

## Introduction

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Human rights are everywhere — in constitutions, in the courts, in the media, in international diplomacy and in the streets. Sadly, human rights abuses are also everywhere. Both sets of phenomena are intrinsically social. Human rights have their abusers as well as their enunciators and enforcers, and for every abuse there is a perpetrator as well as a victim - put more generally and structurally, factors that tend to undermine human decency, like poverty, tyranny and racism, create the possibility of abuses of human dignity which involve the attempted redistribution of disadvantage with added pain. Accordingly, sociological questions readily spring to mind when one thinks about human rights, questions such as:

- What is a human right in sociological terms?
- Are human rights necessarily or solely legal phenomena?
- Are human rights the only or the best way to protect human decency/dignity?
- What is the relationship between citizenship and human rights?
- How do different sociological conceptions of the state, economy, class, law, social structure, culture, morality and the person affect our understandings of the nature of the threats to human decency and dignity?
- Which substantive social-structural conditions favour respect for human decency/ dignity and which conditions threaten them?
- How might sociological knowledge be used to decrease threats to human decency and/or enhance respect for human dignity?
- Is respect for human rights essential to any conception of the 'good society'?

All this said, sociologists have hitherto shown little interest in human rights. In recent years a small but now rapidly growing number of sociologists in

many different countries have set about remedying this situation. But their still small numbers and geographical separation has meant that in the absence of a regular forum for discussion progress has been slow.

This special issue of *Development and Society* contains a selection of the papers given at a conference entitled 'Human Rights and the Social: the Making of a New Knowledge,' which was held at Seoul National University in November 2009 in a bid to try to speed up progress in this crucially important area of work. Several of the papers given at the conference have already been published in *Development and Society* and several more will be published in subsequent issues: papers already published: So, Alvin Y. 2010. "Post-Socialist State, Transnational Corporations, and the Battle for Labor Rights in China at the Turn of the 21st Century." *Development and Society* 39(1); Kim, Joong-Seop. 2010. "Toward Human Rights in the Local Community: Multiple Approaches for Implementation." *Development and Society* 39(1); Neary, Ian. 2010 "Human Rights' in the Discourse of Buraku Liberation: From the 1920s to the 1990s, an Initial Survey." *Development and Society* 39(2); Cho, Hyo-Je. 2010 "Two Concepts of Human Rights in Contemporary Korea." *Development and Society* 39(2).

The program of the conference was as follows:

Johan Galtung (Transcend Peace University, Norway) "Human Rights: From State System To Global Domestic Politics"

Han Sang-Jin (Snu) "Individual Sovereignty, The Confucian Challenge, And The Human Rights Community: Why Do We Need A New Sociological Imagination?"

Koen De Feyter (University Of Antwerp, Belgium) "Law Meets Sociology In Human Rights"

Judith Blau (University Of North Carolina, USA) "Human Rights In National Constitutions: A Few Examples"

Kim Joong Seop (Gyeongsang National University) "Toward The Implementation Of Human Rights In The Local Community"

Claire Moon (London School Of Economics And Political Science, UK) "Knowing About Atrocities And Suffering: What One Sees And How One Files; How One Sees Files And How One Files Seeing"

José López (University Of Ottawa, Canada) "Making Human Rights Ordinary In The Bio And Nanotech Era"

Cho Hyo-Je (Sungkonghoe University) "City Upon A Hill Or Castle In The Air: Two Concepts Of Human Rights In Contemporary Korea"

Kim Mikyoung (Hiroshima City University, Japan) "Zainichi Koreans In

Japan: Human Rights Or Citizenship Rights?"

Park Keong-Suk (SNU) "Considering Old People's Care And Citizenship In The Korean Context Of Politics Of Family Support"

Eylem Yanardagolu (Bahcesehir University, Turkey) "Influences Of Europeanisation Process On Citizenship, Communication And Human Rights In Turkey: Changing Perceptions And Implementations Of Cultural Rights"

Mathieu Deflem (University Of South Carolina, USA) "The Sociological Discourse On Human Rights"

Anthony Woodiwiss (SNU) "How Can We Make The Sociology Of Human Rights More Sociological?"

Koo Jeong-Woo (Sungkyunkwan Univ.), Kong Sukki (SNU), Chung Chin-Sung (SNU) "Measuring National Human Rights: A Reflection On The Korean Experiences"

Harri Englund (University Of Cambridge, UK) "Dependence As Freedom: Economic Rights And African Poverty"

William D. Li (National Dong Hwa University, Taiwan) "Developmental State, Human Rights And Migrant Workers"

Alvin Y. So (Hong Kong University Of Science And Technology) "Post-Socialist Party-State, Transnational Corporations, And The Battle For Labor Rights In China At The Turn Of 21st Century"

Ian Neary (University Of Oxford, UK) "Human Rights' In The Discourse Of Buraku Liberation From The 1920s To The 1990s: An Initial Survey"

Lee Chulwoo (Yonsei University) "The Law And Politics Of Ethnizenship: The Creation And Preferential Treatment Of Kin-Foreigners In Comparative Perspective"

Park Myoung-Kyu (SNU) & Kim Philo (SNU) "Politics And Discourse In The North Korean Human Rights Issue"

Finally and on behalf of the organizing committee, I would like to thank Dongha Medical Foundation (Chairman, HA Choong-Sik) for making the conference possible.

Anthony Woodiwiss, April 2011

