

BOOK REVIEW

‘Akira Iriye, *Global Community : the Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2004 (Paperback). Pp. ix, 246, Index.’

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This book is based on the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Lecture at the University of California, Berkeley, in the spring of 2000. Akira Iriye, who is one of the most famous Japanese academia based in the United States, teaches history as Charles Warren Professor of American History at Harvard University. This volume is among his recent works on globalization, globalism, and internationalism such as *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (1997), *The Globalization of America* (1993), and *China and Japan in the Global Setting* (1992).

The aim of the author is ‘to trace the historical evolution of international organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, since the nineteenth century, in particular during the last fifty years, and to show how they have contributed to the making of the contemporary world’ (p. vii). He tried not to catalogue international or-

ganizations but rather ‘to understand their role in the making of the world today’ (p. ix). In this sense, his study in this volume seems to have been considerably successful, although the space in this book may have hindered the author from fully analyzing the multi-faceted role of these international organizations mentioned above.

For Iriye, three principal reasons justify his approach; the steady growth of the international organizations in number and in the scope and variety of activities since the late nineteenth century; disregard of this phenomenon by most writings on modern world affairs; and ‘reconceptualization’ of modern world history with a fresh perspective on the evolution of international relations (p. 1). Thus, he focuses on the following six types of organizations in order not to be comprehensive but to be illustrative; those dealing with humanitarian relief, cultural exchange, peace and disarmament, developmental assistance, human rights, and environmentalism. His intention is to explore possibilities for world order rather than anarchy, and his point of view is that the ma-

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jority of the international organizations 'are by definition oriented toward seeking international order, cooperation, and interdependence' (p. 5).

Against this background, he seeks to clarify the relationship between international organizations and globalization, so that this study will serve to spell out the 'global community', which, for him, suggests 'the building of transnational networks that are based upon a global consciousness, the idea that there is a wider world over and above separate states and national societies, and that individuals and groups, no matter where they are, share certain interests and concerns in that wider world' (p. 8).

Chapter 1 examines the interaction of intergovernmental and international nongovernmental organizations with each other and with the existing states in the process transforming the nature of international relations. Iriye maintains that internationalism, which came into existence in as early as nineteenth century, 'was being fostered through international organizations working cooperatively among themselves and with state agencies' (p. 23). Moreover, 'the international organizations represented the conscience of the world' and 'global consciousness was kept alive' (p. 36) in spite of the wars and international conflicts during 1930s.

In Chapter 2, the author illustrates his strong belief in the continuous development of the process of 'global interconnectedness' (p. 40) even during the Cold War. Moreover, the awareness of global interconnectedness could be mobilized to provide the basis for postwar internationalism. While he admits the significance of the role and function of the United Nations since its birth, he rather

focuses on no less important role of nongovernmental organizations in the fields of cultural exchange, humanitarian relief, peace, human rights and environmentalism.

In Chapter 3, Iriye projects a distinct point of view as to the existence of a global community in the 1950s made up of international organizations 'beyond the Cold War', as the title of the chapter suggests. In the field of developmental assistance, in particular, exchanges between developed and developing nations were, according to the author, enhanced in parallel with the educational and cultural exchanges throughout the world even in the intensification of the Cold War. This is, as he argues, because international organizations 'were offering hope', goodwill and global interdependence despite the fact that the bipolar conflicts and power politics were creating an atmosphere of fear and insecurity (p. 94).

Chapter 4 relates to the 1960s when the world saw the Cuban missile crisis, the Vietnam War, and the Chinese-Soviet rift. Iriye explains that more than ever before, various parts of the globe were becoming 'interconnected' through the growing number of international nongovernmental organizations. For him, nonstate networks in many fields were being established even under the continuing intensity of Cold War. Moreover, the 'mushrooming' of the development-oriented nongovernmental organizations, particularly, was a distinctive feature of international relations during this period (p. 108). Behind the front scene of the Cold War, as he maintains, the consciousness of a global community had been certainly generated by way of intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations.

In Chapter 5, the author argues, through

the examination of the activities of intergovernmental and international nongovernmental organizations, that 'these organizations have played a decisive role – in some instances even more so than the sovereign states – in the global transformation since the 1970s' (p. 129). During this decade, as he observes, international relations entered a new epoch when the solution of problems 'outside of world peace and arms control' (p. 134) came to attract the attention of people; i. e., in the fields of human rights, humanitarian relief, developmental assistance, environmental protection, and cultural exchange. Thus, he concludes that the challenge of multiculturalism, or cultural diversity, during this period, promoted the necessity of cross-national and cross-cultural exchange and communication especially by means of intergovernmental and international nongovernmental organizations (pp. 155–156).

Chapter 6 deals with the generation of a greater global consciousness during the 1980s and the 1990s. The emergence of such consciousness, as he states, accelerated the sudden and quick rise of international nongovernmental organizations, in particular, against the background of the 'attention-grabbing interstate dramas' of interpower rivalries (p. 160) before and in the post-Cold War era. In addition, he maintains that it is not state governments but 'private initiatives' (p. 167) taken principally by nongovernmental organizations that, towards the end of the century, became more urgent and imperative for carrying out important programs and projects which needed financial and transnational support. In his opinion, the complex interconnectedness among different strands of globalization evidently

led to the emergence of a global community by means of networks of communication through intergovernmental and international nongovernmental organizations, whose 'only weapons are ideas, a sense of commitment, and voluntary service' (p. 193).

In the concluding chapter, Iriye addresses the direction and desirability of the phenomenon of globalization. He attributes the accelerating force of globalization in the twentieth century to the growth in number and scope of international organizations, stating that 'underneath the geopolitical realities defined by sovereign states, the century witnessed a steady growth of another reality – the global (and globalizing) activities by international organizations' (p. 202). In particular, nongovernmental organizations, he suggests, have led the way to 'a human community that would consist of various complementing organizations sharing the same concerns and seeking to solve them through cooperative endeavors' (p. 209).

Of the many evocative implications of *Global Community* for debates about international relations, it is worthwhile to highlight briefly the role of nongovernmental organizations, i. e., NGOs, the term of which he, consciously or unconsciously, does not at all use in the main text except for references in the endnotes of the volume. Doubtless, as Iriye observes, NGOs have been playing a significant and influential role in various fields of contemporary international affairs. However, it has not been established that they have been successful in striving towards the achievement of real and genuine globalization with a view to their own purposes and goals. The consequences should be judged upon the definition and perspec-

tive of the term, 'global community', as he admits. It may be therefore said that, in the course of the analysis of the historical development of NGOs, he could have described and shown the precise and desirable image of globalization of his own, regardless of his initial modest purpose of this rather compact research. Whether or not NGOs have originally intended to bring about the current situation, which the author positively appreciates in the book, still seems to be open to further argument.

Nowadays, there are numerous remarkably concise but instructive studies on glo-

balization, including Manfred B. Steger's *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction* (2003) and Martin Wolf's *Why Globalization Works* (2004), to name but a few. This book under review, with plenty of examples based on widely researched sources, must be among those recommendable ones not only for the experts in the field of international relations and other related international studies but also for historians, sociologists, and anthropologists, whose interest will also be in the sphere of consciousness of people towards globalization and/or non-globalization.