

Completion Report on the ISA Catalytic Research Workshop

‘The Globalization of International Society’

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Convenor

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Participants

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The workshop was an opportunity for a select group of scholars to re-evaluate the acclaimed book *The Expansion of International Society*, edited by Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, 30 years after its publication. Participants considered how far the basis of international order had modified since the original book was published, and the sources of resistance to that order.

While the workshop started with *The Expansion* it does not end there. The context in which sovereign states cooperate and compete in international society today is markedly different from the latter stages of the Cold War when the original volume was conceived. In light of the rigorous discussion and analysis that was undertaken during the workshop, participants are now revising their papers with a view to publication with Oxford University Press in 2016.

1. Rationale for the Workshop: Why Re-visit *The Expansion*?

Today's international order is unique in world history. Never before has a universal system of sovereign states existed, nor one that straddles such a diversity of peoples and civilizations. Indeed, not only is the geographical reach of the present system of states unique; it is also the most densely institutionalized the world has seen.

This global sovereign order is remarkably young. An emergent system or society of sovereign states first emerged in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and over time it spread into new regions of the globe, usually through sequential

processes of imperial integration and fragmentation. It was not until the 1970s, after post-1945 decolonization had run its course, that the system was fully globalized.

Studies that examine the five-century long process of systemic globalization are relatively rare, as eminent world historians such as David Armitage (Harvard) and Glenda Sluga (Sydney) are increasingly aware. Bull and Watson's *The Expansion* remains one of the few overarching accounts. According to them, European states began to form a 'society' from early modern times, and that this international society is also 'the worldwide system of today' – setting this order apart from prior regional systems that were hegemonic or imperial in character.

Bull and Watson's achievements were to give international society a history (albeit a contested one), to provide a vocabulary for discussing the globalization of the society of states, and to advance a number of interconnected narratives about the processes of expansion in different regional settings. Yet despite these achievements, *The Expansion* is a product of its time and many of its conceptual building blocks, analytical orientations, historiographical assumptions and methods, and normative perspectives have been called into question by more recent scholarship in international relations, political theory and the history of ideas, history, law, and sociology. The concept of 'international society' has itself been subjected to intense scrutiny, empire and sovereignty in the European order are now seen as much more deeply entwined, and the Eurocentrism of their conception and narrative of 'expansion' is challenged by those stress the influence of non-European peoples on the evolving global order (to name a few).

Three decades after the publication of Bull and Watson's classic work, the workshop (and subsequent book) reconsider the globalization of the system of sovereign states, drawing on the wealth of new perspectives to better understand this momentous historical development. The first departure is to speak of the system's 'globalization' not 'expansion'. This not only emphasizes the system's eventual global reach, but the way in which its evolution was embedded in, and dependent upon, changing global social forces, from shifts in economic conditions and military technology to evolving institutional practices and epistemologies.

The dialogue that occurred at the workshop has shaped the structure and the content of the book in ways that will result in a more consistent and considered book (including the commissioning of chapters not represented at the workshop):

2. Thematic Priorities identified at the ISA Workshop

Global Context. In 1490, at the very moment when the early Spanish state builders, Ferdinand and Isabella, were expelling the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula and licensing Columbus's conquest of the Indies, the Chinese emperor was completing the great pavilions of Beijing's Forbidden City. This poses most starkly a crucial, yet frequently overlooked, reality of the world in which European sovereign states first emerged, a world characterized by complex and competing forms of identification, varied economic systems and practices, and multiple polities organized into international orders of great complexity. Furthermore, these 'worlds' were increasingly interconnected, shaping one another through engagement and example.

Dynamics of Globalization. Within the highly variegated cultural, economic, and political context previously examined, a distinctive kind of international order emerged, one centred in Europe but with tentacles reaching far into the non-European world. From the outset this order was bifurcated: the construction of sovereign states in Europe occurred in tandem with the building of vast empires in the Americas, Asia, and Africa. Yet from the middle of eighteenth century, this bifurcated order came under challenge, with colonial peoples contesting both individual empires and the institution of empire as a legitimate system of rule. The American Revolution of 1776, the independence of the Spanish and Portuguese colonies in the early nineteenth century, the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires after World War 1, and finally post-1945 decolonization destroyed the imperial face of the bifurcated order, yielding the first global system of sovereign states.

Institutional Contours. To facilitate coexistence and cooperation in today's international society, an array of institutions and practices have evolved; most notably bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, international law, limited war, and the allocation of special responsibilities to particular actors, commonly great powers. Bull and Watson's account of the expansion of international society has notable institutional blind spots. On such omission concerns an adequate theorisation of underlying conceptions of legitimate statehood, or 'the moral purpose of the state'. Not only did the nineteenth century witness the displacement of old ideas of divine right by new conceptions of popular sovereignty, these dominant conceptions have themselves been subject to ongoing contestation: the rise of radical ideas of an Islamic caliphate being a recent example.

Contestation. Throughout its history international society has been subject to multiple and ongoing forms of contestation, as diverse actors have struggled to enhance their political power by challenging its institutional norms and practices. These diverse forms of contestation have been crucial engines of international social change, forcing over time fundamental shifts in the membership, organization, and practices of the evolving society of states.