

the political authority and resources needed to meaningfully address pollution. This implies that China is more like many democracies facing similar environmental problems than one might initially assume. This point is developed in the final chapter analyzing cases of “performative breakdown” drawn from other countries, including the United States.

While this outstanding book will quite deservedly become required reading for those interested in environmental politics in China and beyond, this reader is ultimately left with the question of exactly how far Ding’s concept of performative governance really travels. While the comparative cases introduced in the final chapter are interesting—especially Wuhan at the beginning of the Covid pandemic and the Flint, Michigan water crisis—they seem to capture something different than what Ding so wonderfully documents in the Lakeville case. In Lakeville, we see officials bending over backwards in order to be seen as effective managers (even though they are not), whereas in Flint and Wuhan, we see bureaucrats who initially bungle their PR in the early phases of a governance crisis and later pay a dear price for it. Thus, one wonders how common the Lakeville scenario is outside of the Chinese setting. Conceivably, the combination of a deeply rooted “serve the people” ideology in political culture and a Leninist party-state both willing and able to punish officials that fall out of line sets China apart from political contexts in which bureaucratic inefficiency and indifference are an accepted (if also resented) fact of life. Thus, the extent to which public pressure directly translates into bureaucratic action (whether substantive or performative) is conceivably mediated by other factors. Whether China is a special case in this regard awaits future research.

The Grammar of Time: A Toolbox for Comparative Historical Analysis. By Marcus Kreuzer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. 180p.
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I was inspired to pursue political science by the comparative historical studies that promised answers to big questions of dictatorship and democracy, revolution and reaction, and wealth and poverty. The methods underpinning the study of those big questions mostly centered on reading and looking for patterns. The routine of a political scientist was to spend a couple of years reading great books, criticize them in graduate seminars, and emerge proclaiming to have found a better way. Today,

the approach has changed significantly. Now it is a field full of smaller questions, lots of data, solid causal identification, and cleaner answers. I myself have mostly stopped teaching the comparative historical classics. Why? Graduate students find themselves drowned in statistics and warned off the big, messy questions. History is now a mere repository of “data points.”

If comparative historical analysis (CHA) is ever to re-enter the mainstream, it needs a “grammar,” Marcus Kreuzer contends; that is, a good description of what it is, its various components, and what makes it distinctive from its rivals in purely quantitative social science. In his ambitious and deeply learned book *The Grammar of Time* (2023), he sets out to do this.

Kreuzer’s central contribution lies in his reframing of CHA as a way of doing social scientific research that oscillates between historical specificity and theoretical generalization. He introduces the concept of “unfreezing” history and geography, encouraging scholars to treat time and space as dynamic rather than static categories. This approach helps researchers move beyond reductionist frameworks and engage with the fluidity of historical processes. By emphasizing the need to contextualize events without losing sight of broader patterns, Kreuzer assembles a toolkit that is at once flexible and theoretically robust.

One particularly noteworthy feature of the book is its exploration of how CHA serves two purposes: hypothesis generation (exploration) and hypothesis evaluation/testing (assessment). Kreuzer argues that the dynamic nature of history requires that researchers continuously update their research questions and frameworks, making CHA an inherently iterative methodology.

Kreuzer tells us that we need to think more broadly about research design and move beyond a narrow focus on the technical and confirmatory parts of methodology. “This broadening recognizes that focusing exclusively on causal inference techniques diverts attention from the research tasks required to identify interesting macro-historical question.” (p. 140) The strength of CHA refocuses the scholar’s attention on investigating, exploring, identifying patterns, developing concepts, “and conjecturing about possible explanations.” Only in this way will social science be able to formulate new and theoretically vital research questions, specify concepts, avoid boredom, and pay close attention to nonlinear causal processes. No doubt, this process is messier than what he labels “variable-based analysis.” To his credit, Kreuzer sorts through how CHA is done and labels its parts—what else could a grammar do?

Another strength of the book is its interdisciplinary scope. By integrating insights from political science, history, psychology, biology, and sociology, Kreuzer bridges

disciplinary divides, making the book a valuable resource for a broad group of scholars. His emphasis on methodological pluralism is particularly noteworthy, as it invites researchers to combine qualitative and quantitative approaches while remaining sensitive to the nuances of historical context.

Kreuzer also includes online resources, an annotated bibliography, quizzes, and advanced exercises that enhance the book's value for teaching. These tools make it an exceptionally useful resource for graduate students and instructors teaching courses on comparative historical methods. Historians might not appreciate its methodological and philosophical deep dives, and statistical purists might find it too mushy, but that is unavoidable in such a spirited defense of CHA. It must be emphasized that the author is not a mushy thinker. He avoids cheap shots against purely statistical and static models, cleverly pointing to the advantages of CHA and what good comparative historical researchers actually do that makes their work indispensable.

At various points in the book, Kreuzer illustrates his “grammar” through an extended discussion of the history of the adoption of proportional representation electoral systems. He does the same with the literature on populism. The pairing of concepts and methods with examples is very effective, and the reader is left wishing he had done this more frequently. The examples provide necessary touchstones when the discussion tends to abstraction—a “toolbox” should be a bit more user-friendly.

Indeed, my only criticism deals with the book's “user-friendliness.” This ambitious text is a “grammar,” meaning it attaches names and labels to the various components and techniques of CHA even where the original authors do not. That is fair and perhaps unavoidable when trying to pin down a methodology that has thus far evaded definition, but it can sometimes overwhelm the reader. At times, there are so many new terms that it runs the risk of a long Russian novel, mired down in a plethora of names and patronymics that make the story all the harder to follow. I was also reminded of Perry Anderson's criticism of Jean-Paul Sartre with his “hermetic and unrelenting maze of neologisms.” This is high-octane stuff, to be sure, and the payoff for reading Kreuzer is well worth the effort. Nevertheless, more concrete examples would have better guided the reader through the maze of methodological concepts. Even so, having made it through, I emerged enlightened and energized.

Most of us are consumers rather than producers of social scientific methodology. Works of methodology, in fact, are at their best when they inspire us to do our own work with more enthusiasm and precision, and to reassure us we are not alone. Markus Kreuzer has performed a very

important service to the field by having written a book that accomplishes exactly that.

The Politics of Welfare in the Global South. Edited by Sattwick Dey Biswas, Cleopas Gabriel Sambo, and Sony Pellissery. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2025. 368p.
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The Politics of Welfare in the Global South, edited by Sattwick Dey Biswas, Cleopas Gabriel Sambo, and Sony Pellissery, is both timely and provocative. Across 12 chapters, the editors and contributors collectively push us to challenge longstanding assumptions about how and why social policies take shape in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. They highlight a host of overlapping themes in modern welfare practice, including discourses of universalism versus selectivity, the place of a “residuum” in welfare policy, and how cultural norms shape dignity, shame, and empowerment (or disempowerment) among social-assistance beneficiaries.

The book vividly outlines how rapidly social assistance has grown across the Global South. Over a billion people now benefit from at least one program, with coverage levels in Brazil's Bolsa Família or China's Dibao rivaling those of many OECD nations. On this point, one should highlight a defining puzzle: even as the global North grapples with austerity and retrenchment, many low- and middle-income countries have introduced sizable safety nets that decommodify large segments of the population. As I have argued elsewhere, this phenomenon amounts to a “second shift” in global welfare: the rising prominence of cash transfers and healthcare expansions that operate partly outside formal contributory frameworks. It is a shift that classical welfare-state theory—rooted in industrialized contexts—struggles to grasp, underscoring *The Politics of Welfare in the Global South* as a timely, necessary intervention.

Chapters by Jeremy Seekings, Armando Barrientos, and others prompt us to reconsider or expand Gøsta Esping-Andersen's (1990) *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. Rather than simply appending “southern” subtypes, these authors point out how novel configurations of social policy can emerge where labor markets are largely informal, kinship networks remain strong, and states attempt to balance selective programs against universalist ideals. The result, they suggest, could be new regime “families” anchored in noncontributory social assistance—a regime that we have identified as the “Populist Welfare State Regime” elsewhere (Erdem Yörük et al., 2022, “The four