BOOK ANNOTATIONS

Platform Regulation: Exemplars, Approaches, and Solutions. By Pradip Ninan Thomas. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2023. Pp. xv, 119. $90.00 (hardcover).

<div align="right">Reviewed by Olaa Mohamed</div>

As information technologies become more entrenched in everyday life, Pradip Ninan Thomas' *Platform Regulation: Exemplars, Approaches, and Solutions* investigates the problems associated with digital platforms and uses case studies to explore regulatory solutions. Thomas argues that platforms should be regulated because (1) platforms control and could potentially misuse algorithmic power; (2) big technology companies lack competitors and behave like monopolies; and (3) global platforms need to be subjected to a harmonized global tax system to prevent them from evading taxes. To frame his argument, Thomas characterizes the platform economy as a form of 'curative capitalism,' in which data is the basis for value generation and is controlled by a handful of global companies. Furthermore, Thomas studies how the European Union, the United States, India, and Australia have regulated platforms. While Thomas provides a comprehensive view of these states' regulatory initiatives, he oversimplifies other issues in technology and overlooks the need for drastic forms of regulation to bridge the gap between innovation and regulation.

Concerning the European Union, Thomas focuses on the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which attempts to control local and international corporations that have substantial economic interests in data generated in the European Union. While Thomas points out some of the problems with the GDPR, he regards it as an exemplary framework for platform regulation and argues that it will continue to influence other frameworks internationally. Thomas focuses on the GDPR principles of the right to be forgotten and the right to portability, both of which he considers progressive due to the amount protection they provide to consumers.

The right to be forgotten refers to the right to have personal data deleted and is of particular importance when harmful outdated information is available online. Article 19 of the GDPR also provides a seven-part test to balance the right to be

forgotten with freedom of expression. The right to portability refers to the right to move personal data from one platform to another. Thomas argues that data portability fosters competition and strengthens the rights of data subjects by amplifying consumer choice.

While I agree that the GDPR's principles are progressive, what makes the GDPR truly exemplary is not just its substance but also its breadth. One of the biggest obstacles to regulating platforms is their global nature; however, the GDPR has managed to reach global platforms by focusing on corporations that interact with the E.U. residents, irrespective of where they are located. Other countries may look to the GDPR for its substantive principles, as Thomas suggests, but they will not be successful unless they are able to similarly subject global platforms to their policies.

Unlike the European Union, the United States does not yet have a comprehensive federal regulatory framework and is instead marked by sporadic initiatives. Some states have adopted or proposed their own privacy laws to protect consumer rights. However, these legislations do not cover the data that people generate while using digital platforms. Thomas provides many possible reasons why the United States has not comprehensively regulated platforms, including that technology simply evolves too quickly, and that tech companies lobby government officials. Ultimately, however, Thomas attributes the issue to partisan politics. Nevertheless, Thomas recognizes that after the 2016 presidential election, in which platforms proved very influential, the United States' stance changed from one of ambivalence to one of increasing regulation.

Though the United States continues to struggle with adopting a comprehensive federal policy, it has been more successful in attempting to regulate using antitrust law. The Federal Trade Commission initiated lawsuits against Google in 2020, and at least forty-eight states have sued Facebook. Democratic and Republican subcommittees have published reports on the monopoly power of Big Tech companies, and the Federal Trade Commission is retroactively reviewing all major acquisitions and mergers by Alphabet, Apple, Amazon, Facebook, and Microsoft over a thirty-year period. Although Thomas does not discuss antitrust law in other case studies, he regards it as a promising way to regulate platforms in the United States. Whether that is

the case, however, is questionable given that these lawsuits are relatively recent and still pending.

In describing India's regulation, Thomas explains that there is a dichotomy between regressive policies, such as the 2019 Personal Data Protection Bill, and progressive policies, such as the Equalisation Levy. Thomas argues that these policies are a result of the government's ambivalence about consumer privacy rights and prioritization of improving the economy and uplifting domestic companies. The Personal Data Protection Bill would have allowed the Indian government to access any consumer data through categories of exemptions. Thomas explains that it would have weakened individual data rights by blurring the line between personal and non-personal data. Since privacy advocates were concerned that the bill went too far in enabling surveillance, the bill was eventually withdrawn in 2022. The Equalisation Levy exemplifies the government's nationalistic nature and places a tax on foreign e-commerce operators that sell digital goods and services in the country. According to Thomas, the tax is a "specific response to tax infringements by Big Tech companies, and is an attempt to level the playing field and ensure that taxes are paid within the jurisdiction that these companies operate in."

While Australia is not a global leader in technology or regulation, Thomas includes it as a case study to illustrate how governments can regulate platforms indirectly. Indeed, Australia prioritizes protecting traditional news media from changes caused by platforms, but these efforts allow it to regulate platforms on a larger scale. In 2019, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission submitted the Digital Platforms Inquiry, which investigated and submitted a report on the impact of platforms on journalism concerning the migration of ad revenues to Google and Facebook. The report provided several recommendations, some of which the government has already adopted, such as the establishment of the Digital Platforms Branch in 2019 to monitor anti-competitive behavior of platforms in ad tech and online advertising. Although Australia's platform regulation is driven by the impact of ad migration on news media, the scope of the issues and recommendations has been broad enough to encompass relevant issues of competition and consumer rights in digital markets.

Thomas' arguments are most compelling when they are made in the context of each state's political history, views on

rights, and values. By comparing regulatory efforts in this context, Thomas challenges the reader to imagine how certain regulatory strategies would fare in states with different histories and rights traditions. To illustrate, Thomas describes the European Union as adopting a colonialist strategy aimed at establishing itself in the platform economy and carving out space for the protection of consumer data in transborder data flows amidst domination by U.S. platforms. Thomas also describes how the European Union views data protection and privacy as a fundamental right. The United States, by contrast, does not recognize it as such and is instead concerned with First Amendment rights. India is more like the European Union because it also views privacy as a fundamental right and values data protection. With such similar views, one would assume that the two might have similar regulatory policies, but the European Union's GDPR is progressive in advancing consumer rights while the Indian Personal Data Protection Bill is much more regressive. The GDPR's right to be forgotten and right to portability give consumers greater privacy protection and choice, while the Personal Data Protection Bill increases government oversight over consumer rights. Thomas argues that the bill prioritizes the government because the country has a deep history of state overreach and surveillance. Providing background on India's political history supplies the reader with the necessary knowledge to better understand these regulatory policies and come to their own conclusions regarding Thomas' argument. I agree with Thomas that the Personal Data Protection Bill is influenced by the India's political history. Yet that the GDPR focuses on consumer rights over regulatory oversight may be less a function of the European Union's political history and more that a body made up of multiple governments like the European Union may be more likely to agree on universal consumer rights than specific government powers.

Thomas introduces many issues created by technologies without giving them proper attention or fully explaining their connection to platform regulation. This oversimplifies important issues and makes the book hard to follow. For example, Thomas briefly discusses algorithmic bias to illustrate how platforms control and misuse algorithmic power, but he does not engage the topic in depth or explain the limitations of his discussion. In particular, Thomas argues that algorithms are political because they reflect and actualize some realities,

such as stereotypes of dangerous Black people, and can have profound consequences, such as increased criminalization. Thomas, however, talks about algorithms as if they just happen to exist and does not mention the software engineers and experts responsible for them. Algorithmic bias is a product of the social and economic backgrounds of the technical experts behind the technology, the accessibility of pilot programs to test users, the politics of those using the technology, and many other factors. By oversimplifying algorithmic biases, Thomas downplays the harms they can cause and fails to consider how those harms may be mitigated in the future. This is particularly important given that governments are increasingly relying on algorithms to make authoritative decisions such as welfare benefits determinations.

Thomas similarly glosses over the issue of state surveillance. Indeed, though Thomas introduces surveillance as a key historical factor in his case study of India, he ignores surveillance in the other case studies. This is misleading considering that the other states Thomas studies also surveil their residents. While India's surveillance technology may be visible, the United States is able to surveil its residents indirectly through many of the big technology companies based within its borders. From police departments that track and scour social media for evidence of crimes, to increased governmental reliance on artificial intelligence, the United States grows as a surveillance state with every new technological invention. Faiza Patel, *Advances in AI Increase Risks of Government Social Media Monitoring*, Brennan Center (Jan. 4, 2024), https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/advances-ai-increase-risks-government-social-media-monitoring; Steven Feldstein & David Wong, *New Technologies, New Problems – Troubling Surveillance Trends in America*, Just Security (Aug. 6, 2020), https://www.justsecurity.org/71837/new-technologies-new-problems-troubling-surveillance-trends-in-america/. By explaining a technological concern in one case study while ignoring that same concern in the others, Thomas' comparisons lose credibility. Such limitations must at least be identified to avoid oversimplification and confusion. Indeed, though Thomas enriches the book by weaving in important contexts such as history and rights traditions, he does his argument a disservice by glossing over other areas of technology law.

Another criticism of the book is that it does not adequately discuss the possibility of regulating platforms as public utilities.

Thomas briefly discusses this option at the beginning of the book but then dismisses it as a drastic measure. He seems to imply that governments and scholars should first explore other avenues of regulation, such as the GDPR's comprehensive and progressive regulatory framework, before turning to drastic measures. Thomas briefly returns to the discussion of public utilities towards the end of the book by summarizing some arguments for and against it. In particular, he summarizes an article by Lina Khan, the current Chair of the U.S. Federal Trade Commission, on regulating Amazon as a public utility due to its power as an intermediary and its many roles ranging from retailer to credit lender to hardware manufacturer. Thomas, however, does not critically analyze these arguments or illustrate how such regulation may play out. Contrary to Thomas' view, the argument that platforms should not be regulated as public utilities because such an approach is too drastic of a change is not justifiable. Platforms share many characteristics with other public utilities, and arguments for regulating them as such should be analyzed as potential solutions to the harms created by the platform economy. In the case of rapidly growing technology, drastic regulatory changes may be the only way for the law to catch up to, or even get ahead of, innovation. Thomas espouses a strategy of incremental change—a reactive response that will always be one step behind technological advancements. A drastic change could get ahead of these advancements and more easily place guardrails to protect consumers.

Overall, Thomas provides a holistic view of the landscape of platform regulation. His case studies are well-contextualized and enable the reader to better compare different regulatory frameworks and understand how regulation may evolve in the future. Although the book draws on many areas of technology law and many regulatory initiatives, it could have benefited from treating some areas, such as algorithmic bias and surveillance, with greater care and further exploring arguments for more drastic regulatory changes. In sum, *Platform Regulation: Exemplars, Approaches, and Solutions* provides a useful overview of the field and a starting point for comparing different platform policies for their effectiveness at controlling platform behavior and protecting consumer rights.

#*Help: Digital Humanitarianism and the Remaking of International Order.* By Fleur Johns. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2023. Pp. 272. $99.00 (hardcover).

REVIEWED BY AIDAN SALAMONE

The proliferation of digital technologies has transformed every sector of the global economy, and humanitarianism is no outlier. In #*Help: Digital Humanitarianism and the Remaking of International Order,* Fleur Johns starts from the premise that humanitarian actors have increasingly been practicing what she coins "digital humanitarianism" for several decades now. By this, she means that humanitarian practitioners are increasingly augmenting their practice with digital technologies, like mapping software, tsunami early warning systems, or social media trend aggregators. In #*Help,* Johns surveys a wide range of humanitarian actors and their relationships with digital "interfaces," which she defines as the boundary-spaces allowing communications between humans and digital technologies, like an application's user-facing display. Drawing on this research, she provides broad observations about both the world of digital humanitarianism and serious problems inherent in it. Johns argues, first, that "digital logic" is pervading nearly all aspects of humanitarianism; second, that the logic brings about "slippages, misreads, mismatches, and blind spots" between new practices and old frameworks and goals; and third, that although there are many new practices and characteristics of humanitarianism brought about by digital interfaces, many of the effects of digital logic are merely continuations or exacerbations of current conditions. Johns's argument is convincing, and her numerous case studies comprehensively exemplify the gaps between humanitarian goals and the digital practices developing throughout the field. Her theoretical framework is an innovative contribution, but it suffers at times from the difficulties of line-drawing between digital and analog "logic."

Johns's broad argument plays out in a winding seven chapters that each take on a different theme or aspect of digital humanitarianism and highlight, through case studies, how the prongs of her thesis play out in that area. For example, in Chapter 2 on humanitarian mapping projects, she demonstrates the pervading "digital logic" in different projects, the problematic effects of that logic, and how some of those effects are new and others are continuous with pre-digital humanitarian

practice. Throughout the several chapters, covering themes such as humanitarian mapping, data science, crisis-monitoring, and policymaking, the book provides not only a well-evidenced theoretical sketch of how digitization in humanitarian work causes problems, but also a valuable overview of examples of those current and future problems in the humanitarian world. The latter, though, is the most salient contribution of the work. Johns's dozens of case studies drill home the incompatibilities of supposedly forward-thinking digitization projects with humanitarian goals. At the theoretical level, on the other hand, Johns's over-exposition of the concept of "digital logic" can at times obfuscate her analysis of the projects she presents. This is because she tends to demonstrate what is "digital" about a logic by also analyzing "analog" converses, despite the world of "analog" being perhaps too-large to drill down. Nonetheless, it is an original and rigorous take on the undercurrents of digitization.

In the first part the book, Johns asserts that digital logic has proliferated in the humanitarian world. By digital logic, Johns is referring to the ones-and-zeros binary schematic that allows digital technologies to run. Digital logic "works with discrete units in binary relation: one and zero, on and off, something or nothing." Everything in a digital interface operates, at a basic enough level, in binary code. The basic units of digital systems are definite and offer little room for ambiguity. Digital interfaces can only handle definitely-labeled data. In contrast, analog logic focuses on degree, relationality, and continuum. Analog technology, like a watch, measures time as gears move in unison around a face, always relational based on distances between keystrokes. Digital watches present a number on a screen.

To relate this dichotomy to humanitarianism, in Chapter 2, Johns demonstrates how digital logic entered humanitarian mapping. She first describes the history of humanitarian mapping that goes from 18th century disease mapping to 19th century poverty mapping to 20th and 21st century flood mapping and vulnerability mapping, before turning to digital efforts. What made early mapping efforts "analog" in Johns's framework is that they were focused on relations of symbols in context—not precise labels of every feature. On the other hand, a more recent "digital rewriting" of mapping is represented by the Missing Maps Project (MMP), which includes a

collective of humanitarian organizations stimulating the labe-
ling and improvement of empty satellite image maps of diffi-
cult-to-access places through open-source mapping. It features
"a combination of remote and local volunteers to help create
digital maps" of those under-mapped areas by having them
label satellite imagery based on their personal knowledge. The
satellite imagery is digital by definition, and Johns highlights
the limits of digitization alone by pointing out the necessity of
volunteers to "supplement the digital formalism . . . by overlay-
ing [images] with anti-formal, analog knowledge forms." Johns
continues, "analog community knowledge positions the human
volunteer as a visible marker of anti-formalist correctives."

Johns describes MMP's project in this way to exemplify
the limitations that digitization brings to humanitarian work.
The humanitarian purposes of MMP are to give digital maps
back to under-mapped communities for their own use and to
enable humanitarian organizations to better assist such com-
munities. Johns suggests that this is not fully accomplished by
adding community knowledge to digital labels on maps as an
"anti-formalist," contextualizing "corrective." Digital labels on
satellite imagery add helpful context, but perhaps not enough
to make the maps truly representative of what local communi-
ties see on the ground. MMP's interface allows local community
members to label a rooftop as a grocery store or a dirt track as a
road, but it may leave out nuances of ownership, local cultural
norms about the usage of those places, or other deeper mean-
ing that should be ascribed to them. Furthermore, the identity
of those who input data into MMP becomes irrelevant because
digital interfaces bury the origin and source of data deep within
code "to ensure that they appear as frictionless as possible," and
the system does not care about whether the data is then used
to empower or not. Those who contribute data cannot control
what analysis the maps are used for or the way in which the
binary labels represent information. The point of the project
was to create digital resources for local communities, but MPP
also places them at the whims of black-and-white analysis by any
humanitarian organization seeking to quantify the sensitivities
and complexities of their environment into easily manageable
labels and symbols.

In this example, the most significant insight from Johns is
that digitization causes an unhelpful emphasis on presentation
and data-analysis over accuracy in maps; real-life people, places,

things, and phenomena are simplified and decontextualized into their easiest-coded and represented forms. Thus, it is perhaps unnecessary for her to elaborate, a bit confusingly, on the distinction between these digitized maps and both analog maps of old and the analog knowledge at stake in MMP. To Johns, 18th century mapping initiatives were analog in the sense that they were focused on relations of symbols in context. They were concerned with, for example, the relationship between cases of smallpox to determine drivers, not precise labeling of every feature to assert definite knowledge over the environment. However, to Johns, the analog knowledge that could be better represented by MMP is local community input. It is difficult to see why it is helpful to wrap these qualities together under the umbrella of "analog" as a means of distinguishing them from the "digital," especially since Johns herself concedes that the two are "hard to prize apart," and since we cannot assess whether either is "better" or more "accurate." What is helpful, as mentioned, is her analysis of the qualities of the digitization efforts in humanitarian work.

Another example of the insights and limitations of Johns's work comes from Chapter 4, which examines the way humanitarian emergencies are increasingly digitized. States and humanitarian organizations are now using digital interfaces, often in the form of dashboards, to visualize humanitarian crises and emergencies. These dashboards, because of the digital logic operating them, can only visualize data amenable to digital computing. This includes things like quantified "indicators" of hunger or insecurity. To improve their dashboards and their understanding of emergencies, these humanitarian operations need more and better quantified data. And to then alleviate the crises represented on the dashboards, spread welfare, and provide relief, humanitarians using these dashboards must then improve the underlying data.

Humanitarian operations, according to Johns, have thus become efforts to improve indicator visualizations on digital dashboards. Crises afflicting real populations of people become simplified into informational problems of data-gathering and data-improving, not the complex problems of human experience, law, policy, and economics that they tend to actually be. Johns supports this proposition by referring to Haze Gazer, a platform in Indonesia that overlays social media information and air-quality data onto maps in order to respond to wildfires

and haze conditions. Instead of focusing on the causes of and possible responses to fires and haze, it "refashion[ed] Indonesia's haze emergency as a problem of information and voice, [and] effectively marginalized a range of possible policy responses to prevent haze's recurrence." Another dashboard, HungerMap LIVE, plots food insecurity on a map based on scores derived from World Food Programme Data and machine-learning analysis. In doing so, it reduces actual, human experiences of suffering into a user-friendly interface: "[t]hose who are experiencing hunger are apparent only as embedded drivers of color change . . . from cool tones to a more alarming orange or red." This would be less concerning in a world where the information informing such colors were perfect, but instead, because of the limitations of digital technology, the data informing colors are whatever is most easily gathered and quantified into definite scores. They are not guaranteed to be the most accurate representations of hunger "on the ground." Beyond that, the simple characterization of success of humanitarian operations using HungerMap LIVE is now dependent on the changing of colors on a dashboard: "the primary emphasis . . . is on those who may be alerted and moved to action by this color change, not those whose suffering is implied by it." Those moved to action by dashboard indicators may legitimately help alleviate world hunger, but in doing so, their goals are not in total alignment with classic humanitarianism. Those working on the crisis are now managing a digital representation of the crisis, not specific humans' conditions.

Johns's insights form a rigorous polemic against the allocation of humanitarian resources toward moving zones from "red to green," which can result in systematic failures to relieve suffering. They stand in contrast to Johns's description of 18th century yellow fever mapping, which sought to reach inferences regarding the root cause of the disease and support informed policy decisions about combating it. The former method is geared toward assessing and simplifying crises, while the latter was focused on understanding the underlying causes of disease in order to address them. This difference is helpful in highlighting the limitations of digital interfaces as all-encompassing humanitarian tools. However, the fact alone that yellow fever monitoring fell into a broad category of "analog" technology seems a less practicable takeaway. Analog-driven emergency

management, on its own, is not inherently safe from the very same failures that arise with digital emergency management.

As this review details, *#Help* is an expansive work that acts best as both a theoretical mapping of the ways in which digital interfaces bear on the political, legal, and practitioner realities of humanitarian work and a practical survey of future and present disconnects between the practice and goals of humanitarian work brought about or exacerbated by digital technologies. To the former use, Johns's contribution is an original and meaningful start that can be pushed forward in future work. It is clear from Johns's work that digitization is causing disconnects and overall negative externalities due to the logics and assumptions that underly digital humanitarian interfaces. Johns's framework separating analog "logic" from the proliferating digital "logic," though, suffers at times from attempting to pin down the vast realm of what analog logic entails: seemingly, nearly anything that is not digital logic. Her repeated efforts to highlight the dichotomy between analog and digital logics in humanitarian work do not always seem useful. To the latter use, as a practical survey of ongoing digital humanitarian projects, *#Help* details dozens of case studies that demonstrate disconnects wrought by digitization to the detriment of those most in need of humanitarian relief.

Human Dignity in Asia: Dialogue Between Law and Culture. Edited
    by Jimmy Chia-Shin Hsu. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge
    University Press, 2022. Pp. xviii, 386. $41.99 (paperback).
                      Reviewed by Yingcan (Rachel) Sun

Legal scholars have been exploring the meaning of human dignity throughout history.

In *Human Dignity in Asia: Dialogue Between Law and Culture*, Jimmy Chia-Shin Hsu takes on an exciting task by bringing legal scholars of Asian jurisprudence to one table, while drawing the world's attention to those scholars' heated debate on human dignity within Asia's unique social context. Hsu first selects essays by local scholars from nine major Asian jurisdictions: India, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Singapore, and China. Each scholar leads the readers through the social revolution that has given rise to the unique legal understanding of human dignity in their

respective jurisdictions. Emphasizing the inseparability between religions and legal understandings of human dignity, Hsu then selects essays that introduce three major religious approaches to human dignity in Asia, namely, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Lastly, to illustrate religions' impact on the local understanding of human dignity, Hsu selects essays that situate the conception of human dignity respectively within Islam in Indonesia, Protestantism in South Korea, and Catholicism in the Philippines.

The jurisdiction-specific essays on the meaning of human dignity are in great depth and detail. Indeed, each essay presents the readers with a clear development of human dignity within the respective legal framework. More importantly, together, these essays allow readers to not only see trees but also a forest. As readers travel across different jurisdictions, they become active interpreters of the meaning of human dignity in Asia's ancient land. Although the concept of human dignity underpins the legal framework of all jurisdictions explored, the different historical trajectories of those jurisdictions present distinct challenges. It could be said that the concept of human dignity is a cultural constitution, short in words, yet vast and flexible in the meaning behind it, with its interpretation and implementation heavily relying on each landscape's social and legal codification and each landscape's generations to define. Local scholars are compelled to grapple with a range of dilemmas, including those of judicial minimalism versus radicalism, innovation versus tradition, and individual liberty versus state power. Eventually, different histories lead to various judgments and choices among scholars. Each essay draws on expansive legal and cultural sources and thus could be a valuable starting place for readers who wish to explore further the legal concept of human dignity in a particular Asian jurisdiction.

The subsequent essays discuss several major religious views of human dignity in Asia, the selection of which reflects Hsu's innovative interdisciplinary approach to human dignity jurisprudence. As the essays illustrate, major religious schools, including Confucianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism significantly shape the diverse understandings of human dignity in Asia. However, taking a panoramic view of the book, readers cannot help but see the striking uniformity of the human dignity conception in Asia– just like most of the jurisdictions in the world, Asia ubiquitously

recognizes human dignity as inherent and inalienable. Markedly, as Hsu notes, such a widely accepted conception is written into the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which demonstrates exceptional consistency across mankind. In the dialogue between law and culture, as the book title indicates, human dignity seems to emerge as a collective recognition of the intrinsic worth of every individual, regardless of race, beliefs, and social status, and a powerful moral compass for legal frameworks rooted in equality, justice, and human flourishing.

Readers would find the real impact of human dignity extends far beyond the mere theoretical framework. Importantly, at numerous historical moments documented in the book, human dignity turns out to be not only a standing ground for individual rights but also a safeguard against abuse of state power. Human dignity's transformative impact is illustrated by various examples in the book. In India, the advancement of the human dignity concept assisted lower-caste citizens in overcoming once-impenetrable social hierarchies. In Japan, the evolving constitutional interpretation of human dignity raised the inheritance rights of illegitimate children, releasing them from social pressure over which they had no control. In China, the indispensability of human dignity was a valuable lesson learned from the humanitarian crisis in the Cultural Revolution—the appeal to the concept then grounded the rights and interests of the many who were once disadvantaged.

Despite its numerous strengths, Hsu's book could improve on certain aspects. First, while the local scholars provide readers with just enough information about the major events leading to each country's modern human dignity jurisprudence, the separated chapters seldom talk to each other. Readers might want to see more cross-country connections being made. Thus, the book could benefit from taking a more integrated approach by spelling out for readers how different intellectual forces diverge and converge with each other. Second, although both the legal analysis in the first half of the book and the cultural analysis in the second half of the book facilitate the discourse, the sudden shift between the two may leave readers yearning for a more seamless transition. Consequently, an explanation of how the cultural perspective interacts with the legal perspective could better facilitate the reader's thinking process. Third, the book seems to lack narratives from Asian

countries that are less known to the world. Due to their special socio-economic situations, those countries are on a different timeline for their development of the human dignity concept. It could be worthwhile to bring the human dignity jurisprudence in those countries into the discourse, facilitating a more comprehensive comparative analysis. Lastly, multiple chapters mention how international jurisprudence, particularly of the United States and Germany, helps to shape human dignity in Asian countries. A thorough engagement with the Western theoretical framework for human dignity thus seems necessary to equip readers with a solid foundation for understanding its varied expressions in Asian societies. A question lingering in the background might thereby be answered, namely, why one of Asia's original theoretical frameworks, such as the Confucian conception of human dignity, did not end up predominantly grounding Asia's human dignity concept.

Scholarly inquiry into human dignity continues unabated. Hsu's book briefly leads readers out of the Western intellectual framework and into the Eastern way of thinking about history, culture, and law. Closing the pages, readers might still have not found a satisfactory answer to the question of what human dignity is. However, with the guidance of local scholars who have contributed to the book, readers truly feel the omnipresence of human dignity. The concept exists at the moment when judges employ legal language to speak for the powerless; when people jointly resist the constraints of tyranny and traditions; and when any person ponders the meaning of human dignity. Perhaps human dignity is never mere words on pages, but a collection of those moments. Hsu's carefully selected essays capture those precious moments in Asia, allowing readers to travel across time and space, and speak to the witnesses of history. This book is a gift to the future of academia. Inspired by a conversation with the past, readers might breathe more life into the heated ongoing debate of human dignity. They can either choose to follow the rich literature sources in this book and continue the journey of searching for the human dignity concept or to leave with the wisdom gained from the dialogue with the past and engage in the social life that has always been shaping the human dignity concept. The clash of legal, philosophical, and religious ideas did not end up in a common definition of human dignity, but it did increasingly bring an air of freedom to the world. Upon closing this book, the reader finds themselves considering how

the greed of a few for power and status may at times impede the common pursuit of human dignity, but humanity's natural empathy has repeatedly brought human dignity back into the public consciousness. When the human dignity of some is trampled, others are alerted to their own future. While Western philosophy emphasizes the inherency of human dignity, Eastern philosophy emphasizes that human dignity is derived from the social nature of human beings. The two ideas are not irreconcilable, for it is always through others that we find ourselves. The journey searching for the meaning of human dignity is also the journey leading to humans' common growth. As we have been interacting with each other, we have also been accumulating experiences and lessons. People from different territories all seem to have learned an important lesson, specifically, that human dignity is a prerequisite for peace and human development. The world has not fully shed itself of the fear of the pandemic at this moment, and the stagnant economy unfortunately has given rise to divisive voices. The arrival of this book is particularly valuable in today's world, as the book compels readers to face struggles for human rights and offers a new way of looking at the world—prejudice is never the cure for troubled times, but love and respect are.