

Nov 04, 2016 by [Mark Dillen](#)

Take a Bow ^[1]

Now that the big Asia trip is history, it's natural to judge it on the basis of known results from its biggest portion — Obama's three days in China. For the American president, there were no obvious breakthroughs on exchange rates or trade, climate or human rights, so maybe this visit was not the most successful. On the other hand, viewed in the context of America's recent history with East Asia, there was a certain welcome absence of drama. Expectations were managed, there was no brinkmanship. Maybe that could be considered an achievement.

What is disturbing, though, on the face of it, was the lack of open transmission of the President's own message to the Chinese people while he was in their country. You can say that the Chinese leaders are determined to control their media environment, but to essentially shut down broadcasts of a U.S. President's communication with students shows a real gap in understanding. Even Gorbachev understood that an advanced society could not control communication if it wanted to make the most of its potential. During the U.S. President's visit at least, China stood to gain internationally by showing openness rather than its opposite. What they did instead was unnecessary.

By the same token, Obama's exaggerated bow to Japanese Emperor Akihito in Tokyo was also a misstep.

In our digital age, images stay around, and this one will. If Americans were feeling self-confident about their role in the world at this point in time, the bow would have been seen as an act of protocol, courtesy and even magnanimity. In our current times of American insecurity, it will be seen back home as weak. Moreover, even Japanese found it inappropriate.

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