

Human Insecurity in East Asia



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Contents

Tables and figures	vii
Contributors	x
Acknowledgements	xii
Abbreviations	xiv
Introduction – East Asia in a human security perspective	1
<i>Michio Umegaki</i>	
Part I: Living with human insecurity	19
1 Embracing human insecurity: Agent Orange-Dioxin and the legacies of the war in Viet Nam	21
<i>Michio Umegaki, Vu Le Thao Chi, and Tran Duc Phan</i>	
2 The ageing community: Human insecurity in a “developed” society	47
<i>Satoshi Watanabe</i>	
3 Choice of their own, choice from their need: People on the move in rural northeast Thailand	72
<i>Atsushi Watabe and Chaicharn Wongsamun</i>	

4 Rural changes and ageing in human insecurity in northern Thailand	100
<i>Liwa Pardthaisong-Chaipanich</i>	
Part II: Intervening in human insecurity	119
5 Landlessness and development: Policy purposes and policy outcomes in Southeast Asia	121
<i>Lynn Thiesmeyer</i>	
6 Policy coordination beyond borders: Japan-China environmental policy practices in Shenyang and Chengdu, China	144
<i>Wang Xue-ping and Yoshika Sekine</i>	
7 ASEAN migrant workers: From poverty to human-security-based competitiveness	165
<i>Patcharawalai Wongboonsin</i>	
8 Pesticide dependence in agriculture: Policy for productivity and policy for security in Viet Nam	191
<i>Tran Duc Vien and Pham Van Hoi</i>	
9 Creating a community: Ageing in urban Japan	211
<i>Daisuke Watanabe</i>	
10 Human security practices in a highland minority project	232
<i>Lynn Thiesmeyer and Seewigaa Kittiyoungkun</i>	
Epilogue – Research in human insecurity	260
<i>Michio Umegaki</i>	
Index	269

Introduction

East Asia in a human security perspective¹

Michio Umegaki

Human security: Redefining problems

The beginnings

The 1994 *Human Development Report* introduced the notion of human security, “freedom from fear and freedom from want”, for the first time as an overarching policy goal.² The document of some 100 pages begins with an admonition: “For too long, the concept of security has been shaped by the potential for conflict between states. For too long, security has been equated with the threats to a country’s borders. For too long, nations have sought arms to protect their security.” Then it follows up with the obvious: “For most people today, a feeling of insecurity arises more from worries about daily life than from the dread of a cataclysmic world event. Job security, income security, health security, environmental security, security from crime – these are the emerging concerns of human security all over the world” (United Nations Development Programme, 1994: 3).

Published as it was just a few years after the end of the Cold War, its appeal was lost in the bleaker prognoses for world order, such as that of Samuel Huntington’s (1993) “The Clash of Civilizations?”. The twin goals of human security appeared to be no more than casual remarks, empty of substance, to be made at the coming World Summit on Social Development in 1995, for which the report was prepared.

The report itself may largely be blamed for its less than remarkable

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reception. For one thing, it offered a list of some 24 “identifiable” threats to human security under 8 major areas, ranging from pandemics such as HIV to degradation of global ecosystems, drug trafficking, and international terrorism. Given the fact that each of these threats is itself the tip of a huge iceberg, the list has the ironic effect of leaving everyone wondering uneasily how long it would become. For another, its readers likely felt that the list of minutely itemized threats and the tasks necessary to deal with them would end by making the list even longer and more overwhelming, making the hoped-for improved world something much “more unattainable and unrealistic” (Tow and Trood, 2000: 14). Yet all of this is a familiar scenario in any effort to improve human life, as exemplified by none other than our own post-war record of the ways in which we have tried to overcome wars, poverty, hunger, or inequality. The report, in other words, appeared to be merely a restatement of the obvious.

The transformation

It may have been fortuitous that the notion of human security survived its initiation phase, as two events, among others, played a significant role in popularizing it and eventually turning it into a set of usable propositions. One was the formation of a small but vibrant network of a dozen or so countries, the Human Security Network, which held its first gathering in 1997. The key members, Lloyd Axworthy of Canada and Knut Vollebaek of Norway, who conceived the network, had had prior exposure to a “new kind of global politics” bringing about a “sweeping change in [a] short period of time”. The occasion had been the preparing, drafting, and winning of agreement on the Ottawa Convention banning landmines. The occasion was really a demonstration of a “winning formula” (Small, 2001: 231) – a coalition of governments, civil society, and non-governmental organizations – for a divisive policy issue where national interests and partisan interests of the military establishments, landmine manufacturers, and others would ordinarily have created an impasse. The two men then sought more opportunities to test and expand this “winning formula”.

At the meeting of the network in May 1999, which brought together some dozen or so member countries for the first time, Sadako Ogata, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, gave a powerful speech reflecting her ground-level observations during her work at UNHCR. She could not have been a better observer of human insecurity, as she had been responsible for monitoring, examining, and helping the refugees who were excluded from the very shelter, the nation-state, which is presumably built to protect them. Her speech, while echoing the *Human Development Report* by saying that human security is better grasped

“through its absence than its presence”, stood out for its use of plain, in place of abstract, language:

If to be secure means to be free from fear of being killed, persecuted or abused; free from the abject poverty that brings indignity and self-contempt; free to make choices – then a majority of people in today’s world do not live in security. (Ogata, 1999)

Another event followed the 1997 Asian financial crisis, which exposed the vulnerability of East Asian national economies to the wayward flow of international capital at a time when the region was basking in admiration for its economic success in the preceding decade. Japan’s Prime Minister, Keizo Obuchi, called for “an intellectual dialogue on building Asia’s tomorrow”. What is unmistakable is the plea for the protection of “the socially vulnerable segments of the population” in the light of human security. Instead of making an appeal to increase the production and investment capabilities of the region or of each nation in the region, Obuchi was emphatic about the importance of reinforcing people’s “capabilities” in coping with social strains such as those caused by the Asian financial crisis (Obuchi, 1998).

The Japanese government pushed Obuchi’s plea further by establishing the Trust Fund for Human Security in the United Nations in March 2000, which paved the way for the establishment of the Commission on Human Security a year later. These developments, while placing Sadako Ogata and Amartya Sen, the two icons of human security, in the forefront, also helped consolidate the notion of human security and improve its practical footing. A little more symbolic but no less significant was the renaming of one of Japan’s aid policy programmes in 2003, the Grassroots Grant-in-Aid which had its origin in the 1970s. Following the overhaul of the concept of Japan’s ODA in 2003, the government renamed it the Grassroots and Human Security Grant-in-Aid Programme for nations outside Japan. The programme is unique in that applications for grants are usually initiated locally and the screening of applications is handled and completed within the authority of local embassies. The programme honours the initiatives prepared by those on the very spot where the need for policy solutions is most acutely captured. It also promotes swiftness in response without the usual time-consuming review and decision-making processes involving the entire bureaucratic hierarchy, which often distort the picture of what is needed (Chambers, 1997).

Concomitant to these developments, the notion of human security also began to acquire a much wider forum. The UN Millennium Summit of 2000 is a case in point. The now famous Millennium Development Goals stand out for their closer attention to improvements in the conditions of

life, such as literacy, gender equality, maternal health, and the public health environment among others. When taken together, these goals no longer treat human life either as hinging upon a single factor such as an increase in national income or as secured simply by virtue of protected national borders.

Problems redefined

Subtle but profound shifts in policy orientation have transpired from all these unilateral and multilateral initiatives and activities. There is now, for one thing, an unmistakable concern with how resources are sustained, distributed, and mobilized within national borders. The 1994 *Human Development Report's* admonition – “For too long, security has been equated with the threats to a country’s borders” – led the way. Human security documents are littered with concerns about the *interior* of a nation. Perhaps the clearest statement of this is that human security “is concerned with how people live and breathe in a society, how freely they exercise their many choices, how much access they have to market and social opportunities” (United Nations Development Programme, 1994: 23).

Paradoxically, the attention to the interior of a nation makes it even clearer how individuals and their communities are exposed to threats to their security which know no national borders, such as global warming or pollution from distant origins. The lives of individuals or communities *within* a nation serve as a powerful magnifier of life-threatening or life-damaging issues whose origins may lie *beyond* its borders. This close attention, in turn, exposes the fact that protected national borders may do very little in protecting life within them.

This shift, in turn, leads to another: people are no longer viewed as part of a nation as such. There are people within a nation with higher or lower income, with better access or no access to such public services as hospitals or sanitation facilities. Even within the same income group, people and their lives do differ from each other in terms of the factors – education, health, and others – that determine the types and amount of goods and services needed to support life. In other words, how a nation performs, as measured by such indicators as GDP, savings rate, or life expectancy at birth, now matters less in the human security framework.

What matters more is how people live within the world that these and other “aggregate data” reconstruct and represent. This second shift suggests a need for a different kind of “indicator”, a *microscopic* perspective which reflects, and represents, the lives of many. Rob McRae puts it succinctly: the concept of human security “takes the individual as the nexus of its concern, the life *as lived*, as the true lens through which we should

view the political, economic, and social environment” (McRae, 2001: 15, italics in original).

This brings up a final shift. Individuals are no longer passive recipients, or beneficiaries, of policies made elsewhere. Individuals and their communities play the most critical and immediate role in capturing what needs to be done, which in turn makes them the best agents for protecting and improving their own lives. They live with the consequences not of policies as given but through their individual and/or communal efforts to devise ways by which to turn policies to their advantage in the very context of their lives, or ways in which to minimize potential adverse effects. This shift, though tacit in the 1994 *Human Development Report*, is clearly reflected in *Human Security Now*, the final report of the Commission on Human Security in 2003:

Human security ... aims at developing the capabilities of individuals and communities to make informed choices and to act on behalf of causes and interests in many spheres of life. That is why human security starts from the recognition that people are the most active participants in determining their well-being. It builds on people’s efforts, strengthening what they do for themselves. (Commission on Human Security, 2003: 11)

The question that this shift poses, then, is how to “reinforce people’s ability to act on their own behalf – and on behalf of others” (ibid.); how to empower individuals and their communities as the most active *participants* in making or improving their own lives.

A word of caution may be in order. The empowerment of people and their communities does not exempt the main actor in policy-making, the state, from its familiar “protective” role. The state’s obligations have always lain first and foremost in what have continually been held as the legitimate spheres of state action – building and maintaining the overall environment for promoting empowerment of people and their communities. However, there is an important reservation about this role. The “protective” role must be performed in a manner that reduces threats from “events beyond [people’s and communities’] control” (ibid.). A financial crisis, global warming and all the ills it triggers, pandemics such as HIV/AIDS, and deterioration of water quality are but a few such threats whose impact has no national boundaries. All of them require policy coordination among states, transcending the conventional norm of protecting merely their own “citizens”. The state’s new “protective role” lies in the promotion of cooperation with other states beyond the nation’s borders, and not simply in the protection of national borders.

Concerns with the interior of a nation, the resolutely microscopic perspective in capturing broader threats to human life, and the liberation of

people from their passive status as beneficiaries of policy are the three components underpinning the notion of human security.

Human security, thus constructed, helps redefine all-too-familiar policy issues and problems in a manner which presumes that more participants can join in the process of finding, devising the responses to, and resolving the issues. This redefinition of “problems” respects the knowledge that is developed and tested by people as they live and confront problems in the very specific context of their lives. As such, it reflects an understanding that people are not simply the beneficiaries of any given policy that influences their lives.

This redefinition of the problems also facilitates a mode of thinking in which the solutions can be sought in the *efforts* at removing their causes or moderating their impact, rather than in the *end products* alone. Such a redefinition is perfectly consistent with the view that, given opportunities and resources, people do exercise the “ability to act on their own behalf and on behalf of others” in the specific context of their lives.

Incidentally, this attention to the efforts more than to the ends does not signal a compromise with, or acquiescence to, persistent problems. On the contrary, it reflects a position that life is much too valuable to be cast aside for the interim period before the causes of the problem are removed, especially given the possibility that the “interim” period could be indefinite.

An example may help illustrate the merits of this attention. The problem of HIV, a global crisis of a magnitude matched only by that of global warming, has been with us since the early 1980s. The total deaths are estimated at over 25 million, almost the equivalent of the casualties caused by the two world wars.³ Immense energy and resources have been invested in developing a solution that would seem obvious – powerful anti-HIV drugs. Life without fear of mortality from HIV is the goal, the end product of the anti-HIV efforts.

However, this problem does not leave people untouched during the interim period before the intervention of a powerful drug or treatment. For those who have already been infected, estimated at over 40 million, the goal of any efforts must lie elsewhere – that is, in living with HIV. For them the “solution” must be found in the efforts to make their lives, however limited they may be, worth living. For the relatives and families of HIV patients, too, the thought of “life without fear of HIV” is not even a partial blessing. Questions and burdens of many kinds weigh heavily upon their daily lives: how to care for the patients for the duration of their lives, how to secure their lost labour resources, how to make peace with themselves while fighting different sorts of stigma, and how to prevent HIV from spreading beyond the family confines. The attention to these efforts helps us uncover, and give due credit to, the ample examples

where, prompted by these threats to a secure life, people devise ways – such as mutual help networks – by which to support life and make it meaningful in the *interim*.

HIV may be too extreme a case. Yet it is still exemplary of the basic attitude we need to sustain as we confront many, perhaps less threatening, problems where life needs to go on before the solutions to its problems arrive. The attention to the *efforts* helps us recognize that people may not need to give in to, or passively accept, many of their problems as givens, and that they invent innovative ways of multiplying the utility of limited resources as they refuse to yield to their problems. In other words, the attention to their efforts acknowledges that people can protect life from being totally compromised by even the most insurmountable problems.

East Asia viewed through human security

The notion of human security, thus understood, gives an alternative view of East Asia, and provides East Asia, conversely, with an opportunity to examine some of the key propositions derived from the concept of human security. With all its diversity, cultural, historical, economic, social, linguistic, religious, and political, East Asia defies any attempt at a simple characterization, and is a gigantic field for the observation of policy innovations. The point of departure for this sort of observation is the economic performance of the region as a whole. By dubbing it a “miracle” region as recently as 1993, the World Bank (1993) also rendered East Asia a region of relative cohesion.

East Asia redefined

East Asia⁴ is both rich and poor. There is Japan, which, after nearly 15 years of stagnation, still takes its place among the leading economies of the world. The Republic of Korea and Singapore are not far behind, having rebounded quickly from the 1997 financial crisis. Then there are Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos PDR at the bottom of the low-income group in the region. The dynamic developmental spirals behind the East Asian economic miracles of the 1970s and 1980s have eluded these countries. These spirals once linked the economies in the region in a manner enabling the “follower” economies to take advantage of market opportunities offered by those advancing ahead of them.⁵ Unfortunately, these three countries may have arrived on the scene too late.

The attention to the *interior* of a nation or region redirects our concern away from the issue of whether or not East Asia may successfully

integrate these three into the developmental spiral, and to another issue: that the rich–poor divide does not run only along national borders. Having had nearly three decades of outstanding economic growth, China still has close to 17 per cent of its population living on under \$1 a day. To be sure, for China as a whole the change from around 35 per cent living on under \$1 per day in 1995 to the current level may indeed be an outstanding achievement. Yet we are speaking of 17 per cent of a population of over 1 billion people, which is equivalent to the sum total of the populations of Viet Nam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar combined. Equally astonishing is another figure: 46 per cent of China’s entire population live on under \$2 a day (annual income of \$730), and this from a nation which claims an average per capita income of \$5,530.

The persistence of the income gaps *within* nations alerts us to the need for a cautious view towards East Asia. Even if the region as a whole may be achieving the targets set by, for example, the UN Millennium Development Goals, it is far from achieving the goal of ensuring a secure and stable life for a large portion of its population. This indictment, of course, should not be limited to East Asia, which actually is one of the very few regions with a remarkable record of success in reducing the poverty level as measured in GDP. It is rather an indictment of the mind-set, still prevalent, that economic growth is *the* solution to all the ills that poverty brings about.

A similar indictment, the “dethronement of GNP”⁶ voiced early in the 1970s, however, seems to have gone mostly unheeded. Figure I.1 may suggest why. Countries with higher GDPs tend to have less internal income gaps – as indicated by the Gini coefficient – than those with lower GDPs. With a few exceptions, such as the United States among the advanced economies and Viet Nam among developing economies, the figure suggests simply that economic growth should eventually bear the kind of fruit that can be shared among broader populations internally. If only by virtue of the absence of alternatives, then, economic growth has not lost its allure.

The issue that concerns us, however, lies elsewhere. Historical experience tells us that it may take 30 or even 40 years for most of the countries on the right half of Figure I.1 to reach the level of economic equality exhibited by those on the left. However, 20 or 30 years are really the length of one entire generation. This raises two important questions. What will life be like for the majority of the population during this generation-long *interim*? Are we to ignore the need to address some of the ills during this interim period just because the solutions to them are expected at a future point? It is one thing to speak of the need for the Weberian “stoicism”, long seen as one of the prerequisites for facilitating capital investment for economic development.⁷ However, it is entirely another thing to expect

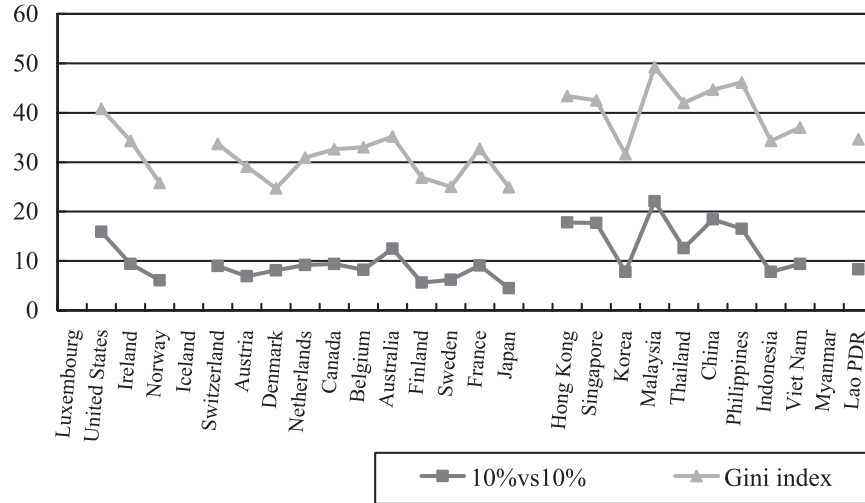


Figure I.1 Economic inequality (highest GNI countries and East Asia)
 Note: 10%vs10% – ratio of the income or expenditure share of the richest 10 per cent to that of the lowest 10 per cent.
 Source: United Nations Development Programme (2006).

the majority of the population to endure the interim period without sufficient “precedents” that such endurance does pay.

Beginning with Hofheinz and Calder’s (1982) *Eastasia Edge*, through the World Bank Policy Research Report (World Bank, 1993), many have argued that some East Asian countries, such as the Republic of Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore first, and then Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia, were such “precedents”. Yet the 1997 financial crisis uncovered the not-so-stable foundations of most of these “precedents”, and some of the figures cited above also offer counter-evidence to the “precedent” argument. The *interim* has not been completed, nor has there been any convincing sign of it ending, for the majority of East Asians. Life cannot be sustained and justified just because it appears to be on its way to improvement.

That, in turn, raises the second question: for whom are the benefits of economic growth policies conceived and prepared? Table I.1 shows the life expectancy at birth (LEB) at two different points in time in East Asia. At first glance, anyone whose age is currently above the LEB is presumed to be excluded as a beneficiary of economic growth. Not a ripple of economic growth may reach these people while they are alive. This portion, the elderly who are above or near the LEB, usually accounts for 2–7 per cent of the entire population. Considering also that even the age

Table I.1 Life expectancy at birth (LEB), 1999 and 2004, and percentage of population beyond or near LEB

	1999	2004	%
Cambodia	56.4	56.5	5
China	70.2	71.9	3
Indonesia	65.8	67.2	3
Japan	80.8	82.2	3
Korea	74.7	77.3	3
Laos	53.1	55.1	7
Malaysia	72.2	73.4	2
Myanmar	56.0	60.5	7
Philippines	69.0	70.7	2
Singapore	77.4	78.9	2
Thailand	69.9	70.3	4
Viet Nam	67.8	70.8	5

Source: US Census Bureau (undated).

groups under the LEB were born in the years when the LEB was lower than the current level, this portion of the population is very likely to become considerably larger. And for the majority in this age group, the elderly, the *interim* may not even start.

Furthermore, economic growth is not an isolated change towards a higher per capita income. It is a host of changes which often adversely affect human life. Here it may suffice to recall a familiar sequence of changes in rural areas as part of economic growth. Pressure for higher agricultural productivity, an indispensable ingredient of the economic growth recipe, sets off a series of changes. It usually facilitates the integration of small farmlands, their mechanization, and heavy reliance on chemicals. These, in turn, result in an increase in surplus labourers in the agricultural sector, prompting their migration to urban centres where employment opportunities are scarce, housing conditions far from acceptable, and the public health environment appallingly poor. For those remaining in rural villages, too, the transition to commercial agriculture is usually a mixed blessing. A heavy reliance on cash crops, while forgoing production for domestic or household consumption, makes their household economies vulnerable to fluctuations in the market prices of their products.⁸

All these changes may also disrupt the customary manner by which goods and services change hands among relatives and neighbours in support of their lives. Good will, and not a good credit rating, is the key means in meeting unexpected increases in demand for goods and services occasioned by a death or even sickness in a family. These and other informal, or extra-market, mechanisms for procuring the necessary goods

and services have to undergo profound changes. Economic growth, with all the accompanying changes in social life, is a change supported by, or entailing, immensely diverse changes that interfere with existing life, often making it worse before improving it. The critical phase for human life lies in this interim period before economic growth begins to improve it.

As stated in the 1996 *Human Development Report*, “If not properly managed, [economic growth could lead to people becoming] jobless, voiceless, ruthless, rootless and futureless, and thus [be] detrimental to human development” (United Nations Development Programme, 1996). Economic growth, in other words, not only counts out an older, and substantial, portion of the population as beneficiaries, but also threatens the foundations for its future beneficiaries. Of course, it may not be just an *economic* growth policy that forfeits the future for its own beneficiaries. Potentially, *any* policy that presumes a certain period for its results to emerge is bound to encounter a similar problem. What is unique about economic growth is that it requires a vast array of resources, material as well as mental, to be mobilized for a long period of time. The resources mobilized for economic growth are resources lost for alternative means of sustainable life.

To put it differently, a perspective is needed that captures people as active participants in the making of their own lives in the effort to survive the interim, and not as the beneficiaries of a policy whose outcome may or may not reach them. One human security perspective, “life as *lived*”, helps us capture the conditions of life during this important interim; and another, “empowerment of people”, helps us capture their innovative efforts under limited conditions for surviving the interim.

None of the problems mentioned above, such as income gaps within national economies, is unique to East Asia. They are prevalent elsewhere, especially in the regions that struggle to meet, for example, UN Millennium Development Goals. Ironic in East Asia is the fact that these problems are far more glaring than in most other regions, precisely because of the region’s exceptional economic success measured in GDP growth since the end of the Second World War.

Human security perspectives

These brief observations, aided by human security perspectives, may suggest the need for a shift in our overall perspective. A much-needed focus may be the conditions for sustainable life during what we may casually term the *interim* phase. Figures I.2 and I.3 are graphic representations of how economic growth may meet the welfare needs of people. Figure I.2, admittedly a gross representation, may be useful in showing our

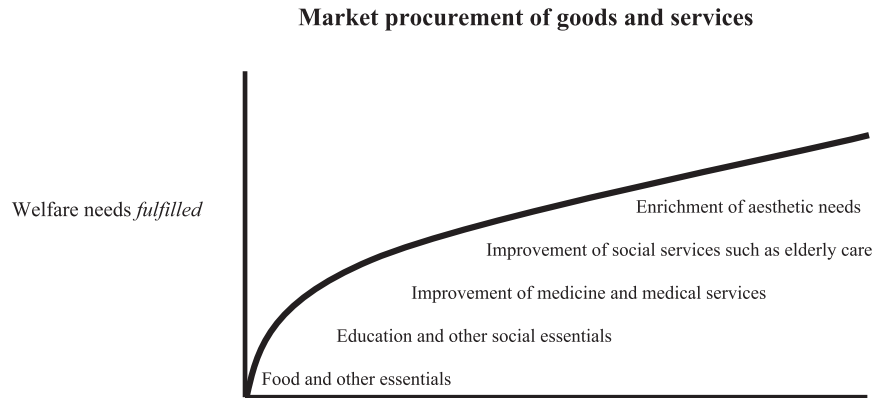


Figure I.2 Economic growth and welfare fulfilment

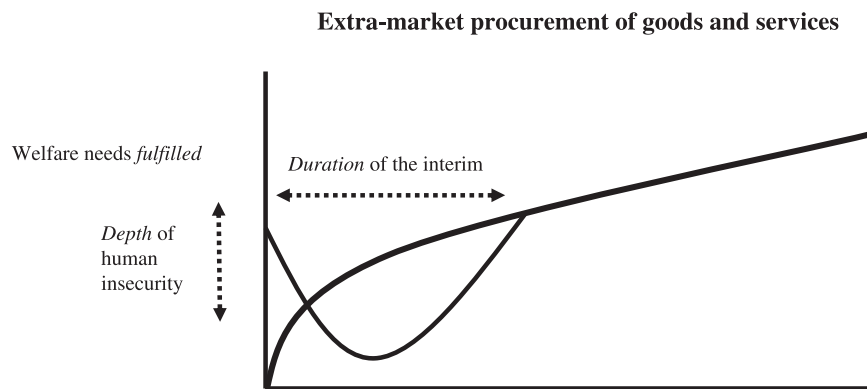


Figure I.3 Economic growth and human insecurity V-curve

conventional, and implicit, presumption that an increase in income improves life. The key assumption here is that the market functions as the mechanism for exchanging the goods and services that sustain life. Figure I.3, on the other hand, calls attention to the *interim* period, one of deepening human insecurity, as shown in the V-curve, before economic growth begins spreading its gains. This is the period when people may be deprived of their informal, or extra-market, mechanisms for exchanging the necessary goods and services.

This new focus should allow us to capture, for one thing, how economic growth either interferes with or improves the life of the society in question at different points in its progress. For another, and more importantly,

the new focus calls attention to the ways in which people confront economic growth, including its accompanying problems, with the limited resources at their disposal at any given time. The underlying proposition is that the majority of people, in any nation, live because of the simple fact that they have only the choice of living the life given to them, and not for the promise that their life would improve in “due time”. The fundamental differences among people, then, lie not so much in which country they live in as in their efforts and ability – or “capabilities” as Amartya Sen puts it (Sen, 1999, especially ch. 4) – to derive and multiply the kinds of “utility” they can attain from the resources at their own disposal.

Cast in the light of these perspectives, East Asia is no longer an exceptional region either for its economic success or for the obvious discrepancies between economic and other performance measured at national level and the persistence of many problems captured at subnational levels.

There are of course significant developments and characteristics which make the region different. The ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural diversity readily strikes even a casual observer as something that makes the region unique. Historic events such as the Viet Nam War also separate the region from the rest. The war left lasting marks on the region through, for example, the wartime special procurement demands which served to usher in the growth period of the 1970s and 1980s for some countries in the region.

The human security perspective, however, prompts us to see any development on the regional scale in a somewhat different light. The growth and transformation of ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) are a case in point. Originally a loose alliance among five Southeast Asian countries, it now embraces all the countries in the region. With China, the Republic of Korea, and Japan joining in as part of ASEAN+3, it has truly become a regional organization to be taken quite seriously. We may add to this a development towards an even broader attempt at regional policy coordination frameworks: the East Asia Summit, the first of which was held in 2005 in Kuala Lumpur. The membership includes India, Australia, and New Zealand in addition to ASEAN+3. The forum, initiated by Malaysia’s former Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad, is quickly becoming the stepping-stone towards a regional integration resembling that of the European Union.

From a human security perspective, we may consider two ways of evaluating this development. First, with an original commitment to honour the non-interference principle, ASEAN and its expanded version have always meant that member nations exercise a certain degree of self-restraint as to each other’s internal affairs. Yet the growth and expansion of the East Asia Summit are really the story of fundamental shifts in

policy orientation. The earlier preoccupation with protecting national borders has given way to one of controlling and promoting cross-border issues and tasks such as environmental degradation, labour conditions for migrant workers, and an orderly international trade and investment environment. To put it differently, the development of policy coordination among the region's countries has been in line with the human security proposition that the state's role is to reduce or remove the threats of "events beyond [people's and communities'] control".

A second view of this development comes with a caution. Whether or not the development may eventually lead to an East Asian community, it is still a very long way away. In the meantime, the more promising the development becomes, the more profoundly it influences the distribution of scarce resources and the more likely it is to instil among many, including political leaders, the familiar feeling that life will become better *in due time*. In other words, it raises the same issue of "life in the interim" that accompanied the growth-first policy orientation. This is all the more reason, then, for calling attention to "life as lived" as the magnifier of how people capture, and devise ways to cope with, changes for better or worse.

Overview of this volume

The following chapters help illustrate only a fraction of the immensely diverse and complex sources of human insecurity prevalent in East Asia. Many of them, such as the excessive use of energy resources in industry and chemicals in agriculture, have been inseparable from the growth drive in the region since the early 1970s. There are also sources of insecurity which originate in the very benefits of growth-oriented policies, such as rapidly ageing populations as a result of improved diet and public health environments. Even the penetration of the market economy, the evidence of economic growth, could be an unexpected source of human insecurity, as it often renders tenuous the traditional or customary relationship between, say, farmers and their land.

Instead of tracing the origins of these sources of human insecurity, however, the chapters call attention first to the local contexts in which these sources manifest themselves, and then to the normal conduct of life by the people. The attention to the local contexts reflects our primary concerns: first, to capture how these sources interfere with and threaten what might otherwise be secure and sustainable lives; and second, to seek incidents of innovative policy responses by individuals or their communities. There is another, more implicit, concern. Nearly all these issues are evidence, as pointed out earlier, that the beneficiaries of a policy –

say, that of economic growth or development – are not the same people as those who bear the costs of it. Attention to the local context is a way of illuminating this lack of correspondence.

Our attention to the normal conduct of life is a reflection of our understanding that threats to human security may not take the form of unusual or cataclysmic events, and that people are left with the choice of embracing dormant and actual threats of disruption to their lives, regardless of their magnitude, in a manner that does not betray the conduct of life with which they are most familiar.

Each of the contributors to this volume maintains one or more field-work sites, where he or she has sustained observations of, and in most cases been directly exposed to, the local manifestations of threats to human security and efforts by the people and their communities to take up their disruptive impact. From the vast desertified area outside Shenyang in northern China to the crowded urban district of Da Nang, Viet Nam, from a hillside tea-producing hamlet outside Tokyo to rice-producing villages in northeastern Thailand, the contributors have exposed themselves to the consequences of policies made elsewhere, higher up in the national policy-making hierarchy. They have situated themselves on the spots where policies aimed at improving the life of a nation interfere with and often disrupt the lives of those who compose the nation. While acutely aware of the need for long-term policies such as economic development or relief for the victims of pandemics, these contributors are equally aware of the difficulty of effectively communicating the problems perceived at the local level to the policy-makers at the national and even regional policy-making levels. Through their first-hand observations, they are aware that life usually cannot wait for certain conditions to be met, but is there to be lived with whatever one has.

The chapters are divided broadly into two parts. Part I, “Living with human insecurity”, illustrates the ubiquity of threats to a safe and secure life. It uncovers the deceptively simple fact that people usually live in the manner with which they are most familiar, and not in a manner specifically designed to avert or extricate themselves from potential or explicit threats to their safe and secure lives. By contrast, Part II, “Intervening in human insecurity”, sheds light on the more explicit efforts to moderate and cope with threats of disruptions to life. It suggests that a consensus on a particular threat still falls short of generating pressure to change normal conduct of life among people, and that communication needs to be promoted among the concerned parties, between the government and the people, in advancing policies for human security. More importantly, Part II calls attention to cases where local, and not governmental, initiatives in reducing human insecurity often emerge when the threats are captured within the purviews of local, ordinary people.

In conclusion

There is a simple folk song in Quang Tri, Viet Nam, born out of the hardship imposed by foreign colonial rule for those who lived life with whatever resources they had. A truly human security song:

Ten Eggs

January, February, March, April, and all the difficult months
Go around and borrow 1 quan [a local currency under the French rule]
Go to Ke Dien [Spring] market and buy a hen
Bring it back home, it delivers 10 eggs
The first: rotten
The second: rotten
The third: rotten
The fourth: rotten
The fifth: rotten
The sixth: rotten
The seventh: rotten
The three left turn into three chicks
One: Hawk dragged
One: Crow caught
One: Falcon ate
Don't moan about hard life
There is the skin, there grows the hair
There is the bud, there grows a tree.

Notes

1. This chapter was originally published in *Keio SFC Journal* (2008), 8(1), pp. 33–46, and is reproduced with permission.
2. Actually, the origin of these twin goals can be found in the sixth clause of the Atlantic Charter of 1941, prepared and drafted by the leaders of the United States and Great Britain.
3. For updated information see UNAIDS: Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (2006).
4. By East Asia I refer to Japan, the Republic of Korea, China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Viet Nam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, and Myanmar. Sometimes Taiwan is excluded, especially when relevant data are not available.
5. For a succinct account of this development see Watanabe (1989), especially chapters 2 and 3.
6. The director-general of the International Labour Organization, David Morse, used the term in a speech given in 1970 (quoted in Arndt, 1987: 92).
7. See, for example, Walt W. Rostow's arguments, which, despite initial criticisms for being merely a historical narrative rather than a theory of economic development, continue to dominate the conventional thinking that emphasizes the importance of savings and all else that instills and promotes savings (Rostow, 1960).
8. The literature abounds with discussions of misplaced hope for industrial-sector-led growth strategies, especially where employment opportunities are concerned. One of the earlier of these works is Morawetz (1974).

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Threats to human security do not necessarily take cataclysmic forms such as war or natural disaster. Nor does human insecurity exist solely within a suspended living environment like refugee camps. Often threats to human security are as subtle as a slow-rising tide, whose calamitous nature remains unknown till it breaks as a monstrous flood. The essays in this volume call attention to these less obvious threats to human security and how people and communities face them. Woven from the first-hand observations of life at various sites in East Asia, the narratives in these essays illuminate how uncanny the threats to human security can be.

East Asia, no stranger to regional wars or major natural disasters, is also known as the best performer in the United Nations poverty reduction program. The essays in this volume explore the interior of this dynamic and vibrant region and examine ordinary life as it illustrates the ubiquitous subtlety and obvious threats to safety and security.

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