Global Governance: From Organizations to Networks or Not?

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Introduction

During the second half of the nineteenth century, activists concerned with the expansionist tendencies of industrial capitalism planted the first seeds of what we now call "global governance" by convincing national governments to hold conferences that led to an ever-expanding universe of international organizations. Around the same time, scientists and engineers invented the processes of "voluntary consensus standard setting" (VCSS) that have long been used to set industrial standards and, more recently, to establish standards for social and environmental integrity that are monitored by another constellation of new organizations. Both parts of this system were built on Western models. Today, when many of the most vital centers of industrial growth are in Asia, some observers believe that this "Western" focus on rules and formal organizations should be supplemented or replaced by an "Asian" system of less-formal networks that will produce and monitor pragmatic, ad hoc agreements (see the summary of scholarly, policy-maker, and activist views in Mahbubani and Chesterman 2010).

This paper argues that the outcome will be more complex. Asians have become enthusiastic participants in "Western" global intergovernmental organizations and international standard setting. At the same time, many Westerners in the leading sectors of the new global economy have developed a fundamentally network-centered vision of the next generation of global governance, a world "beyond bureaucracy," to use the words of Oracle standards guru, Trond Arne Undheim (2008, p. 1). These shifts have as much to do with the industrial specializations (and related sources of power) in different regions of the world than with fundamentally different cultural assumptions about governance.

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The (Largely) Western Origins of Global Governance

Global governance consists of two roughly equal parts. One is the system of agreements administered by intergovernmental organizations. The UN, including the specialized agencies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, lies at the center of this part, but does not encompass it, even though the major organizations that are not part of the UN system, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Criminal Court, are deeply entwined with the UN (Weiss and Thakur 2010). The second part, private global governance, is made up of regulatory standards agreed upon by combinations of firms, governments, professional associations, unions, and other advocacy-oriented non-governmental organizations (NGOs). While the number of standards created by such ad hoc coalitions has exploded since the 1980s (Abbott and Snidal 2009), most private global standards have been set by a single process ("voluntary consensus") within a nested structure of standard setting organizations that has existed for over a century. Since 1946 the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has been the peak association within this structure and, since the 1990s, ISO has become deeply involved in setting international environmental and social responsibility standards alongside the ad hoc coalitions. Meanwhile, some of the most prominent of the new private standard setters have adopted ISO's VCSS practices (Murphy and Yates 2011).

The early histories of both the UN system and the VCSS standard setting bodies are largely European. They go back to institutions created during the era of the "New Imperialism" and the "Second Industrial Revolution." The oldest of the UN's specialized agencies began as part of the "Public International Unions" that were designed both to facilitate the Second Industrial Revolution and to moderate the social harms that it caused (Murphy 1994, pp. 119–52). The non-governmental international standard setting bodies grew out of late nineteenth-century conferences of scientists and engineers connected with the lead industries of the day, especially electrical engineering (Yates and Murphy 2006).

Nevertheless, the original institutions of global governance were never strictly "Western." The conferences that created the *private* institutions of global governance included representatives of all the nations with firms in the new leading sectors. Thus, Japanese engineers took part in all of the early meetings on electrical standards as well as in the organizations that were ISO's predecessors (Yates and Murphy 2008, p. 17). South Asian engineers took part in international industrial standard setting from the 1920s onward (Verman 1973) and in ISO's early years, India took on a role that was a little bit less prominent than Sweden's, but more prominent than Italy's (Murphy and Yates 2009, p. 31). Similarly, in the *public,* intergovernmental realm, Asians have long been involved. From the UN's beginning, its Secretariat and the military forces it has placed in the field have included disproportionately large numbers from Asia.

Even so, the UN's Asian staff has largely come from the British Commonwealth, the legacy of a system of hiring designed by a British civil servant and student of

Keynes who favored people who shared his managerial and social/ideological preferences (Toye and Toye 2004, p. 61). For similar reasons, UN ranks, accounting procedures, professional codes, and procedures for identifying and punishing bureaucratic lapses all reflect governmental practice in the West and, officially, UN system Secretariats understand themselves to be impartial, rule-driven, and meritocratic models of Weberian rationalization.

Nevertheless, many of the outsiders who know the United Nations system best argue that, while UN staffers may *wish* to act in accord with these "Western" ideals, that rarely happens. The capstone volume of the recent UN Intellectual History Project calls these bemused outsiders the "Third" United Nations (Jolly et al. 2009, p. 7) as distinct from the club of state members (the "First" UN) and the UN Secretariat (the "Second" UN). The volume, whose authors admit to being part of this Third UN, argue that it is impossible to understand the work of the UN system unless one takes into account this informal network of the NGOs, independent commissions, external experts, scholars, consultants, private benefactors, and other individuals who work with the First and Second UNs. The Third UN and the similar penumbra of people connected to the UN's predecessors have been essential simply because members of the UN, the League of Nations, and the Public International Unions have never provided the organizations' staffs with the funding and independence that they need to do their jobs. The organizations have always had to rely on the voluntary efforts of others—from the sponsorship of key international conferences provided by nineteenth-century European aristocrats to the critical independent judgment offered by scholars like those involved with the UN Intellectual History Project. Looked at from the point of view of those involved in the Third UN, neither the club of member governments nor the secretariat that it oversees are particularly rational or rule-driven, let alone impartial or willing to judge arguments on their merits. In fact, the ultimate lesson of the History Project's Richard Jolly and Thomas Weiss is that the intergovernmental part of contemporary global governance is really just part of a larger transnational network of individuals and organizations linked not by rational self-interest or devotion to their professions, but by an attachment to the ideals that the UN represents: peace, social justice, development, and the like.

Similarly, a prominent historian of industrial standard setting, Winton Higgins, reminds us that the founders of today's VCSS organizations were "evangelical engineers" who, "in a spirit of internationalism (...) generated enormous enthusiasm around the project of optimising the application of mass-production principles, not least standardisation, to civilian industries" (Higgins 2005, p. 39). The centerpiece of the "private" side of contemporary global governance has always been much more a social movement than a rationalized bureaucracy (Murphy and Yates 2011).

Changes in Global Governance with the Rise of the East?

Nonetheless, even if the reality of global governance has always fallen short of the Weberian ideal, that ideal has been the goal of its proponents. As Higgins notes, the standards movement has always "evangelized for rationalization" and VCSS standard-setters often judge their success by the (surprising) degree to which their "voluntary" standards become mandatory (Olshan 1993, p. 319). Similarly, until quite recently, for most of the advocates of the UN and its predecessors, the *real* goal was to create a world government—limited, yes, but rational and modern, like the best of the welfare states (Weiss 2009).

Some observers believe that, with the rise of Asia, this will change. Asians, argue Simon Chesterman and Kishore Mahbubani, value pragmatism and "constantly adapt and change." The Asian approach to global governance involves "respect for diversity and an emphasis on consensus-building over conflict, practical solutions over lofty principles, and gradualism over abrupt change" (Chesterman and Mahbubani 2010, p. 1). The modal form of such governance is a network of powerful individuals, states, and organizations linked by common goals but with mutual respect for, and deference to, any disagreements within the group.

Not surprisingly, some advocates of the older "Western" ideal of global governance worry about the narrowness of the set of goals that all the world's powerful political and economic leaders might share. Perhaps all of them value economic growth and the liberal international economic institutions that foster it, but that, the critics say, is not the major problem of global governance today. The current problem is the need to find ways to "re-embed" the global economic order that liberal economic institutions have helped create in a broader set of social and environmental values, not only because those values are desirable in themselves, but also because, without that, the global economy will not survive (Bernstein and Pauly 2007; Ruggie 2008), something that some Westerners fear that key Asian leaders do not recognize. Some analysts even fear that China is attempting to create "a world without the West," to the detriment of the liberty and welfare of all (Barma et al. 2009).

At the very least, the conflict between "Asian" and "Western" values may have provided some Asian governments with a justification for limiting their contribution to international governance. Chesterman and Mahbubani (2010) report that Chinese and Indian leaders are convinced that just "by taking care of more than two billion people" they make a sufficient "contribution to global stability and order." Deng's admonition, "Tao Guang Yang Hui" ("Do not overreach") justifies this free riding. In the early 1990s, Deng used the phrase to explain why China should not be expected to provide aid to the least developed countries, "China couldn't and never could take this leadership. We are not capable" (quoted in Wang 2010, p. 17). Similar claims have been made about China's long refusal to boost the global economy by floating its currency and about both India's and China's reluctance to move forward with global climate negotiations.

Nevertheless, the political scientist James C. Hsiung (2010) believes that an effective system of global governance will develop despite current conflicts over "Western" and "Asian" political values (Yu et al. 2010, ix–xii). Hsiung argues that Confucian values played an important role in twentieth-century East Asia by authorizing and buttressing economically interventionist states that successfully overcame the legacies of foreign rule and domination. It was less that Western liberal ideals were rejected than that they "did not answer postcolonial Asia's immediate needs and concerns" (Hsiung 2010, p. 200). That does not mean, Hsiung argues, that Asian governments will fail to learn how to provide global governance effectively even if that requires taking on new global responsibilities that some neo-Confucians once seemed to reject. After all, China's current policies in Africa seem to be fostering growth and industrialization more successful than the ones pursued by Western donors for the last 50 years (Brautigam 2010) and, in that way, China may be doing more than any other power to embed the world economy in an *effective* global consensus that absolute poverty is unacceptable. Moreover, even if China has undercut democratic governments in order to pursue its potentially poverty-reducing economic policies, undermining democracy is not China's fundamental purpose on the continent (Carmody and Taylor 2009). Similarly, an early Western critic of Ban Ki-Moon's deferential, gradualist, ad hoc approach to running the UN (in contrast to Kofi Annan's aggressive, legalistic, rationalistic reform agenda) now praises Ban and his network of Korean, Japanese, and Chinese partners for their commitment to reducing global warming and "successful incorporation of the needs of the developing world into the [recent] global stimulus" (Williams 2009).

There is also evidence that China and the other new industrial powers of East Asia have become increasingly comfortable with the older, "Western" forms of global governance, although their comfort level differs by issue area. Jing Gu, John Humphrey, and Dirk Messner do see a difference between the institutions of global governance that create and manage global markets and those, such as the global development system, that are concerned with the social embedding of the new, truly global economy that is growing within them. In terms of market creation: "The WTO arena is accepted by Western countries and China as the institutional context to deal with conflictive trade interests (. . .). In this field, institutionalist optimism—that cooperation and common institution building between new and old global powers is possible—seems to be justified. (Gu et al. 2008, p. 288). But China rejects the development assistance norms promulgated by the exclusivist OECD (Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development), and is obviously going its own way in creating new norms that govern its assistance relations with Africa (ibid.).

Both Hsiung and Gu suggest that China's reluctance to operate within the traditional Western system of global governance vis-à-vis the developing world may have less to do with a preference for "Asian" forms of governance than it has to do with an aversion to the hypocrisy of the most powerful Western states whose actions toward the developing world have been anything but rule-governed. The newly powerful industrial states of Asia, they remind us, still identify with the

postcolonial and neo-colonized governments who look to the universal, legalistic, and unanimity-oriented UN as the only legitimate source of global governance. Perhaps, if the major Western aid donors were willing to accept the UN's coordination mechanisms (the UN Development Group and its country teams) as the institutions governing the global development system, China and other new major aid donors (India, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf States) might be much more willing to embrace Western models of global governance in this market-embedding arena.

The East in the World of Western Standard Setting

There is certainly evidence from the world of *private* global governance that Asian involvement with Western market-creating institutions (in this case, industrial standard setting) has led, over time, to greater Asian involvement with Western market-embedding institutions (environmental and social standard-setting).

Recall that, despite the Western-bias of the early international industrial standard-setting bodies, engineers from Asian countries with significant industrial sectors were involved from the beginning. Nevertheless, some Asian countries took a much less active role than others did. For example, despite Japan's industrial prowess, its companies and engineering associations were less involved in international standard setting than India's were until the late 1980s. Japan had no need to be. For decades, Japanese firms had organized themselves to produce to the different standards required by all of the national markets to which they sold their products, a strategy that few other Asian societies were able to emulate (Sturén 1981).

Ironically, Japanese firms only became deeply interested in international standard setting after ISO set a quality management standard, ISO 9000, that many of them considered inadequate. They already were leaders in the "customer orientation" and "continuous improvement" that ISO 9000 was supposed to encourage; following the ISO standard, alone, would leave them with a less effective quality management system than the one they already had. Yet customers in other parts of the world began demanding that suppliers be "ISO 9000 certified" and this new cost of doing business led Japanese firms, going forward, to become active in ISO's work in order "to formulate world standards that start from Japan" (Stortz 2007, p. 37).

China and South Korea also became much more actively involved in international industrial standard setting from the mid-1990s, quickly moving from being "standards takers" to "standards makers" in information technology (IT) (Dai and Kshetri 2008; Lee and Oh 2008). Both learned from Japan; from the beginning, Chinese and South Korean IT firms used standard-setting strategically, trying to gain advantage for themselves by assuring that their own standards became the global ones, a strategy that can be successful for countries with a large domestic market—that is, for China (Garud et al. 2002). Also beginning in the 1990s, exporters throughout Asia faced the same pressure that Japan did to adopt ISO

9000. That experience led them to seek an active part in the negotiations that created environmental standards (the ISO 14000 series), labor standards (the private SA 8000), and social responsibility standards (ISO 26000 and many NGO-sponsored standards of the ISEAL Alliance) based on the ISO 9000 model.

Certainly, many Asian firms—like firms elsewhere—involved themselves in those negotiations simply to weaken the result (Balzarova and Castka 2010). Nevertheless, familiarity with ISO 9000 was key to bringing Asian firms and national standard-setting bodies into the private processes that aim to re-embed global markets in a larger set of social norms. ISO 9000 is widely adopted throughout Asia and there is strong evidence that firms adopting that standard are much more likely to adopt environmental management standards and other social responsibility standards (see references in Murphy and Yates 2009, pp. 77–82). Surveys of Chinese firms suggest two mechanisms by which this happens. On the one hand, firms that are already using the ISO 9000 standard, find ISO 14000 and similar standards understandable and easy to implement, so they choose that route if they come under pressure from purchasers to do something about their environmental impact or other externalities (Cordeiro et al. 2010). On the other hand, the orientation toward customers and clients that ISO demands often leads to a broader stakeholder orientation and more active communication between suppliers and buyers, which encourages the transfer of social norms down supply chains (Song et al. 2010).

There are other reasons to believe that the ISO standard-setting process, in particular, might become central to the creation of effective global minimum standards for labor, the environment, and human rights. Among the groups attempting to set new global standards, ISO is the most widely legitimate because more Third World stakeholders are involved (Castka and Balzarova 2008). In addition, people familiar with ISO standards play important roles in high-tech firms throughout the world as directors of quality management or standard-setting (Murphy and Yates 2011). Finally, in high-tech firms at least, the engineers who head the standard setting divisions are often activists in global social and environment movements (ibid.) There is nothing new in this. Since the nineteenth century, the standards movement has been dominated by socially progressive engineers in the high technology fields of the day (Yates and Murphy 2008.) In fact, the process of industrial standard setting may always have encouraged private firms in the new industrial powers of the day to join in the development the social norms that made capitalism sustainable.

Finally, in many parts of Asia, including the Middle East, Vietnam, and China, the private institutions of global governance work hand in hand with a UN system that is trying to convince governments to embrace stricter environmental regulation, enforce higher labor standards, and provide greater social security (Murphy 2006, pp. 177–94). In a 2009 interview, the UN chief in China said that the role of the UN was to promote, "global norms and standards (. . .) help China become a full and active, concerned, global citizen, (. . .) [and] test out sensitive ideas – land reform for farmers (. . .) growth of civil society" and other policies to promote a sustainable economy (Malik 2009).

In sum, the current system of global governance may be working to assure that, despite the system's Western origins, it will continue in a more Asia-centered world.

The Western Embrace of Network Thinking

Nonetheless, there is reason to believe that global governance will shift toward the "Asian" model simply because parts of the current system have become obsolete. Oracle's Trond Arne Undheim (2009, p. 1) looks forward to a day in the near future when, "ISO is either revitalized or disbanded (. . .) smaller, leaner, and not under the UN [idea of national representation] anymore. Industry has an equal seat, and there is ample funding for SMEs [small and medium enterprises], especially from the third world, who want to participate." Undheim is typical of the many IT engineers who believe that the traditional "evangelical engineers" goal of creating technologies that can be as widely used and as widely interconnected as possible might best be achieved by companies making their standards freely and publicly available (Weber 2004, p. 238). Members of the new generation of engineers are likely to see themselves as part of the "Open Source" movement more than as "standard-setters," even if their jobs require attention to both. As David Clark, a leading Internet architect, famously put it, "We reject: kings, presidents, and voting. We believe in: rough consensus and running code" (quoted in Russell 2006, p. 104). According to telecommunications historian Andrew L. Russell, "This phrase (. . .) represents a jab at the competing set of standards for internetworking created by (. . .) ISO [whose] process lacked experimental value and flexibility" (ibid.).

Social standard setter Alice Tepper Marlin (2009), the developer of the SA 8000 labor standard, believes that this problem of ISO adhering to outdated rules and procedures, despite their perverse impact on the organization's larger goals, has been evident throughout the recent (2004–2010) negotiations over the ISO 26000 social responsibility standard. Instead of learning from social entrepreneurs who had actually created similar standards using an updated VCSS process, ISO followed its outdated rules. One requires that each national standards body develop an internal consensus among different stakeholders (firms, unions, human rights organizations, environmentalists) before it takes a position. This is the "UN" character of ISO that seems so anachronistic to Undheim. Not all national bodies enforce that rule, but in the ISO 26000 negotiations the USA body did. That was particularly unfortunate because ISO's rules required that many of the existing transnational social standard setting bodies (like Tepper Marlin's) be represented through the USA body simply because their headquarters are in the global financial capital, New York. Therefore, many of the people with the greatest practical knowledge of how to negotiate social responsibility standards were prevented from speaking in ISO 26000 meetings because their views did not correspond to the lowest-common-denominator consensus that could be forged within the USA group.

Many in ISO's traditional movement constituency, the "evangelical engineers" in the leading technological sectors of the day, understood Tepper Marlin's problem. Pekka Isosomppi, a Nokia standard setter who is now in also in charge of his company's corporate social responsibility efforts, hopes that ISO 26000 will lead to the wide use of auditable social responsibility standards created by some of the social-movement oriented national standards bodies like the one in Brazil, which is linked to the World Social Forum, the annual global NGO conference that aims to a more just and democratic world. Yet, he worries that the ISO standard will become the basis for disparate systems of lowest-common-denominator national regulation (Isosomppi 2009, p. 13).

Isosomppi agrees with Tepper Marlin (2009) that ISEAL Alliance of NGO standard setters combines the strengths of both innovatory "Open Source" and traditional ISO approaches to social standard setting: It fosters coalitions of businesses and NGOs that want to set new, higher standards in different social and environmental fields. At the same time, it promotes the consolidation of standards through its own voluntary consensus process among its members.

At least one of the engineers who embraces a marriage of VCSS and Open Source thinking as the key global governance, Oracle's Undheim, explicitly links this new way of thinking to "Asian" models in his *Leadership from below*, a book that promises to bring "Asian and Scandinavian influences together with the true logic of the workplace Internet into a pragmatic leadership framework" (Undheim 2008, jacket). Despite his questionable claim of having a uniquely fresh "Gen-Y" insight in *Leadership from below*, Undheim is on to something. Alfred D. Chandler (1962) famously argued that the structure of the great bureaucratic firms of the late nineteenth-century's Second Industrial Revolution coevolved with the corporate strategies that most successfully responded to the mix of technologies and the scope of the markets available at the time. S. E. Finer (1997) saw the evolution of the massive modern state as a response to the same technologies and the political battles among the social forces newly empowered by the industrial system. Hsiung says that in the colonized and neo-colonized worlds of East Asia similar models did not evolve due to the additional environmental constraint of Western power. Therefore, it is not surprising that a different model came to be seen as the norm in many countries. After all, this "Confucian" or "Chinese" model allowed countries under Western pressure to thrive. The model, Hsuing argues, continued to be respected even when, as is the case in some parts of Asia, the actions of Chinese capitalists, which were often supported by the Chinese states, were widely considered a form of sub-imperialism. (The brilliant Indonesian novelist, Pramodeya Ananta Toer [1960/2007] has written some of most insightful and sympathetic analyses of the origin and role of the hated yet respected "Confucian" networks in his own country.) Clearly, today, the technological, geopolitical, and market constraints faced by states and firms are very different than they were a century ago. We should expect the governance models that prove most successful to be very different as well.

Scholars of global governance need to be conscious of how tentative and unformed the systems regulating today's global economy really are. We especially

need to be careful about adopting concepts that could blind us to changes that may be taking place.

I am, for example, attracted by the conceptual clarification proposed by Steven Bernstein (2010), one of the scholars who has done the most to document and clarify the distinction between the market-creating global governance that is already in place from the market-embedding work that has yet to be done. Bernstein would have us focus on governance that really governs, on authoritative norms that are enforced by monitoring and sanctions, on what, some might argue, is a very "Western" version of global governance, but, importantly, a version of the concept that lets us distinguish between "private global governance initiatives" that are nothing more than the branding strategies of companies trying to appeal to a particular group of elite consumers and those nongovernmental initiatives that truly aim for universal compliance.

In contrast, another recent attempt at conceptual clarification, this one by a scholar who has long-focused on the global information economy, J. P. Singh (2009), emphasizes the ways in which "global governance" is a *process*. The process orientation attunes Singh to the *learning* that scholars focused on sources of authority of fixed institutions might overlook: He is particularly concerned with the conditions under which international actors learn to pursue solidaristic goals, especially solidarity with and among those who are less advantaged. Like Undheim, who shares a similarly "Asian" model of governance, Singh is able to uncover a range of successful "strategies from below" that have transformed social practices, even if they have not led to the complete embedding of the global market in a solidaristic compact that both he and Bernstein hope for.

We need both concepts, both lenses, both models in order to understand the kind of global governance that is actually developing and to pursue the kind that we would prefer to see. If the "Western" versus "Asian" distinction is used only as a shorthand to point to these different emphases (they are not, I think, different ideal types) of global governance, then it may be a distinction worth maintaining even if it has little to do with what has actually happened to or in global governance, either recently or over the last century and a half.

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