Human Security in Northeast Asia: The Challenges and Opportunities

Speaker: Stephen Robert Nagy (Ph.D.) (Waseda University)

Affiliation:
Assistant Professor, Japanese Studies Department, The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Senior Fellow, Waseda University's Global Institute for Asian Regional Integration

In the comprehensive and well organized seminar given by Dr. Stephen R. Nagy, he argued that fostering human security in Asia requires an ad-hoc approach which is revolving around "freedom for want" and minimum and maximum views of human security. He specifically used migration, human trafficking and labor rights as parameters in the issue. In his lecture on human security, Dr. Nagy compared Canadian interpretations of human security which revolve around "freedom from fear" and the Japanese views on human security which is the "freedom from want". In particular, he explained how these two approaches differed in terms of impetous and outlook.

In the Canadian case according to Dr. Nagy, the Canadian experience in Kosovo (part of the former Yugoslavia) and the then Foreigner Minister Lloyd Axworthy's interpretation of human security led Canadians to the conclusion that individual security could not be guaranteed without a focus on governance and building governmental institutions that breakdown the cycle of violence of the state against its own people. For the exponents of Canadian interpretations of human security, the fostering of stable governments, liberal democratic values, and stability were and continue to be the pillars on which human security is built. As a consequence, Canadian approaches and policies revolve around strengthening individual security by They are also in line with the capabilities and resources of middle power states such as Canada who have significantly smaller military, economic, political and social resources compared to much larger states such as the US or even Japan.

In contrast to the Canadian example of human security, Dr. Nagy argued that Japan's views on human security have focused on "freedom from want" for several reasons including but not exclusive to: constitutional limitations on the use of military forces internationally, its own developmental post WW II past and Japan's historical focus on economic development. Citing Japan's response to the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, Dr. Nagy walked the audience through a series of declarations made by successive Japanese Prime Ministers who consistently conveyed the notion that true human security was related to economic security as well as a

host of other interrelated variables. That being said, individuals can neither be considered secure or stable if they do not have economic security as illustrated by the 10s of millions of Asians who felt victim to the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis. With this in mind, Japan has continued to emphasize "freedom from want" as its central focus of its human security approach.

During his talk Dr. Nagy also introduced the concepts of minimum and maximum levels of security to address the different human security challenges and situations in developed vs. developing countries. Simply, he argued that it was unreasonable to apply the same standards of human security to Sudan as we would Japan because of the level of development.

Borrowing from Korea University's Shin Wa Lee ideas of minimum and maximum security, Dr. Nagy asserted that minimum security revolved around the protection of individuals from hunger, poverty, natural disasters, violence and forced displacement. On the other hand, the maximum level ensured that an individual could achieve self-fulfillment through equal opportunity, social and political empowerment and the establishment of a sustainable civil society.

When discussing the international relations views of human security, Dr. Nagy mentioned human security can be an obstacle to objective and effective responses to conflict and each state's national imperative. According to the neo-liberal view, international institutions can help overcome differences in national interest and find common interests. For example, UN has a role in shaping discourse and EU represents the most sophisticated form of international institutionalism. He argued that Northeast Asia is too diverse in terms of development, political systems, social and legal development, making it a challenge for states to develop a similar line of thinking related to human security. Moreover, a general lack of institutionalism in the region continues to be a hurdle for broader cooperation on the issue of human security. Lastly, although Japan is at the vanguard of human security dialogue, discourse and policy in the region, Japan's leadership position remains illegitimate in the eyes of her neighbours because of historical issues and Japan's domestic treatment of migrants.

Dr. Nagy proposed for the possible mixture of Canadian and Japanese human security approaches, from unilateral to bilateral and then to multilateral initiatives. Furthermore he advocated for step by step institutionalization along with sub-regional or intra-regional approach which can start with commonalities. ODA can be one of the tools to shape the human security behavior, as he sees it.

Following the brilliant lecture of Dr. Nagy, Prof. Katsumata stimulated the discussion with his constructive comment on the topic and also raised the question about why Canada and Japan are so active in comparison to other countries, in this particular issue and why not other countries like Germany? Why Japanese government is putting the sticker of Human Security ODA instead of ODA? What is the idea of Japanese security policy?

In response to the first group of questions Dr. Nagy focused on the historical differences between Japanese and German post WW II behaviour, especially on their approaches to reintegrating within their respective regions. In the case of German, reintegration into Europe in the post WW II era was through the vehicle of being one of the lynchpins of the EU. Through economic, political and social integration, Germany built strong ties with her neighbours and had the opportunity to develop more shared values.

In the case of Japan, reintegration with Asia has continued to be a sticking point in the post WW II era. Memories of atrocities committed by the then Japanese military have remained at the forefront of the collective memory of many in China, South Korea and North Korea hampering (and also being used strategically) further integration. Also, as mentioned in the discussion today, Japan's constitutional limitations limit the use of military forces. Together, Japan's historical legacy in the region and her constitutional limitations in addition to Japan's size have compelled Japan to create a foreign policy that revolves around an apolitical, non-military ideal that is palpable to her neighbours. A human security approach which revolves around "freedom from want" and economic stability resonates well with her limitations.

In the case of Canada, Dr. Nagy argued that Canada's human security interest are a natural extension of Canada's long time interest and activity in Peace Keeping Operations (PKO) and an effective focus of her capabilities and resources in a particular foreign policy area. Simply, although geographically the second largest country in the world, its population and economic size limit her abilities to engage in large scale military activities like the US or provide the same kind of economic and political influence. As a middle power, Canada has chosen to develop a human security approach that matches its capabilities and allows it to have a positive role in international affairs while remaining true to its historical interest in peace keeping.

Other questions rose for how the Canadian security policy is reflected in the action of Canada in Afghanistan?

According to Dr. Nagy, Canada's security policy in Afghanistan and its relationship to human security is best illustrated by the kinds of roles the Canadian military are engaging in the region which are not confrontational but focused on creating the conditions for stability and development.

What's the distinction between human security and human rights discourse?

In terms of the differences between human rights and human security, Dr. Nagy stressed that there is much overlap between the two concepts but where as human rights focuses on the rights of an individual as a human being, human security stresses the minimum conditions of an individual to live with out fear or want. He also mentioned that human security is less ideologically focused and more acceptable to various countries and cultures notions of human beings and their place in society.

How do you see human security discourse of Japan raising the global environmental episode through the use of its ODA which is a very important instrument for Japanese human security approaches?

I would argue that Japan's current global environmental initiatives and push to become the leader in global environmentalism has many overlapping principles with human security. They are relatively apolitical, they do not focus on the military and they are related to economism and developmentalism. In short, both foreign policy agenda's allow Japan to have a proactive, prominent foreign policy and international presence without changing its post WW II constitution and international position in society.

As part of realizing these policies, ODA may be a tool to further support and encourage behaviour that echoes Japan's foreign policy direction.

Human security fits in the nontraditional security areas, but when the issues of North Korea assist everyone to refocus on the traditional security area, do you think North East Asia is lessening the human security focus?

I think what you are addressing is the tendency of states to discuss and focus on non-traditional security (NTS) in times of stability and quick shift to tradition security (TS) responses when there is a crisis like we saw with N.Korea in November. I don't think that countries forget about their NTS during these times, rather they become less prominent as states attempt to put out the flames of the current crisis that is occurring. Behind the scenes during crisis' states are still providing aid, focusing on government etc. The change is the focus of the media which generally conveys to audiences the must colourful side of international events.

One of the audience mentioned that there are lack of example of good practices of human security, then why he (Dr. Nagy) thinks that human security has succeeded to overcome the barriers of traditional security?

NTS and TS will continue to have tension between them and I don't think NTS initiatives like human security will supplant or be prioritized over TS. What I do argue though is that there are many successful examples of human security initiatives. For instance, middle power states came together to create a Land-mine Treaty, South Korea has given long-term foreign residents the right to vote in local elections and Japan has acted unilaterally in 2004 to eliminate trafficking of women into Japan by rigidly screening entertainer visa. These are a few examples of states acting multilaterally and unilaterally in the areas of human security. I predict that we will continue to see more and more cooperation in these areas and others.

How does the Canadian or Japanese concept try to address the non intervention of the inter-state matters?

Completely different because of historical legacies. In the case of Canada, its traditional PKO role has given it a 60 year plus track record of engaging in international crises and such, a certain legitimacy in the eyes of the international community. It also has non-constitutional limitation on its military activities abroad, facilitating its activities abroad. Lastly, Canada seeks consensus of the international community before it engages in what you call international intervention.

The Japan case is much more complicated because of the aforementioned historical legacy of Japan, constitutional limitations on the military and geo-political rivalries in the region. For Japan, intervention is not an option.

Addressing the examples of international-local level cooperation, final question was asked about city level cooperation, that sometimes have the example of having cooperation with more wealthier cities, when the problem lies actually in a less developed area. Therefore how does it relate with the international solidarity issue?

When I give the examples of transnational cooperation at the local level as spring boards for further cooperation in the areas of human security I was specifically referring to leaders in local level cooperation such as Kita-Kyushu City. She has been active since the early 90s in environmental cooperation and indirectly human security with local governments first in China and then in Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines. The expansion of this cooperation is indicative of growing consensus of norms and international solidarity related to the environment and its relationship to human security, although only at a local level. I expect these trends to continue as localities seek out transnational partners that better complement their needs.