

Reflections on Asian Human Rights Mechanism Workshop
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In May 2019, I had the opportunity to travel to Taipei, Taiwan to attend an advocacy workshop for an Asian human rights court. Hosted by the Chang Fo-Chuan Center for the Study of Human Rights at Soochow University, this workshop consisted of approximately 40 academics, journalists, civil society organizers, and practitioners working the field of human rights throughout Asia. Each panel began with introductions on the work surrounding specific human rights issues in specific countries and expanded into engaging conversations on similar issues and response efforts in other parts of Asia.

With several organizers including a judge from different people's tribunals in Asia, a constant theme throughout the conference concerned the successes and limitations of people's tribunals to deal with a range of human rights issues throughout Asian countries. Personally, I had the honor to present on a people's tribunal centered around an ongoing conflict in South Asia. I was able to engage in dialogue concerning the impacts of this particular tribunal, including the State's response to its findings and whether victim-survivors felt justice was served through the tribunal's work. These collaborative sessions made me think critically about the goals of people's tribunals around Asia, and whether they have the ability to apply enough pressure on States to elicit an acknowledgment or even an acceptance of responsibility, let alone a barrier to impunity.

Another thread throughout the conference was the collaboration and alliances amongst sub-regional groups. While law school classes in the U.S. tend to include ASEAN as a footnote due to its lack of a court system, in actuality, I learned that there is quite a bit of activism occurring in Southeast Asia to bolster ASEAN. In fact, the delegation from ASEAN countries envisioned ASEAN as a model for creating other sub-regional systems, on which a larger regional human rights mechanism could be constructed. This particular course of action was coined the "ecosystem

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approach” to developing regional coordination. It was interesting to learn of the alliances that already exist to bolster human rights advocacy at the sub-regional level, whether that be through a forum for national human rights commissioners or through a Nepali civil-society-led people’s tribunal on Dalit rights across South Asian countries. These alliances already in existence were viewed as the path forward to creating more sub-regional platforms, similar to ASEAN. The interactions between sub-regional platforms could then serve as stepping stones toward creating a regional system.

Overall, I was grateful for the opportunity to learn about the efforts already taking place in the region, and to directly engage with a range of scholars and human rights activists throughout Asia on the seemingly impossible task of forming a regional human rights mechanism for Asia. While the task is daunting and the end goal still looming, the participants’ general optimism and willingness to engage in difficult conversations throughout the conference not only served as an unforgettable intellectual experience but also solidified my own desire to pursue a career in human rights.

