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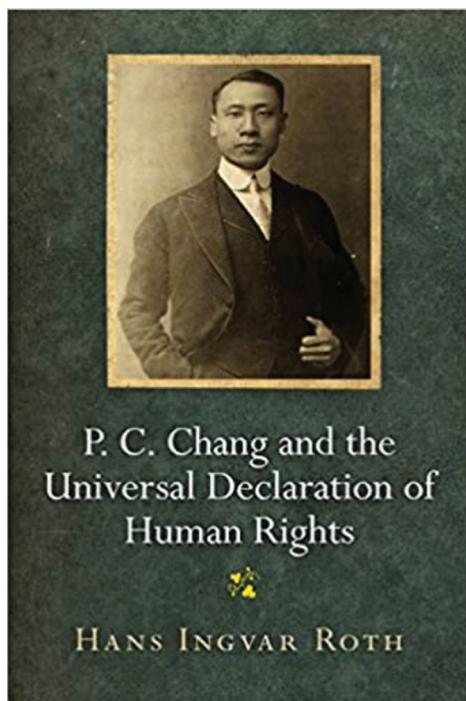
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## Book review

Chang Liu\* – *UCL Institute of Education, UK*

### *P.C. Chang and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, by Hans Ingvar Roth

Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018; 320 pp.; ISBN: 978-0812-25056-5 (hbk)



Hans Ingvar Roth's recent biography provides a unique view that investigates P.C. Chang's role in the development of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which was adopted by the newly established United Nations (UN) on 10 December 1948. The book reviews Chang's entire life, from his early childhood in China to his death in the United States, focusing specifically on his career in the UN Commission on Human Rights, where he was the representative of the Republic of China and vice-chairman. With a detailed review of the historical background and valuable recollections from Stanley Chang, P.C. Chang's youngest son, this book highlights Chang's contributions to the UDHR, the philosophy behind his ideas, his interventions at the United Nations and his relationships with other delegates. This is the first book in the human rights field that unfolds the personal story of P.C. Chang, one of the most influential contributors to the Declaration, and reveals the struggles and challenges that the UN Commission on Human Rights faced in the 1940s. Its unique angle contributes to the field by noting that the UDHR was not only a prominent UN document, but was also a work that was put together by multiple individuals with distinct cultures and life experiences.

Roth, a professor of human rights at Stockholm University, Sweden, starts with an introduction to Chang's early life in China and his later education in the United States. Unlike other members of the Commission, who were either lawyers or politicians, Chang initially pursued a career in education, as he was fascinated by Chinese art and philosophy. Although Chang later became a diplomat, his educational experiences played a critical role in shaping his character. Indeed, Chang's understanding of human rights and universality was greatly influenced by his experience at Nankai University, China, and at Clark University and Columbia University, USA, where he encountered different cultures and ideas and tried to find their common ground. This idea of a common ground was the key ideology that Chang proposed in the UDHR, where harmony and pluralism are underscored (126). Chang's advocacy of harmony was rooted in Confucianism, which calls for 'harmony instead of sameness' (126). Given how power and rights are often balanced, it is commonly assumed that human rights is incompatible with Confucianism, as the latter struggles to address how human rights can protect one from the abuse of the power. However, Chang's argument provides an interesting way to understand how a Confucian perspective could enrich and connect with the philosophy of the UDHR. Chang found that Enlightenment philosophers, such as Voltaire, shared many ideas with Confucius. The similarity is especially evident in the field of 'anti-feudalism, the right to overthrow an unjust ruler, and the importance of religious tolerance' (214).

This idea is associated with another contribution by Chang. He was cautious of using different 'isms' in relation to human rights, since, in his view, they could trigger ideological conflicts. For the sake of educating people, he suggested that the UDHR move beyond the application of ideological language and seek commonality across cultures. He was also concerned with the Eurocentrism of the UDHR and argued against the overuse of metaphysics in the draft, such as 'inherent, internal and inalienable' (164), the kind of language one finds in the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the American Declaration of Independence. Chang hoped that the UDHR would become a document that applied unbiased language and represented universal validity and legitimacy.

Besides presenting Chang's philosophy and his contributions to the UDHR, Roth also reveals some of his limitations. Although Chang was a great human rights advocate, he never took women's rights particularly seriously. What is more, Chang is understood to have held an 'almost archaic, hierarchical view of family' (242), which contradicted his liberal proposals in the UDHR. Inconsistent as Chang's ideas and actions sometimes were, such a discrepancy might be seen as the result of the sociocultural environment in which he was raised. Roth's elaboration on the political circumstances in China in the early twentieth century sheds some light on the reasons why Chang formed the values that he did. Yet it should also be said that other members of the Commission had their weaknesses. For example, French delegate René Cassin, with whom Chang often clashed, was a nationalist who believed that 'everything French was superior' and that 'colonies were a vehicle for spreading French values in the world' (182).

Overall, this book makes a great contribution to the field of human rights research. Too often, researchers today begin an article or book with a reference to the UDHR, yet omit any detailed discussion of the people behind it. This book details the philosophy and drafting process of the UDHR from the perspective of P.C. Chang. It presents the UDHR not only as a declaration of universal human rights, but also as a work constructed by many individual delegates with distinct personalities, education and cultural backgrounds, as well as limitations. By recovering Chang's life story, the book reminds readers that the UDHR is a socially constructed and

historically contingent document, produced by particular individuals at a specific point in time.

## **Notes on the contributor**

**Chang Liu** is a recent graduate from the MA in Early Years Education programme at UCL Institute of Education, UK, having achieved a distinction in a dissertation exploring Chinese parents' attitudes towards children's right to play in Shanghai, China. Under a poststructuralist paradigm, this study provides insights into the translation of children's rights from an international level to a local level. Chang Liu is currently applying for a PhD.

## **Declarations and conflict of interests**

The author declares no conflicts of interest with this work.