



Sreeram Chulia

International Organizations and Civilian Protection: Power, Ideas and Humanitarian Aid in Conflict Zones

London: IB Tauris, 2011, ISBN: 978 1 84855 640 0, 336 p., £59.5

By examining the case studies of Sri Lanka and the Philippines, this book investigates and analyses the major factors that affect the characteristics of the humanitarian intervention and relief activities of five international organisations - United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Save the Children, OXFAM, and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). In specific, the author attempts to examine the following hypotheses: international organisation that "face greater material demands and inducement from powerful donors or that compete harder for scarce funds are less proactive on civilian protection"¹ and "whose prevailing beliefs and norms privilege state sovereignty or whose bureaucratic culture and identity are more resistant to change will be less proactive on civilian protection".² In the author's analysis, power and idea (that are considered as the principle of rationalists who are seeking to discover the universal principles or conditions in international relations primarily based on an assumption of the rationality of actors as well as scientific methods and culturalists who stress the importance of people's perception and belief, and the interpretation of events respectively) are identified as two chief variables influencing the international organisations' behaviour. While general academic awareness on humanitarian activities predominantly has maintained the state-centred argument, the book mainly deemed that those five international organisations embraced the leading roles in civilian protection.

The first three chapters in this book discuss conceptual and theoretical issues. It firstly refers to the problem that the humanitarianism of international organisations has been in the shadow of the powers and the ideas, and it would weight to progressive structural theories in Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2. In addition, this work attempts to supplement the Third Debate of International Relations theory³ and to apply the IR theory to the practical field bases. It is mentioned that the qualitative methodology would be employed throughout the writing in Chapter 3.

Then, the author displays two empirical cases studies. What is remarkable in his empirical study is that the 'proactiveness scores'⁴ of five organisations were distinct between Sri Lanka and the Philippines. The author accurately demonstrates the reason why the same organisations present significantly dissimilar performance in the two countries by conducting in depth interviews in-the-field practitioners, referencing his experiences and providing material evidence.

Chapter 4 analyses the Sri Lankan intra-state war, where the proactiveness score of UNICEF was the highest and that of UNDP was the lowest. The Sri Lankan government has been a good pupil of the Washington Consensus in a sense that it formed intimate relationship with Western donor countries, and designated the rebel groups as terrorists involving Western's

-
1. Chulia, 42
 2. Chulia, 43
 3. The debate between rationalists and reflectivists, which include culturalists, is related to the epistemology of international relations. The author tries to combine those two theories in this book.
 4. The author utilises them as gauges of international organisations' activities to inhibit armed actors from violence against civilians.



implicit consent. This ambiance led the role of the international organisations to be restricted within relief areas except for UNICEF that was characterised as the child protection agency, raising its voice on the matter of child conscription.

Chapter 5 describes the local conflicts in the Philippines where OXFAM acquired the highest score and UNDP had the lowest one. The most dominant variable in the Philippines was the donor pressure from the US, Canada or Australia. Since OXFAM was independent from the pressure, it could proactively behave on abuses and violence against civilians. Other international organisations including UNDP were less proactive because of their strong bureaucratic systems or due to the political pressure from local government.

In the last part of this book, the author develops analytic discussions. In Chapter 6, the reasons why each IO had the different proactiveness level in two regions are illustrated. There was the great chasm in the score of OXFAM and UNICEF between Sri Lanka and the Philippines due to the fact that the 'idea' variables like culture or identity of those organizations worked inside them. Chapter 7 and 8 argue that the neutrality of IOs was widely exaggerated and the business of saving lives does not include protection of civilian from abuse and violence. The book points out that the humanitarian IOs in Sri Lanka and the Philippines commonly neglected local activists and displaced civilians who mostly needed their support.

Prominent contributions of this work come from the author's successful integration of his extensive experience in the field and theoretical and analytic study. His direct experiences make it possible to transmit the fact of the theatre of internal war and to dispel the myth of humanitarian works. Moreover, theories of political science that can be easily ignored in discourses on the field work are creditably employed. The hypotheses in the book deploy the principle parts of both rationalists and culturalists, which redress the Third Debate of IR theory. He neither adopts the examples for supporting theories nor struggles to apply unwieldy theories to his experiences. Rather, the author emphasises that the compatibility between empirical and theoretical parts can raise the value of this writing.

The authenticity to local residents and their lives is another valuable aspect of this book. Both intense criticism of the international organisations' bureaucratic attitude and the admonition on their ambiguous position between relief and advocacy activities derive from this adamant perspective throughout the book. It also rectifies the widespread notion that aid organizations save lives in emergencies and that any price is worth paying for it to continue. It has strong powers of persuasion not merely because of his field-work experiences, but because of his penetrating insight about the truths of local conflict areas.

The interview methodology, one of the main approaches of this work, may engender some problems of representativeness or the bias by interlocutors, but these could be inhibited by author's long-term observation and the cross-checking measurement. The quantitative method which is rampant among a majority of political scientists certainly has positive features in the research. This method, however, may be distant from *realpolitik* since researchers choose the measurable subject only and to distort the results by quantification. The qualitative research methods such as interviews (which are considered less scientific by some people) and enquiries of this book definitely demonstrate that it reflects the complexity of real humanitarian affairs.



This work deserves to be praised for the innovative product from the perspective of political scientists as well as practitioners. It encompasses a wide range of extant theories of political science and overcomes the theoretical limitation, and warns against lackadaisical attitudes of humanitarian organisations. Also, it reminds us that humanitarian activities must not be 'business as usual' and that the importance of the local civil society should not be disregarded in the field any more.

Junhyup Kim
Korea University, Seoul, South Korea