

Book Review: *Rethinking Global Governance*. Author: Thomas
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Against the backdrop of stalled globalization and rising global challenges in the post-pandemic era, the significance and future of global governance have become core academic and practical concerns. Thomas G. Weiss and Rorden Wilkinson's *Rethinking Global Governance* adopts interdisciplinary approaches integrating history, geography, sociology, and anthropology to systematically examine the concept, origins, evolution, spatial dimensions, and practical operations of global governance. Rejecting over-reliance on theoretical construction, the book adopts a problem-oriented perspective and combines top-down institutional analysis with bottom-up social investigation. It traces the long-term historical roots of global governance, interprets its spatial logic, and reveals its close links to ordinary people's daily lives. While pointing out the book's limitations such as insufficient case studies, this review affirms its innovative analytical framework, multi-dimensional perspective, and profound insights into improving global governance. The work offers valuable theoretical references and methodological inspirations for rethinking and advancing the global governance system.

Keywords: global governance, interdisciplinary analysis, problem-oriented approach, bottom-up perspective

Overview of Content

The book is divided into five chapters, reflecting on the study of global governance from multiple levels such as concept, history, space, and vision.

Chapter one "The Global Governance Problématique", mainly defines its research scope from the perspective of systematicness, openness, and problem-oriented. The book quotes the French historian Braudel as saying, "The vocabulary of social science... It is difficult to have a clear and decisive definition" (Weiss & Wilkinson, 2019, p. 40). It also agreed to uphold the principle of broad, open, and inclusive in examining conceptual issues. The book makes the following demands: First, it focuses on the connection between global governance and current society. Second, it should be distinguished from international institutions. Third, explore the functioning of the global governance system. Fourthly, it analyzes from the perspectives of origin, evolution, and current development (p. 44). In addition, this chapter believes that researchers need to highlight the "governance" element in global governance, so as to trace the origin of the concept and find out the outline of global governance (pp. 59-60).

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Chapter two “Why History Matters”, mainly traces the generation of global governance from the perspective of time. The author believes that the study of global governance should not only be limited to the analysis of the changes in the world order after the end of the Cold War, but also need to examine the global management issues from a long-term perspective (p. 71). This chapter reviews the establishment of the British colonial system in the late 19th century, the formation of imperialism and European diplomatic relations in the early 20th century, and the change of the global order and the development of international organizations during World War I and World War II. The author believes that some elements of global governance have emerged in 1820-1850, and puts forward the following questions for analysis: First, the basic relationship of power and the primary criterion of organization. Second, why are all groups related to power and organization. Third, the elements of the world order, relevant institutions, and their operational mechanisms. Fourth, the functioning of them. Fifth, organization and management of global issues (p. 80). Finally, the book questions Fukuyama’s “final conclusion of history”. It is believed that considering from the historical point of view, on the one hand, we can understand its constituent elements more deeply and comprehensively; on the other hand, we can reflect on its conceptual problems.

Chapter three “Planetary Isn’t the Point”, mainly interprets the impact of global governance from a spatial perspective. The author retracing the evolution of global governance from a spatial perspective “can provide us with a more dynamic perspective to understand global governance and better analyze the evolution and survival of the world order” (p. 96). From the perspective of time and space, on the one hand, this chapter analyzes the establishment background, evolution process, and function of international organizations; on the other hand, it explores their influence on expanding the spatial scope of global governance, strengthening regional cooperation, and promoting international order. In addition, the book argues that geographical analysis of global population and size is an important yardstick for understanding global governance. The author emphasizes that it is important to consider global governance not only in terms of time, but also in terms of space (p. 112).

Chapter four “Global Governance in the Everyday”, mainly from the perspective of social acceptance, examines the operation of global governance. On the one hand, it is more difficult to analyze problems from the bottom up than from the top down, according to the author, who studies Breidjing refugee camp in Sudan, grain traders in Kana, and sex workers in Tijuana, Mexico. On the other hand, it points out that there are obvious deficiencies in most people’s understanding of global governance. The book points out that global governance may seem irrelevant to the daily lives of ordinary people, “but this supranational, trans-regional system of governance affects the lives of everyday people in direct and indirect forms” (p. 120).

Chapter five “Better and Better Global Governance”, mainly examines the operation of global governance. Combining the analytical approach of the previous chapters, the author emphasizes that it is not intended to illustrate the evolution of international order and global governance; “on the contrary, it uses global governance as a tool for analyzing global operations” (p. 147). The book believes that the “change” and “constant” issues of global governance can be explored. “Only in this way will we be able to understand the factors that drive changes in the world situation; and the impact of the continuation or alteration of this system on our individual daily lives” (p. 144).

In the conclusion part, the book argues that although the existing research results are more or less problematic, the contributions of predecessors should not be reduced. With the acceleration of the process of globalization, the issue of global governance should receive sufficient attention. In the perspective of time and space, with bottom-up and top-down analysis methods, the global governance is reflected. The author argues that

“our next work is to think about how to make global governance better and better, how to make it more standardized, and what the impact of human global governance will be” (p. 151).

Key Themes and Analysis

The analytical perspective of “Looking from the bottom up” is an important achievement of the historical revolution in the 20th century. Since the middle of this century, there has been a trend in history to sort out the development of human history from a global perspective. Nowadays, more and more emphasis is placed on the application of global historical view, social historical view, and anthropological analysis methods to historical research. Rethinking global governance, which combines global history, social history, and anthropological analysis, it not only has important academic value, but also highlights certain practical significance. Throughout the research methods and analytical perspectives of the book, it has the following characteristics.

First, this book emphasizes a problem-oriented approach rather than a theory-oriented approach. The author mainly analyzes the origin, evolution, current situation and development trend of global governance from the approach of “finding problems—analyzing problems—solving problems”. In terms of finding problems, the book finds that there are quite a lot of words and concepts about global governance, some of which are not rigorous enough, when searching literature and sorting out academic developments. It would be “unprofessional and embarrassing” (p. 10) to continue to conduct an investigation based on concepts and theories.

In terms of analyzing problems, the author puts forward that too much emphasis on conceptual construction and theoretical elaboration will cause the following three problems. First, the diversity of concepts and theories prevents us from reaching agreement; second, spending too much time on theoretical construction and conceptual discussion will neglect the investigation and analysis of practical problems; third, too much emphasis on the construction and elaboration of theories will ignore the general public’s acceptance of global governance and fail to make breakthroughs in terms of vision (pp. 10, 45).

In terms of solving problems, the book argues that we should change our thinking and explore more from the perspective of global operation and management. “Our aim is not to propose unique theories, but to better solve the problems arising from the consciousness of problems” (p. 12). Through the approach of “finding problems—analyzing problems—solving problems”, this book has a very strong awareness of problems from the aspects of research goals, perspectives, and methods.

Second, the author is committed to examining global governance from a systematic and structured perspective. To help us clarify the contours of global governance, the book asks three questions: “What is global governance? When did it start? What exactly is “global” about global governance?” (p. 24)

“What is global governance?” mainly explores its constituent elements from the structural and systematic perspective. After comparing the similarities and differences between global governance and international organizations, the author believes that global governance “is the sum of all elements that create and manage the world order” (p. 26).

“When did it start?” is mainly from the perspective of time to track the evolution of each element. By analyzing the governance systems of different periods and countries, the book finds the underlying elements of global governance. By answering the five questions raised in Chapter 2, the author argues that: First, it allows us to distinguish more clearly between the global governance systems of the 18th and 19th centuries and the post-World War II era. Second, it allows us to clarify the origin, evolution, and current status of the elements of global governance today. Third, it can be used to explore the elements that promote change in global governance (p. 80).

“What exactly is ‘global’ about global governance?” is mainly from the perspective of space to construct the relationship between the elements. The book argues that the effective operation of global governance is related to the integration and interaction of various elements in a particular space and time.

Therefore, global governance is closely related to the integration of the global order in a given time and space... Above all, it is important to grasp what it is made of and how these elements make the world work more efficiently. (p. 31)

Third, the combination of “bottom-up” and “top-down”. The author argues that global governance does not rely solely on top elites for top-down promotion; its acceptance and recognition by the people at the bottom are also very important. “It looks at events at the top of the global chain and how it flows down. But few scholars have paid attention to how global governance is accepted by society at large” (p. 33). Throughout the book, it mainly focuses on two aspects. First, the public’s understanding and cognition of global governance; second, the impact of global governance.

From the perspective of the public’s understanding and cognition of global governance, people used to analyze it from the perspective of elite management. But on the one hand, it is difficult for this perspective to detect global governance in daily life, and on the other hand, the current global problems need to pay more attention to the “managed”. As stated in Chapter 4 of this book, “When we discuss and understand global governance issues, we must not only discuss them from the perspective of managers’ management, but also analyze them from the perspective of ordinary people’s acceptance” (p. 119).

From the perspective of the impact of global governance, the author believes that researchers need to change their original research perspective and analyze the impact of global governance from the perspectives of economy and trade, medical health, social groups, and their governance, with the help of anthropological field investigation methods and cases of refugees, traders, and sex workers. “These cases show that residents of unstable communities that exist in the world are more likely to have a daily connection to global governance than those who live near global managers” (p. 123).

Conclusion

Inevitably, there are problems with this book. For example, there are too few case studies and too many explanations of conceptual problems. However, the defects cannot obscure the virtues, *Rethinking Global Governance* still has some innovations and redeeming points in the method and vision. It presents global governance under the holographic vision with multiple research perspectives and a broad space-time span, which is a cutting-edge and inspiring masterpiece.

References

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