

Human Rights and Human Security by Bertrand G. Ramcharan. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2002. Pp.246 . ISBN 90-411-1818-7.

Asia Pacific and Human Rights: A Global Political Economy Perspective by Paul Close and David Askew D. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004. Pp. 230 pp. ISBN 0-7546-3629-1.

‘The quest for human security is a defining issue of our times... In the contemporary world, it is of the utmost importance to understand the linkages between human rights and human security. The relationship between freedom and security is also a central issues of our time.’ (first book’s back cover) Specifically, how do the international human rights norms define the content of human security? How does the protection of human rights in the contemporary world contribute to human security? The first book under review, as Volume 70 of International Studies in Human Rights series (of which the author also wrote/edited Volumes 1-3 since 1982), provides a theoretical frame as well practical cases of the United Nations to answer these questions.

The book has twelve chapters. Chapters I, III and V focus on the relationship between human rights and human security, and the relationship with global poverty and equality. Ramcharan also includes ‘Declaration on Human Rights as an Essential Component of Human Security,’ adopted by the Commission on Human Security on 1 December 2001, in the book as a theoretical guide. Although many views expressed in the book are rather self-evident, they are nonetheless precious words from a former high UN official and expert. ‘The vision of the Charter of the United Nations remains valid in the world beyond September 11th.’ (p.2) ‘September 11th has taught the world one fundamental lesson: the security of nations, even the mightiest, requires genuine partnership and cooperation at the United nations.’ (p.2) ‘A world in which one group feels that it is being looked down upon by another is a world that will remain insecure.’ (p.3) ‘international human rights norms define the meaning of human security.’ (p.3) Alas, despite so many good international resolutions, recommendations, treaties or orders, the human security for the world, even for the mightiest nation (the U.S.), is nowhere near realization, and the situation of human rights remains in crisis in many countries.

Rather than an academic research work, this is a well organized commentary of UN functions on human rights and human security for policy practitioners. Most chapters of the book explore the mission and mechanism of the Security Council (Chapter II), the Commission on Human Rights (Chapters V, VI and XII), the High Commissioner for Human Rights (Chapters VII, IX and X), and the Secretary-General (Chapter VIII). It raises up these agencies far beyond the administrative level defined by the UN Charter. The author especially highlights Kofi Annan: ‘by far the most dynamic Secretary-General as far as human rights are concerned the Organization has ever seen’ (p.165) and the second High Commissioner Mary Robinson: ‘the international community owes a debt of gratitude for the public visibility she has brought to the Office and for the higher profile she has given to human rights’ (p.165). The author persuasively explains that protecting human rights by these UN agencies greatly enhances human security.

The book was written before 2001, thus we still read such sentences as ‘This workshop is due to be held before the end of 2001’ (p.139). It uses too much space on some cases (such as of the former Yugoslavia before 1992) with lengthy details so readers may feel the book a little outdated. It is worthy of a new edition of this book to cover new “burning issues” of human

rights and human security of the world, such as in Iraq and North Korea. At the same time, the book does not mention some long-lasting and mass human rights violations (such as in China especially after the June 4th Incident in 1989) at all. In the case of China, since the Chinese government always refuses international criticism as 'foreign intervenes,' it is vital for the UN human rights agencies and officials to persistently raise this issue to improve the situation. In fact, UN officials' visits to Chinese political prisoners did greatly improve the life of the victims and their families. In China's poorest rural province of Guizhou, dozens of political dissidents enthusiastically celebrate the UN human rights day on December 10th every year. They risk their life to appeal to the Chinese government to respect universal human rights and to join and ratify the relevant international human rights treaties. We may even want to support their appeal to set up another UN human rights agency there besides Geneva.

This book is an admirable accomplishment. Ramcharan has been a Commissioner of the International Commission of Jurists and a Member of the Permanent International Court of Arbitration, and was Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights when he wrote this book. He is eminently qualified to write this book as an international law expert. Methodologically, he traces the linkage of human rights and human security from the former perspective. Unfortunately, this approach is generally nullified by international politics pundits. Only a few books from the security perspective relate to human rights issues. One excellent example is Gurtov's book (*1) in which the author tries to use the concept of 'global humanism' to redefine international security debates. On the other hand, since wars are the gravest human rights violations, most anti-war movements become human rights movements. In this regard, there are also encouraging developments, including the recent American midterm elections result (*2).

Since the first book does not deal with human rights and human security issues in Asia, I read the second book with high expectation. However, I soon realized that I was betrayed. The second book is a disappointment. First of all, the title is vague and the subtitle is misleading. The book actually discusses East Asia region only (mainly on Japan where the authors live) even though they state Asia Pacific 'encompassing East Asia, the South Pacific and the Americas' (p.11). The authors use "A Global Political Economy Perspective" as the subtitle merely because the book is published as a volume of the International Political Economy of New Regionalism series. This book has nothing to do with global political economy. What I learn from this book is that the authors are curious at some "strange" human rights debates or arguments in East Asia from Western eyes. It does not touch the main human rights issues in this area.

The book has ten chapters. Three chapters (Chapter Seven, Eight and Nine) introduce Japan's cases of death penalty practice, the constitutional debate and the status's Ainu. The authors teach in Japan's university, so even though these cases are not necessarily of Pacific Asia's human rights issues, different readers may find interesting stories. For example, I learnt one thing from this book: '[The] word, kenri, first appeared in William Martin's Chinese translation of Weaton's Elements of International Law, published in Beijing in 1864 and introduced in Japan by Mitsukuri Rinsho in 1865' (p.139).

The other chapters sporadically deal with the relations of human rights and such subjects as "power, politics" (Chapter Two), "Asian ways" (Chapter Three), "game" (Chapter Four),

“realism” (Chapter Five), “regionalism” (Chapter Six) and “globalization, sovereignty, international law” (Chapter Ten). There is not a logical structure of the book. The authors do not provide a sense of the aims, intention or purpose of the book. Readers wonder why did they write this book? Perhaps because they discovered some interesting phenomena, such as ‘Human rights have generated a booming industry’ (p.1), which could be curious enough to make a book. In ‘the Asia Pacific game of human rights’ (Chapter Four), they want to show English readers what they think interesting or meaningful in East Asia. When you read Chapter Seven ‘The meaning of human rights and the uncertainty of death’, the authors here actually discuss how the Japanese interpreted human rights differently from Western people. This is what the authors mean of ‘a global political economy perspective’ to ‘Asia Pacific and Human Rights’. Similarly, when I read Chapter Eight ‘Political rights of non-nationals: the constitutional debate in Japan,’ it is not of the actual human rights violations in Japan, but is about how the authors interpret the Japanese thinking about Japan’s voting system on the degree to which the rights of non-national residents can and should be guaranteed.

Essentially, the authors lack knowledge of the issues they are dealing with in the book. For example, since they cannot read the vast writings regarding human rights violations in Asia Pacific in the Chinese language, they use up many pages to cite one article of little value from an “official Chinese scholar” to discuss China’s human rights situations. They conclude that the Chinese government’s attitude toward human rights under Jiang Zemin evolved progress: ‘This is the first time that “human rights were written[...] into the formal document of the Party’s national congress”,’ (p.72) ‘The Chinese style of human rights may be on its way to assuming a more Marxian character’ (p.74). The fact is that the CCP was founded with human rights as one of its pillar slogans eighty years ago and the Jiang Zemin regime abandoned most meaningful remainder of Marxian character for the purpose to stay at power. If we have to decide one most important human rights case in Asian Pacific, it is China’s democratic & human rights movement since 1989. The movement saved Taiwan’s security and created an unique opportunity for Japan to establish its leadership in the filed of human rights with its economy power. However, the short-sighted Japanese ruling class miscalculated this as an opportunity to gain the Beijing regime’s recognition by denying the Chinese people’s human rights. The fact that Japanese government collaborated with the Chinese government to oppress the Chinese students in Japan indicates that human rights in Asia has the same political character as in the world everywhere. It has nothing to do with ‘Asian Way’ (Chapter Three).

When you read the book using lengthy citations to teach you some basic political words (such as “politburo” from Wikipedia at p.33, “supranational” from Oxford dictionary at 135), or to introduce some well-known international organizations (such as Amnesty International and the Central Intelligence Agency), you are lost to wonder for what kind of audience the book is written. On the other hand, some acronyms made by the authors (such as “GHRR” for global human rights regime, “GPE” for global political economy) confuse readers as if they are important special terms to discuss human rights issues. Perhaps only the authors’ Japanese junior college students in Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University will use the book in their classrooms.

After reading the two books, I feel obligated to point out one basic fact regarding human rights and human security in Pacific Asia from “a global political economy perspective.” Although East Asia has become the world economic dynamic center, there is still not a principle of human

rights to define human security, to guarantee the prosperity in this region. The historical issue of the largest human rights violations (Japan's criminal war against Asian peoples) has not been settled down, especially in regard to the people in North Korea. The largest population in the region (and the world) are still under an oppressive one-party dictatorship system. Only China's democratization can provide a base for Pacific Asia's human rights and human security. Any publications and debates on human rights and security should not, cannot avoid this perspective.

[Reference]

*1. Gurtov M. (2002) Pacific Asia? Prospects for Security and Cooperation in East Asia. Asia in World Politics Series. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield. I wrote a review for this book which was published by H-US-Japan in July 2002 at <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=196671029215885> .

*2. 'It was, all in all, a satisfactory outcome. Americans have at last started to hold to account the Republican leadership and the administration of George W. Bush for their incompetence and disdain for the law, and for the way they have dragged America's reputation through the mud and muddle of the Middle East.' (The Financial Times Editorial on 09 November 2006, 'A very good day for American democracy').

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