunpowder to augment the morale and theatrical aspects of combat instead of active destruction of military bodies. In Southeast Asia, it was much the same; culture filtered the use of force against one’s enemies. In the account of the myth historical tract, the *Sejarah Melayu* or ‘*Malay Annals*’ dating back to the 1400s and 1500s, battles between kings exerted destructive force only to the point of convincing the enemy of the spiritual and moral superiority of one’s majesty. In one battle between a Raja Iskandar (a translation of ‘Alexander’) of Makkadunia (Macedonia) and Raja Kida Hindi of Kalinga (the Indian subcontinent), the latter was defeated by force of arms but allowed to graciously convert to ‘the True Faith ... the religion of Abraham, the Chosen Friend of God’ and consequently allowed to retain his kingdom intact by Iskandar.³⁵ By virtue of his nobility and magnanimity conjoined with his military victory, Iskandar was invited to marry his erstwhile enemy’s daughter. With this

³³ Donald K. Emmerson, “‘Southeast Asia’: What’s in a name?”, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 15:1 (1984), pp. 1–21.

³⁴ Peter A. Lorge, *The Asian Military Revolution: From Gunpowder to the Bomb* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

³⁵ *Sejarah Melayu* [*Malay Annals*], trans. C. C. Brown, intro. R. Roolvink (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 2. (Hereafter *Sejarah* [Brown translation]).

consummation of marriage, the Iskandar royal line begot a Southeast Asian royal line that was narrated to be linked to the glorious Melaka Sultanate of the 1400s and 1500s.

Likewise, it has been pointed out by many historians that much of premodern Southeast Asia adhered to a paternalistic ‘big men theory’ of intersocietal relations. Kings and princes ruled primarily over populations who owed allegiance to the royal person, and only then could their lands be claimed as territorially controlled by an overlord. These royal personages expanded or defended their demographic ‘empires’ through employing mostly skilled emissaries and lesser nobles who acted as their eyes, ears and mouths in persuading other nobles and kings at their self-perceived peripheries to maintain their allegiance, or if undecided, to switch their loyalties accordingly.³⁶ Force was used very sparingly since the primary object of empire-building was to persuade lesser kings and nobles to be loyal to oneself through elaborate displays of culture and its associated demonstrations of piety.³⁷ The famous temple-palace complexes of Borobodur in Indonesia and Angkor Wat in Cambodia attest to these forms of intra-civilisational diplomacy through competition in awe and publicised religious merit. Since the ultimate aim in kingly ‘statecraft’ was to attract loyalties, and along with it manpower for agricultural harvests and even more ornate temple construction, warfare ought never to be practised to the point where human casualties become counterproductive to the intensification of allegiances to the meritorious ‘big men’ whose majesties claim to protect the people from pestilence and other misfortune. Through all this, taming violence was not a primary objective, the culture of attaining and preserving royal authority through demonstrations of cosmological superiority were.

Indianisation as a cultural imprint on Southeast Asian polities

The ‘Indianisation’ of Southeast Asia’s early kingdoms contains in itself another fine illustration of a competition in culture instead of a militarised process. George Coedès argues in his famous book, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, that early Indian influence spread through a combination of enterprising and culturally aware maritime traders, in tandem with the liberating influence of Buddhism in curtailing the socioeconomic pecking order of the caste system, encouraging seafaring and emigration by Indians without fear of contaminating contact with foreigners. In surveying efforts by his contemporaries to decipher the exact nature of Indianisation, Coedès posited that the early Indian arrivals sought to overcome the initial language barrier with the Malays of Malacca, Sumatra, and Java through offers of welcoming gifts, self-proclaimed cures for common maladies, and other gifts that purported to ward off supernatural evils.³⁸ Subsequently, the first arrivals mastered the local languages and embraced inter-ethnic marriages in Southeast Asia. This opened the doors to social intercourse and transfusion of Indian ideas in names, social norms, fashions, and observance of piety.

Given the pre-existing local predilection for rule by ‘big men’ able to demonstrate religiosity and other prowess, the arrival of real and false Brahmans from India in search of adventure and new pastures to spread Hinduism was also an opportunity for Southeast Asian rulers from the Malay lands to ancient Cambodia, Siam, and Vietnam to augment their spiritual majesty.³⁹ The widespread evidence of the use of Sanskrit – a language originating from the noble and priestly elites in India – in Borobodur and Angkor Wat, even in the historic temples of Bagan in present-day Burma/Myanmar,

³⁶ O. W. Wolters, *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives* (2nd edn, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2004), p. 113.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

³⁸ George Coedès, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, ed. Walter F. Vella, trans. Susan B. Cowing (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1968), pp. 21–2.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 23–6.

are evidence that Southeast Asian civilisation adopted the currency of ‘cultural glorification’ from the Indian subcontinent even before AD 100. Subsequently, Buddhism was not too far behind in affecting Southeast Asian notions of pious intercourse between peoples and their kings. Throughout the classical and neoclassical periods, ranging approximately from AD 300 to AD 1100, there was significant evidence of pilgrimage traffic between Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent, and between China and the Indian subcontinent with lengthy transits through Southeast Asia’s port cities. One such Indian-influenced Southeast Asian ‘empire’ that controlled the important ports of Jambi, Palembang and Kadaram, all straddling the Melaka Straits, was the subject of extensive reports by the Chinese Buddhist monk I-Tsing who described Sri Vijaya (or San Fo-chi) as an important religious repository by itself, in addition to being an important maritime trading power.⁴⁰

Accommodating the arrival of Islam

Likewise, the arrival of Islam on Southeast Asian shores was similarly motivated by reasons other than reducing physical violence. In Anthony Reid’s comprehensive survey of the historical literature concerning the embrace of Islam in this region, he posits that while Hinduism, Buddhism, and other Indian influences witnessed some erosion of their appeal by the early 1500s, Southeast Asians were attracted by the new wave of wealthy traders from the Arab lands carrying the Word of the Prophet Muhammed.⁴¹ Islamic converts and their leaders controlled almost the entire Mediterranean region, most of modern day Turkey, Palestine and Israel, and were set to complete their conquest of the Arabian peninsula and potentially convert the Mughal Empire in South Asia. Southeast Asians’ encounter with Arabs came in the form of warriors and traders. One local commentary from the syncretic Ngadju Dayak religion in Borneo at the time lamented that ‘if one man is richer than another they say it is because he must have sponsored the correct rituals at the right time and was careful in his selection of spirits ... The more a man knows about ritual, the more he can do for his own and his family’s welfare.’⁴² Christian missionaries who arrived in the region slightly later lamented that any new religion would encounter severe obstacles in proselytisation since the locals ‘seemed to have no heart or understanding for anything except the gaining of money’.⁴³

Islam, unlike Christianity at the time, possessed yet another advantage that aided in its civilising appeal: the religion of Muhammed needed no priesthood, it merely required that individual travellers, whether they were traders, warriors, mystics or teachers, establish viable communities of the faith. The arrival of prominent preachers and scholars from Arabia such as Muhammed Azharai and Sheikh Abu’lkheir ibn Syeikh ibn Hajar of Mecca and Syeich Muhammed of Yemen established a living presence for Islam in the Sumatran subregion of Aceh. This encouraged Southeast Asian converts to make the *haj* to Arabia aboard Arab merchant vessels. It also helped that Arab traders had started taking a very profitable interest in shipping pepper from Southeast Asia to Arab lands. Moreover, the emergence of the religious dimension to the increasingly prominent rivalry between the Arabs vis-à-vis the Portuguese and the Dutch traders tilted Southeast Asian favour towards Islam.

⁴⁰ Lynda Norene Shaffer, *Maritime Southeast Asia, 300 B.C. to A.D. 1528* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 37–43.

⁴¹ Anthony Reid, ‘Islamization and Christianization in Southeast Asia: the critical phase, 1550–1650’, in Anthony Reid (eds), *Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Era: Trade, Power and Belief* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 151–79.

⁴² Douglas Miles, ‘Shamanism and the conversion of Bagdju Dayaks’, *Oceania*, 37:1 (1966), p. 5 quoted in Reid, ‘Islamization and Christianization in Southeast Asia’, p. 160.

⁴³ Diego Duarte, ‘Historia de la Provincia del Sancto Rosario ... en Philipinas’ [1640], in E. H. Blair and J. A. Robertson (eds), *The Philippine Islands, 1493–1898, Volume 30* (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clarke, 1903–9), p. 238.

Finally, Islam was attractive to Southeast Asians since it was a religion based on holy books, sacred scripts, and the literally written interpretation of faith that committed its adherents to read diligently. This was a well-trodden routine that had commenced with the linguistic forms of Indianisation, encompassing the Sanskrit expressions of Hinduism and Buddhism in stone, paper and other media. In any case, the embrace of Islam by Southeast Asian peoples was tolerantly uneven and Shari'a Law were found in the 1500s and 1600s to have been administered harshly and formally only in Aceh and in Banten, two locations at the geographical extremities of what is present-day Indonesia.⁴⁴

The observance of Islam across premodern Southeast Asia has been confirmed by most historians as being mostly inconsistent, even antithetical to notions of Islam practised in Arab lands. This was due in large measure to the ingrained nature of Southeast Asian habits of assimilating diverse layers of cultural influences without jettisoning most of the past accumulation whenever a new one was embraced. Citing assorted Arab and Portuguese sources from the 1500s, Anthony Reid observed that some Arab arrivals were shocked at the visible absence of Islamic practices in Melaka. Moreover, there were frequent intermarriages between 'Muslims' and non-Muslims in Melaka contributing to the dilution of Islamic practice. Alcohol was reported to be freely sold in shops and drunk by Malays.⁴⁵ Although Islam had arrived on the shores of Southeast Asia a century before, it was only during the reign of one of the final Sultans of the Melaka royal line in the early 1500s that the first mosque was built in his kingdom. In the annals of one Malay kingdom in Patani, it was recorded that even though local Muslims gave up eating pork and worshipping idols, 'heathen practices such as making offerings to trees, stones and spirits were not abandoned by them'.⁴⁶

Cultural hybridisation in the *Sejarah Melayu*

These complex hybridities of practised culture are on full display in the early sixteenth-century mythical and historical tract known as the *Sejarah Melayu*, or *Malay Annals*, which is widely regarded as a touchstone for comprehending the history, literature, and anthropology of the Malay world. I close my commentary by briefly discussing this text as a representative record of a culturally-driven civilising process. As many scholars in the social sciences and humanities also agree, the *Sejarah* depicts an essentialised but accommodating 'Malayness' that transcends kingdoms, accumulation of military power, assimilated cultures, and geography.⁴⁷ Although its authorship is unknown, the *Sejarah* articulates a world where Malay kingdoms trace their lineage from Alexander the Great's (that is, Raja Iskandar's) victory over the kingdom of Kalinga in South Asia and his betrothal to a daughter of the defeated king. It weaves in several unconnected tales of how slaves and other commoners successfully elevate themselves socially and politically through acts of spiritual redemption, charity, or martial prowess. Wars are never the central part of the narrative and where they are recorded, they always terminate with a positive outcome or a moral lesson against wanton violence. In my earlier reading of the *Sejarah*, I noted that competition in noble prowess was a recurring theme in the intersocietal relations of the ancient Malay world.⁴⁸ Victorious Sultans allowing their defeated rivals

⁴⁴ Reid, 'Islamization and Christianization in Southeast Asia', pp. 178–9.

⁴⁵ Reid, 'Islamization and Christianization in Southeast Asia', p. 156.

⁴⁶ *Hikayat Patani: The Story of Patani*, eds A. Teeuw and D. K. Wyatt, 2 vols (The Hague: Koninklijk Instituut, 1970), 1:75, 78–9, quoted in Reid, 'Islamization and Christianization in Southeast Asia', p. 156.

⁴⁷ A. B. Shamsul, 'A history of an identity, an identity of a history: the idea and practice of "Malayness" in Malaysia reconsidered', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 32:3 (2001), pp. 355–66.

⁴⁸ Alan Chong, 'Premodern Southeast Asia as a guide to international relations between peoples: Prowess and prestige in "intersocietal relations" in the *Sejarah Melayu*', *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 37:2 (2012), pp. 87–105.

to live as dignified vassals within an enlarged empire was regarded as correct political behaviour and crucial to the longevity of the more established kingdoms. In plenty of instances, territorial conquests were often accompanied by the parallel quest to enlarge one's knowledge of both the conquered realms and their adjacent territories for scientific and scholarly purposes.

Where diplomatic inequalities and royal decorum were challenged in relations between the greatest Malay kingdom, Melaka, and the kingdoms of Siam and China, the recourse was to competition in demonstrating noble prowess through the despatch of distinguished embassies, martial arts displays, and gifts that symbolised the sender's level of cultural refinement and material achievements. In the contentious story of China-Melaka ties, the rivalry in majesty was resolved when the Sultan of Melaka reportedly despatched a sample of water used for washing his feet to cure the Emperor of China of a skin disease known as chloasma.⁴⁹ Once a Malay kingdom's reputation has been consolidated by an act of beneficence or wisdom, elaborate palace diplomatic rituals and ornate architecture consolidate its 'soft power' along with its standing as *primus inter pares*. From time to time, the reigning esteemed Sultan at Melaka would be called upon to adjudicate on matters of local justice across the far-flung parts of the Malay world, especially where disenchanting local nobles invite such intervention. In so many instances, the Sultan of Melaka's plenipotentiary would settle the dispute in question through references to good breeding and the need for figures of authority to retain the moral high ground.⁵⁰ Where the subjects of any Sultan suffer injustice meted out locally, a wise descendant or plenipotentiary from Melaka would remind the errant king, along with the readers of the *Sejarah* that

it has been granted by Almighty God to Malay rulers that they shall never put their subjects to shame, and that those subjects however gravely they offend shall never be bound or hanged or disgraced with evil words. If any ruler puts a single one of his subjects to shame, that shall be a sign that his kingdom will be destroyed by Almighty God. Similarly it has been granted by Almighty God to Malay subjects that they shall never be disloyal or treacherous to their rulers, even if their rulers behave evilly or inflict injustice upon them.⁵¹

In the narrative of the *Sejarah*, this last phrase attains a status equivalent to a biblical injunction since it was a contract made between one of the illustrious great grandchildren from the original marriage between Alexander the Great (aka Raja Iskandar) and the King of Kalinga's beautiful daughter, and the subsequent royal families of the Malay world.

The point about this entire sampling of insights into the premodern Southeast Asian political *milieu* centred upon the Malay world is to draw attention to alternative civilising processes that do not always focus on the taming of physical violence. Culture, and cultured behaviour encompassing the practice of ethics and non-violent material transactions, including even trade in spices and luxuries, was a prominent counter-example in the premodern Southeast Asian sociology of intersocietal relations. Linklater's employment of historical sociology ought to have taken this alternative into account. Even better, he might wish to take note of how the *Sejarah* ends with the conquest of Melaka by the fleet commanded by the Portuguese 'Grand Vizier' Alphonso Albuquerque who showed little mercy in his military invasion. The *Sejarah* notably described this inglorious episode in the Malay world in apocalyptic terms comparing the sound of cannon with the thunder from heaven and the necessity of the Malay warriors in beating back the Portuguese armed landings through the

⁴⁹ *Sejarah* [Brown translation], p. 87.

⁵⁰ Chong, 'Prowess and prestige', pp. 97–9.

⁵¹ *Sejarah* [Brown translation], p. 16.

mode of combat known as ‘amok’. Tellingly, this term meant the discarding of all notions of restraint and other propriety in fighting an enemy that behaved as unmitigated evil.⁵² This amply captures the dissonance between a possible non-Western historical sociology tracing the evolution and demise of culture and a rival one treating violence and civilisation. Incidentally, when one conceives of a more inclusive IR theory syllabus today, one ought to treat seriously the redemptive, humanistic dimensions of premodern Asian philosophical thought as a foundation for what many have fashionably claimed to be ‘embryonic’ theorising from the non-West.⁵³ Certainly, this offers a different way of putting human beings and humaneness back into IR as a supplement, or antidote, to the obsessively hyper-rational systems-analysis and uni-dimensional human nature assumptions of Realism and Liberalism and their neo-variants.

Conclusion

Linklater’s pessimistic conclusion that bonds of mutual obligation to thwart violence amongst humanity penned up in nation-states can only depend on ‘associated changes in personality traits and psychological dispositions’⁵⁴ that have not developed sufficiently in the direction of peaceable behaviour, despite advances in international norms and institutions promoting peace, is not fully warranted. It may be that his version of doing historical sociology derives its inspiration excessively from Norbert Elias, Norman Geras, and Primo Levi. Culturally framed explanations rooted in relatively more hybridised and humanistic non-Western philosophical traditions should not be cast aside for being unscientific but ought to be held up as an alternative to a Western dialectical narrative.

One should recall an earlier-mentioned maxim from the narrator of the *Sejarah*: ‘Malay rulers ... shall never put their subjects to shame, and that those subjects however gravely they offend shall never be bound or hanged or disgraced with evil words. If any ruler puts a single one of his subjects to shame, that shall be a sign that his kingdom will be destroyed by Almighty God.’⁵⁵ Reciprocally, the subjects are expected to scrupulously observe obedience to monarchic paternalism even if it should assume the hue of despotism. Armed conflict cannot enhance prowess in good governance unless some enlightening outcome can be produced from it; even humiliation ought to be treated as a learning process according to non-Western perspectives. And technology should never be allowed to race ahead of moral principles of appropriate conduct. There is a clear privileging of a political power-knowledge nexus according to my preceding illustrations from the world of premodern Southeast Asia as a sample of non-Western historical sociology. Worldly political entities cannot be founded, stabilised or subsist peacefully for the physical assurance and prosperity of their peoples if they did not contribute in some substantive way to the furthering of knowledge about the world on a moral dimension.

Linklater’s academic achievements are indeed most commendable, but from the perspective of thinking about Critical Theory from the non-Western position, one can agree that ‘there is much to be said for developing the comparative sociology of states-systems in that sober but cautiously optimistic spirit’,⁵⁶ *provided* non-Western cultural and intellectual perspectives supplement that analysis. Looking at historical sociology must mean that a globalising world ought to be

⁵² Chong, ‘Prowess and prestige’, p. 100.

⁵³ See, for instance, Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan (eds), *Non-Western International Relations Theory: Perspectives on and beyond Asia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010).

⁵⁴ Linklater, *Violence and Civilization*, p. 379.

⁵⁵ See fn. 51.

⁵⁶ Linklater, *Violence and Civilization*, p. 471.

accommodative towards alternative civilisational standards even if the latter appears to have hitherto been footnotes and stories peripheral to a Western states-system.⁵⁷

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Biographical information

Alan Chong is Associate Professor at the Centre for Multilateralism Studies, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore. He has published widely on the notion of soft power and the role of ideas in constructing the international relations of Singapore and Asia. These ideational angles have also led to inquiry into some aspects of ‘non-traditional security’ issues in Asia. His publications have appeared in *The Pacific Review*; *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*; *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*; *Asian Survey*; *East Asia: an International Quarterly*; *Politics, Religion and Ideology*; the *Review of International Studies*; the *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*; *Armed Forces and Society*; the *Journal of Strategic Studies*, *Global Change, Peace and Security*; and in the *Japanese Journal of Political Science*. He is also the author of *Foreign Policy in Global Information Space: Actualizing Soft Power* (Palgrave, 2007), and co-editor (with Faizal bin Yahya) of *State, Society and Information Technology in Asia* (Ashgate, 2014). He is currently working on several projects exploring the notion of ‘Asian international theory’. His interest in soft power has also led to inquiry into the sociological and philosophical foundations of international communication. In the latter area, he is currently working on a manuscript titled ‘The International Politics of Communication: Representing Community in a Globalizing World’. In tandem, he has pursued a fledgling interest in researching cyber security issues and international discursive conflicts. He has frequently been interviewed in the Asian media and consulted in think tank networks in the region.

⁵⁷ My position associates with the tone of L. H. M. Ling, ‘Introduction: Learning anew: Asia in IR and world politics’, in Pinar Bilgin and L. H. M. Ling (eds), *Asia in International Relations: Unlearning Imperial Power Relations* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), pp. 1–10.