

The Emergence of a Comprehensive Approach to Human Security

Implications for Human Rights in Asia and Beyond

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1. Introduction

The concept of human security has been a focus of debate since the mid-1990s. After the 1994 United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report sought to expand the security paradigm from its traditional focus on the state to a broader definition that also included the security of people's lives within national borders, the concept has developed along two major lines of thought.

The first approach emphasizes the creation and maintenance of a stable social and economic environment as a means of achieving human security, and seeks to promote freedom from fear and freedom from want. This approach draws on the human rights legacy that focuses on economic, social and cultural (ESC) rights and includes development issues, and has been mainly promulgated by the Japanese government. The second approach seeks to promote freedom from fear alone and emphasizes civil-political (CP) human rights in particular. The Canadian government favors this approach, and has spearheaded efforts to frame debate on human security issues in terms of freedom from fear. However, there are recent signs that Canada may be abandoning its promotion of an exclusively narrow approach.

In this paper, I will outline the two approaches and explain how the debate on human

security in East Asia is evolving. Nations in the region have generally favored the Japanese approach over the Canadian school due to the central role of the state in promoting citizens' welfare, and colonial legacies that promote strongly Westphalian views on such issues as political non-interference and cultural relativism. Rather than consider security issues from the perspective of the individual, East Asian governments have tended to focus on non-traditional security threats such as terrorism and pandemics due to the fact that these problems are non-political in nature and the primacy of the state is maintained.

However, the case can be made that both the concept and practice of human security in East Asia is currently broadening to include not only freedom from want initiatives but also freedom from fear initiatives that focus on individual rights.

One factor behind this change is the adoption at the government level of more human rights policies, as seen in the involvement of East Asian nations in international efforts to deal with transnational humanitarian problems, and in the establishment of human rights commissions. A second reason is the growth of civil society movements in East Asia and the spread of the rights-based-approach (RBA) as a method of achieving rights enjoyment. I will use examples from a number of countries in East Asia to show that human security-related activities are expanding to include more freedom from fear initiatives.

In conclusion, I aim to show that the Japanese and Canadian schools are beginning to converge into a comprehensive model that largely follows the broader Japanese approach. This broader approach to human security is strengthening individual empowerment and human rights awareness in East Asia with regard to the full spectrum of human rights, and may eventually lead to the a greater diffusion of rights enjoyment that can help boost community building in the region.

2. Approaches to Human Security

2-1. The Japanese Approach

One of the first Japanese to take up the cause of human security was former Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama. In 1995, he advocated before the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) that the concept ought to be used to change the focus of security from states to the security and rights of each person. After the Asian financial crisis in 1997, leading Japanese intellectuals argued that economic factors should be included in the concept. In a speech in May 1998 outlining Japanese assistance to alleviate the crisis, Foreign Minister Keizo Obuchi cited health and employment as being basic human security concerns, signaling that a freedom from want approach aimed at assisting socially vulnerable segments of the population ought to be employed. Obuchi continued to develop the Japanese view after he became prime minister in July 1998. In a key policy speech in December 1998, he set out a broad definition of human security that included the need to respond to economic deprivation and linked the concept of human security to human dignity.

The emphasis on a freedom from want approach was perhaps partly spurred by a desire to link Japan's Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) program to initiatives under the human security rubric. The Japanese approach includes economic vulnerabilities and considers both ESC rights and CP rights to be of equal standing. Indeed, a Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) official in 2000 criticized approaches to human security that solely focused on freedom from fear.

Japan holds the view, as do many other countries, that human security can be ensured only when the individual is confident of a life free of fear and free of want.

On the other hand, some countries seem to focus solely on freedom from fear...I believe that freedom from want is no less critical than freedom from fear...

(Statement by Mr. Yukio Takasu, Director-General of Multilateral Cooperation Department, at the Third Intellectual Dialogue on Building Asia's Tomorrow Toward Effective Cross-sectorial Partnership to Ensure Human Security in a Globalized World, June 19, 2000 Bangkok)

The Japanese school focuses on more than freedom from physical violence. Rather, it emphasizes freedom from structural violence and the need to build and maintain a society that improves the human condition beyond a state of mere freedom from fear. In this respect, the Japanese approach includes not only CP rights and ESC rights, but also third-generation human rights.

As part of efforts to promote a broader view of human security in the international arena and strengthen the philosophical foundations of the Japanese school, Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori proposed in September 2000 launching a Commission on Human Security. This commission, which was co-chaired by Sadako Ogata and Amartya Sen, produced perhaps the most developed version of the broader approach to human security in its 2003 report. Yet the report's definition of human security raises questions about the relationship between human security and human rights.

The Commission on Human Security's definition of human security: to protect the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfillment... The vital core of life is a set of elementary rights and freedoms people enjoy. What people

consider to be “vital” - what they consider to be “of the essence of life” and “crucially important” - varies across individuals and societies.

(Commission on Human Security, *Human Security Now: Protecting and Empowering People*, CHS, 2003, p4)

Human security, according to the commission, means protecting “elementary” rights and freedoms. The report says such rights are vital, but adds that what is vital to people changes across societies. Clearly then, “vital” or “elementary” rights are not the same as human rights according to Donnelly (1999) which are inalienable and do not change according to location (p61). Rather, the report seems to be suggesting that human security is culturally relative.

Although this definition appears to promote a needs-based approach over a rights-based based approach, a careful reading of the entire report suggests that may not be the case. The commission also included a lengthy section in the report on the importance of human rights in achieving human security, stating that

those rights have to be upheld comprehensively – civil and political, as well as economic and social... Human rights and human security are therefore mutually reinforcing...

(Commission on Human Security, *Human Security Now: Protecting and Empowering People*, CHS, p10)

Foreign Minister Taro Aso repeated Japan’s commitment to empowering individuals to

be free from both fear and want as recently as August 2006, a phrase that has now become an official policy aim in MOFA documentation.

Thus, the Japanese approach to human security can be considered comprehensively rights-based in that it includes the full spectrum of human rights in its mandate. This broad foundation draws on CP, ESC and third generation rights such as the right to development. It regards locally appropriate freedom from want initiatives to be of equal importance to freedom from fear initiatives in achieving human security.

2-2. The Canadian Approach

Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy was key in developing the Canadian approach to human security. In a speech before the UNGA in September 1996, he set out a broad view of human security that included security against economic privation, and a guarantee of human rights. This approach included freedom from want issues such as child labor, environmental issues and economic development, and appeared to be generally in line with the Japanese approach that was to be later developed by Obuchi and others.

However, Axworthy (1997) later linked human security to the practice of peacekeeping and warned that prioritizing the right to development over human rights matters ought to be avoided (p190). Acharya (2001) states that the Canadian approach became critical of the definition of human security in the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report on the grounds that it focused too much on threats associated with underdevelopment at the expense of human insecurity stemming from violent conflict, and adds the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) argued more forcefully in policy documents in 1999 that the human costs of violent conflict should be the primary focus of human security (p445). According to P.M. Evans (2004) this view holds that freedom from fear should be the prioritized over freedom from want as a

variety of networks and institutions already exist to address the issue of development (p267).

The objective is to build a world where universal humanitarian standards and the rule of law protect all people; where those who violate these standards are held accountable... a world, in short, where people can live in freedom from fear.

(Speech by Mr. Allan Rock, Ambassador of Canada to the United Nations, entitled "Human Security: A New Diplomacy," September 27, 2004, New York)

The Canadian concept of human security thus draws heavily on the Western tradition of viewing human rights primarily in terms of CP rights and the rule of law that prevailed during the Cold War. Much of the discussion in Canadian circles glosses over second and third generation rights, and tends to equate the concept of human security to protection of human rights in the face of physical oppression. The Canadian Consortium on Human Security (CCHS), a think-tank funded by the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, states:

Canada's conception of human security... is about protecting individuals from repression and violence – notably terrorism, civil wars, genocides and other gross violations of human rights.

(*Human Security Bulletin*, Canadian Consortium on Human Security, May 2003, p2-3)

This narrower approach to human security enjoys support from European nations such as Norway and Switzerland. It views human security as a humanitarian issue, and is sometimes used in tandem with calls for intervention to prevent humanitarian disasters which are feared may result in violations of CP rights.

Until recently, the Canadian view adhered closely to the view that freedom from fear should be pre-eminent in human security. However, there are signs that Canada is returning to a broader approach in line with Axworthy's earlier views that included social aspects of human well-being.

For example, the CCHS dedicated a volume of its flagship publication in 2006 to human security and health. Although Obuchi had earlier made the connection between these two issues in 1998, Canada appears to be reviewing its position in light of the possibility of bio-terrorism and the threat of pandemics such as SARS and avian flu. In the bulletin, MacLean (2006) calls for including the development issue of health within the human security rubric, and points out the importance of freedom from want prerogatives.

Recent events suggest that it is probably impossible to separate health and security, analytically and practically; similarly, it is impossible to disregard 'freedom from want' if we are to achieve 'freedom from fear' within a human security agenda ("Health and Human Security" section).

The above statement can be seen as a significant break from the exclusive focus on freedom from fear that has characterized the Canadian school since the late 1990s. It also appears to have presaged a tacit acknowledgement by the Canadian government that it had lost the ideological contest with Japan over the definition of human security.

In 2007, the Canadian DFAIT cut its' funding to the CCHS (which is now being financially supported by the University of British Columbia) and launched a new official program to replace its Human Security Program.

The new Canadian section is part of the DFAIT's Global Peace and Security Fund and is known as the Glyn Berry Program for Peace and Security. The program website states that its five thematic priorities are democratic transitions, human rights and protection of civilians, rule of law and accountability, conflict prevention and public safety. These themes can perhaps be described as the narrow approach to human security, the two additional goals of democracy promotion and good governance. There is no mention of ESC rights or the right to development.

The quiet withdrawal of Canada from the turf-battle over the definition of human security leaves the broader Japanese approach as the main policy tool for implementing human security initiatives. This broad approach is preferred by many countries in East Asia, and also by NGO groups working in developing nations worldwide for a variety of reasons that I will outline in the next section.

It should also be pointed out that, like the CCHS, there are a growing number of NGOs and non-profit organizations in the West that recognize the need for a broader approach to human rights that promotes second and third generation rights. Examples include the New York-based Center for Economic and Social Rights, and the Boston-based ACCION International micro-financing organization. The Carter Center in Atlanta has also long recognized the importance of health to human rights.

2-3. Human Security in East Asia

The broader Japanese approach emphasizing freedom from want is more palatable to governments in East Asia than the Canadian approach. Several factors come into play.

Firstly, many states in the region have only recently become independent and are

extremely wary of any interference or encroachment upon their sovereignty by former colonial powers. The Canadian approach has been used to advocate humanitarian intervention when human rights are violated and is sometimes seen as a vehicle for criticizing internal conditions in foreign nations. Democracy is a relatively new concept for many countries in the region and governance tends to be top-down rather than bottom-up. Gilson and Purvis (2003) point out that central governments around Asia are reluctant to relinquish control of foreign policy to non-state actors, or allow them to gain too much social influence as they have been viewed as sources of anti-government sentiment in the past. Politicians in East Asia often attempt to exert control over non-governmental organization (NGO) activities that may infringe their traditional spheres of interest, and structural impediments exist that prevent the full participation of NGOs in the human security agenda (p204).

A second reason is that states play a central role in the welfare of citizens in East Asia – the traditional Westphalian concept of the state taking sole responsibility for its own citizens is manifested in sometimes paternalistic government rule over citizens, rather than governments being instruments of the people. The increasing threat of terrorism after the events of 9-11 has refocused the security debate on the state, as the methods used for combating terror have generally been framed in terms of strengthening state regimes and using traditional coercive instruments (P.M. Evans, 2004, p278).

A third reason is the existence of the “comprehensive security” concept in East Asia. Comprehensive security goes beyond strictly military aspects of security and encompasses such non-traditional areas as economic development, political stability and environmental degradation in a manner similar to human security. It also connects easily to the developmental agenda contained within human security. Acharya and Acharya (2000) state that the key difference between the two concepts is that comprehensive security does not include human rights. The focus is not the individual but economic

growth and domestic political stability (“Human Security In The Asia Pacific: Puzzle, Panacea, Or Peril?”).

One way in which East Asian nations have approached the concept of human security while keeping governments central to the debate is by limiting the dialog to problems where the primary referent object is the state. This is done by focusing on so-called non-traditional security (NTS) threats within the post 9-11 international context, but labeling these issues human security problems. The 2003 Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders’ Statement in Bangkok, for example, contained a specific section on human security and placed terror, weapons of mass destruction, SARS and energy security under this heading. The 2006 APEC Leaders’ Statement in Hanoi added avian flu, HIV/AIDS, and natural disasters to the human security agenda for the region. However, these statements contain no reference to freedom from want, freedom from fear, the right to development, or human rights in general. The method of dealing with NTS problems is top-down, via the state, rather than through bottom-up methods of individual empowerment.

The approach to human security taken by APEC has been described as Hobbesian because of its focus on the dangers posed by chaos and the breakdown of social order (P.M. Evans, 2004, p279). Many policymakers in East Asia prefer to adhere to a state-centered approach and have called for the comprehensive security concept to remain the basis of regional security cooperation. In seminars held by MOFA to raise awareness on human security among APEC policymakers, some participants from East Asia expressed opposition to even discussing the definition of human security.

Thus, the human security concept appears to have been accepted only partially at the state level in many East Asian nations. While governments in the region are generally in favor of the developmental aspects of the broader Japanese approach, joint statements that mention human security normally do not go beyond setting out a list of threats to

regional stability.

3. Changes in Application of Human Security in East Asia

3-1. Freedom From Fear and Human Rights Initiatives in East Asia

While nations in East Asia have pursued freedom from want under a development agenda, some governments in the region have recently become more actively involved in initiatives that seek to promote freedom from fear.

Increasing acceptance among East Asian governments of measures that ameliorate the human costs of violent conflict can be seen occurring under international agreements concerning landmines, the proliferation of small arms, and child soldiers. International pressure under a human rights rubric has also led to improvements in measures to deal with the problem of human trafficking in Asia. Pressure by the U.S. under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act prompted Japan, for example, to increase its measures against trafficking from early 2004, and a National Plan of Action against human trafficking was approved in December of that year.

Undocumented migration is increasingly seen as a human security issue as illegal migrants are subjected to conditions where they are not free from fear, want or humiliation. Piper (2004) points out that the Philippines has a strong record on this issue due to a migrant workers bill that includes human rights (p80). Indonesia passed a migrant workers bill in 2004, but migrant labor advocates and labor sending companies have criticized it due a weak focus on human rights and launched a court appeal to have the law amended.

Greater commitment to human rights in East Asia can be seen in a recent surge in the establishment of National Human Rights Commissions (NHRC) in compliance with UN standards. NHRC have been established in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, South

Korea, and Thailand. There are also NHRC pending in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Although it appears that a number of NHRC were set up in order to deflect international criticism over human rights records, C. Evans (2004) states that some Commissions have interpreted the mandate given to them very broadly to include more rights than their constitutive documents appear to cover. The Malaysia Commission, for example, often refers to ESC rights despite the fact that Malaysia has not ratified the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights. By overstepping the boundaries envisaged for them by their political creators, NHRC are helping the long-term development of culture of human rights in East Asia (p716).

The inclusion of a clause on human rights in the Vientiane Action Program (VAP) at the December 2004 ASEAN meeting, and the decision at the July 2007 ASEAN Ministerial Meeting to include a provision for the creation of a regional human rights body in the ASEAN Charter also shows the growing commitment to human rights in East Asia. The Working Group for an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism stated at the ministerial meeting that member-countries should promote human rights awareness and education by raising awareness, integrating human rights standards into policy, and using human rights as a governance tool to transform ASEAN into a human rights respecting community and to infuse the public service sector with the culture of human rights.

The decision to create a regional human rights body follows years of policymaker effort, such as the December 2005 signing in Kuala Lumpur of a declaration to promote human rights in such a charter. To date however, Asia remains the only region without a specific human rights treaty or some form of region-wide mechanism.

One other area in which government actions are helping lift the profile of human rights in Asia is within the context of UN reactions to chronic human rights violators. While East Asian countries other than Japan, the Philippines and Timor-Leste have traditionally been reluctant to condemn human rights abusers in the UN, South Korea in

December 2006 switched camps by voting for the first time for a resolution condemning human rights abuses in North Korea.

These recent events at government level suggest that East Asian nations are boosting efforts to directly address human rights issues. This may be due to a growing commitment to international norms not only at state-level but also at the community level due to a more robust civil society.

3-2. More Active Civil Society

NGOs in the region are becoming more active in addressing freedom from want issues and freedom from fear issues in relation to abuses of human rights. The number of NGOs in East Asia, the scope of their activities, and the links between them are growing. While many NGOs appear to be primarily involved in promoting ESC and third generation rights, the use of right-based methods that switch the focus from top-down methods of realizing rights to bottom-up methods is leading to empowerment in terms of the full spectrum of human rights. Uvin (2004) argues that strong social movements and participatory processes that include the disposed help boost not only ESC rights but CP rights also (p183). An increasing number of NGOs that focus on CP and freedom from fear initiatives is evidence of this dynamic.

Cambodia is a good example of a country where a broad human security agenda is taking hold mainly through NGO activity. Lizee (2002) shows that the successful installation of electoral processes in Cambodia has opened up a space in the political spectrum where NGOs are promoting an agenda of change and democratization. The human security agenda provides a framework for introducing the process of a rights-based political system (p521). Examples of NGOs using a rights based approach (RBA) to promote human security in Cambodia include the Japan International Center for the Rights of the Child (JICRC) and the Child Rights Foundation.

NGO activity in East Asia concerning freedom from fear is also expanding in relation to Myanmar. Examples of NGOs taking up freedom from fear issues are the Thailand-based Women League of Burma (WLB), which comprises 12 women's organizations representing different ethnicities, and the Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma (Altsean). The WLB address such issues as forced labor, the use of rape by soldiers as a strategy of war, denial of legal redress, extra-judicial killing and torture. Organizations such as Altsean are primarily concerned with freedom from fear measures and use shaming methods in a similar manner to Western human rights organizations such as Amnesty International.

One key group that takes a region-wide approach to human rights promotion is the Hong Kong-based Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC). The AHRC is primarily concerned with freedom from fear measures and has branches in such countries as Thailand and Indonesia, but reports on abuses as far away as Pakistan and the Maldives. The AHRC was the first Asian NGO to attempt formulating an Asian Human Rights Charter, launching a draft document at a meeting of over 200 NGOs in South Korea in May 1998. The AHRC draft emphasized the indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights, and put forward the view that the various types of rights, be they economic, social, cultural, civil or political, cannot be enjoyed at the expense of each other. This is clearly in line with the broad Japanese approach.

Thus it can be seen that NGOs around Asia are addressing freedom from fear as well as freedom from want initiatives. It can be argued that RBA methods of empowerment with regard to freedom from want activities help raise rights awareness in general and encourage individuals to claim their rights regardless of whether they are first, second or third generation (although fieldwork is needed to verify this claim). In terms of the human security agenda in East Asia, it is becoming clear that NGO and civil group activities are an essential factor in creating the conditions to achieve freedom from

various threats and empower individuals.

As a final observation, I would like to point out that the broader approach to human rights also enjoys much support in developing nations outside of Asia, mainly because it includes ESC prerogatives. Many NGOs in Latin America and Africa enthusiastically promote such things as education and health as basic human rights, which ought not to be forgotten at the expense of CP rights. The potential for developing synergies in the field of human security between Asian NGOs and groups in Latin America and Africa is vast. Governments in Asia seeking to promote the human security paradigm may also find it beneficial to develop stronger links with local groups in these regions.

4. Conclusion

Approaches to human security since the 1990s can be classified into two broad categories – the Japanese school which seeks to promote freedom from fear and freedom from want initiatives in equal measure, and the Canadian school which favors prioritizing freedom from fear over freedom from want. There is recent evidence to suggest that the Canadian school is fading from the scene, leaving the Japanese approach as the primary methodological approach to the practice of human security, which includes not only first generation human rights, but also second and third generation rights.

Many governments in East Asia have been wary of the concept of human security due to fears of political interference by outside actors. East Asian nations have generally only been willing to accept the expanded security paradigm if questions of social stability or economic distress are involved. This can be seen in the willingness of governments to address pandemics and currency crises, but not matters of a more political nature.

However, recent developments show that the range of issues acceptable under the human security rubric is expanding in East Asia, and human rights education and the

creation of NGO networks are increasingly seen as worthy goals. Civil society groups are also helping promote human rights and the broader human security approach. NGOs working on ESC-related issues are spreading awareness of rights in general, and becoming more active in addressing freedom from fear issues with regard to chronic human rights abusers such as Myanmar.

Thus the debate surrounding human rights is moving, on an issue-by-issue basis, towards a human security framework that promotes both freedom from want initiatives and some freedom from fear initiatives. The broader Japanese approach to human security is seen as less threatening to state sovereignty as it allows for a degree of cultural relativism, but the promotion of locally appropriate second and third generation rights is also boosting awareness about first generation rights at the community level. If a more flexible approach to freedom from want initiatives that meets local needs can be combined with a gradual expansion in the range of freedom from fear initiatives acceptable to East Asian nations, human rights conditions in the region are likely to improve. As human security is further promoted, common social and political values may emerge with regard to human rights that can help underpin the East Asian community building process.

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