

Pok Yin Stephenson Chow

Assistant Professor

City University of Hong Kong

Obtaining his LLM in Human Rights Law (with Distinction) and PhD in Law from the University of Nottingham (UK), Dr. Pok Yin Stephenson Chow is currently an Assistant Professor at the School of Law, City University of Hong Kong. Dr. Chow's research focuses on diversity and international law and addresses topics such as ethnic conflicts, cultural rights and cultural diversity. He also researches on general themes of public international law such as unilateral acts and the use of reservations. In 2017, he was awarded the Young Scholar Prize from the leading UK-based peer-review journal *International & Comparative Law Quarterly* (ICLQ) for his article entitled 'Reservations as Unilateral Acts? Examining the International Law Commission's Approach to Reservations' (2017) *International & Comparative Law Quarterly* 335.

The International Court of Justice and Ethnic Conflicts: Challenges and Opportunities

Minority groups and stateless nations have traditionally been the targets of brutal state violence — sometimes resulting in extremely distressing situations. One of the major factors that contributed to their plight is that minority groups and stateless nations do not have standing before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), and are thus unable to bring the violating State accountable when political organs at the UN, such as the Security Council, fails to intervene. Their inability to do so also led to the misimpression that the work of the world court is irrelevant to ethnic conflicts and has created a void in existing literature on the contributions of the ICJ's jurisprudence to protecting minority groups at times of ethnic conflicts.

This article intends to fill the above gap. First, it will take note of the legal framework for minority rights protection post-WWI, highlighting, in particular, the issue of standing for minority groups before international courts. Then, it will explain the law on the protection of minority developed subsequent to WWII and the contributions of the ICJ in supplementing many of these rights. A special focus will be placed on the practical relevance of these rights at times of ethnic conflicts, and how, through the jurisprudence of the ICJ, these rights are translated into inter-State obligations capable of being invoked by a State on another. Third, it will explore the challenges and opportunities that the ICJ faces in expanding the law in this area. More importantly, it will analyse two promising developments in the area of international law that will dramatically increase the role of the ICJ in addressing ethnic conflicts - (1) the development of the law concerning provisional measures and (2) the articulation of the concept 'obligations *erga omnes partes*' – and how the developments in (1) and (2) have opened up possibilities for a new system of protection for minority groups, whereby minority rights violations could be challenged at the world court by a State not directly injured, in a manner that is, in some respects, similar to that which is provided under the 'minority treaties' regime imposed post-WWI. As the article further provides an analysis of the recent Order laid down by the ICJ in *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (The Gambia v Myanmar) (Provisional Measures)*, it argues that these developments will prove extremely vital to the protection of stateless nations.