

BOOK REVIEW

DWI ARDHANARISWARI SUNDRIJO. *REGIONALIZING GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS NORMS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA*. SWITZERLAND: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2021.

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The establishment of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) as a regional human rights watchdog has gained popularity especially in an era when Southeast Asia has been facing human rights problems: the persecution of the Rohingya in Myanmar; the disappearance of human rights advocates in Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines; the suppression of the freedom of expression in Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, and the Philippines; as well as the arbitrary resumption of death penalties in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. This book, *Regionalizing Global Human Rights Norms in Southeast Asia*, written by Dwi Ardhanariswari Sundrijo, is part of the growing, complex literature that acknowledges and reinforces what duly constitute as human rights norms at the grassroots level, as well as the powers of the AICHR in fulfilling its primary mandate in promoting and protecting human rights effectively in Southeast Asia. It also provides valuable insights into how human rights norms and mechanisms in the ASEAN region have evolved, considering the essential roles of the regional non-state actors who are often unheard in the ASEAN regionalism discourse.

This book is one of the titles under the “Human Rights Intervention” series which seeks to depart from the traditional human rights paradigm by positioning the marginal yet powerful non-state actors who call for intervention and influence in (re)configuring human rights discourse amid grave insecurities, as well as bridging the wide gap between theoretical inquiry and empirical investigations through the contributors’ critical evaluation of human rights interventions interceded by temporal, spatial, geopolitical, and other dimensions. This book deals with the International Relations Theory

(IRT) and is composed of 253 pages and seven comprehensive chapters. These chapters have been taken from the author's PhD research which highlight not only the power and centrality of the roles and contributions of actors in ASEAN regionalism but also the use of the bottom-up approach to human rights norms and mechanisms development as well as the historic establishment of the AICHR, the ASEAN's regional human rights body.

Chapter 1 introduces the general aim of the book, that is, to develop a constructivist and sociologically informed international relations (IR) perspective that explains how a regional human rights watchdog can flourish in a milieu where global human rights norms are not valued. It also examines norm interpreters as strategic individuals who interpret the value and application of human rights norms. Being the most outstanding regional institution outside of Europe and a highly heterogeneous group of political units, ASEAN and its regionalism have been described as an amalgamation of traditional and rational approaches which employ multi-track diplomacy, dialogue fora, and deliberations. Accordingly, the idea of establishing a regional human rights body is problematic since no independent state wants to create a watchdog institution that enforces human rights on it, as human rights violation is a domestic issue and creating institutions allows the international community to exert influence on the member state's internal affairs, as well as imposes "sovereignty costs" on member-states by outside constraints brought by external monitoring and scrutiny. Furthermore, ASEAN regionalism has been shaped by behaviour dynamics, action and interaction, of norm interpreters which consist of political community (state actors), policy network (non-state actors as think tanks), and advocacy coalition (people's representatives).

Chapter 2 discusses the following three essential norms as critical focal points in understanding the interpretation process, namely the global human rights norms (the International Bill of Human Rights), the Southeast Asian local norms (Asian Values and ASEAN Way), which serve as the input, and the newly institutionalised regional human rights [AICHR's Terms of Reference (ToR)] as the output. However, the author argues that for global norms to be accepted in the region, it requires norm interpretation and examination of norm interpreters' behaviour as an examined behaviour defines the process output, that is, the institutionalisation of the AICHR. As the sole catalogue promoting Western values and interests, the International Bill of Human Rights has been unsuccessful in accommodating global pluralism. Asian Values and the ASEAN Way, as local norms, have promoted the non-universal concept of human rights and are part of each member state's internal affairs. As a local norm, Asian Values is a developmentalism doctrine which emphasises

that democracy remains an unaffordable luxury. Meanwhile, ASEAN Way is a web of norms that forms a regional identity into which member-states have been socialised to transform their interests, identities, and behaviours. Such conditions become major obstacles to the promotion of global norms into the region as inherent values of the International Bill of Human Rights are irreconcilable with local beliefs, and that creating a regional watchdog in the exercise of human rights opposes the local idea that human rights are a domestic issue. The issue on irreconcilability poses challenges to the interpretation and integration of global human rights norms into the region. Despite apparent weaknesses, the establishment of the AICHR should still be regarded as a victory as it illuminates the progression of ASEAN regionalism and the region's acceptance of a human rights mechanism with a clear intervention mandate which is limited only to human rights promotion.

Chapter 3 presents the conceptual framework needed for understanding the concept of norm interpreters as well as the characters of political community, policy network, and advocacy coalition as subgroups. As a concept, norm interpreters is an intermediary agent of change which works on the regionalisation of global human rights norms by interpreting the value of imposed external standards, gearing towards enhancing its compatibility with long-held local norms. In identifying these subgroups, Johnstone's (2005) Interpretative Community has been adopted as a model as it involves a group of professional interpreters whose members work similarly in a persuasive activity. Diamond and McDonald's (1993) Multitrack Diplomacy, meanwhile, has been espoused to situate these subgroups in the Southeast Asian context. Following these models, they represent the government actors [the High-level Panel (HLP)], the think tanks [ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS) Colloquium on Human Rights (AICOHR) and Working Group for an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism)], and the network of civil society leaders (the Task Force). Elaborated lastly, the Bowtie Model of Southeast Asian Norm Interpretation becomes central to understanding the interpretation process of global human rights norms in the region. As an amalgamation of various strategies such as the Veto Player Model, Policy Change Model, and Activist-Lobbyist Model, the Bowtie Model of Southeast Asian Norm Interpretation defines the final form of the AICHR which was established in 2009. Moreover, theoretical explanations have been prompted by norm interpreters which provide reasons for the failure of the interpretation strategies to create an "ideal" regional human rights body that serves the values of the International Bill of Human Rights as global human rights norms.

Chapter 4 assesses the behaviours of the members of AICOHR and working group (WG) as regional institutions comprising the Policy Network. As think tanks, the AICOHR and the WG became successful in mainstreaming human rights concerns which paved the way for the establishment of the AICHR. As policymakers, they became successful in maintaining a complex bridging system which the author also describes to as being composed of informal networking activities, unofficial communication channels, and people-to-people and non-governmental diplomacy across various levels that are gearing towards changing the norms, identities, as well as institutions. To attain this main goal, the Network's main strategy is to approach policymakers directly in order to change their perceptions on human rights values and influence their decision to establish a regional human rights body. The Network has also employed an intermediary strategy to influence policymakers' behaviour indirectly by empowering the leaders and members. With these approaches, methods like providing policy recommendations, securitising human rights issues, internalising these issues, and creating venues for broader networking among actors have been successful in enabling changes in Political Community (the HLP) and in expediting internal changes within network of private actors (the AICOHR, the WG, and broader civil society organisations). Although unrecognised in Compston's (2009) Policy Change Model, national governments are intermediary agents between public and private actors and institutions, and changes to groups of actors can be found in all policymaking aspects like resources, strategies, preferences, rules and norms, problems and solutions. Furthermore, the scope of the members' networks (policymakers from ASEAN member-states) and the preferred, formal approach (dialogue fora, working groups, and institutional meetings) to engaging policymakers are the two other issues which are dealt with in this chapter.

Chapter 5 examines the behaviours of the Solidarity for Asian People's Advocacy Task Force on ASEAN and Human Rights (SAPA-TFAHR), the main Advocacy Coalition's institution which helped shape the drafting of AICHR's ToR. As activists, the members of the Task Force established a public awareness campaign and media advocacy to show how ASEAN has failed to be effective in establishing a regional human rights watchdog. As lobbyists, the members of the Task Force utilised the influence of AICOHR and WG, lobbied individual members of HLP, and directly lobbied HLP during interface meetings. Although its goal in shaping public opinion about ASEAN Human Rights Commission's accountability, independence, and effectiveness was attained, the author argues that the Task Force's lobbying

activism was less successful in shaping a policy framework. The author also agrees to what Rietig (2011) has pointed out, that the success of Advocacy Coalition's lobbying on negotiation can be only observed through their valuable contribution during the agenda-setting and success in shifting leaders' opinions, but not in changing HLP members' views and positions towards having a powerful AICHR. Although they acknowledged the Task Force's lobbying activism, foreign ministers, ASEAN secretariat, and ASEAN leaders said that this was never reflected in AICHR's ToR; thereby, a manifestation of Task Force's failure to secure direct involvement in the AICHR as a regional human rights watchdog. In contrast, the Task Force was at least successful in setting the agenda and influencing negotiation outputs, although some contained weakening adjustments such as the AICHR having the mandate on human rights investigation and the right to obtain information from member-states on human rights promotion and protection. The Task Force's lobbying activism failure was due to their inability to place pressure on the HLP, thereby, reflecting the Task Force's lack of bargaining power. The dearth of media coverage, a less than positive image of civil society organisation (CSO) engagement with ASEAN, the lack of expertise in regional human rights mechanisms, and the lack of concrete support from broader groups and people have become the Task Force's points of weakness. Of these points, concrete support from the people is the most critical as people have the power to reshape the member-state's position on issues and influence the dynamics within HLP, thereby, redefining the end product of any negotiation.

Chapter 6 analyses the behaviours of the HLP members, a Political Community entity consisting of both government and intergovernmental officials who are responsible in crafting policies. As individuals who represent the ASEAN member-states, the HLP is composed of career diplomats who collaborate under the mandate of the ASEAN Charter with the goal of establishing a regional human rights body. They interact using an official negotiation channel known as ASEAN Track-1 Diplomacy where formal government-to-government communication occurs. A closer examination of the process confirms that Policy Community individual members fight more for their respective governments' interests than for common regional interests, such as establishing a regional human rights mechanism. Instead of concentrating on installing a body serving the region's interest, the negotiation process makes sure that member-states' individual vested interests remained secure under the newly-created regional "watchdog" framework. These differences result from their domestic political situations, particularly on influence and adoption of local norms in their respective countries. Meanwhile,

the Veto Player theory explains how these differences have created ideological distances, generating a global norms interpretation process that leads to the institutionalisation of a politically compromised, hence weak, AICHR. It also highlights that interpretation processes took place within the Political Community as compared to those in Policy Network and Advocacy Coalition. Contrary to Policy Network and Advocacy Coalition which work together for one common goal, Political Community only works together to secure individual goals. This observation also confirms Moravcsik's (2000) previous claim that Political Community is not the most established liberal mind in the region. Such condition relates to the individual members' long and short-term interests, and that in AICHR and within the Political Community, the global norms interpretation process involves more traditional instead of progressive elements such as constructed identities, local standards, and vested interests in decision making. As much as they have worked together in interpreting global human rights norms and in drafting AICHR's ToR, the Political Community has acted more like a local norms defender instead of an international human rights norms promoter.

Being the last section, Chapter 7 reflects the author's understanding of the empirical findings and their corroboration in explaining norm interpreters' role in institutionalising AICHR and its contribution to ASEAN regionalisation process. The term "interpreter" describes the general character and interactive relations of actors working on establishing the AICHR. Guided by "X-Y Centric" model, the interpretation process is the potential mechanism that connects the X, the input of the research process, and Y, the output of the research process, the AICHR. It also outlines processes which facilitated the acceptance of global human rights norms, such as securitisation of issue, internalisation of issue, policy recommendations, transactional negotiation, creating dialogue avenues, consolidation forum, public awareness campaign, media advocacy, engaging the AICHOR and WG, and lobbying the HLP. Two elements have calibrated these processes: first, the value of norms, and second, the policymakers' understanding and perception of human rights norms. It also recapitulates AICHR establishment as an anomaly brought by these incompatibility issues: first, the two norms represent two different rights generations; second, they are incompatible in the contending ideas of human rights and national sovereignty; third, they are incompatible regarding individual liberty and communal needs disputes; fourth, they are incompatible in their decision-making mechanisms and non-confrontational, behavioural code of conduct; and fifth, they are incompatible in their understanding of relations between state and society, as well as between religious and secular

life. Action and interaction among Political Community, Policy Network, and Advocacy Coalition are distinctive, defined by institutions' characters and key members' professional backgrounds. Although they differ on several aspects, they share key similarities such as their effort in interpreting the value of the Bill and their reliance on key individuals' qualities rather than on formal negotiation procedures. The Bowtie Model also provides explanations as to how interpretation resulted in the establishment of a toothless and considerably weak AICHR, which becomes a compromise between political pressure of adopting the values of global human rights norms and the political interest to remain loyal to local values. Lastly, the author concludes by stressing that ASEAN is progressing with its regionalism, considering not only the traditional formal governmental processes but also the participation of non-state actors, contribution of immaterial elements, and interactive relations in both informal and non-official media. Similar to the AICHR, the establishment of the "people-oriented ASEAN" is no longer a jargon but is instead gradually becoming real.

Overall, this book is worth reading and even sharing as it affords readers as well as researchers like us not only valuable perspectives about how global human rights norms and dispersal mechanisms have been promoted and applied in the ASEAN region, but also how important non-state agents are in promoting and implementing human rights initiatives effectively especially in the said region. This book is another vital contribution to the growing complexity of both ASEAN and human rights studies, as well as to the constructivist and sociologically informed literature of norm transmission and application coming from a different, non-Western outlook. Furthermore, what is more fascinating and convincing about this book is that it is purely research-based, where the author's viewpoints, claims, and even methodologies applied are primarily guided by sound theoretical and conceptual underpinnings as well as strongly supported by empirical investigations which stem most particularly from the grassroots level.

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