Developing Networks of Human Rights Teaching Universities in the Asia-Pacific: The Establishment of SEAHRN and AUN-HRE

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HUMAN RIGHTS AS A SUBJECT taught at university is now established in a number of curriculums around the Asia-Pacific. While there are still glaring gaps in the teaching and research on human rights, there is no question that it is a legitimate subject with both students having interest in it, and many academics identifying it as their area of expertise. Looking at the landscape of human rights at universities in the Asia-Pacific twenty years ago, this was far from the case. In the 1990s, human rights had little presence in the classrooms and lecture halls in the Asia-Pacific. There were no degrees in human rights, though there may have been some individual courses, mainly in law degrees. Research on human rights coming out of Asia-Pacific universities was rare, and there was little demand from students to study it. A huge change has occurred over the last twenty years because of a handful of reasons, and this article describes the contribution of a university network to this development.

Before detailing the emergence of human rights as a subject at the university, it is important to first justify why this is a positive development. It is still common to see human rights not as a university subject but rather an activity of civil society. Some civil society actors can be heard demarcating the tasks of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from that of universities, with the division of labor commonly seeing universities as doing the less important conceptual work and civil society doing the activities in the real world, the actual protection of rights. Or, there are others who see universities as quasi-State agencies, and thus on the wrong side for human rights protection. This attitude is far less common now than it was some decades ago, and people realize that neglecting universities in the promotion and protection of right comes at a cost. While NGOs are far better suited to programming activities and working directly with human rights stakeholders, the university can, and should, play a critical role. Though university

work is more conceptual, this is needed for human rights to evolve. The development of human rights should come from evidence-based ideas, from new and critical thinking, and from understanding and evaluating current processes in promotion, protection and prevention. Greater protection does come from greater understanding. Further, the people now working in the human rights and related sectors (such as the environment, democratization, peace and development sector) continue the work with more capacity because they have been able to study the sector through the increasing number of available degrees. And while it is true that most universities are government bodies and therefore face challenges to their academic freedom, academics, students, and programs rarely are the voice of government.

As this paper details, through establishing a network of universities active in human rights, the study of human rights has been legitimized, the academic freedom for students and academics has been growing, and currently there is an increasing capacity of stakeholders across all sectors to promote and protect human rights. This paper examines the foundation of the two main Southeast Asian human rights university networks, the Southeast Asian Human Rights Network (SEAHRN) and the ASEAN University Network, Human Rights Education Focal Point (AUN-HRE).[1] While the discussion on universities covers the broad Asia-Pacific region, for reasons detailed later in the paper, the focus will be on networks in Southeast Asia. The paper also addresses the benefits of a human rights network, what these networks do, and importantly what they should be doing. Some of the points raised in this paper are also reflected in the larger study: The Mapping and Analysis of Human Rights and Peace Education in Southeast Asia conducted by the AUN-HRE in 2013.[2] Though this study was conducted during 2011-12 and published in 2013, the main findings are similar, such as the challenges faced when teaching and researching human rights.

Emergence of Human Rights at Asia Pacific Universities

Human rights courses emerged from the Asia-Pacific Universities in the 1990s. For the most part, up to this time human rights was taught in law degrees, sometimes as a stand-alone course, or as a part of a public international law course. It may have appeared in some universities in politics or international relations, but the footprint of human rights in the 1990s was extremely limited.[3] This was not a reflection of what was occurring in

the world: human rights were a topic in the media; there were many human rights NGOs, and in international politics human rights were frequently mentioned. The significant global events, such as the Rwandan genocide, the Asian Financial Crisis and the IMF (International Monetary Fund) bailout, the war in Yugoslavia, and the anti-globalization movement were all spoken about in terms of human rights. Civil society throughout the Asia-Pacific actively advocated for human rights (leading to their inclusion in the Thai Constitution, the establishment of a number of national human rights institutions, and the increase in ratified conventions[4]). These achievements were undoubtedly from an engaged civil society as universities at this time had little influence. It was clear that universities needed to catch up.

The reason universities engaged with human rights is open to debate. Perhaps the rise in human rights education in the 1990s was student-driven, with a politically engaged student movement wanting to discuss more about human rights. Or it could have been lecturer-driven with more activist lecturers in the region pushing for the inclusion of human rights in curriculum and research. Regardless, the politics of the post-Cold War society demanded a greater knowledge of human rights. It can also be debated if the growth was indigenous to the region or led by European funding. While human rights NGOs in the region mostly predate more recent European NGOs, there is a longer history of the study of human rights in Europe and USA. Initial developments at universities were funded by, for example, the Raoul Wallenberg Institute (RWI) and Open Society Foundation, who were funding universities in the late 1990s. But on the other hand institutes and programs were opening to deal directly with national issues, such as the founding of the Centre for the Study of Human Rights at Colombo University in 1991 to address violations occurring as a consequence of the on-going Sri Lankan civil war.

Though this debate is interesting, this paper is not about the origins of human rights education at university, nor why it took so long for universities to bring it into the curriculum, but the impact of having human rights at Asia-Pacific universities. In the 1990s, human rights courses began to be established at research centers, in Master's degrees, or as majors in study programs. By the early 2000s, there were enough centers and programs established at universities such as Colombo University, the University of Calcutta, Mahidol University, Ateneo de Manila University, University of the Philippines, Hong Kong University and Soochow University, that

clearly it was not a coincidence, but region-wide phenomena. An important development was the offering of the first degrees in human rights in the region at Mahidol University,[5] which opened about the same time as the LLM in Human Rights at Hong Kong University. Alongside these degrees were a handful of human rights centers and other activities at other universities. Around 2006, staff at Mahidol University began a conversation with partners about developing links with other universities in response to the growth of university initiatives on human rights. It seemed that a critical mass has been reached where human rights were not a trend that was going to disappear, but rather it was expanding as a discipline.

Why a Human Rights Network?

In the early days, there was an obvious question in the discussion about developing relationships between universities teaching human rights: for what reason? Most universities function perfectly on their own: they are autonomous, self-regulating, administrative bodies. How could partnerships add value? While at the time the value of a network may not have been apparent, as soon as the network began to develop clear reasons for its existence manifest. There was a clear strategic importance of such a network from the start. The answer lies in the fact that teaching human rights is unlike any other university course.

At most, human rights constituted a fringe course at the university. The fact that only a handful of students in the whole Asia-Pacific region would graduate with a basic knowledge of rights was of no concern in universities and education ministries, regardless that human rights education is a human right in itself. Human rights as a subject was entirely ignored in Myanmar, Lao PDR, Malaysia, and Singapore (though later, sometimes through the network, degrees or compulsory course are now available in nearly all these countries). As a fringe topic, it was not seen as serious enough to deserve research or space on the curriculum. Basically, human rights lacked legitimacy. It was seen as a civil society thing, or something done for advocacy only and not for academic careers. The task of establishing human rights as a legitimate discipline to university administrators, students, academics, and researchers was a task that could be assisted by a network. The fact that human rights was international, taught across different universities by academics with international profile helped it gain this. More universities

teaching similar courses, and producing more graduates, would prove it was a serious discipline.

A second reason for a network is that it can address the fact that for many countries in the Asia Pacific human rights remain a sensitive topic that attracts attention from the government, conservative groups, or the security sector. Academic freedom is already challenged at many Asia Pacific universities especially for a more politicized discipline like human rights. It needs much greater support than simply the university administration itself and there is safety in numbers. Not only are there international networks such as Scholars at Risk, but through a network threats to academic freedom can be responded to at a regional level where advocacy may be stronger. More recently the teaching of human rights itself is not often denied academic freedom as most threats to academic freedom stem from the study of cultural or religious issues, or of history.[6] This does not mean that academic freedom is not an issue. Firstly, there is the challenge of self-censorship, where academics or students do not want to engage with human rights because they perceive it as a sensitive topic. There is also the case where discussion of human rights has to be modified to comply with national norms, for instance where human rights discussion is reduced to rights of women and children (such as in Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei which have ratified the relevant treaties). A network of universities does add to the ability of universities to protect the teaching of human rights in the subregion.

A further reason for the network is due to the multidisciplinary perspective of human rights as a subject. If taught well, human rights covers the basics of law, philosophy, political science, development, and a range of other disciplines, according to the interest of the educator. This is a significant demand for the new lecturer. While it can be a single topic in law, most human rights is taught outside the law faculty, and to students who do not want to study law but want to work on peace, development, the environment, social welfare, public health and other issues. The capacity demands on human rights academics are greater than many other disciplines, and there is a greater need for capacity development in this area. These gaps in capacity can be addressed in a couple of ways: either to bring in guest lecturers to teach courses, or to develop programs training lecturers in human rights teaching. Both these responses have been a central feature of the human rights networks.

Finally, as a new topic, there are limited resources for teaching and researching human rights. Initiating the teaching and research in human rights in a university is not a simple task. There are no textbooks, curriculum, student interest or body of research available to lecturers, as in other more established disciplines. Only a handful of textbooks exist on human rights, and none of them directly addressing the Asia-Pacific. The tendency is for European and North American courses and textbooks to focus on human rights as a legal discipline. While currently there are a number of new multidisciplinary textbooks, there were few, if any, textbooks from the Asia-Pacific region. Similarly, there is little in the way of established curriculums. While most academics prefer to develop their own course structures and outlines, it does help to see how others structure their course outlines and degrees for ideas on the best way to teach human rights. Developing courses afresh is very much a trial and error process, but errors can be reduced by learning from the experience of others in developing and delivering their courses. As was the case in the Asia-Pacific, some MA degrees started off being based on the Mahidol University degree before evolving into their own degree suitable for the student interest and relevant issues. Pooling resources, developing capacity, and learning from each other would become central activities of the human rights network.

A second question at the inception phase was of what form should the relationship between universities take? There are a wide variety of inter-university relationships. The most common form of university relationship is the Memorandum of Understanding (or MoU), which is a simple, non-binding document indicating university interest on research partnerships, student exchanges, academic visits and so on. MoUs are easy to do, and enhances the international profile of a university, and yet they rarely result in anything significant. MoUs after all are non-binding and rarely commit any resources for their implementation. At the other end of the scale is the joint degree, where universities agree on a curriculum and jointly teach students, a deal which demands the coordination of curriculum, teaching, assessment, and academic standards. Somewhere in-between is the network. It is not as weak as a MoU, for it must exist as an established body, but it is not as demanding as a joint/double degree. The network is the most suitable form of relationship to take; where a range of activities such as academic and student exchanges, joint research projects, or short course trainings can be

done. The network structure is loose and flexible, and with it come advantages and disadvantages, which will be addressed next.

Challenges of a Network

The challenge of establishing a network is clear for human rights, as the first attempt to do so was a failure. With funding from the Japan Foundation[7] the first meetings between human rights teaching universities across the Asia-Pacific occurred in 2006. Representatives from a range of Asia-Pacific countries attended.[8] There were discussions on the status of human rights education, on the needs, and what could be the benefits of a network. However, without further funding, and with no university having the capacity to take on hosting a network, the plan was dropped. It was decided that there would be no attempt to found a network. Among the reasons reached at that meeting were that the goals of establishing a network were not universal. It was unclear if the network should work towards collaborating human rights research, assist in student recruitment, be an information portal on human rights education, or be an alert system for human rights issues. The purpose of a network was not clear. Also, most institutions were more concerned with the viability of human rights education in their own institution, before thinking about how to network with outside institutions, given most programs were less than ten years old and still not established. Further, the infrastructure for a network was not ready. A network needs a web page or a regular publication, and most universities had neither of these. However, there were positive outcomes. Participants gained much knowledge from talking about the issues of human rights education at university and in particular, learning about the breadth of human rights and the common difficulties of teaching human rights. Informal networks were set up between institutions which formed the basis of the next attempt to found a subregional network three years later.

There are many common faults made when networks are established, which at this point are useful to consider. The first is that many assume the main task is to establish a network alone, and from this good things will flow. The "build it and they will come" attitude means most networks fail before even getting started. It is not difficult to start a network; it can be as simple as an e-mail list or a single document acknowledging a relationship. The structure of technology and media today means that establishing a network

can be done in seconds. What is forgotten in the rush to establish a network is its function: to distribute a commodity, most commonly information but also finance, access, people, legitimacy, and so on, between the members of the network.

A network is only as useful as the resource it distributes to its members. In the first attempts to establish a network between human rights teaching universities there was a connection between universities, but not much to distribute. With little finances for research or training, and few available lecturers, what could be distributed? Most human rights programs were struggling to established themselves let alone develop their international profile. They were also more deeply involved in local human rights issues and did not have the expertise or resources to take on human rights concerns of an international nature, or in other countries.

The second important fault with many networks is misunderstanding if it is really needed by the community. A simple measure of a network's worth is to ask: what can the network do that Google cannot? Networks which are established merely so members are aware of each other, or to show there is a body of experts across different universities are done much better by Google than it is done by a network. Rather than having a database which must be periodically updated and cleaned, for most people a simple google search will provide answers much quicker and easier.

A third common mistake is assuming a network will produce something. They do not produce but they distribute. A network will not provide the missing resources unless members themselves are capable, and willing, to produce the resources and allow them to be distributed through the network. And when it comes to producing something in a network, the 80/20 rule is very common: that 20 percent of the actors will produce 80 percent of the products. The other 80 percent of the actors will be largely passive.[9] Some actors may be upset by this, feeling they are doing most of the work while many of the participants are idle. However, this is the nature of networks.

Establishing a Network: Birth of SEAHRN and AUN-HRE

The early problems in establishing a network were to change quite quickly with the establishment of the Southeast Asian Human Rights Network (SEAHRN) and the ASEAN University Network (Human Rights Education

Focal Point) AUN-HRE in 2009. These networks were to become successful bodies and strengthen human rights education in the subregion. The reason they succeeded where the first attempts failed was that, firstly, they came with funding. The SEAHRN network was established with funding from RWI, Sweden,[10] which underwrote the costs of travel for universities to send representatives to the meetings founding the network, and funding for activities. Secondly, the networks were more focused on a subregion, in this case Southeast Asia. Establishing networks across the Asia-Pacific was too broad, and the human rights issues did not have the focus as they did in Southeast Asia. The standards and styles of Northeast Asian, Southeast Asian, and South Asian universities were diverse enough to challenge any attempt at a unified human rights discipline. Lastly, the umbrella of the ASEAN University Network (AUN) gave legitimacy to the network to establish it as a discipline at the university and not an advocacy project of a group of academics.

First meeting of the SEAHRN members, 2009, Bangkok.

A word on these networks. SEAHRN is a network of currently nineteen universities which teach or research human rights in Southeast Asia, with universities from Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. There currently is interest from Timor Leste, Lao PDR, and Myanmar to join, though some administrative issues hold them back. Singapore and Brunei are the only countries not active (though individual academics from these universities do participate). The requirements to join are the active teaching or researching of human rights at a program, cen-

ter, Department or Faculty. With originally nine members, SEAHRN now has twenty-two members at both public and private universities that have human rights programs, centers and courses. The AUN-HRE is a focal point for human rights of the thirty universities who are part of the AUN – which is a network of around three selected universities per ASEAN country. Most universities are members of both networks, which lead to confusion. It is important to explain why this structure, though it is confusing to some, has been kept.

The difference between them is that the AUN-HRE is only open to the selected thirty universities, and not all of them are actively teaching human rights. Simply put, SEAHRN is inclusive, while AUN-HRE is exclusive. AUN-HRE offers access to university administrations, and adds legitimacy to the network, and SEAHRN can reach all tertiary education bodies active in human rights. Through AUN-HRE, human rights curriculum can be instituted and validated at the subregional level. However, the limit is that the AUN-HRE is exclusive to the thirty member-universities, leaving hundreds of other universities out. A mixture of both networks enables both inclusive participation and access to university administrations.

What Can a Network Do?

Early meetings of these networks focused on needs. As noted above, teaching human rights at university was not easy. A number of priorities were established. Firstly, teaching was difficult because of the lack of resources; basically there were few textbooks to use in the classroom. So the production of a textbook on human rights in Southeast Asia was given priority. Second, many lecturers wanted to teach or improve their knowledge of human rights, so training was identified as a second priority. Third, there was not enough support for academic research on human rights, and this was caused by a number of deficiencies. Many academics had minimal training in research, let alone in human rights. There was little support to research on rights, or to present their research work. The identified priority of the networks was the development of the capacity of researchers, and preparation of spaces to present research, such as seminars and conferences. This paper looks briefly at each of these priorities, and how they were met by the SEAHRN/AUN-HRE networks.

Classroom Resources

Developing a curriculum, topics to teach, and student resources is made much easier by having established textbooks. Well known courses such as an Introduction to International Relations, International Law, or Sociology are made easier to teach because of the large number of textbooks and student materials available. A new lecturer to any of these topics can access many course outlines through a google search, identify many textbooks, and teach themselves how to deliver the course. An introduction to human rights, especially in Southeast Asia is more challenging. While there are more textbooks available now (and a rough guess of about six to ten textbooks which could be used in a classroom),[11] the novice lecturer faces some difficult questions. Firstly, the texts are often limited to their discipline: either law or political science textbooks. Secondly, all textbooks are written for a North American or Western Europe student audience. While these alone will not disqualify the texts, they do limit what can be taught. Some simple examples: the civil society sector is probably the most important body in human rights in Southeast Asia, as most students entering a career in human rights will most commonly work either at an NGO or an international organization. Yet few textbooks address human rights work at NGOs in any systematic way. Secondly, human rights teaching in the subregion is closely linked to the disciplines of development, democratization, and more recently peace and the environment. There are available printed materials on civil and political rights, yet little on the developing field of economic, social, and cultural rights. Most texts teach human rights with the legal discipline, focusing on legal standards and cases. While this is still relevant, human rights work in the subregion mostly does not involve the judiciary, but involves community development, government administrations, or education. Again, these are topics not covered in the textbooks. This is not to say these textbooks are not of any worth, because they teach many critically important topics in rights such as an understanding what rights are, and what they mean. Finally, and most importantly, the texts were not accessible. A textbook costs about forty US dollars, too expensive for most lecturers, let alone students. On top of this is the problem that most undergraduate teaching in the subregion is done in national language, and few textbooks are translated.

In response, SEAHRN developed the textbook *An Introduction to Human Rights in Southeast Asia*. With fifteen chapters over two volumes, the textbook was authored by Southeast Asia academics teaching human rights in the subregion. The textbook has been downloaded thousands of times and will soon be available in four ASEAN languages.[12] When SEAHRN developed the human rights textbook, two simple priorities were established: the textbook must be freely and widely available, and that it is relevant to the Southeast Asian universities.

In the process of developing the textbook there were regular debates about the content in the textbook. There are so many topics in human rights that an early discussion was which ones to focus on. Should the textbook focus on civil rights, or rights in the court room, or should issues such as democracy and development be chosen? A list of twenty chapters were drawn up and divided into three volumes, and some topics given priority by appearing in the first volume. Migration was chosen for the first volume as an important topic (covering refugees, migrant workers, trafficking, and statelessness), with business, environment, sexuality and women's rights among the topics for the second volume. The textbook also was structured more around topic ideas (like business or the environment) and not focused on specific rights as a way to address its interdisciplinary nature. Students in business or environmental studies could select the relevant chapter to understand how human rights relate to their discipline. See Annex A for the contents of the two volumes.
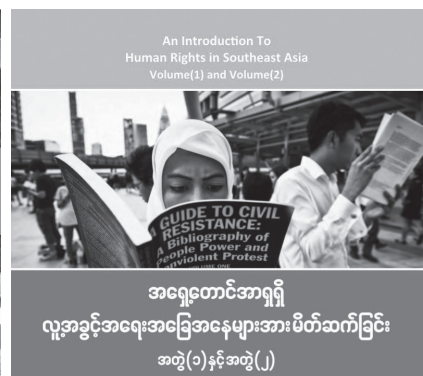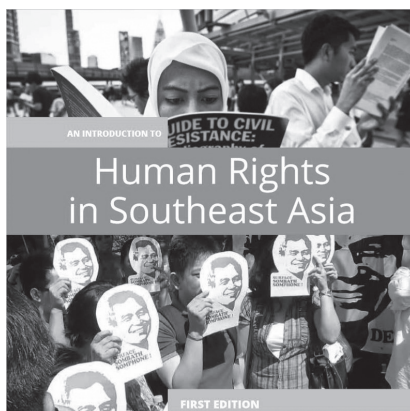
The English and Burmese versions of *Human Rights in Southeast Asia*.

Another issue was how critical a textbook should be of human rights standards. In the worst case, a textbook can become just another form of human rights advocacy which lists violations and shows the failure of States. As truthful as this view may be, it does not necessarily mean the textbook achieves its purpose. Not only are there threats that the textbook will not be supported or distributed because it is seen as too political – by both governments and lecturers – but it may be seen not as an educational text but a political one. This was addressed by the selection of case studies to capture the ways human rights are used. Sometimes there are clear cases of rights violations, such as systemic rape of ethnic women in Myanmar or forced evictions in Cambodia. But mostly cases looked at the application of rights, such as how the United Nations Universal Periodic Review process worked or an examination of NGO activities.

Human rights textbook editorial meeting.

Another issue was about the kind of violations to focus on. The opening of the textbook describes two examples of human rights violations – the genocide during the Pol Pot Regime in Cambodia, and a homeless woman begging. Often gross human rights violations are emphasized as if these are the main, and most important, category of rights. There is a tendency for people to consider human rights as stopping torture, slavery and genocide. While these are very important, a much more common violation across the region is access to health, education, and work. Everyday discrimination of women, children, people with a disability, non-citizens is pervasive. For a textbook to have an effect and to reach its purpose, students should be able to recognize how they can contribute to a more tolerant world, and how they can contribute to everyone in their country having their human rights met.

In reality there has been little, if any, criticism or government concern about the textbook. Most likely this is because the textbook is not widely read by governments and being widely accepted by the academic community. There are some concerns voiced around two chapters. The first is the history chapter where sensitive events such as the Indonesian 1965 massacre of suspected communists, the genocide by the Khmer Rouge, and impact of the Vietnam War are discussed. Governments have official histories which may not match a human rights history and in these cases the textbook contradicts these official histories. The second area is in the chapter on political rights and freedom of expression. Given widespread censorship in the region, and the lack of democracy in most Southeast Asian countries, any human rights account would directly conflict with government's official views. Again, there has never been any direct criticism of these chapters from governments. However, translations have sometimes left sections out because they may face government protest.

The textbook had to be widely distributed and free and also available for translation to ensure that it is accessible. To accomplish this, the textbook was written under a creative commons of free non-commercial use, and the freedom of readers to adapt it (for example, taking out sections for a workbook, or producing their own translation) to their context or subject. Allowing anyone to download and use the textbook is the first step. The format of the book also fits this – it can be easily printed because it is A4 size. An obvious challenge is that the textbook cannot raise any revenue. Since the writers, editors, and page layout people have to be paid somehow, international funding was sought.[13]

The translation of the textbook was more challenging. Translation is more expensive, with a translation of the whole textbook costing up to 5,000 US dollars. Further, it is difficult to assess the quality of a translation. Many terms in human rights do not have established translations (such as degrading treatment, inalienable, or rights-based approach), and different authors may translate terms differently. People organizing the translation may not want some sensitive issues translated, so the textbook is not exactly the same in the national language. While some attempts were made to assess quality by peer review and translating back the texts (some paragraphs are translated back to English from the national language), ultimately the quality of translations cannot be assured by the textbook editors and authors.

For the textbook to be relevant to the Southeast Asian classroom it uses Southeast Asian cases, examples, and exercises. This was achieved though mobilizing the resources of the network, and asking the academics to suggest and write up case studies of rights issues. These varied from debates about the Chinese lion dance in Indonesia to cases of trafficking in Malaysia. The textbook has a focus on issues relevant to the subregion, which is reflected in the chapter structure, with chapters on the environment, business, migration, sexuality, and political rights. The textbook is the product of SEAHRN, as it involves around thirty writers, editors, fact-checkers, and peer reviewers from around fourteen universities in Southeast Asia. It is also distributed through the network. The first two volumes of the textbook are widely taught across Southeast Asia.[14] They have proved useful to lecturers, graduate students, and even the civil society sector to explain key features of human rights and show relevant Southeast Asian examples.

Developing Lecturers to Teach Human Rights

A textbook alone does not guarantee that human rights will get taught, even though its format and local content make it easier for lecturers to teach human rights. There are still issues of how to develop a human rights curriculum, how to design classes, and how to adapt human rights to the discipline it is taught in. In response, the networks started a lecturer training program. As a standard four-day short course, lecturers were given a background and update on human rights, discussed curriculum structure and learning objectives, and also went over useful texts, classroom exercises, and methods of assessment. However, training lecturers alone does not guarantee a course will be taught. There must be curriculum approval for the course and also student interest; which are growing in the subregion. Human rights courses are not only found in law faculties but also as components of courses on politics, international relations, social welfare, and development.

A further challenge is the standard of teaching across Southeast Asian universities. With basic facilities, and in some countries a history of poor funding and marginalization, universities are not a venue for innovative thinking, or widespread participation. Rote learning and memorizing text books are still common. Many lecturers have not been taught to teach, and their only experiences of learning are classrooms where rote learning is the predominant pedagogical methodology. It is not only the content of human

rights which has to be learned, but the process of teaching, including learning activities which promote participation (say small group work), or innovation (studying problem solving, debating, or simulations). Learning about these are additional values for the lecturers in training, because they enable lecturers to be better teachers in any subject as they have developed their skills in learning activities and managing the classroom.

Developing Research

Research on human rights in the subregion was dominated by researchers based outside the subregion, or working for international organizations such as the United Nations, Human Rights Watch or the International Commission of Jurists. There is nothing wrong with this research as it is high quality, and has an impact. However, there are advantages for more research coming from within the subregion. There are obvious interests for academics and universities in the subregion, as university standards and reputation are often based on the research produced.[15] Part of the attraction of working as an academic is undertaking research, and academics throughout the subregion want to undertake this activity. Other advantages of having the universities active in research on human rights include the ability to engage with emerging issues. Research driven by international organizations or from universities outside the subregion tends to be prescriptive, they are responding to an already identified issue. Hence certain topics like trafficking, women's rights, and refugees receive much attention. But other topics may not receive attention because they are not as apparent. Having local academics working on local issues can open up issues to research. Further, local researchers may have the language and the access to reach topics which are not so accessible to international researchers. These points are overly generalized, and are not meant to imply that local researchers are better and are more in tune with human rights issues. Rather, there is much value in having a skilled and active local body of researchers in responding to human rights issues, and also in the prevention of human rights violations.

The networks are well situated to develop the capacity of local university researchers. In 2014, the project Strengthening Human Rights and Peace Research in Southeast Asia (SHAPE SEA) was founded by SEAHRN and AUN-HRE. The main program of this project was to fund graduate students, emerging academics, and subregional research programs in Southeast Asia.

In the first four years, around sixty research projects were undertaken including about ninety graduate students and academic researchers. During the implementation of this project, it became clear that academics in the subregion needed development in their research skills. Many academics had not designed and undertaken large research projects. While data collection skills were strong, the analysis and writing up of research findings were challenging for many researchers. Similar to developing the capacity to teach, workshops were run in methodology and research design. Support was given for the presentation of research findings at events such as the bi-annual regional conference on human rights,[16] or the variety of national forums organized through SHAPE SEA.[17] This project is still ongoing so the outputs and their impact as yet are not published. The ultimate aim is to have more academics publishing more research to a broader audience. The work of SHAPE SEA is complemented by the handful of human rights journals and growing number of human rights academics in the subregion.[18]

What's Next?

While SEAHRN has been important in establishing and energizing research and teaching on human rights, there is still more to do. The problem of academic freedom in the subregion needs to be addressed. Lecturers are still reporting that their administration requests them not to criticize the human rights situation in their own country when teaching human rights. Students still see human rights as a "political" and "sensitive" subject rather than a topic like any other. Importantly, some lecturers face harassment, security threats, and job insecurity because of what they say and write about some subjects. Much protection of academic freedom occurs at the international level, and can work successfully. But the subregional networks recognize that more should be done at the national level.

The success of a Southeast Asia network has triggered interest from neighboring subregions. Academics from Northeast Asia have piggy-backed on SEAHRN activities to have their own Northeast Asian subregional meeting. While it may be sensitive for Japanese, Taiwanese, Chinese, Korean and Mongolian academics to meet and discuss human rights in their own subregion, they can meet as an outreach of the Southeast Asian networks. As yet, the need for a Northeast Asian network has not been demanded by the universities, but there is a widespread interest in human rights at

Northeast Asian universities, though with little cross fertilization between them. Having a network would mean greater subregional student and academic mobility and closer cooperation, all of which are beneficial for the subregion. Through SEAHRN and AUN-HRE there are seeds for a Northeast Asian subregional university network.

SEAHRN Plus Northeast Asia meeting on human rights education, 2016, Bangkok.

As a final point, the next stage in human rights education at the university is mainstreaming human rights in the curriculum. Sometimes it is good to have human rights courses in disciplines where students have a specific interest (especially in law, development, and political science). But given that so few students graduate without having been exposed to human rights in the classroom, it is important that human rights be mainstreamed in the curriculum, appearing in all disciplines. Whether students are doing nursing, teaching, engineering, or physics, a knowledge of the basics of rights will ensure that there is less discrimination, more respect of others, better treatment of women, and a collective sense that the goal of education for communities, countries and regions is not just about creating wealth or knowledge, but ensuring a world fairer for everyone. This has not been achieved in Southeast Asia, but it is a goal which the networks are moving towards. Given that when the networks were established just over ten years ago human rights was a fringe topic, the realization of human rights being a necessary part of a university curriculum is now a realistic goal.

Annex A

INTRODUCTION TO HUMAN RIGHTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA:
A TEXTBOOK FOR UNDERGRADUATES (14 FEBRUARY 2018)
SOUTHEAST ASIA HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK (SEAHRN)

Volume 1:
Chapter 1: Fundamentals
Chapter 2: International Standards
Chapter 3: International Treaties
Chapter 4: Protecting Human Rights in Southeast Asia
Chapter 5: Protection: The International System
Chapter 6: Refugees and Stateless
Chapter 7: Migrant Workers and Trafficked Persons

Volume 2:
Chapter 8: History
Chapter 9: Women's Human Rights
Chapter 10: Children's Human Rights
Chapter 11: Sex and Gender Diversity
Chapter 12: Human Rights and Development
Chapter 13: Business and Human Rights
Chapter 14: The Environment and Human Rights
Chapter 15: Political Rights, Democracy and the Media in Southeast Asia

Endnotes

1 Both networks were founded and are currently based at Mahidol University.

2 IHRP and AUN-HRE. *The Mapping and Analysis of Human Rights and Peace Education in Southeast Asia.* Bangkok: IHRP. This larger study performs a country by country assessment of human rights and peace studies. In much greater depth, it shows the variety of ways human rights are introduced into curriculums, and the challenges faced.

3 A point such as this is very difficult to verify. Records on university curriculum are rare. While there are a number of noted human rights academics, not all of them taught, or had subjects on human rights.

4 Thailand's 1997 Constitution, called the People's Constitution, is also known for its strong human rights provisions. In the 1990s, three national human rights institutions were established (Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand); and there were

nineteen treaties ratified across Southeast Asia (nearly tripling the number of ratified treaties).

5 At that time, the degree was taught at the Office for Human Rights and Social Development (OHRSD) from 1998-2006, which changed to the Centre for Human Rights and Social Development (CHRSD) from 2006-2012, before becoming the Institute for Human Rights and Peace Studies (IHRP).

6 Examples are about teaching religion in Malaysia or Indonesia, teaching about sensitive historical events such as the 1966 massacres in Indonesia, or teaching politics in Vietnam or Laos.

7 This is under the Grant Program for Intellectual Exchange of the Japan Foundation.

8 The full list of people attending: Suzannah Linton, PhD, Faculty of Law, LL.M Programme in Human Rights, University of Hong Kong; Prof. Linda Briskman, Centre for Human Rights Education, Curtin University, Australia; Atty. Amparita Sta. Maria, Ateneo Human Rights Center (AHRC), Law School of the Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines; Prof Buddhadeb Chaudhuri, International Post Graduate Program in Human Rights, University of Calcutta; Mariko Akuzawa, PhD, University of Hyogo, Japan; Nguyen Thi Xuan Son, International Law Department, Law Faculty of the National University of Vietnam; Prof. Sharya Scharenguivel, Centre for the Study of Human Rights, University of Colombo; Ms. Hesti Armiwulan, Human Rights Studies Center, University of Surabaya, Indonesia; Yang Yumin, Research Center for Human Rights, Peking University Law School; Chia-Fan Lin, Chang Fo-Chuan Center for the Study of Human Rights, Department of Political Science, Soochow University, Taiwan.

9 More commonly known as the Pareto Principle, it has been found to be roughly accurate in networks such as Wikipedia editors, Facebook contributors, and so on.

10 This is the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, for more information visit https://rwi.lu.se/about/.

11 Well known textbooks include Henry Steiner and Philip Alston's *Human Rights in Context,* thought intended for law students. Manfred Novak's *Introduction to the International Human Rights Regime* is extremely useful in explaining human rights, but over half the text is about the European system. Good free undergraduate textbooks include Magdalena Sepulveda, et al., *Human Rights Reference Book* from the University for Peace in Costa Rica, and Wolfgang Benedek's *Understanding Human Rights.* Other important textbooks, such as Rhona Smith's *Textbook on International Human Rights* and Michael Goodhardt's *Human Rights: Politics and Practice* are excellent but out of the price range for many students in the region.

12 The textbook is available in multiple formats, either as individual chapters or by volume. In total, there are about five hundred downloads a month. The textbook is available in English, Burmese and Khmer languages from the SHAPE SEA website, with Vietnamese and Thai versions to be made available soon. For the files of the English version of the two volumes, please visit the following url:

Introduction to Human Rights in Southeast Asia: A Textbook for Undergraduates

Volume 1 - http://shapesea.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/HR-Textbook-Ed-1-Complete-low-rez.pdf;

Volume 2 - http://shapesea.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Textbook-Vol2-complete.pdf.

13 The textbook has been funded by RWI in Sweden, and The Norwegian Centre for Human Rights (NCHR).

14 There is no data on the number of courses or classes that use the textbook, but around eight courses are known to the author which use the textbook, and parts of it are translated and used in the Myanmar university curriculum.

15 This is even more so with many universities now engaged in academic rankings, where somewhere between 30-60 percent of a university's rank (depending on the ranking system), is judged by its research output.

16 The Conference on Human Rights and Peace in Southeast Asia has been held every two years since 2010 starting with Bangkok (2010), Indonesia (2012), Malaysia (2014), Bangkok (2016) and the Philippines (2018).

17 Regional Forums through the SHAPE SEA project have occurred in all Southeast Asian countries except Myanmar, Singapore, and Brunei.

18 The *Journal of Southeast Asian Human Rights* is based at Jember University in Indonesia, and Mahidol University has the *Human Rights and Peace Journal.*