

CO-EXISTING DIFFERENCES: TOWARDS AN EAST ASIAN WAY OF INCOMPATIBILITY MANAGEMENT

By Associate Professor Mikio Oishi

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Abstract

A careful observation of the ways in which conflicts in East Asia are managed reveals a unique approach to addressing incompatibilities involved in conflict. This approach is fundamentally different from the mainstream Western approach, which is characterized by an effort to integrate the incompatible positions of the parties to conflict. According to John Burton, this integration is made possible by delving into human needs that lie beneath these positions. In contrast, an East Asian approach (in its best case scenario) seems to result in the co-existence of incompatible positions without integration. This paper investigates how such co-existence of incompatible positions is achievable. After discussing several possible ways in which incompatibility of conflict can be addressed, the paper examines three representative East Asian conflicts from the standpoint of incompatibility management, namely the Korean Peninsula, Taiwan Strait and South China Sea. It highlights that incompatible positions co-exist with each other in the management of these conflicts. While there are observable efforts to transform conflicts for better management in the three cases, a regional approach is found to manoeuvre around incompatibility. This is made possible partly by the function of the parties absorbing tension arising from incompatibility. Yet, more fundamentally, this paper argues that the Buddhist concepts of *sōsoku-sōnyū* (mutual presence and mutual merging), *shi-hokkai* (four realms of existence) and *dai'enkyō-chi* (wisdom comparable to an infinite round mirror), originating in *Kegon-kyō* or the *Avatamsaka* (Flower Garland) Sutra of the Mahayana Buddhism are key to explaining outcomes in these cases.

Speaker's Profile



Mikio is Associate Professor in Peace and Conflict Studies on a dual appointment of Academy of Brunei Studies and Institute of Asian Studies. He is eager to develop an Asian approach to this field. Born on Kyushu Island, Japan, he has a wide range of work experience as an administrator of a Japanese provincial government and an NGO worker and consultant in Malaysia. He taught and researched on Peace and Conflict Studies, International Relations and Politics at Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, University of Otago and University of Canterbury before joining UBD in October 2010. His current research interests include: the new ASEAN Way of conflict management; managing territorial disputes in East Asia; the *PaxSinica* (peace by China); and the East Asian way of incompatibility management.