

The Globalization of International Society: **ASSA Workshop – Main Report**

Convenors & Authors of the Report

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The Hedley Bull and Adam Watson collection, *The Expansion of International Society* is thirty years old in 2014. The workshop – hosted by the University of Queensland and supported by the Academy of Social Sciences Australia – was an opportunity for a select group of scholars to re-evaluate the book. From the perspective of several disciplinary areas, the assembled academics 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 project 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. To take us beyond *The Expansion*, the workshop convenors brought together a group of internationally renowned academics; each delivered a draft of their chapter at a workshop on the theme of *The Globalization of International Society* (held at the University of Queensland, 14-16 July 2014). In light of the workshop, contributors are revising their chapters with a view to final submission of the manuscript to Oxford University Press in mid-2015.

1. 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 enabled by the workshop - with internationally renowned academics, supported by graduates students at UQ and elsewhere (participating through social media) - has shaped the project in accordance with the following thematic priorities:

2. Thematic Priorities of the Book identified at the 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.

The first part of *The Globalization of International Society* re-examines the complex global context in which the European system of sovereign states first emerged. But where Bull and Watson’s goal was to show the historical uniqueness of European innovations, ours is to show the complexity of the cultural, economic, and political universe in which these developments took place, and to show how, though complex patterns of interaction, this universe conditioned Europe’s nascent sovereign order.

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 I, and finally post-1945 decolonization destroyed the imperial face of the bifurcated order, yielding the first global system of sovereign states.

Bull and Watson's account of the 'expansion' privileges processes endogenous to European international society. By contrast, *The Globalization of International Society* takes a broader and more complex view of the long term processes that produced today's universal system of sovereign states; that transformed a small, regionally concentrated system of states, embedded within larger sovereign-imperial complexes, into a sovereign order of global reach. Some of these processes were indeed endogenous to the European order: the role of capitalism, war-fighting, and ideational revolutions in European state formation, the civilizational and extractive impulses to empire, anti-colonial movements in the West, and the membership practices of the evolving society of states. Yet this privileging of endogenous dynamics is radically insufficient. It misses the critical role of exogenous processes such as the impact of social revolutions by subject peoples that transformed the norms of international society as they forced its expansion.

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.

Bull and Watson's volume focuses squarely on issues of contestation, in particular 'The Challenge to Western Dominance'; their treatment of the main challenges are statist and civilizational. *The Globalization of International Society* rethinks the role of contestation of the continued evolution of international society. Contestation is seen as an inherent feature of any social order that constitutes and distributes political power, and international society is no exception. These challenges extend from American exceptionalism, Russian breaches of the norm of non-aggression, and the rise of new centres of power in the non-Western world, to anti-systemic movements seeking to overthrow the sovereign order altogether.

