

Asia Journal of Global Studies

FOREWORD

The papers in this issue were all delivered at the 7th AAGS Conference, held 17-18 March 2012 at Tokyo's International Christian University. This was the same location as the previous year's conference, disrupted the day before its opening by the 11 March 2011 earthquake/tsunami/nuclear disaster. The 2012 conference theme, "Humanity and Humanitarianism in Crisis," was chosen largely with the disaster in mind. At the same time, the call for papers also mentioned the global economic crisis, conflicts in the Middle East, and human rights issues, *inter alia*.

Michelle Hui Shan Ho discusses rumors which emerged in July of 2011, several months after the Japanese disaster began, to the effect that beef contaminated with radioactive cesium had found its way onto the domestic market. These rumors seem to have spread through television infotainment shows aimed at housewives, who do most of the food preparation. Focusing on one such show, *Sukkiri!!* (a difficult-to-translate exclamation meaning "to feel refreshed"), Ho follows the development of the "beef scare" from its inception, to the government response and its aftermath, and critiques the implicit audience and "community at risk" narrative (after John Langer). *Sukkiri!!* is an example of a "wide-show" (the pseudo-English phrase is used), a type of daily talk/news show known for sensationalism. Ho identifies a "fundamental paradox" in the position of the Japanese housewife, who is expected to "conform to the social order by complying with authority," but in the case of the beef scare, feels compelled to distrust government reassurances in order to qualify as a "good wife, wise mother" (thus reaffirming another kind of authority, that of traditional gender roles).

Yezi Yeo discusses the role of Japan's Self-Defense Forces during the 2011 "triple disaster," which saw all three branches (army, navy, and air force, or their equivalents) pressed into relief work. The resulting improvement in public relations-positive views of the SDF rose from 19.5 percent to 37.5 percent, with even greater gains in the directly-affected areas-suggests that "militarized humanitarianism" (as Yeo puts it) serves to assuage public fears of re-militarization and, perhaps paradoxically, widen the scope of possible military action. (The Berlin Airlift offers a precedent.) Following studies by Thomas Berger and Paul Midford on Japan's stance in the Cold War and Gulf War, respectively, Yeo interprets Japanese "pacifism" (a misnomer) as supporting a more active SDF, provided that this activity is limited to combatant roles. The paper's core is an analysis of PR material on the Japanese Ministry of Defense/SDF website, which show increased emphasis on humanitarian/disaster relief themes in 2011. Yeo describes this as a pilot survey, in anticipation of a later, fuller analysis of the PR effects of noncombatant operations by the SDF.

The need of refugees for legal protection and material assistance suggests a rights framework, as in the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (UNCRSR); and a humanitarian approach, which some criticize as inadequate or paternalistic. In an analysis of the refugee policies of Australia, Japan, and Malaysia, and their effects on refugees, Jera Beah H. Lego discusses how these states "have appropriated and redefined the terms refugee and humanitarianism" by avoiding the acknowledgement of rights in favor of more discretionary arrangements. One issue is the UNCRSR's narrow definition of a "refugee" as someone fleeing persecution on the basis of ethnicity, religion, etc., as opposed to a more generalized violence or disorder; another is the absence of any official mechanism above the national level for determining who is a refugee. (Note that Malaysia is not even a UNCRSR signatory.) By granting visas on the basis of "humanitarian" considerations, without formal recognition of refugee status, a state can present itself as compassionate, while retaining control over the number of those admitted.

The complex, overlapping territorial claims in the South China Sea mask a simpler geo-political reality-the rise of China, which has been aggressively enforcing its claim to some 80 percent of the region. Ha Anh Tuan points out that the usual focus on nation-states tends to neglect the interests of ordinary stakeholders, in this case primarily fishermen (along with their families, and others dependent upon the fishing industry). Focusing on the human security of Vietnamese fishermen, Tuan describes regular threats to their lives and livelihoods in the form of being fired upon, boarded, or arrested by Chinese authorities; the seizure of their ships, fish, fuel, and/or equipment; attacks by unknown vessels (but widely assumed to be Chinese) which routinely sink Vietnamese fishing ships and then speed away, without robbing them; and large-

scale encroachment by Chinese fishing vessels on Vietnamese fishing grounds. Tuan calls for bilateral/multilateral cooperation aimed at safeguarding the human security of fishermen in the South China Sea, through such measures as coordinated (rather than unilaterally-imposed) fishing bans, and agreements guaranteeing humane treatment for all captives.

In the final paper, William Ashbaugh and Mizushima Shintarou examine a recent iteration of the *Gundam* anime series, *Gundam 00* (pronounced “double-O”). To the casual viewer, this is a cartoon about giant robots, a familiar Japanese fantasy trope. In fact the titular “mobile suits” have human pilots-unlike, say, Transformers, which are sentient machines-and are thus closer in spirit to Iron Man’s armor, the bipedal cargo loader from the film *Aliens* (1986), the similar, weaponized models from *District 9* or *Avatar* (both 2009), or the much larger versions in *Pacific Rim* (forthcoming 2013). Within the wider “mecha” genre of hi-tech fantasy, the *Gundam* franchise is known for its relatively realistic, human-centered conflicts, as opposed to battles with giant monsters and the like. Ashbaugh and Mizushima show how the war-torn 24th-century setting of *Gundam 00* reflects the international politics of the mid-2000s, when the show was being written. The traditional antiwar theme of previous *Gundam* series is here directed at analogues of US militarism on one hand (the Gundam pilots are forced to reconsider their role as hegemonic peacekeepers), and Japanese isolationism on the other. As Adam Roberts’ *Science Fiction: The New Critical Idiom* (2000) points out, science fiction, despite its reputation for futurism, often appeals on the basis of nostalgia (an observation which goes far in explaining why the Gundams resemble armored samurai, complete with swords); to this we may add that, perhaps inevitably, it also comments on the present. In addition, a timeless, archetypal dimension may be glimpsed in the (inner as well as outer) struggles of the young protagonists who, as chivalric heroes, symbolize strength and hope during dark times. Let us conclude on this optimistic note.

Associate Editor

Bei Dawei

[Note: Editors for this issue were Derrick M. Nault (Editor in Chief), Brian David Berry (Associate Editor), Bei Dawei (Associate Editor), Iain Macpherson (Associate Editor), Rab Paterson (Associate Editor), Cesar Andres-Miguel Suva (Associate Editor), and Riaz Ahmed Shaikh (Managing Editor).]