

The English School in Transition: Dialogues, Adaptations, and Limitations

Geçiş Sürecindeki İngiliz Okulu: Diyalog, Uyum ve Sınırlamalar

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Abstract

This article examines the contributions of the English School to the development of Global International Relations (Global IR) through a critical analysis of its systemic framework, historical development, and normative theoretical focus. By undertaking a qualitative and historical analysis of foundational texts by figures such as Manning, Wight, and Bull, as well as relevant secondary literature, the study illuminates the interaction between the English School and Global IR. The study's key findings indicate that, while the English School's Eurocentric legacy presents theoretical constraints, its focus on norms, international society, and justice offers valuable frameworks for addressing contemporary global challenges. Furthermore, the study identifies the integration of emerging powers and non-Western perspectives as evidence of the English School's adaptability in a pluralistic global order. Methodologically, the study's focus on historical analysis and qualitative approaches constrains its capacity to offer broader empirical generalisations. Additionally, its theoretical scope reflects the challenges of reconciling diverse perspectives within a cohesive framework. Despite these limitations, the article highlights the potential for transformative dialogue between the English School and Global IR, with practical implications for fostering inclusive global governance and providing pathways for future interdisciplinary research.

Keywords: English School, Global IR, International Society, Eurocentrism, Normative Theory

Öz

Bu makale, İngiliz Okulu'nun sistemik çerçevesini, tarihsel gelişimini ve normatif teorik odağını eleştirel bir şekilde analiz ederek Küresel Uluslararası İlişkiler'in (Küresel Uİ) gelişimine katkılarını incelemektedir. Manning, Wight ve Bull gibi isimlerin temel metinlerinin yanı sıra ilgili ikincil literatürün niteliksel ve tarihsel analizi yoluyla çalışma, İngiliz Okulu ile Küresel Uİ arasındaki etkileşimi vurgulamaktadır. Temel bulgular, İngiliz Okulu'nun Avrupa-merkezci mirasının teorik kısıtlamalar getirse de normlara, uluslararası topluma ve adalete odaklanmasının çağdaş küresel zorlukları ele almak için değerli çerçeveler sunduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışma ayrıca, yükselen güçlerin ve Batılı olmayan perspektiflerin entegrasyonunu, İngiliz Okulu'nun çoğulcu bir küresel düzene uyum sağlayabileceğinin kanıtı olarak tanımlamaktadır. Metodolojik olarak, tarihsel analize ve nitel yaklaşımlara dayanması, çalışmanın daha geniş ampirik genellemeler sağlama kabiliyetini sınırlarken, teorik kapsamı da farklı bakış açılarını tutarlı bir çerçevede uzlaştırmanın zorluklarını yansıtmaktadır. Bu sınırlamalara rağmen makale, İngiliz Okulu ile Küresel Uluslararası İlişkiler arasındaki dönüştürücü diyalog potansiyelinin altını çizmekte, kapsayıcı küresel yönetişimi teşvik etmek ve gelecekteki disiplinler arası araştırmalar için yollar sağlamak için pratik sonuçlar doğurmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İngiliz Okulu, Küresel Uluslararası İlişkiler, Uluslararası Toplum, Avrupa Merkezçilik, Normatif Teori

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Introduction

The English School represents a distinctive and highly attractive theoretical approach to the study of IR, with a particular approach that distinguishes it from other elite theories such as realism and liberalism.¹ The English School of IR is an approach to understanding world politics and analyzing the specific details of how they operate. It is based on three basic concepts: international society, the international system and the global community. These schemas form the frameworks, perspectives or lenses through which the English School understands global politics. The English School shows a particular interest and focus on historical research.

The English School's primary intellectual focus is to elucidate the historical origins of key concepts in IR, as well as to gain insight into the formation of the international society as we know it today. This intellectual tradition has produced a substantial corpus of scholarship aimed at understanding the historical evolution of the contemporary international order. Hidemi Suganami describes the English School as follows: "Life in the international sense is not so bad. What a big surprise. Let us examine why".² The English School and the works published in this perspective focus on the concepts, epistemology, and history of the European or Western experience.³ The concept of Eurocentrism and the dominance of Western perspectives in the social sciences are increasingly being examined. This structural critique identifies the centrality of Western epistemology and ontology, which permeates almost every aspect of social phenomena.

Global IR⁴ emphasizes the inclusion of peripheral perspectives in prominent debates and frameworks, a trend gaining momentum in academia.⁵ Analyzing the relationship between English School and Global IR has emerged as a significant area of interest, highlighting the importance of the English School in understanding contemporary issues in global IR.⁶ These issues include globalization, regionalism, institutional roles, and future world order. By focusing on the social dimension of the international system and the interaction between structure and agency, the English School provides invaluable insights into the complexities of global politics.

This article begins with an overview of the historical development of the English School, followed by a critical analysis of its integration into discourses on global international relations (IR). It examines both the contributions and limitations of the English School in this context. The study investigates the origins and historical evolution of the English School, key

1 Hidemi Suganami, "The Structure of Institutionalism: an Anatomy of British Mainstream International Relations", *International Relations*, 7:5, 1983, pp. 2363-2681; Barry Buzan, "From International System to International Society: Structural Realism and Regime Theory Meet the English School", *International Organization*, 47:3, 1993, pp. 327-352.

2 Suganami, "The Structure of Institutionalism", p. 2369.

3 Filippo Costa Buranelli and Simon F. Taeuber, "The English School and Global IR – A Research Agenda", *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace*, 11:1, 2021, pp. 87-105.

4 Amitav Acharya, "Advancing Global IR: Challenges, Contentions, and Contributions", *International Studies Review*, 18:1, 2016, pp. 4-15.

5 Arlene B Tickner, "Core, Periphery and (Neo)imperialist International Relations", *European Journal of International Relations*, 19:3, 2013, pp. 627-646; Ersel Aydınli and Gonca Biltekin, "Widening the World of IR: A Typology of Homegrown Theorizing", *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy Peace*, 7:1, 2017, pp. 45-68.

6 Martin Wight, *Systems of States*, Bloomsbury Publishing, New York, NY, 1977; Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight (ed.), *Diplomatic Investigations*, St Leonards, Allen & Unwin, NSW, Australia, 1966; Cornelia Navari, "The Development of English School Theory: An Introduction", *International Society*, 2020, pp. 1-13; Balkan Devlen, Patrick Macgill James, Özgür Özdamar, "The English School, International Relations, and Progress", *International Studies Review*, No. 7, 2005, pp. 171-197; Charlotta Friedner Parrat and Kilian Spandler, "Using the English School to Understand Current Issues in World Politics", Cornelia Navari (ed.), *International Society*, Springer, New York, NY, 2020, pp. 145-160.

turning points in its development, the core tenets of its arguments, and its potential, with a particular focus on its interaction and collaboration with global IR.

Methodology

This article follows a qualitative and historical methodology to examine the contributions of the English School to Global IR. The research employs a combination of primary and secondary sources to facilitate a comprehensive analysis. The primary sources include foundational texts by key figures of the English School, such as Hedley Bull's *The Anarchical Society. A Study of Order in World Politics* (1977), Martin Wight's *Systems of States* (1977), and Butterfield and Wight's *Diplomatic Investigations, Essays in International Politics* (1966). These works provide the theoretical basis for understanding the English School's principles, particularly its emphasis on international society, justice, and norms. Secondary sources, including Barry Buzan's *An Introduction to the English School of International Relations, The Societal Approach* (2014) and Amitav Acharya's "Advancing Global IR: Challenges, Contentions, and Contributions" (2016), offer critical perspectives and demonstrate the evolution of the English School within the pluralistic and interdisciplinary framework of Global IR.

The methodology is based on a thematic analysis of the texts in question, with the aim of tracing the intellectual development of the English School and its engagement with the challenges of Eurocentrism and inclusivity in global discourse. By examining the works of the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics (1959–1985) and the contributions of figures such as Hedley Bull and Martin Wight, the study identifies how the English School distinguished itself from the American positivist tradition through its emphasis on historical and normative inquiry. Furthermore, the analysis situates empirical examples, such as Japan's adoption of the "standard of civilisation" in 1899, within a broader context to illustrate the English School's contribution to the integration of non-Western perspectives into the concept of international society.

Although this qualitative and historical approach permits a thorough examination of the English School's theoretical framework, it is not without its own constraints. The utilisation of historical texts and interpretive methodologies constrains the capacity to generalise the findings to contemporary Global IR dynamics, particularly in regions that have been underrepresented in previous studies, such as Africa and Latin America. Moreover, the absence of quantitative analysis precludes an empirical evaluation of the broader applicability and limitations of the English School's concepts. Nevertheless, this methodology provides a robust foundation for a critical assessment of the English School's theoretical contributions and its ongoing relevance in fostering a more inclusive and pluralistic understanding of IR.

1. Formation and Intellectual Waving in the English School

The English School emerged in the early period after the Second World War. This theory emerged as a distinct school of thought with its own thematic research agenda as a result of the work of academics at British universities.⁷ In 1949, Charles Manning, an academic at the London School of Economics (LSE), developed an undergraduate course entitled "The Structure of International Society".⁸ In 1962, Manning published an important work that contributed to the further development of the theory. The nature of international society⁹

7 Tim Dunne, "The English School", *Oxford Handbooks Online*, 2011.

8 Hidemi Suganami, "C. A. w. Manning and the Study of International Relations", *Review of International Studies*, 27:1, 2001, pp. 91-107.

9 A. Nuri Yurdusev, "The Concept of International system as A Unit of Analysis", *METU Studies in Development*, 21:1, 1994, pp. 143-74.

was characterized as the “formal institutional framework of modern world politics”.¹⁰ He assumed that sovereign states represent a society in which international law is binding for everyone. Manning’s work represents a significant contribution to establishing a foundation for studies of international society, the impact of which continues to this day.

Daniel Green posits the existence of academic waves within English School and offers a categorisation thereof.¹¹ The initial phase, which may be considered the classical period, encompasses the years between the 1950s and 1980s. A review of the literature reveals that the English School was established by the British Committee on International Political Theory. This period encompasses significant scholars and works, including *Diplomatic Investigations*, edited by Butterfield and Wight,¹² *The Anarchical Society* by Hedley Bull,¹³ and *Systems of States* by Martin Wight,¹⁴ which was an output of the Committee.¹⁵ With regard to the evolution of the English School’s identity, it is crucial to acknowledge that English School scholars were at odds with American-style IR studies. The American academic landscape was defined by its quantitative, positivist, and behavioural approach to the study of International Relations.¹⁶

The aforementioned works represent a diametrically opposed approach to the prevailing American style of scholarship in terms of interpretation. Both American and British classical academia were significantly shaped by historical, philosophical and legal perspectives. However, from the 1930s onwards, the behavioural approach gained momentum and became dominant by the 1960s.¹⁷ It is problematic that many classical scholars sought to “make the social sciences more scientific, emulating the natural sciences and adopting their methodologies (or at least trying to adapt them) to include formal hypothesis testing and quantitative methods of analysis”.¹⁸ Butterfield, a prominent figure within the early English School, characterised the American academy as “over-scientific” due to its conceptions of social enquiry.¹⁹

It would be beneficial to consider the criticism proposed by Hedley Bull at this same point in the discussion. Bull posits that the American or scientific style of scholarship has not made a substantial impact on the development of IR theory.²⁰ Furthermore, Bull does not believe that the scientific approach will facilitate the progress that is desired. In his 1966 critique, he rejects the “construction and manipulation of so-called ‘models’” proposed by the “scientific school”.²¹ It could be argued that the objections to American science shaped what English School wanted to do and how it would explain social phenomena.

In this first wave, the following names are worthy of note: Herbert Butterfield, Hedley Bull, Adam Watson and R. J. Vincent, all of whom played a significant role in the

10 Navari, “The Development of English School Theory: An Introduction”, p. 1.

11 Daniel M. Green, “Introduction to the English School in International Studies”, *Guide to the English School in International Studies*, Cornelia Navari and Daniel M. Green (ed.), John Wiley, 2013, p. 2.

12 Butterfield, Wight, *Diplomatic Investigations*.

13 Hedley Bull, *The anarchical society: A study of order in world politics*, Palgrave, London, UK, 1977.

14 Wight, *Systems of States*.

15 Dunne, “The English School”.

16 Green, “Introduction to the English School in International Studies”, pp. 1-6.

17 Mark V. Kauppi and Paul R. Viotti, *International relations theory*, 6. b., Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, Maryland, U.S., 2019.

18 *Ibid.*, pp. 129-130.

19 Roger Epp, “The British Committee on the Theory of International Politics and Its Central Figures”, *Guide to the English School in International Studies*, Cornelia Navari, Daniel M. Green (eds.), John Wiley, 2013, p. 26.

20 Kauppi, Viotti, *International Relations Theory*.

21 Hedley Bull, “International Theory: The Case for a Classical Approach”, *World Politics*, 18:3, 1966, p. 370.

development of this school of thought.²² It is also important to highlight the contribution of the British Committee to the evolution and development of this school of thought.²³ The committee comprised academics who were in opposition to the scientific school led by positivists, sharing similar ideas and an ontological understanding. The British Committee convened on a regular basis for an extended period, from 1959 to 1985.²⁴ The individuals who held the most prominent roles within the British Committee during this period were as follows: Herbert Butterfield (until 1968), Martin Wight (until 1972), Adam Watson (until 1978), and Hedley Bull until his death in 1984.²⁵

The ideas and work of these scholars have had a significant and illuminating impact on scholars engaged in research from an English School perspective. Notable texts produced by this school include *Diplomatic Investigations* (1966), edited by Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight, and *The Expansion of International Society* (1984), edited by Hedley Bull and Adam Watson. These were the works of the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics.²⁶ The Committee was highly productive, publishing numerous articles and books and making a substantial academic contribution. Herbert Butterfield held the position of inaugural chairman of the British Committee on International Political Theory.²⁷ He was responsible for establishing the Committee and extending invitations to prospective members.

Martin Wight (1913-1972) was another significant scholar who played a leading role in the British Committee. From the 1950s onwards, Wight developed a conception of international society that was central to this English School of thought. This conception positioned international society as a middle way between realist explanations of systemic logics and revolutionary explanations that envisage the collapse of the state system as a whole.²⁸ In 1958, Martin Wight was an academic at the LSE when he was invited to join the British Committee. Wight's decision to join the Committee was of significant importance to Butterfield who later stated that, "his 'great ambition' as chair was to 'meet the ideals and aspirations of Martin Wight in particular'".²⁹

Wight constituted a significant catalyst for English School's intellectual curiosity and pursuit of knowledge.³⁰ The 1966 publication of *Diplomatic Investigations*, co-edited with Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight, played a pivotal role in establishing English School's identity.³¹ It is significant in that it contains some of English School's most seminal early articles, and Wight contributed texts "Why Is There No International Theory?"³² and "Western Values in International Relations".³³ This book, which was written by a critic of behavioural

22 Dunne, "The English School".

23 Suganami, "The Structure of Institutionalism".

24 Navari, "The Development of English School Theory: An Introduction", pp. 1-13.

25 Dunne, "The English School", p. 732.

26 Hidemi Suganami, "Alexander Wendt and the English School", *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 4:4, 2001.

27 Navari, "The Development of English School Theory: An Introduction", p. 1.

28 Dunne, "The English School", p. 732.

29 Epp, "The British Committee on the Theory of International Politics and Its Central Figures", p. 26.

30 Martin Wight, Hedley Bull and Carsten Holbraad, *Power Politics*, Penguin Books, London, UK, 1979; Martin Wight, "Why Is There No International Theory?", *International Relations and Political Philosophy*, Martin Wight & David S. Yost (eds.), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2022, pp. 22-38.

31 Butterfield, Wight, *Diplomatic Investigations*.

32 Wight, "Why Is There No International Theory?", pp. 22-38.

33 Martin Wight, "Western Values in International Relations", *International Relations and Political Philosophy*, Martin Wight & David S. Yost (eds.), Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, 2022, pp. 49-87; Andrew Linklater and Hidemi Suganami, *The English School of International Relations: A Contemporary Reassessment*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2006, p. 21.

methodology, contained elements that contradicted the scientific approach. *Diplomatic Investigations* also made references to Aristotle, Machiavelli and Montesquieu, rather than Khrushchev, Kennedy and Castro, respectively. Furthermore, the British Committee argued that the Committee was more interested in the historical and philosophical aspects than the scientific, methodological and contemporary aspects of the work.³⁴

It is important to acknowledge Wight's significant role in the advancement of the English School and his pioneering efforts in reproducing the articles. Wight's approach to scholarship is not based on comparative studies but rather concentrates on the norms and values that animate each system and the institutions through which they are expressed.³⁵ In 1977, Wight published *Systems of States*, which was subsequently edited by Committee member Hedley Bull, an admirer of Wight. Bull also contributed the introduction, "Martin Wight and the study of international relations".³⁶ As a result of Wight's influence, his students and followers produced a substantial body of literature, including numerous articles and books. Contemporary global IR interactions with the English School can be traced back to Wight's historical knowledge and 'pattern-seeking' approach to social science, which, as Barry Buzan notes, set a foundational precedent for many of his followers.

Buzan additionally states that the primary objective was to conduct an "empirical analysis" of the modern international society that was shaped by Europe.³⁷ He correlates empirical analysis with the English School's historical methodology by addressing its limitations and proposing a more integrated framework. While the English School has traditionally relied on historical and political analysis to explore international society, Buzan highlights that this method often lacks a robust theoretical structure. He proposes that integrating empirical analysis into the English School's approach can enhance its explanatory power by examining how states with diverse cultures develop shared norms and institutions. To illustrate, Buzan employs empirical case studies, such as the European "standard of civilisation", to demonstrate how states with disparate cultural heritages have historically embraced shared practices.³⁸ Additionally, he incorporates structural realism and regime theory into this framework to address deficiencies in the English School's emphasis on shared culture as a foundation for international society. Structural realism provides a functional explanation for the emergence of international society in the context of anarchy, while regime theory offers insights into the specific rules and institutions that shape state interactions. By combining empirical analysis with historical perspectives, Buzan enriches our understanding of how international society evolves in a multicultural, interconnected world, emphasising the dynamic interplay of historical, functional, and institutional factors.³⁹

Hedley Bull is one of the scholars who contributed to the development of the English School, and his work was influenced by Wight. Bull held the position of Professor at the University of Oxford from 1977 to 1985. Hedley Bull published the seminal text *The Anarchical Society* in 1977, which has since become a classic in the field of international relations. Bull's book focuses on the sources of order in an anarchic international society and the extent to which international society corresponds to reality.⁴⁰ He discussed a number of concepts, including the balance of power and figures such as Grotius. Additionally, Hedley Bull was among the critics of the North American method of International Relations. His

34 Epp, "The British Committee on the Theory of International Politics and Its Central Figures", p. 26.

35 Navari, "The Development of English School Theory: An Introduction", p. 3.

36 Wight, *Systems of States*, p. 1.

37 Buzan, "From International System to International Society", p. 329.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 343.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 352.

40 Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A study of order in world politics*.

work, “The Theory of International Politics 1919-1969,” presented an argument in favor of the “classical approach”.⁴¹ Bull’s article was included in *The Aberystwyth Papers*, edited in 1972 by Brian Porter,⁴² a student of Manning and Wight.

The post-classical wave, as defined by Dunne, represents the subsequent era that commenced in the 1990s. During this period, a number of significant thinkers made contributions to the field, including Andrew Hurrell, Andrew Linklater, Hidemi Suganami, Robert Jackson, Barry Buzan, Christian Reus-Smit, William Bain and Alex Bellamy.⁴³ Notable contributions to the field include Barry Buzan’s article “From International System to International Society” published in *International Organization*, which has helped to disseminate the English School’s ideas to a wider audience and garner attention.⁴⁴ Further elaboration of Barry Buzan’s work and endeavours is required to more accurately depict the development of the English School. Buzan’s presentation at the British International Studies Association (BISA) in 1999 represented an attempt to reinvigorate the English School.⁴⁵ As Flippo Costa Buranelli notes, this served to “revitalise” the English School, as Buzan’s presentation sparked much debate and paved the way for “an explosion in the geographical spread of English School and a major expansion in its publishing output”.⁴⁶

Additionally, Tim Dunne’s work on the history of the English School, “Inventing International Society: A History of the English School”, is especially noteworthy. His contributions have greatly deepened our understanding of this foundational tradition within International Relations. The book traces the development of the English School, highlighting the contributions of scholars like Hedley Bull and R.J. Vincent to new normative thinking in the field. Through meticulous research, insightful analysis, and efforts to connect the English School with contemporary debates, Dunne’s scholarship has become an invaluable resource for scholars and students.⁴⁷

2. Core Concepts and Assumptions of the English School

This section provides an overview of the foundational assumptions, key arguments, and central concepts that define the English School of thought. It is essential to outline these assumptions in order to build an understanding of how the English School has contributed to the development of Global IR, despite the inherent contradictions and limitations of the approach.

The initial assumption is that the world is an “international or anarchic society” in which “both state and non-state actors operate”.⁴⁸ The English School ascribes a pivotal and fundamental significance to the notion of society, a concept that is not employed in conjunction with the notion of anarchy by Realists. It is argued that the English School’s focus on the concepts of international society constitutes its distinctive features in comparison to other theories. In this context, it is useful to provide a definition of the concept of international community. As stated by Watson and Bull and cited in Kauppi that:

41 Hedley Bull, “The Theory of International Politics, 1919–1969 (1972)”, *International Theory: Critical Investigations*, James Der Derian (ed.), Palgrave Macmillan, London, UK, 1995, pp. 181-211.

42 Brian Porter (ed.), *The Aberystwyth papers: international politics, 1919-1969*, Oxford University, London, UK, 1972.

43 Dunne, “The English School”; Green, “Introduction to the English School in International Studies”, pp. 1-6.

44 Buzan, “From International System to International Society”, pp. 327-352.

45 Filippo Costa-Buranelli, “‘Do You Know What I Mean?’ ‘Not exactly’: English School, Global International Society and the Polysemy of Institutions”, *Global Discourse*, 5:3, 2015, pp. 499-514; Green, “Introduction to the English School in International Studies”, pp. 1-6.

46 Green, “Introduction to the English School in International Studies”, p. 2.

47 Tim Dunne, *Inventing International Society, A History of the English School*, MacMillan Press, London, UK, 1998.

48 Kauppi, Viotti, *International Relations Theory*, p. 125.

*“an international society is[A] group of states (or, more generally, a group of independent political communities) which not merely form a system, in the sense that the behavior of each is a necessary factor in the calculations of the others, but also have established by dialogue and consent common rules and institutions for the conduct of their relations, and recognize their common interest in maintaining these arrangements”.*⁴⁹

The concept of the state as a member of the international community is a fundamental tenet of international relations theory. It is important to note that actors are sovereign and recognise each other’s rights.⁵⁰ In other words, this act of ‘mutual recognition’ represents a social practice, and recognition constitutes the initial phase in the formation of an international community. The boundaries of the international community are subject to change as a result of the inclusion or exclusion of states. To be more precise, China was not acknowledged as a sovereign state until 1942. This suggests that China was excluded from the international community, which was defined in the nineteenth century by establishing a “standard of civilisation”. This indicates that membership and the criteria for membership in the international community were largely contingent on the style, equipment and conditions of governance in line with European ideas and norms.⁵¹

The other significant assumption is that the concept of order in an anarchic society occupies a pivotal role within the English school of thought. Order is not solely derived from power and power politics; it is also shaped by the adoption of norms and institutional arrangements. In a manner similar to classical realism, the English school acknowledges the significance of power, encompassing material factors, ideas and norms, in international relations.⁵² Furthermore, international law constitutes an essential component of this theoretical framework. The English School has its roots in the tradition associated with Grotius, who is known as the “father of international law”.⁵³

The English School’s approach to rationalism focuses on the establishment of rules, laws, and institutional frameworks that states use to bring a sense of order to the inherently chaotic international arena. Unlike realism, which emphasizes structures defined by power distribution and polarity, the English School places greater importance on a system grounded in shared norms and institutions. Another assumption that can be made is that the English School recognises the importance of Immanuel Kant’s (1724-1804) understanding of morality and ethics. The English School’s perspective incorporates a practical view of international society, recognising that power and self-interest still play a significant role in an anarchic system. Its concept of ‘world society’ is in line with Kantian ideals, aiming to create a cosmopolitan world in which universally accepted rules and shared norms foster a sense of global community.⁵⁴

The concept of world society is a significant tenet of the English School of thought. However, the concept’s meaning differs from the liberal understanding of world/global society. Liberalism posits that world society is a phenomenon that extends beyond the relations between states, encompassing “state, non-state and transnational actors” that

49 Hedley Bull and Adam Watson (Ed.). *The Expansion of International Society*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, UK, 1984, p. 1.

50 Wight, *Systems of States*.

51 Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith (eds.), *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, (5th ed.) Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2020, p. 139.

52 Kauppi and Viotti, *International Relations Theory*.

53 Dunne, Kurki and Smith, *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*.

54 Kauppi and Viotti, *International Relations Theory*.

interact with each other “globally”.⁵⁵ The English School, however, regards the notion of a global community as a revolutionary concept, one that was initially proposed by Kant. This is because the concept of an international society is of paramount importance to the English School, and the term “world community” is used to convey a distinct vision. The English School draws a distinction between the concepts of “international society” and “world community” by situating them within distinct theoretical traditions. In accordance with Wight’s tripartite framework, international society aligns with Grotianism, which emphasises the importance of shared norms, rules, and institutions among sovereign states in order to foster order.⁵⁶ In contrast, the concept of a world community evokes the tenets of Kantianism, which postulates the existence of a global moral order anchored in universal values and cosmopolitan principles. The Hobbesian perspective, which forms the foundation of the anarchic “international system,” emphasises the primacy of power and self-interest.⁵⁷ This distinction highlights the fact that while international society functions according to norms that are state-based, the concept of a world community is not constrained by state boundaries and aspires to a universal ethical standard. By situating these concepts within Wight’s theoretical frameworks, the English School offers a sophisticated analysis of the influence of different philosophical traditions on the development of global political structures. This discussion draws on the integration of Kantian and Grotian ideals with historical English School scholarship, including Wight’s *Systems of States*⁵⁸ and Bull’s *The Anarchical Society*.⁵⁹

Although the historical development of the English School cannot be neatly divided into distinct waves, Buzan’s⁶⁰ call for a “reconvening of the English School” signals a new wave of intellectual engagement and scholarly collaboration within the School.⁶¹ This new wave builds on the foundational work of the school’s early thinkers but adapts its focus to contemporary issues such as international society, globalisation and regionalisation. Current research within this new wave addresses several key concerns: the analysis of regional international institutions and their structures, the interactions between state and non-state actors in world politics, and the pursuit of order and justice in a globalised world. It also examines the institutions that underpin these goals and how they function.⁶² These developments show that the English School, while remaining true to its traditional focus on order and justice, has evolved its approach to meet the complexities and challenges of the contemporary international landscape.

3. The English School’s Influence on Global IR

This section focuses on the strong correlation between the English School and Global IR, with the objective of underscoring their shared goals of challenging Eurocentrism⁶³ and fostering a more inclusive understanding of international relations. Both frameworks place

55 Kauppi and Viotti, *International Relations Theory*, p. 127.

56 Martin Wight, *International Theory*. Gabriele Wight & Brian Porter (eds.), Leicester University Press, London, UK, 1994; Edward Keene, “Three Traditions of International Theory”, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*, 2020.

57 Dunne, *Inventing international society*; Bull, *The anarchical society: A study of order in world politics*.

58 Wight, *Systems of States*.

59 Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*.

60 Barry Buzan, “The English School: an Underexploited Resource in IR”, *Review of International Studies*, 27:3, 2001, pp. 471–488.

61 Suganami, “Alexander Wendt and the English School”, p. 404.

62 Hidemi Suganami, “The English School in a Nutshell”, *Ritsumeikan Annual Review of International Studies*, 9, 2010, pp. 15-28.

63 Pinar Bilgin, “How to Remedy Eurocentrism in IR? A Complement and a Challenge for The Global Transformation”, *International Theory*, 8:3, 2016, pp. 492-501.

significant emphasis on the necessity of decolonising the field,⁶⁴ recognising the agency of non-Western actors, and advocating for methodological pluralism and grounded research.

In the co-authored with Buzan, Acharya, one of the leading figures in Global IR, posed the question: “Why is there no non-Western theory of IR?”⁶⁵ As Acharya notes, while the distinction between ‘the West’ and ‘the rest’ has become increasingly blurred in economic, military and material terms, there has been no corresponding change in the way we study, publish and discuss IR. This represents a challenge currently faced by IR disciplines. Acharya suggests that Global IR aims to promote greater inclusivity and diversity within the field of international relations.⁶⁶

The English School has a more notable historical approach than other mainstream international relations theories. This school of thought posits that the international community, or what Acharya terms the “Global International Community”, emerged in conjunction with decolonisation. In essence, this school of thought focused on the emergence and expansion of European international society over time. The roots of the international community can be traced back to medieval Europe and began to emerge in its modern form from 1648 onwards.⁶⁷

As Acharya notes, this historical perspective has enabled the English School to be distinguished from other IR theories, such as Neorealism and Liberalism, which de-emphasise history.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, while the English School emphasises the importance of historical analysis, this does not preclude it from critiques of Global IR.

Acharya proposes that Global IR is founded upon world history, rather than merely “Greco-Roman, European, or US history”. In other words, Global IR argues for an approach to international relations that is more deeply rooted in global history as a whole, rather than being centered solely on European or American perspectives.⁶⁹ It is therefore essential that the discipline of IR be founded upon ideas and practices that encompass a more inclusive global perspective, without overlooking non-Western experiences.

Buzan argues that the fundamental objective of the English School system is “to cast light on the contemporary global international society within which we all live”.⁷⁰ A considerable number of scholars associated with the English School have published works examining the emergence of the contemporary international society. However, it seems that the English School has sought to elucidate the modern international society’s processes around Europe. It could be argued that it is reasonable to understand the historical experience in Europe. While this is not entirely inaccurate, it is a limitation in uncovering how European and non-European societies interact. Global IR indicates that the environment must be considered when attempting to theorise and understand the world.⁷¹

64 Buranelli and Taeuber, “The English school and global IR”, pp. 87-105.

65 Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, “Why is There No Non-Western International Relations Theory? An Introduction”, *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 7:3, 2007, pp. 287-312.

66 Amitav Acharya, “Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds”, *International Studies Quarterly* 58:4, 2014, p. 649.

67 Acharya, “Advancing Global IR: Challenges”, p. 8.

68 Acharya, “Advancing Global IR: Challenges”, p. 6.

69 Acharya, “Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds”, p. 649.

70 Barry Buzan, *An introduction to the English School of International Relations*, Polity Press, Oxford, UK, 2014, p. 60.

71 Pinar Bilgin, “‘Contrapuntal Reading’ as a Method, an Ethos, and a Metaphor for Global IR”, *International Studies Review* 18:1, 2016, pp. 134-146; Amitav Acharya, “Dialogue and Discovery: In Search of International Relations Theories Beyond the West”, *Millennium Journal of International Studies*, 39: 3, 2011, pp. 619-637.

Acharya suggests that a central aspect of the concept of global IR is pluralistic universalism. The field of global IR posits the need for a change in the dominant conceptualization of universality within the discipline of international relations. This existing conceptualization of universality is based on the assumption that it is “applicable to all”. The prevailing universalism in IR has its roots in the Enlightenment tradition and is characterized by Acharya as “monistic universalism”. Robert Cox assumes that the Enlightenment concept of universality affirms its universal and timeless truthfulness through an appeal to a “homogeneous reality”.⁷²

In the case of the English School, Acharya and Buzan suggest that this school of thought and its history have largely ignored the contribution that the rest of the world made to Europe in its formative phases.⁷³ Consequently, Acharya directs his criticism of development towards this particular aspect. This aspect of the school is significant as its exclusion would be contrary to the fundamental principles of the English School. To illustrate, interpreting historical research would require a more comprehensive and non-selective understanding of the subject. In other words, The English School aimed to trace the historical roots of concepts such as systemic order.⁷⁴ However, it became clear that the society was only interested in a selected aspect of the historical process. This is somewhat at odds with the school’s own claim that this view of world politics is not teleological. Nevertheless, many works of the English School, particularly those of a more traditional nature, failed to recognize the influence of other cultural areas. This represents a significant omission and, in some ways, a contradiction.

This selective engagement with history presents a major challenge for the English School in presenting a coherent vision of global IR. The roots of international society lie in the concept of modernity and its historical development. The Enlightenment Era established a “standard of civilization” that was used to evaluate and categorize other cultures, states, and societies. Membership in the international community requires the acquisition of values, ideas and standards shaped by the European experience. The standard of civilization exerts a coercive force on other states, forcing them to conform to its norms. The English School seems to represent this kind of universalism that applies to everyone.⁷⁵

In his 2014 book, Barry Buzan posits that the international community’s approach evinces a cultural arrogance towards other cultures.⁷⁶ In his work, Buzan examines the connections between nations and the circumstances that lead them to join the international system. He subsequently turns his attention to the significance of “cultural identity”, citing the works of Martin Wight, particularly *System of States*, and Adam Watson’s *The Evolution of International Society*. Additionally, Buzan examines the historical evolution of state systems, providing numerous examples. In his analysis of Wight’s concept of international and state systems (which encompasses the suzerain system), Buzan also elucidates the distinction between primary and secondary state systems.⁷⁷

The above-mentioned sense of cultural superiority appears to be a significant obstacle to the formation of a unified international community, as it affects the ability of states to

72 Acharya, “Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds”, p. 649.

73 Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, *The Making of Global International Relations Origins and Evolution of IR at its Centenary*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2019.

74 Richard Little, “The English School’s Contribution to the Study of International Relations”, *European Journal of International Relations*, 6:3, 2000, pp. 395-422; Ole Wæver, “International Society — Theoretical Promises Unfulfilled?”, *Cooperation and Conflict*, 27:1, 1992, pp. 97-128.

75 Costa Buranelli and Taeuber, “The English school and global IR – A research agenda”, pp. 87-105.

76 Buzan, *An introduction to the English school of international relations*, p. 65.

77 *Ibid.*, p. 83.

engage in collective negotiations and consensus-building processes to establish common rules. As noted, the existence of a standard of civilization makes it difficult, if not impossible, to imagine an international community whose rules are determined collectively and globally. Buzan provides the example of Japan. He claims that Japan, as a non-European power, had already shown in 1899 that it was adapting to civilizational standards and was recognized as a member of the international community.⁷⁸

The standard of civilization gradually faded from public discourse after 1945, as the decolonization era saw numerous former colonies attain unconditional status within the international community.⁷⁹ However, the Eurocentrism of the English School also seems to be re-emerging. The Cold War years saw a significant expansion of the international community. The independence of postcolonial states and their integration into the international community are viewed with skepticism by scholars at the English School.

Hedley Bull, a prominent figure in the English school of thought, perceived this expansion of the international community as a potential weakening of the world order. A central focus was the cultural integrity of the international community. The standard of civilization remains a central concern for scholars of the English School. This has led some scholars to consider novel phenomena and develop strategies to maintain the international community's alignment with Western values and norms. For example, Buzan postulated that states would be optimistic if their ruling elites embraced Westernization.⁸⁰ The emphasis on elitism has arguably resulted in the English School weakening its relevance in the field of Global IR.

The Eurocentric or Western conceptualisation of international society presents a significant challenge to the English School's capacity to engage effectively with and contribute to the broader field of Global IR. This limitation can be attributed to the English School's historical roots and theoretical framework, which are significantly shaped by Western traditions and assumptions. However, recent years have witnessed a notable shift, characterised by an increasing demand for dialogue between these perspectives. This is further evidenced by the growing body of prominent publications that explore and seek to bridge the intersection of the English School and Global IR studies, reflecting a progressive effort to overcome these epistemological divides.⁸¹ This shows that a large number of works by advocates of global IR draw heavily on the English school of thought. This may be because the English School offers a historical model of explanation for the current international order and society. Alternatively, it may be because the scholars of the English School and the facilities encourage them to develop ideas towards Global IR. However, it seems more plausible that it is the school's historical methodology that inspires it. The rise of non-Western powers such as China could serve as an evaluative context for the English School, a perspective already considered by its leading thinkers.⁸² Therefore, conducting rigorous academic research is essential to support the ongoing development of the English School and facilitate dialogue within Global IR.

78 Buzan, *An Introduction to the English School of International Relations*, p. 66.

79 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

80 *Ibid.*, p. 155.

81 Hidemi Suganami, "The International Society Perspective on World Politics Reconsidered", *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 2:1, 2002, pp. 1-28; Ian Clark, "Towards an English School Theory of Hegemony", *European Journal of International Relations*, 15:2, 2009, pp. 203-228; Barry Buzan, "Could IR Be Different?", *International Studies Review*, 18:1, 2016, pp. 155-157; Shunji Cui and Barry Buzan, "Great Power Management in International Society", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 9:2, 2016, pp.181-210; Amitav Acharya, "Race and Racism in the Founding of the Modern World Order", *International Affairs*, 98:1, 2022, pp. 23-43.

82 Jiangli Wang and Barry Buzan, "The English and Chinese Schools of International Relations: Comparisons and Lessons", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 7:1, 2014, pp. 1-46.

The English School addresses important modern processes and challenges, providing insightful contributions to the study of Global IR. First, its framework for studying regional and global dynamics is especially pertinent to comprehending regionalization and globalization, two important processes influencing contemporary world politics.⁸³ A helpful lens for analyzing the role of rising powers in global governance is also provided by the English School's insights into the integration of emerging powers into the international system, which are based on its study of the expansion and transformation of international society.⁸⁴ Additionally, the School's emphasis on normative theorizing how justice and order can be established and upheld in a global society aligns with the growing significance of normative issues in global international relations studies.⁸⁵

The English School's emphasis on ideas like international community, order, justice, historicity, and methodological pluralism can enhance Global IR by providing new insights on important issues, even though the literature does not directly compare it to studies of Global IR. The comprehension of the various actors and processes that contribute to international relations and global governance can be improved by using this multifaceted approach.

Conclusion

This article has discussed the potential of the English School to make a substantial contribution to the advancement of Global IR, emphasising the significance of dialogue between these frameworks. By undertaking a critical analysis of the historical evolution, methodological foundations and normative emphasis of the English School, the study has identified three key findings. Firstly, the Eurocentric legacy of the English School represents a significant constraint. However, its focus on international society and norms provides a robust framework for addressing global challenges. Secondly, the incorporation of emerging powers and non-Western perspectives into international society demonstrates the adaptability of the English School within a pluralistic global order. Thirdly, the School's emphasis on the interplay between order and justice offers valuable insights into contemporary issues, such as global governance and regionalism.

From a practical standpoint, these theoretical contributions can inform policies and strategies aimed at fostering inclusive global governance. To illustrate, the English School's normative focus on justice and historical sensitivity can inform multilateral negotiations, enabling the accommodation of rising powers and the addressing of global inequalities. Similarly, its methodological pluralism provides analytical tools for examining the dynamic interactions between state and non-state actors, thus offering a nuanced understanding of the evolving international system. Policymakers could utilise these insights to construct frameworks that more accurately reflect the diverse interests of the global community.

Further research could build on the existing work on the English School and Global IR by focusing on three key areas. Firstly, empirical studies could analyse specific instances of non-Western contributions to international society, thereby providing a more detailed historical narrative. Secondly, comparative studies of regional governance models could assess the relevance of English School concepts in diverse cultural and geopolitical contexts. Thirdly, interdisciplinary approaches integrating economics, sociology and cultural studies could enhance the theoretical and practical utility of the English School in addressing

83 Barry Buzan and Yongjin Zhang (ed.), *Contesting International Society in East Asia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2014.

84 Parrat and Spandler, "Using the English School to Understand Current Issues in World Politics", pp. 145-160.

85 Navari, "The Development of English School Theory: An Introduction", pp. 1-13.

complex global challenges. By expanding its analytical scope, the English School could play a pivotal role in shaping a truly global discipline of international relations.

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The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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