



The Palgrave Handbook of Global Politics in the 22nd Century

Edited by
Laura Horn · Ayşem Mert
Franziska Müller

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Introduction—The Qurative Turn in Global Politics

Laura Horn, Ayşem Mert, and Franziska Müller

Q Collective

There is no longer any serious contender to quuration as central approach to social science. Nonetheless, it is worthwhile to recount the developments of the Qurative turn and what they mean for our understanding of global politics. Remnants of perspectives pre-dating the 2022 Chiang prism event are surfacing in academic debates ever so often; mostly these discussions corroborate the archaic nature of the foundations on which global politics scholars had built their scholarly endeavours. The purpose of this book, however, is not to reproduce the triumphalism of early quantum social science perspectives (Nilsson Ψ 2029; Whitey and Moon Ψ 2030). Rather, given the conjunctural constellation of the upcoming celebrations of the bicentenary of the scientific quantum revolution, as well as the recent observance of the bicentenary of

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‘International Relations’, as obscure as these events might have been perceived outside of certain academic circles, it seems a particularly auspicious moment for stock-taking of the field. Its past achievements are well covered, so our attention here focuses on the present condition of Global Politics, showcasing the strength of *quration*. Naturally, the ambition of this book stands rather in contrast to the handbooks of the past (e.g. Dunne et al. 2020; Weber 2021; Tickner and Smith 2020; Chandler et al. 2021). Whereas prior academic works sought, like this example from the early twenty-first century, to ‘provide a single volume of extensive, systematic, authoritative overview of the state of the art within the various sub-fields of the discipline’ (Carlsnaes et al. 2002: preface), the *qurative* turn has made these closures redundant. Instead, the book seeks to open up a glimpse into the many worlds, and by extension many futures, of contemporary global politics. This brief introduction situates this book and its format within the contemporary context and then lays out the plan of the book.

1 HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS

The onto-epistemological position espoused in *qurative* approaches is informed by the imperative to oversee, chronicle and witness global politics, rather than mimic the analytical, Newtonian impulses that have long withheld social sciences from reaching their full potential in exploring human progress.

Interestingly, an engagement, if not entanglement with quantum science had already emerged within ‘International Relations’ in the early twenty-first century (Wendt 2015). Some of this appears to have come about as a counter-reaction to a dominant twentieth-century social science approach which posited a naïve approach to reality, epitomized by the then famous academic motto: ‘Social scientists who focus on only overt, observable behaviors are missing a lot, but how are we to know if we cannot see?’ (King et al. 1994: 41).¹ Early ramifications of what later (de)(anti)materialized as the *qurative* turn emerged in the context of Anthropocene IR studies. While lacking the groundbreaking quantum approach, already in these writings a critique of temporalities indicated that IR’s ideational history desperately needed to move beyond its anachronistic paradigms. Quantum social science followed in the slipstream of the opposing constructivist paradigm, which in the early twenty-first century had established itself as the mainstream approach to the study of world politics, but fell prey to ‘paradigm erosion’ following the new and gruesome materialities pervading late-stage eco-modernism. Despite the considerable niche positioning of early quantum social science researchers, the

¹ Historical records show that there was a persistent, if rather tired tradition for wearing this sentence on robes for graduation during the 2020s, 30s and 40s as counter-reaction to *quration*.

technological advances at that time propelled academic interest towards ‘quantizing IR’. As Der Derian and Wendt argued back then (2020: 409), ‘quantum is just too important to be left to the scientists alone’.

We know now that the arguments and theoretical propositions of these early quantum scholars ultimately remained dangling due to the absence of computational power, as well as a certain propensity of this scholarship to fetishize abstract discussions over a concrete engagement with the burning (quite literally, in some parts of the world) challenges in global politics. The bodies kept piling up, while theorists retreated into metaphysics to discuss social wave functions. That is not to say that these approaches were without merit. They raised crucial questions, e.g. about the geopolitical realities in which quantum computing emerged (Der Derian and Wendt 2020). A plurality of early quantum approaches unfolded, including feminist, posthuman and critical perspectives (Barad 2007; Cudworth et al. 2018; Zanotti (2019); Murphy 2021; Der Derian and Wendt 2022). While they did not foresee the qurative turn as such, some of the concepts central to quration have indeed been prefigured in this literature. The pivotal position the research group ‘Project Q’ had in the immediate aftermath of the prism event in 2022 indicates that there was some relevance of these pre-prism quantum approaches.² At the same time, their failure to retain this role when it had become clear that classical assumptions of causality had collapsed shows that many of these early quantum scholars remained bound by remnants of ‘International Relations’ thought of the twentieth century.³ It is difficult for us to grasp the conditions of knowledge production of these early twenty-first-century scholars; the unequal power relations and hostile structures in academic environments at the time are indeed quite confounding.

With this in mind, it is perhaps easier to understand just how important the events of 2022 were not just in human history, but also the study of it. Fortunately, after the first few waves of social unrest over the political, economic and cultural consequences of the prism event had subsided, academic discussions started to make sense of the quantum spectrum. Fundamentally instrumental in this was the revalidation of late twentieth-century philosophical thought, in particular the work of Douglas Adams. His seminal pentalogy HHGTTG did not get recognition upon publication other than as a novel, whereas by the mid-2030s it had been established that it had, in fact, much to say on the subject of parallel universes. Generally, the literature highlights two core arguments of Adams’ framework (Bonfert Ψ 2036). Firstly, the ontological acceptance of epistemological inadequacy; as the book states: ‘you don’t stand the remotest chance of understanding it. You can therefore say “What?” and “Eh?” and even go cross-eyed and start to blither if you like without any fear of

² Archival records have been backed up here <https://projectqsydney.com/>.

³ The physical destruction of their HQ in the mega bush fires that destroyed large parts of New South Wales in 2028 certainly also was a factor in the breakdown of academic engagement.

making a fool of yourself' (Adams 1992: 25). This proved an essential starting point for a qurative approach, as readers will no doubt also experience while engaging with this book. The second foundational argument put forward by Adams concerns the fundamental ontological constitution of the universal wave function, and by extension the branching off of the many worlds. Even though it is well-known, it is worth relaying his formulation of WSOGMM in some detail.

[A]ny given universe is not actually a thing as such, but is just a way of looking at what is technically known as the WSOGMM, or Whole Sort of General Mish Mash. The Whole Sort of General Mish Mash doesn't actually exist either, but is just the sum total of all the different ways there would be of looking at it if it did. [...] You can slice the Whole Sort of General Mish Mash any way you like and you will generally come up with something that someone will call home. (Adams 1992: 26)

The pragmatism inherent in this ontology is at the heart of quration. The concept of WSOGMM has perhaps gone out of fashion as quration moved across academic disciplines, and consolidated into a universal scientific approach with a concomitant linguistic apparatus. The eclipse of English as *lingua franca* in academic conversations by the rapid rise of Amharic, Bengali and Bahasa also meant that Adams' original work receded somewhat into the background from the 2050s onwards, at least until the realization of babel fish implants that enabled instantaneous cognitive translation such as the one taking place when you read this text.⁴ It should also be kept in mind here that there were massive trench wars, academic squirmishes and in a few cases even physical altercations at conferences in the decades it took for such an entangled understanding of the universe to fully become academic common sense. As a prescient early twenty-first-century physicist noted, 'the connection between all the components of the universe is disconcerting' (Rovelli 2020: 85). Eventually quration crowded out any of the remnant perspectives that pre-dated 2022. Towards the end of the twenty-first century, and ever since, the main theoretical development in our field has in fact been exnovation; a welcome trend against the background of almost 200 years of scholarly bickering that ultimately proved to be missing the point on the very nature of reality.

2 THE PRISM EVENT AND QURATION

The Chiang prism event in late 2022 marks the historical point when quantum theory became actualized into an applied social science. As a physicist of the twentieth century had suggested, quantum theory was indeed 'not the problem, [but] the solution' (Deutsch 1997: 51), and eventually it resulted in severing the link to the classical, single universe conception of reality. Much

⁴ halo pembaca yang budiman! [note to production—this one keeps glitching, can you please check the code?].

has been written on the prism event in our branch (see, e.g. Mbabazi Ψ 2067). Historiographies particularly highlight the role of technological innovation in the early twenty-first century, leading to remarkable progress on quantum computation, as compared to only several decades before (Deutsch 1997: 214) (Ox Ψ 2045). What is often omitted from these narratives however is the broader context in which these technologies were developed. Compared to the early twenty-first-century forecasts, anthropogenic climate change (global heating) and biodiversity loss took place at much higher scales and speeds, resulting in considerable changes in microbiological processes. Prior to the prism event, the growth pattern of fungal mycelia as an interconnected network had been well-studied (e.g. Fricker et al. 2017); but not connected to quantum theoretical discussions. The sudden spike in neural activity across colony formation in several mycelial species, linked to changing macroecological conditions, was first observed by indigenous scientists in what was then the Amazon Delta. Follow-up research eventually resulted in the realization that these mycelial networks could be harnessed for qbit computing, solving fermionic oscillation and making computational processes more powerful than previously imaginable. The vocal protests of several indigenous communities about what was in effect a possibility to weaponize fundamental microscopic (and vast!) parts of ecosystems were a crucial factor in the early regulation of, access to and governance of what became the Chiang prism.

The political, social and academic ripple effects of the prism event are well-known, of course, and will only be sketched out in passing here (for a comprehensive overview, see Grogiratti Ψ 2072). Its emergence is perhaps the biggest triumph of the power of human ingenuity and imagination. The mycelial-quantum revolution essentially built on a fictional account of a prism (Chiang 2019); conceived, developed and implemented at a staggering speed. It should be kept in mind that the conditions of the early twenty-first century were dire indeed, with imminent ecological collapse, disastrous social inequalities, a pathological economic system and increasing political and military conflicts. A techno-optimist imaginary underwriting the early quantum community hence certainly had a role to play in this process. The Henkenian School is perhaps the best known example of the kind of interdisciplinary research programmes that ushered in the quantum age (Henke Ψ 2031). The mechanics of the prism, establishing a permanent state of coherent superposition, are based on basic quantum theory (now part of early-childhood education, but in the 2020s only studied by a select few). Prior to the prism, it was assumed that any measurement, or observation of a specific quantum state caused it to assume a classic state. With the prism, the collapse of the wave function was no longer a mystery, but rather an event that could be controlled, albeit only to some extent, by manipulating the ions sent through the mycelial network. Activating the prism, just like Chiang (2019) had predicted, split the universal wave Ψ into two branches. In the many-worlds reality, instead of collapsing the wave function, all its probabilities are realized, resulting in an

infinity of branched worlds. The mechanics of the prism are obviously probabilistic rather than deterministic; observation of a branched world is also a question of where and when. Branching in effect means that the linearity of time is suspended; rather the sideways exploration can be conceptualized as a jump without vectoral orientation. Similarly, prism mechanics has an inherent randomness that prevents comprehensive examination of branch events; it is impossible to achieve full directionality (which also explains the slightly random selection of branch worlds included in this volume, see below).

The initial prism event technology manifested this revolutionary process at a very rudimentary level. Historical artefacts from the 2020s show the bulky, almost primitive apparatus that was used (Xiaoning Ψ 2047). The anonymous creators had shared the source code and instructions in a simultaneous transmission to all entities that were at that time member of the ‘United Nations’ organization. After the initial blackout on the discovery had been lifted, commercial applications of the prism technologies were widespread; however, the consequences of the prism on populations traumatized by decades of existential dread proved difficult to manage (Hernandez Ψ 2028; Egede Ψ 2035; Diakité Ψ 2029).

Eventually, the Quantum Council (QC) decided to strictly regulate access to prisms, prioritizing research and knowledge production over commercial pursuits. This decision was not easily reached, given the way the world was organized around the idea of competing nation-states, and the prioritization of corporate interests in the early twenty-first century. There were significant struggles between nation-states to be at the centre of this new technology, and the corporate push-back against regulation was powerful. Against them, there was the coalition of Most Affected People and Areas, who gained increasing power when they asserted their leadership in key organizations such as the IQC (MAPA Ψ 2032). It has been rumoured that even the decision to establish the IQC Headquarters in Nusantara was not without contestation: The then city of Copenhagen, also competing to be the centre of the new organization, and keen to remain the central site of quantum interpretation and a hub of global politics, organized a number of cyberattacks against the current Indonesian capital. The fact that Copenhagen is now partially submerged, and large parts of the Danish population are relocated to Greenland illustrates well the shifting patterns of techno-political progress, as well as the wisdom of the decision-makers.

The curative turn was a natural consequence of the quantum revolution. Social scientists found a starting point in Chiang’s visionary text from 2019, where he posed the questions that would come to define quuration.

Can a single quantum event by itself lead to visible changes between the two branches? Is it possible for broader historical forces to be studied using prisms?

These famous words were the beginning of quurationism as the new and ultimate epistemology of the futures to come. At once, infinite possibilities to

explore various realities emerged, or at least this is what was considered to be the case. Unfortunately for those early quationalism optimists, however, information exchange between branched worlds proved difficult. Only limited transmission across the respective branches was eventually established, through costly ion manipulation technique. The strain this communication took on the mycelial network however was not anticipated. Had the risk of losing the mycelial network altogether not been so clear and immediate, the swift and strict regulation of prism technology would probably not have taken place. Only with closely monitored restrictions on its use and directionality could safe use of the prism event technology be guaranteed. This effectively limited the possibilities of information exchange with the principles now known as *simple code* and *absolute zero centralization*: The former means that only simple codified information content can be exchanged between the branches, and no type of physical matter can be experimented with even in laboratory conditions. The latter principle is more obvious and common sensical: As the prism event occurred in $\Psi 0$, i.e. the reality in which we are based, it appears that communication is effectively limited to bilateral exchange between $\Psi 0$ and other Ψ s. The 2065 prism convention convened by the IQC explicitly prohibits sharing superpositioned information between Ψ s as this might risk further branch-offs, or cause their states to decohere. This puts us as quators in a privileged position, and has significant implications for the quative approach. The next section engages with the core propositions and ambitions of quationality.

3 QURATIVE REFLECTIONS

Permanent superimposition and the collapse of deterministic causality across many worlds allow the quative approach to achieve a relational and yet simultaneously a fully detached researcher positioning. This book perhaps serves as a perfect illustration of how the author function, so crucial still in twenty-first century pre-prism academia, has been transcended. Quration enables reflective retrospectives and trans-temporal dialogues. As quators, we do not have to question the material that is transmitted to us; our role rather is to showcase and oversee the exchange. While the angel of history is still flying backwards, he is also casting his eyes sideways now. Even the Benjaminian renaissance scholars of the mid-2070s eventually had to agree that quration is the proof that ‘nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history’ (Benjamin 1940). The recalcitrant discussions about the societal commitments of quration are a legacy of pre-prism debates in Global Politics and International Relations, where scholarship appears to have been deeply divided about such archaic notions of neutrality and emancipatory ambitions. The early quantum literature had also picked up on this, arguing that the birth of quantum physics in the early twentieth century included no ‘emancipatory goal’, but that quantum approaches shared common ground with the critical impulse to search for new conceptual territory (Murphy 2021: 5). Quration shed the tired binary of critical vs problem-solving social science,

since it is neither conceptual nor political, but *quantum* territory that is to be explored and discovered. As historians remind us, this relativity of positioning, the coherent contingency of superposition, had already been explored in twentieth-century science fictional analysis, e.g. this account by Larry Niven (1968: 39).

If alternate universes are a reality, then cause and effect are an illusion. The law of averages is a fraud. You can do anything, and one of you will, or did. [...] Every decision was made both ways. [...] And so it went, all through history.

The curative understanding that there are, in fact, no facts that hold a truth outside of a branched-off world, is complemented by researcher positioning that allows for rejecting the classical state ontology that permeates pre-prism approaches. Instead, permanent superposition constitutes the epistemological and methodological foundations of curation. Following the many-worlds approach, curation essentially supersedes empiricism, in that objective observation is no longer a singular point in time, with clear questions and binary findings. Critics have questioned the privileged position of curators in $\Psi 0$, and posited that the power hierarchies across the wave function might result in unequal access to quantum knowledge (Menchu de Sousa Ψ 2078). In fact, even if access to curative communication is limited for some, a quantum approach furthers the connections across the universal wave function as it shows that ‘everything exists solely in the way it affects something else’ (Rovelli 2020). What, then, does it mean for our understanding of global politics that, as was already pointed out in early quantum theory, ‘the multiverse is not a discrete set of universes but a continuum, and not all the universes are different’ (Deutsch 1997: 211)?

4 OUTLINE AND SCOPE OF THE BOOK

The chapters included in this book have been curated following the probabilistic logic at the heart of the approach. Scholars operating the prism in their respective branch prepared these contributions on developments in global politics in their reality, starting around 2022 and reaching into the contemporary period. Having received the prism transmissions, we then subsequently selected a kaleidoscope of contributions that really showcases what many-worlds actually means. We have avoided those branches that had clearly collapsed due to developments related to the prism event. Not every global society managed to avoid the weaponization of the Chiang prism. Public debates about the horrors transmitted from these branches might pop up in the news cycle, but are not relevant for our debates. Similarly, we have omitted branch-off transmissions that have seen sudden ecological changes which have

eradicated human life as we know it.⁵ As is clear from the table of contents, the contributions also address a plethora of themes and approaches relevant in the particular branch they come from. While International Relations and Global Politics in the first century of their academic pursuit seem to have been thought of as ‘interdisciplinary’ engagement, quuration of course renders interdisciplinarity redundant. When your approach is relational and relative to branched-off realities, the need for absolutes such as academic disciplines dissolves. At the same time, there is a remarkable tendency cutting through the many world transmissions quurated in this book. The impulse of knowledge production and certain scholarly practices, whether as research in academic institutions or in other contexts, appears to be a near-universal feature; global politics is one of the central themes. To explore the differences in the transmissions and contributions to this volume, we point the reader towards the importance of understanding the shared history these transmissions have until the 2022 Chiang prism event. The occurrence of pre-2022 references across several of these chapters, drawing on a shared literature and academic history, might initially be alienating. As was common during that time, the reference style for this period has been chosen to be using simple brackets (...), as unprecise as that might seem to the contemporary reader. All references after 2022 however are marked with the familiar $\langle \Psi \rangle$.⁶ A striking feature of the transmissions included here is that none of them mention the 2022 event, and quuration seems to be unique to our branch; essentially establishing ours as the master reality. This either showcases the strength of the government cover-up on the technology, or else might point towards cognitive rejection of this particular form of quantum science.

The book is broadly structured in three parts. The section on Theories and Concepts covers theoretical developments and conceptual discussions. In truly quurative fashion, the authors cover ‘time epistemics’, reflect on IR’s ideational histories and how they—thanks to the prism event—finally overcame their silo-thinking and rearranged across the earlier camps.

The section on themes in Global Politics is quurated so as to cover transmissions on (in)security, governance and technology, the Anthropocene, as well as identity and culture. Reflections on diplomatic orders and strategic partnerships as well as the beauties and horrors of algorithm antipolitics highlight some of the challenges our worlds have seen in the past decades. More so, several pieces on ecological crises, labelled as the looming ‘Anthropocene’ already a century ago, give an impression of how human–nature relations have evolved, and how international politics now seek to navigate species

⁵ We did consider including the one with the cephalopods, but they seemed close to figuring out how to stabilize the Ψ prism transmission to connect to other branches, which would have obviously jeopardized our own research.

⁶ Surely the diversity of scholarly references in itself is sufficient proof for the many-worlds interpretation. At the same time, transmission was challenging with such vast amounts of data, resulting in data loss such as with the transmission from Patrick Thaddeus Jackson where the reference list could not be recovered.

and ecosystemic survival. Repercussions on identity and humankind's ongoing quest for transcendence form the concluding part of this section.

Part three offers reflections from practitioners, as well as an outline of new forms of scholarly practice. A concluding transmission has been added that complements the branched-off transmissions with a past perspective.

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Theory and Concepts



The Evolution of Global Society Theory

Barry Buzan

1 INTRODUCTION

As we stand at the bicentenary of the formal founding of International Relations (IR) as a discipline, it is a good moment to look back at the origins and evolution of Global Society Theory (GST). The next section briefly reviews the deep origins of thinking about global society. But its main focus is on the so-called ‘English School’, and its thinking about ‘international’ and ‘world society’, as it evolved during the last decades of Western-global international society from the 1950s to 2019. Section 2 covers the turbulent period of deep and contested pluralism dominating the 2020s and 30s, and marking both the transition from a Western-dominated to a more global society, and from the English School framing to an emergent GST one. Section 3 surveys the development of GST, and its relationship to the embedded pluralism and humanist solidarism that consolidated global society in the long five decades following the Impactor Crisis of the late 2030s. Section 4 examines the breakdown and reconfiguration of GST from the 2090s to the present under the rising pressure of deep divisions over questions about the nature and purpose of humankind. Will the relevance of GST’s analytical framing, which has proved adaptive for nearly two centuries, survive the highly divisive tensions now fracturing global society?

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2 THE ‘ENGLISH SCHOOL’ UP TO 2019: INTERNATIONAL AND WORLD SOCIETY

For most of human history, society had been mainly a local affair. The Axial age religions offered wider visions of what world society might be, such as the Islamic *umma*, Christendom, and the Chinese concept of *Tianxia* (all under heaven), though without being able to deliver it as more than a subglobal reality. The nationalism that developed during the nineteenth century, also transcended localism, but at the cost of dividing the idea and the practice of a world society into mainly competing politico-cultural fragments. The radical idea that these fragments might form a second-order form of *international society*, had its roots in thinking about international law. It is conventionally tracked back to the seventeenth century jurist Hugo Grotius, but became more explicit during the nineteenth century, with the rapid expansion of positive international law. The then emergent discipline of Sociology ignored the idea, preferring to restrict its study to first order societies in which individual humans were the constituent members. But lawyers could not conceive of international law without there being a society of states to give it meaning, and they developed this framing during the nineteenth century (Lorimer 1884). What became known as the English School developed this idea within the discipline of IR from the 1950s onwards.

The English School only began to emerge at the point after the Second World War when 150 years of a highly West-centred colonial global international society was drawing to a close. Although Western dominance lingered on for a further six decades, from the late 1940s decolonization began the long process towards a more truly global and equal international society. In its first phase during the 1960s–1980s, classical English School Theory (EST) generally privileged the interstate domain, saw the transnational domain as largely subordinate to it, and took the interhuman domain mainly as a moral referent for the interstate one, but with little or no meaningful agency. Its main concern was the weakening of interstate society both by the ideological division between ‘communist’ and ‘democratic capitalist’ superpower blocs, and by the influx of numerous poor, weak, and non-Western states and peoples into interstate society. The principal perspective was a state-centric pluralist order, with world society and solidarism/justice generally seen as a supplicant to that order. Hedley Bull (1977), with his key insight that even the anarchical interstate landscape exhibited social norms significant enough to constitute a ‘society’ rather than simply a ‘system’, is the representational work for this phase. The key focus was on the interstate primary institutions of sovereignty, territoriality, international law, diplomacy, balance of power, great power management, and war, with Mayall (1990) adding nationalism.

From the late 1980s to the Great Recession starting in 2007, a second phase emerged alongside the first as English School theorists responded to the intense globalization and seeming triumph of the liberal teleology of the time. Led by a brief burst of US primacy after 1989, and the explosion of the

global internet onto the scene from the mid-1990s, the last peak of Western primacy seemed to be shifting the balance away from the interstate domain and pluralism towards the transnational and interhuman domains. There was a significant rise of the justice/solidarism agenda, particularly concerning human rights, not seen as in tension with order, but as a necessary condition for it. Wheeler (2000) and Hurrell (2007) are the representative works for this phase. Although resisted by committed pluralists, there was an expectation, that in some important ways what was called ‘international society’ (interstate) and ‘world society’ (transnational and interhuman) were beginning to merge. Responsibility in international society, traditionally covered by great power management, was increasingly diffusing into, and being shared by, global governance (Bukovansky et al. 2012). By 2019, a century ago, when IR was celebrating its first centenary, the ES had added a social structural approach, focusing on the primary institutions of international society, and their interplay with intergovernmental organizations and other so-called secondary institutions (Buzan 2004).

But by this time the transition to a post-Western world order was already well underway. From 2020, a sharp turn towards deep pluralism—not just a diffusion of wealth and power, but also of cultural and political authority—became the dominant trend.¹ Both the liberal teleology and US leadership weakened severely and unrecoverably under the Trump administration. Xi Jinping’s China and Putin’s Russia turned increasingly totalitarian and aggressive, triggering a new cold war with the West versus China and Russia. And the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020–2023 reinforced self-reliance more than cooperation. This turn led to a resurgence of pluralism/order thinking, and a loss of confidence among those promoting solidarism/justice.

By the end of the Western era early in the last century, EST had coalesced around three analytical cores:

1. Understanding global society ontologically in terms of the interplay and balance of social institutions across three domains: interstate, transnational, and interhuman.
2. Understanding global society structurally in terms of a set of durable but evolving primary institutions that played variously across the three domains, and which were mutually constitutive with a likewise durable but evolving set of secondary institutions.
3. Understanding global society normatively in terms of a permanent interplay and tension between order (*pluralism*) and justice (*solidarism*) that had continuously to be renegotiated according to the circumstances of the time.

EST had, of course, always been built around triads, starting with Martin Wight’s (1991) famous distinctions among international system, international

¹ For discussion see Acharya and Buzan (2019), Chapter 9.

society, and world society. This analytical framing proved growingly attractive because its core analytical triad proved flexible enough to capture the ongoing events and transformations that were continuously reshaped global society under modernity.

3 2020S–2030S—THE TRANSITION FROM ENGLISH SCHOOL TO GLOBAL SOCIETY THEORY IN THE ERA OF CONTESTED DEEP PLURALISM

The quite rapid shift from expectations of liberal globalization to the realities of a deepening contested pluralism, set up a major challenge to EST. The main direction and form of global society changed quite dramatically. What had seemed a strong solidarist momentum in the interstate and transnational domains, faltered as its dependence on a declining West became apparent. As the West weakened, so did its commitment to liberalism. As the rising powers gained wealth, power, and cultural and political authority, so their commitment to the core pluralist values of sovereignty, territoriality, and nationalism, strengthened. EST was not the only IR theory to be challenged by these changes. Inward-looking, self-obsessed, defensive, great powers not interested in dominating the international system, did not fit the realist framing at all well. Liberal assumptions and values were in palpable retreat almost everywhere, and the system of rules and intergovernmental organizations that had been set up by the Western powers was increasingly contested. The ongoing restraints on great power war, plus the constraining of the global economy, and the re-empowerment of non-Western cultures, reduced the appeal of materialist approaches to IR, and strengthened the imperative to understand global social structures and the normative dynamics that shaped them. The implications of these changes for the discipline of IR were anticipated by Acharya's (2014; Acharya and Buzan 2019, Chapter 10) call for a Global IR discipline, and Tickner and Wæver's (2009) for the 'worlding' of IR.

Under these conditions, the analytical triad of EST turned out to be attractive and flexible enough to widen the academic support base of the approach. EST's openly normative strand suited the cultural differentiation that was a feature of contested deep pluralism. Its quite fine-grained social structural approach showed not only what was changing in GIS, but just as importantly highlighted that the array of pluralist primary institutions was remaining relatively stable. And the fact that it was a widely acknowledged IR theory, but one that was not associated with the US, made it congenial to the expanding non-Western community of IR scholars. During the mid-2020s, the English School debated all this, conscious both of the opportunity around it, and of the problem of its increasingly inappropriate name, which had been coined by someone calling for its closure (Jones 1981). Several leading ES scholars decided to relaunch the brand as Global Society Theory (GST). The label GST

removed the parochial, ‘English’ part of the name, while retaining the flexibility to encompass ‘society’ in the interstate, transnational and interhuman domains. To this end major workshops on GST were convened at both the ISA in 2026, and the World International Studies Conference (WISC) in Singapore in 2027. Not only were the major figures from EST involved in this, but also people from complementary academic strands: postcolonialists interested in hybridity; global sociologists prepared to think about interstate society; global historical sociologists interested in following through the dialectics of the spread of modernity; liberal institutionalists interested in the interplay of primary and secondary institutions; constructivists wanting to use the social structural framing of primary institutions; and international political economists interested in the evolving political economy of the global market as a normative structure. This relaunch benefitted from the general move of IR towards a more global form marked by declining Western dominance and rising participation by scholars with roots in other cultures.

The edited volume coming out of the 2026–2027 workshops (Dunne et al. [Ψ 2028](#)) highlighted several themes. First, the liberal teleology as the implicit template for how global society was evolving, had collapsed. Second, the classical pluralist institutions proved resilient because they had been internalized by the rising powers. Third, the driving force behind the new pluralism was more about the distribution of status than about the norms and institutions of global society themselves. Fourth, how important what was remembered about colonialism, and what was forgotten, and by whom, was to the ongoing dynamics of global society. Fifth, how crucial the changing character of the security agenda was as a driver of the global social structure, as common security issues became more prominent, and national security ones less existential. This landmark work in many ways shaped the development of GST over the following decades. It made clear that despite some big changes—the infusion of new blood, a much wider and more balanced historical perspective, and a more diverse set of theoretical approaches—GST retained key features of the English School. In particular, it continued the commitment to taking society into account across all three domains, and retained the normative core of a permanent debate about the actual and the desirable balance between order and justice in global society.

Initially, the decline of Western dominance, plus the accompanying retreat of the liberal teleology, and the ‘rise of the rest’, favoured the pluralists. The quite swift emergence of deep contested pluralism put in place a world that was more fragmented in political, cultural, and economic terms, and with a more even distribution of wealth, power, and cultural authority, than had been the case before 2020. Yet this was not the traditional sort of state-centric pluralism that was a close reflection of realism’s power politics with a bit of minimalist order management tacked on. As argued by Acharya and Buzan ([2019](#)), and Buzan ([Ψ 2024](#)), this was pluralism of a quite different sort. It had been partly foreshadowed by Williams ([2015](#)) who showed how pluralism could be, and needed to be, applied beyond the interstate domain and into the transnational

and interhuman ones. The deep contested pluralism of the 2020s and 30s was in part about rival states, and the strengthening of sovereignty, territoriality, and nationalism as primary institutions of global society. But it was not about rival desires among great powers to dominate global society, because the principle of global hegemony was, by the mid-2020s, deeply illegitimate. In addition, no great power was any longer driven by a crusading universalist ideological vision. Neither did this new deep pluralism assume a willingness to resort to great power war for other than extreme defensive needs. Because all of the great powers were capitalist in one political form or another, there was a shared reluctance to shut down the global trading system entirely. There was also a rising, though far from dominant, shared understanding, reinforced by both the Covid-19 pandemic, and rising evidence of climate change in the form of extreme weather, that there were planetary threats in which all were entangled, and which none could handle alone. Another key difference with traditional pluralism was that this general understanding of things was also deeply rooted in the transnational and interhuman domains. All of this was first set out and theorized by Ashok Jones and Felicity Cui in their path-breaking 2028 book *The Moral Purpose of Global Society*, which dominated debate in GST circles for almost a decade.

Another landmark contribution to GST in this period was the book *Postcolonial Global Society* by Tagore and Suzuki (Ψ 2031). In part, this book built on the new pluralism template laid down by Jones and Cui. But it brought into that a deep historical, cultural, economic, political, and discursive/memory analysis of how the dialectics of colonialism and decolonization had flowed through world history to shape the current world (dis)order. The key to their analysis was the three stages of revolt against Western and Japanese imperialism and hegemony. During the colonial era, resistance mostly failed, and politics and the economy were run by the colonial powers. But the resistance left a much stronger memory in the periphery than in the core, which became crucial to identity formation in the Third World/Global South after independence. During the postcolonial era (1945–2008) the ‘revolt against the West’ noted by Hedley Bull, had some political success, but made little impact on either the economic and cultural position of the periphery, or on the hegemonic position of the West. Despite some limited success with economic nationalism, most of the periphery remained heavily linked to, and dependent on, the core capitalist powers, with only very few successful in closing the development gap. This phase built up resentment and frustration not only in the periphery because of its weakness and failure; but also in the core, because of the relentless security, economic and social burdens placed on it by the underdevelopment, corruption, and political chaos in many parts of the Global South. The third stage of revolt began in 2008, when the great recession undermined both the relative wealth and power of the West, and its liberal universalist model of political economy. Led by a then fast-rising China, substantial parts of the Global South, especially in Asia, increasingly added the revived possession of wealth, power and authority to their still sharp historical

resentments against the West and Japan. Tagore and Suzuki documented in penetrating detail just how big a role postcolonial resentment played in the unfolding of deep contested pluralism from 2008 on. A telling point in their analysis was how the general forgetting in the West and Japan of the darker sides of their colonial legacies contributed to a mutual misunderstanding and incomprehension between the retreating old great powers, and the rising new ones.

During this period, the first book to begin looking beyond deep contested pluralism was Falkner's (Ψ 2036) *Functional Pluralism*. Falkner's prescient work was not much noticed until after the Impactor Crisis of the late 2030s, but then became a foundation for much that followed in GST. She theorized global society in terms of what she saw as an emergent functional pluralism based on ever-rising collective concerns about the need to manage the growing environmental crisis. She tracked the coalescence of both public opinion and government policy across the major powers, and argued that despite the divisions, inadequacies, and failures of the previous two decades, environmental stewardship was gaining ground against sovereignty, territoriality, and nationalism in the institutional structure of global society. Her key insight was about how environmental stewardship had the potential to override, and in some senses solve, the disputes over status that had undermined much of the old system of intergovernmental organizations. She could not anticipate that the Impactor Crisis would hugely accelerate the core thrust of her analysis.

4 2040S–2080S—GLOBAL SOCIETY THEORY IN THE ERA OF EMBEDDED DEEP PLURALISM

It is difficult to underestimate the effects on global society of the great double meteorite strikes of 2037 and 2039 that respectively devastated Central America and the Caspian Sea basin. The direct casualties and damage, great though they were, were not the primary material effect of the impactor crisis. More important in the middle term was the twenty years of global cooling that was a consequence of the dust, gases, and smoke blasted into the atmosphere not only by the impacts themselves, but also by the subsequent volcanic activity triggered by them. The immediate effects were dealt with fairly well by national and international emergency response agencies. The global cooling was both a crisis of its own, and an opportunity. The crisis part was how to cope with disruptions to agriculture, transport, and power supplies. The opportunity was the temporary relief from rising global temperatures and sea levels, and the extreme weather events, that had put increasing pressure on many societies during the 2020s and 30s. These twin effects of the Impactor Crisis brought to an end the contested pluralist period of drift, turbulence, contestation, and uncertainty in global society that had been gathering force since the first decade of the century. In a sense, it marked the end of the difficult transition from the Western-dominated global societies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to the more egalitarian embedded pluralism, and

increasingly humanist solidarism, of the later twenty-first century. By pushing global society in all domains into a prolonged period of emergency responses, the longer-term cumulative effect of the crisis was to reset its institutions and attitudes, and rebalance its direction, for the next five decades.²

The most obvious change was in the new institutions that were a direct result of the Impactor Crisis: the Global Space Guard Organization (GSGO) in founded in 2038, and the Earth Environment Organization (EEO) in 2045. These started out as emergency responses, but quickly became deeply embedded. They were not part of the obsolete family of UN intergovernmental organizations. Indeed, they were not intergovernmental organizations at all in the old sense, but hybrids involving both states and non-state organizations, and with significant executive powers. As set out by Chen and Singh (Ψ 2051), these two organizations, and their increasing family of related institutions, not only embodied and reproduced the primary institution of environmental stewardship, but progressively strengthened it. They led a change in the balance between national and planetary security that underpinned the emerging embedded pluralism that was consolidated during the 2040s. That, in turn, unfolded into an increasingly homogenized, but still differentiated, global solidarist society. The old framing of nation-states still existed, and retained political and cultural importance, so it was still a pluralist system in that sense. But states existed alongside powerful new IGOs led by GSGO and EEO, that reflected the actual distribution of wealth, power, cultural authority, and technical capacity among both states and non-state actors. Common security perspectives to do with planetary defence and global environmental management now outweighed residual concerns about national security. The GSGO was increasingly effective in both locating and countering the dangers from space rocks. Its occasional high-profile intercepts increased both its legitimacy, and that of the need for a constant planetary defence. There were growing synergies between GSGO and EEO as global environmental management required some space-based infrastructure. What had once been a disturbing synergy between the dynamics of national security politics, and the interests of the so-called military-industrial complex, increasingly softened as high-tech efforts were directed more to planetary defence and global environmental management.

² Looking back on all this, the neo-historical sociologist Alexandr Lawson (Ψ 2053) calculated that while the Impactor Crisis was, in one sense, a random event having unique and particular consequences, in another sense it could be seen as a structural event. He demonstrated statistically using the new global database, that by the 2030s human society had become so dense and interdependent, and was inflicting such stress on the planetary ecosystems, that the probability of some sort of transformative global crisis was fast rising towards certainty. Whether that crisis was the two meteorites, or a global plague, or relentless sea-level rise, or widespread agricultural collapse, in one sense didn't matter. The particularities of the crisis would, of course, have particular effects, possibly much worse than what actually happened, but the longer-term shift towards heightened awareness of environmental stewardship was almost a structural inevitability.

The broader social effects of the Impactor Crisis fed into, and amplified, deeper social developments that were already underway in the 2030s. One was the functional pluralism already noticed by Falkner in the mid-2030s, but now much more strongly emergent. This trend was best captured by Kobinski and Chan (Ψ 2048). They argued that global society remained pluralist in the sense that most peoples and government preferred to retain a differentiated political structure to express and defend cultural differentiation, and to keep a substantial element of politics local. But at the same time, there had been a fundamental shift in the understanding of both governments and peoples that all were in the same boat, and that boat needed to be both maintained and navigated effectively if the differentiation among its passengers was to have any meaning or purpose. Environmental stewardship was now supported by a general understanding that Earth was not a given, stable environment, and that environmental management to maintain the supporting conditions for human civilization was a necessary and permanent task for humankind.

A new balance was emerging in which pluralism was more focused on maintaining cultural differentiation, and was much less concerned with national security, military power, and great power rivalry. The security agenda shifted strongly towards the common ground of planetary protection and management. It seemed that humankind was at last finding a sound balance between a desired degree of cultural and political diversity on the one hand, and a degree of global governance and coordination on the other, without these two being in contradiction. This new layering of identity featuring a strong collective/cosmopolitan component, was first set out by Tang and Mohammed (Ψ 2050).

Accompanying this was a notable convergence in the social concerns, practices, and perspectives of the major powers and their peoples, that stood in stark contrast to the cultivated divergence that marked the first four decades of the twenty-first century. Within the GIS literature this convergence, and its implication for global society, was first picked up and elaborated by Justin Goh, Cornelia Gonzalez, and Jorge Singh (Ψ 2048). Until the impactor crisis, convergence was masked not only by differences in development, but also by the preoccupation with cultural, political, racial, and civilizational differentiation, and the cultivation of historical grievances and populist victimhood politics. But the closing of the development gap that had dominated the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, meant that all the leading states and societies finally shared a common substrate of modernity. The market socialist approach led by the Chinese, and the social capitalist one dominant in the old West and Japan, looked increasingly similar in their policies on employment, surveillance, welfare, private property, and management of trade and finance. And as the twenty-first century wore on, the newly modernized powers such as China, India, and Brazil lost the prickly, hubristic, and aggressive edge that had so often accompanied the first attainment of modern wealth, power, and cultural authority by big societies. They blended into an expanding core which was