Global Multi-Level Governance: European and East Asian Leadership

by César de Prado

Reviewed by Susanne Rentzow-Vasu

As the introduction to this book quite rightly notes, making sense of the international environment post-key events such as the Cold War and 9/11 is exceedingly difficult and incredibly complex. Realists (both traditional and neo), liberals, Marxists and Constructivists arguably only offer unsatisfying jaundiced structural perspectives that champion their respective pet key actors. Moreover, these different sense-making theories of global politics appeal to different constituencies: realism is normally well-received by military strategists; liberalism is embraced by diplomats and the business community; and Marxists and Constructivist thought appeals largely to social democrats and civil society organizations.

Motivated by Edward Wilson’s reductionism in the guise of “consilience”, de Prado in this book offers an ambitious attempt to reconcile the different analytical approaches to understanding global politics in an increasingly interconnected world. In a nutshell, de Prado offers a novel theoretical paradigm of world order in the guise of global multi-level governance. He argues that although inter-state relations are important for understanding global politics, to attain a fuller picture one has to also appreciate the flows between and across state-level politics. With the blooming of both sub-state actors and supra-state regional bodies buoyed by rapid communication technology, global governance has become influenced at various interrelated and networked levels. The actors at the three levels of sub-state, state and supra-state interact and influence each other – sometimes in contestation while at other times in cooperation.

The manner in which the argument is supported in the book is commendable. Through a thorough analysis of multi-level governance in the four domains of the political, advisory, economic and social in Europe and East Asia, de Prado cogently and systematically supports his argument. In each of these domains, he shows how governments, intellectual actors,
multinational corporations and universities interact in formal and informal ways through formal regional structures, Track-2 and Track-3 exchanges and economic agreements in order to synthesize their agendas.

It is in the analysis of Track-2 exchanges led by think-tanks and Track-3 interaction at the university level in the domains of the advisory and social that the book’s most valuable contribution is made. Both formal and informal economic and political governance in Europe and Asia have been comprehensively analyzed before but de Prado here has forged new ground with his work in Chapters Three and Five. Often overlooked, it may be argued that these two domains are the ones that lubricate the interactions at the economic and political level.

Although insightful and thought provoking, de Prado could have further strengthened and supplemented his argument with reference to the English School approach to global politics as best exemplified by the work of Hedley Bull and Adam Watson. With its focus on international society as opposed to the Spartan international system that characterizes other theoretical lenses by which global politics is understood, the English School would have been willing and enthusiastic bedfellows with de Prado’s argument.

The point raised here does not diminish the value of this book for anyone who is interested in discussions surrounding the Pandora’s Box of global politics. It is a valuable supplement to those aware of the issues as well as to those at the starting gates of the topic.