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Globalization and the social state*

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Abstract. One of the most common themes in the vast literature on globalization is that it is gradually undermining the state by making it meaningless if not obsolete. This article is a contribution to the growing body of literature that seeks to challenge that thesis. It does so by arguing that there are two distinct sets of processes at work in contemporary world politics: globalization and interstate interaction. While the former tends to break down territorial boundaries and replace them with new, uniform configurations of power, money and culture, the latter reconfirms territorial boundaries and the structures and processes contained by them. The interaction among states, which is often ignored by globalization theorists, may best be understood by situating it within the traditional international relations concept of an international society, provided that this is redefined to give it a more 'constructivist' orientation.

'Globalization' is currently one of the most fashionable concepts in several academic disciplines: international relations, sociology, history, cultural studies, geography and anthropology, with less frequent guest appearances elsewhere. Inevitably the vast outpouring of writings on the subject from such diverse fields has produced a wide range of definitions, interpretations, explanations and predictions. Yet if there is a common core to this literature it is the argument that various processes of globalization threaten the sovereign state by making it meaningless if not obsolete. This article is a contribution to the growing body of literature that seeks to challenge this thesis. It does so not by attempting to refute the assertion that there are indeed processes at work in the world today that may reasonably be described as 'globalizing', but by suggesting that there is an equally strong set of worldwide interactions and processes that confirm and enhance the sovereign state. It argues that these interactions and processes may best be understood by situating them in the traditional international relations concept of an international society, so long as this concept is given a broader, more dynamic and more 'sociological' grounding than it has in the relatively static and juridical conceptualization of international society of the 'English School'. In particular, it suggests that the role played by any society in giving intersubjective meaning and identity to its members is also played by international society in respect of its members: states. Whereas the 'globalization' thesis tends to place a self-seeking, individualistic and isolated state in opposition to vaster and more powerful globalizing structures and processes, this article argues

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that the state should be seen in its international context as a social as well as a self-seeking entity, with its membership of international society helping to confirm and preserve its identity as a state, while also shaping and changing it. In other words, there are two important processes (or discourses) at work: globalization and the social interaction among states. Each of these is powerful enough to be self-sustaining: they can and do affect each other, but one will not subsume the other.

Globalization versus the state

The term 'globalization' has been variously used to refer to *processes* (e.g., the expansion and internationalization of financial markets),[1] *interactive networks* (e.g., global corporate management; worldwide epistemic and interpretive communities),[2] *structures* (e.g., newly emerging power relationships deriving from changing global investment patterns),[3] and *discourses* (e.g., new social constructions of cognition, identity and meaning built upon postmodern global conditions).[4] Each of these perspectives has been applied to a wide range of issue areas, and each of these issue areas, in turn, contains its own logic, rules, norms and operational dynamic. Hence, the term is capable of sustaining an almost limitless variety of shades of meaning and of being applied in an equally wide range of contexts. What follows, therefore, is a necessarily simplified summary of some of the principal ways in which the concept has been employed to problematize the state. I shall then note some of the main criticisms that have been advanced against these variants of the globalization hypothesis before proceeding to my central argument, which situates the state in a particular social context—the society of states—and considers statehood against the two larger backgrounds of globalization and international society.

Discussions of globalization as an antithetical force to the state tend to fall into one or more of seven broad categories, whose central arguments may be listed under the following headings.

1. Issues

Numerous contemporary issues, notably the environment, health, crime, drugs and migration, can no longer be contained within national boundaries. This challenges the sovereign state's claim to exclusive jurisdiction within a given territory. It also

[1] The literature on this is vast. Examples include: E. Helleiner, *States and the Reemergence of Global Finance: From Bretton Woods to the 1990s* (Ithaca, NY, 1994); Richard O'Brien, *Global Financial Integration: The End of Geography* (London, 1992).

[2] On management, see, e.g., Vivien A. Schmidt, 'The New World Order Incorporated: The Rise of Business and the Decline of the Nation State', *Daedalus*, 124:2 (Spring 1995), pp. 75–106; on epistemic communities, see the special issue of *International Organization*, 46:1 (Winter 1992). The useful term 'interpretive community' is employed by Cynthia Weber, *Simulating Sovereignty: Intervention, the State and Symbolic Exchange* (Cambridge, 1995).

[3] e.g. Susan Strange, *The Retreat of the State: The Diffusion of Power in the World Economy* (Cambridge, 1996).

[4] e.g. Barrie Axford, *The Global System: Economics, Politics and Culture* (Cambridge, 1995); Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash and Roland Robertson (eds.), *Global Modernities* (London, 1995); Roland Robertson, *Globalization, Social Theory and Global Culture* (London, 1992); Jonathan Friedman, *Cultural Identity and Global Process* (London, 1994); Bryan S. Turner, *Orientalism, Postmodernism and Globalism* (London, 1994).

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renders unfeasible attempts to deal with such problems through traditional interstate organizations, since these also emphasize sovereignty.[5]

2. Actors

The world's affairs are increasingly being decided by non-state actors operating on a global scale. These include the managerial networks of giant transnational corporations (TNCs), large holders of capital, such as pension funds, the owners of vast media empires, and transnational terrorist and criminal groups. At another level, increasing numbers of individuals are becoming semi-detached from their states as they join one of the world's new nomadic tribes: sales and management personnel, bankers, scientists, international bureaucrats and others. Hence the state's leading role as an actor in world politics is under pressure from without (the growth in prominence of other actors) and within (the loosening of bonds tying elite individuals to their states).[6]

3. Markets

The state is also threatened by several interrelated developments in global markets. The size and reach of global financial markets makes it impossible for governments, even several governments acting in concert, to maintain the value of their currencies against contrary market forces.[7] Government fiscal and monetary policy is similarly circumscribed by the requirements of making economies attractive to foreign investment capital. This means, for example, that governments interested in redistributing wealth in favour of poorer sections of the community find it impossible to do so by increasing taxation on incomes.[8] Indeed, in order to meet their expenditure commitments they may need instead to increase taxes on goods and services, which hurts the poor more than the rich. Equally, where production has become globalized so that, for example, an automobile has parts manufactured in several different countries, governments are unable to employ conventional protectionist measures as the distinction between 'imports' and 'exports' becomes increasingly meaningless.[9] The seemingly inexorable power of markets breathes new life into neo-classical economic doctrines, which, amongst other things, require

[5] Joseph A. Camilleri and Jim Falk, *The End of Sovereignty? The Politics of a Shrinking and Fragmenting World* (Aldershot, 1992); John Macmillan and Andrew Linklater (eds.), *Boundaries in Question: New Directions in International Relations* (London, 1995); Marvin S. Soroos, *Beyond Sovereignty: The Challenge of Global Policy* (Columbia, SC, 1986).

[6] Strange, *Retreat of the State*; Howard Wachtel, *The Money Mandarins: The Making of a New Supranational Economic Order* (New York, 1986); C. Stirling, *Thieves' World: The Threat of the New Global Network of Organized Crime* (New York, 1994).

[7] Philip G. Cerny (ed.), *Finance and World Politics: Markets, Regimes and States in the Post-Hegemonic Era* (Aldershot, 1993); Geoffrey R. D. Underhill, 'Keeping Governments out of Politics: Transnational Securities Markets, Regulatory Cooperation, and Political Legitimacy', *Review of International Studies*, 21:3 (July 1995), pp. 251–78; Ron Martin, 'Stateless Monies, Global Financial Integration and National Economic Autonomy: The End of Geography', in Stuart Corbridge, Nigel Thrift and Ron Martin (eds.), *Money, Power and Space* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 253–78; Tony Porter, 'Capital Mobility and Currency Markets: Can They be Tamed?', *International Journal*, 51:4 (Autumn 1996), pp. 669–89.

[8] Philip G. Cerny, 'What Next for the State?', in Eleonore Kofman and Gillian Youngs (eds.), *Globalization: Theory and Practice* (London, 1996), pp. 123–37; Vincent Cable, 'The Diminished Nation-State: A Study in the Loss of Economic Power', *Daedalus*, 124:2 (Spring 1995); Ian R. Douglas, 'The Fatality of Globalization', paper presented to 1996 BISA Conference.

[9] Cable, 'Diminished Nation-State'.

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governments to deregulate their economies and in various other ways reduce their capacity to intervene in, still less control, their economies.[10] In all these ways what is frequently referred to as the 'economic sovereignty' of states is eroded.

4. Communication

Governments have less and less ability to influence the flow of information within their borders. This is partly because of the power of the major news agencies and the TV and press oligopoly, but more significantly because of the globalization of technological innovation. For example, the Chinese Government has tried without success to control its citizens' access to fax machines, satellite television and the internet. Other developments, notably fibre optics, are bringing ever closer the day when any individual, anywhere in the world, will be able to communicate cheaply and instantly with any other individual. This both weakens the state's separation in space and time from other states (and hence the citizen's psychological identification with 'his/her' state)[11] and destroys the capacity of any state wishing to be fully engaged in the modern world to control its citizens' access to 'undesirable' information. Furthermore, the capital cities of the leading states become 'world cities': part of an integrated network of urban centres which are becoming, in effect, decoupled from the national political communities to which they notionally belong.[12]

5. Culture

States, in their most common guise as 'nation-states', have traditionally been seen as the territorial location of 'national societies', which in turn have been seen as the repositories of distinct 'national cultures': common languages, values, symbols, rituals, practices and institutions. The state's ability to be seen as the embodiment and guardian of the national culture and identity enhanced its claim to sovereignty as well as its right to demand sacrifices and resources from its citizens. Now all national cultures are seen as threatened by an all-devouring global culture that is variously labelled as one of modernity, capitalism or westernization. The concern to protect what are seen as distinct national cultures is at the heart of debates and developments in countries as diverse as China, Iran and Britain. At the same time, a process of fragmentation of national cultural identities is under way, whereby ethnic and other subnational groupings become increasingly assertive of their right to a separate identity.[13]

6. Legitimacy

The legitimacy of the state's entitlement to sovereign authority over a clearly demarcated territorial domain rested upon its claim to be able to provide various

[10] Philip G. Cerny, 'The Infrastructure of the Infrastructure? Toward "Embedded Financial Orthodoxy" in the International Political Economy', in Ronen P. Palan and Barry Gills (eds.), *Transcending the State–Global Divide: A Neostructuralist Agenda in International Relations* (Boulder, CO, and London, 1994), pp. 223–49; Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson dispute such restrictive views of national economic sovereignty in P. Hirst and G. Thompson, *Globalization in Question*: *The International Economy and the Possibilities of Governance* (Cambridge, 1996).

[11] D. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 284–307.

[12] S. Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton, NJ, 1991); J. Friedman, 'The World City Hypothesis', *Development and Change*, 17:1 (1986), pp. 69–83. Paul L. Knox and Peter J. Taylor (eds.), *World Cities in a World System* (Cambridge, 1994).

[13] Robertson, *Globalization, Social Theory and Global Culture*, esp. pp. 164–81.

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collective goods, most importantly security against external threats, internal law and order and, more recently, economic welfare and social justice. All of these claims are open to question today. Globalization is one of a number of factors that have made old-fashioned wars of conquest pointless, while other types of threats to security are less easy to deal with by means of a conventional state response of mobilizing force against the threat.[14] The globalization of markets has also seriously affected the state's capacity to provide other kinds of public good, so that its authority is increasingly being challenged, bypassed and ignored by its citizens, while the power and authority of various transnational entities is growing. A 'neo-medieval' structure of authority is emerging, in which claimants to authority both outside and within the state undermine the legitimacy of the state's claim to sovereignty.[15]

7. Postmodernity

With the proviso that the term 'postmodernism' and those regarding themselves as postmodernists resist easy classification and even the notion that they form a class as such, various postmodernist readings of globalization argue that an even more profound paradigm shift is under way than is implied in any of the above scenarios, amounting, indeed, to nothing less than a general crisis of postmodernity, characterized by 'its all-deriding, all-eroding, all-dissolving destructiveness', as Bauman puts it.[16] The tortured and bizarre language favoured by postmodernists frequently obfuscates more than it reveals, but beneath the posturing and self-indulgent jargon are some interesting and important reflections. These include the assertion that globalization is undermining the dominant 'discourse' of modernity and the Enlightenment, a discourse that links positivist approaches to knowledge (the separation of subject and object, theory and practice, fact and value) with the constitution of specific dichotomies such as domestic/foreign, East/West, North/South, realism/idealism, order/anarchy, security/insecurity, together with the power relationships that underlie and emerge from such representations of reality. Since the state, and the categories of identity and difference that it incorporates, are centrally involved in such dichotomies, the state also becomes problematical, if not meaningless.[17]

Contra-globalization

All of the above arguments have been disputed or qualified in various ways and from several different standpoints: conservative, socialist, neorealist and liberal,

[14] Camilleri and Falk, *End of Sovereignty?*, pp. 139–70; Stephen J. Del Rosso, Jr, 'The Insecure State: Reflections on "the State" and "Security" in a Changing World', *Daedalus*, 124:2 (Spring 1995), pp. 175–207.

[15] Hedley Bull was the first to use the 'neo-medieval' image when he speculated about the possibility of a 'modern and secular counterpart' of the old medieval system of authority 'that embodies its central characteristic: a system of overlapping authority and multiple loyalty'. Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (London, 1977), p. 254. This image has been picked up (sometimes unacknowledged) by many globalization theorists.

[16] Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London, 1992), cited in N. J. Rengger, *Political Theory, Modernity and Postmodernity* (Oxford, 1995), p. 200.

[17] Richard Devetak, 'Postmodernism', in Scott Burchill and Andrew Linklater (eds.), *Theories of International Relations* (London, 1996), pp. 179–209.

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amongst others. It is not the purpose of this article to discuss these in any detail, but some of the principal arguments that have been advanced against globalization may be briefly noted in order to situate my conceptualization of the 'social state' within the more general debate about globalization.

A recurrent theme in the more sceptical responses to the globalization literature is that it contains nothing essentially new.[18] International trade and even capital flows have only recently returned to levels reached as long ago as the period before the First World War; the same period witnessed countless assertions to the effect that the world was so interdependent that war was impossible; the main arguments about the power of markets as against governments would have been familiar to Adam Smith, who, indeed, originated many of them; the Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Spanish and British all preceded the Americans as bearers of globalizing cultures, while the East India and Hudson Bay companies had more power than most contemporary TNCs; even postmodernism (ironically) has its foundational figure, Nietzsche. However, while valuable in bringing some historical perspective to bear upon the more extravagant claims of globalization theorists, such arguments should not permit the equally erroneous (if more comforting) illusion that everything is as it always has been. The speed of movement, both physical and electronic, that is possible today has reached an order of magnitude that would have been unimaginable only a hundred years ago, as also has the sheer quantity of information that is transmitted daily.

A related argument is that, while the globalization concept has undoubtedly identified processes and phenomena that clearly exist, it frequently exaggerates their effects. Professors of political economy who, when not surfing the internet, are jetting off to international conferences can sometimes lose sight of the more limited boundaries of most of the rest of the world. Even in the heartland of the global culture, the United States, the parochialism of TV and newspapers (with honourable exceptions) can often astound. Whether globalization has really reached into vast parts of China, Africa, India and Latin America must be even more open to question. Even if the concept has some validity, the severity of its impact on the state is highly questionable. While a particular conception of the state, as the provider of cradle-to-grave welfare and Keynesian macroeconomic management, may be on the decline, this occupied only a brief period in the history of the state and played no part whatsoever in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century state, when few could seriously question the state's claim to sovereignty. A similar point may be made in relation to twentieth-century models of the totalitarian state. Moreover, closer inspection usually reveals TNCs and other economic actors and processes to be more firmly grounded in their original national economies than globalization mythology suggests.[19]

[18] Examples of this more sceptical literature include L. Amoore et al., 'Overturning "Globalisation": Resisting the Teleological, Reclaiming the Political', in the special issue 'Globalisation and the Politics of Resistance', *New Political Economy*, 2:1 (1997); Hirst and Thompson, *Globalization in Question*; and R. J. Barry Jones, *Globalisation and Interdependence in the International Political Economy* (London, 1995).

[19] Richard Higgott, 'Globalisation and Governance: Changing Relationships between State, Market and Civil Society', unpublished paper, University of Warwick, 1996, pp. 9–10; for the argument that large corporations will remain state-based only so long as they retain their competitive edge by so doing, see Philip G. Cerny, 'Globalization and Other Stories: The Search for a New Paradigm for International Relations', *International Journal*, 51:4, p. 627.

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In this context, it should not be forgotten that many governments, led by Reagan's USA and Thatcher's Britain, have openly embraced globalization by deregulating and opening up their economies to market forces. Globalization deterministsm tend to argue that they had little choice in the matter, but this completely disregards the intense ideological conviction of both Reagan and Thatcher and the extent to which they represented a genuine revolution in political thinking. An economic policy that gave governments the central role of controlling inflation through interest-rate management while leaving everything else to the market had the attraction of simplicity, but more importantly appeared to offer governments a more effective set of policy instruments than economic plans, incomes policies and the other failed devices of the previous twenty years. Paradoxically, governments actually believed that they were *regaining* control over their economic affairs by liberalizing in response to globalization, not that they were losing control in the manner predicted by the globalization theorists.[20]

Similar points can be made about the non-economic features of globalization. Challenging new issues may well be emerging that defy solution within state boundaries, but that has always been the case, and, where necessary, governments have collaborated to deal with such problems. Piracy and infectious diseases were two such 'transnational' problems in the nineteenth century, for example. Similarly, while cultural globalization may indeed be weakening some aspects of individual identities and strengthening others, it can hardly be said to be having the same all-pervasive impact as European and American imperialism in Asia, Africa and Latin America from the sixteenth century onwards, or Roman Christianity in Europe, or Islam in the Middle East. Moreover, in some respects the world is less open now than it has ever been, with increasing obstacles to migration tending to confirm, not weaken, individuals' identification with their states.

The social state

The state has always contended with other claimants upon people's identities from within and without, but its authority has never rested solely upon its identification with the nation, notwithstanding the close linkage between state and nation that emerged during the French Revolution and gathered strength during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In essence, the state has authority simply because it does, it says it does and it is prepared to use force against alternative claimants. After a lengthy process during which it saw off competitors, it became the sole legitimate source of all obligatory rules for individuals within its domain. In other words, it became sovereign. That means, quite simply, that *all* entities inside and outside the state that aspire to exercise any kind of authority—from tennis clubs to multinationals and international organizations—can do so only because, ultimately, they have received some kind of entitlement from the state. No other kind of *legal* authority exists today. Even the European Union, which comes closest to possessing supranational powers, does so because its member states have delegated certain

[20] John Zysman, 'The Myth of "Global Economy": Enduring National Foundations and Emerging Regional Realities', *New Political Economy*, 1:2 (1996), pp. 157–84.

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powers to it: powers which, singly (by withdrawing from the Union) or collectively, they can take back at any time they choose. Aspirants to authority that are not approved of by the state will invariably be resisted by force. If they defeat the state (which is always possible since authority is not the same as power) they will receive the capacity to exercise sovereignty themselves. This, of course, does *not* mean that they will be capable of controlling all that happens within their domain, simply that they will be the only authority with the legitimate right to control what can be controlled and to enact and enforce laws that apply to all within their sovereign territory (except diplomats, who are exempt only because, technically, they remain within the sovereign jurisdiction of another state: their own).

Precisely how the state came to enjoy this enviable position is another story,[21] but its sovereignty, and the authority and legitimacy that go with it, are accepted by the overwhelming majority of individuals and non-state collectivities. In this respect, the postmodernists are quite correct. Ultimately sovereignty is merely a discourse: a socially constructed representation or writing of reality that is sustained by linguistic practices in which sovereignty becomes a taken-for-granted value.[22] However, intellectually deconstructing sovereignty is one thing; constructing a new discourse around some wholly different principle of political community quite another. The sovereignty principle looks set to remain at the heart of the global legal order and it is difficult to imagine how, in practice, any alternative could supplant it. But, to reiterate, sovereign authority is not the same as the capacity to control everything, which is why the attempts of political economists to erect an easily demolished straw man by defining sovereignty as if it *did* involve such control are misplaced. Nor should assertions to the effect that sovereignty does not really matter, that the important developments in the world are shaped by other forces, be allowed to go unchallenged. Most, if not all, of the contemporary struggles in which people are prepared to take and risk lives are ultimately struggles about sovereignty and aspirations to sovereign statehood. The clear desirability of statehood that is revealed by such struggles is, perhaps, the final and most convincing evidence that the (equally real) force of globalization is some distance from rendering the state invisible or irrelevant.

It is rather the case that the spread of the state form, and its continuing popularity, is itself the product of a particular kind of globalization.[23] The fundamental error of those globalization theorists who write off the state is to see globalization as a massive, interconnected and unstoppable force, while states are isolated, individual units whose vulnerability in the face of such an all-powerful process is cruelly exposed. However, what globalization actually confronts is an equally powerful interlinked system of states which, through their social interaction in accordance with the characteristic rules and processes of this system, learn from and confirm to each other what it means to be a state. The relationship between

[21] For an excellent recent study of the emergence of sovereign authority, see Hendrik Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and its Competitors* (Princeton, NJ, 1994).

[22] For discussions of sovereignty from postmodernist perspectives, see Jens Bartelson, *A Genealogy of Sovereignty* (Cambridge, 1995); R. B. J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge, 1993); Cynthia Weber, *Simulating Sovereignty: Intervention, the State and Symbolic Exchange* (Cambridge, 1995).

[23] Robert H. Jackson and Alan James, 'The Character of Independent Statehood', in Robert H. Jackson and Alan James (eds.), *States in a Changing World: A Contemporary Analysis* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 3–25.

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globalization and the state, the durability of the state in the face of the powerful force of globalization, and the nature of international change and transformation cannot be adequately understood unless the distinctive features of *both* globalization *and* the states system, as well as the interaction between them, are fully appreciated.

This basic point has been understood by some social theorists and international relations specialists who have discussed globalization. Anthony Giddens, for example, refers to the emergence of a 'reflexively monitored system of nation states' after 1918, by which he means a system in which states recognized each other's sovereignty and cooperated in mechanisms like the balance of power, the League of Nations and the United Nations to support the sovereignty principle. He adds:

> 'International relations' are not connections set up between pre-established states, which could maintain their sovereign power without them: they are the basis upon which the nation state exists at all.[24]

Much the same point is made by Axford, who describes sovereignty as a 'global social institution which legitimates the idea of territorial integrity';[25] but neither writer develops this insight much further, nor do they sufficiently differentiate the social interaction amongst states from global processes that take place with little reference to state boundaries—the phenomena with which globalization theorists are concerned. In the remainder of this article I suggest the basis for a conceptualization of interstate relations as aspects of the mechanics of a society of states. This conceptualization is then distinguished from globalization, while the interaction between the distinct processes of globalization and socialization within international society is identified as the principal dynamic of contemporary international relations.

Essentially, what this article will now seek to do is to follow theorists such as Dunne, Hurrell and Wendt[26] in combining two distinct theoretical perspectives on international relations—the international society tradition and constructivism—in order to develop a conceptualization of international society as a set of shared cognitive, normative and juridical assumptions among states that emerge from their social interaction. Taking the first of these perspectives, the idea of an international society has been present in writings about international relations since the sixteenth century.[27] At first it was closely connected with natural law theories, since it attempted to assert that there existed certain fundamental moral principles which states were no less bound than individuals to observe. Later it was employed by both practitioners and theorists to express the conviction that the relations between states were characterized by generally acknowledged rules, norms, institutions and

[24] Anthony Giddens, *The Nation State and Violence* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 263–4.

[25] Axford, *Global System*, p. 140.

[26] Timothy Dunne, 'The Social Construction of International Society', *European Journal of International Relations*, 1:1 (Sept. 1995), pp. 367–89; A. Hurrell, 'International Society and the Study of Regimes: A Reflective Approach', in V. Rittberger (ed.), *Regime Theory and International Relations* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 49–72; Alexander Wendt, 'Collective Identity Formation and the International State', *American Political Science Review*, 88:2 (1994), pp. 384–96; Alexander Wendt and Raymond Duvall, 'Institutions and International Order', in Ernst-Otto Czempiel and James N. Rosenau, (eds.), *Global Changes and Theoretical Challenges: Approaches to World Politics for the 1990s* (Lexington, KY, 1989), pp. 52–73.

[27] David Armstrong, *Revolution and World Order: The Revolutionary State in International Society* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 24–40.

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common practices. Taken together, the latter could be said to constitute a 'society' among states, albeit a somewhat unique one since it coexisted with a formal condition of international anarchy, given the absence of government, legislature, courts and police operating at the international level. In more recent times the notion of an international society has been central to the work of a group of British and Australian writers to such an extent that it was sarcastically referred to by one critic as the 'English School', an appellation, however, which soon lost its original negative connotations, becoming instead a convenient label for those whose writings could be placed within this broad tradition.[28] The 'School' also spawned a 'critical international society' literature as well as attempts to develop it along neorealist and other lines.[29] In this paper, my starting point in discussing international society will be the 'foundational' literature upon which both critics and neorealists draw, since my aim is to develop the traditional international society concept in a particular direction, rather than to build upon either of those two alternative perspectives.

The central point to note about this 'foundational' literature is that its conception of both the state and international society is primarily a juridical one.[30] The state is defined as an entity exercising sovereign authority within a specified territorial domain, while international society is depicted as an association of such sovereign entities possessing and exercising such essentially juridical functions as determining criteria for membership (i.e., legitimate sovereignty), creating common institutions, such as the diplomatic system, and elaborating rules appropriate for interaction among sovereign states. It should also be noted that the international society literature is almost exclusively concerned with the state as a unit in international relations, paying little attention to alternative conceptualizations of the state, for example in terms of state–society interaction, or of specific sets of functions. Clearly, a discussion of globalization and the state that proceeded from a definition of the state in either of these alternative senses would be very different from the present discussion, and indeed much of the globalization debate has been based upon different interpretations of the state. Some of the critics of the English School have also focused upon this supposed deficiency in the School's definition of the state.[31] However, two of the main purposes of this article are to argue that the state can be fully comprehended only in its international context and to suggest ways of further developing the conceptualization of the state as a unit in international

[28] For this debate, see Roy E. Jones, 'The English School of International Relations: A Case for Closure', *Review of International Studies*, 7:1 (1981), pp. 1–14; Sheila Grader, 'The English School of International Relations: Evidence and Evaluation', *Review of International Studies*, 14:1 (1988), pp. 29–44; P. Wilson, 'The English School of International Relations: A Reply to Sheila Grader', *Review of International Studies*, 15:1 (1989), pp. 49–58.

[29] For a 'critical international society' perspective, see Nicholas J. Wheeler, 'Guardian Angel or Global Gangster: A Review of the Ethical Claims of International Society', *Political Studies*, 44 (1996), pp. 123–35; for an attempt to integrate neorealism and international society, see Barry Buzan, 'From International System to International Society: Structural Realism and Regime Theory Meet the English School', *International Organization*, 47:3 (Summer 1993), pp. 327–52.

[30] The following works constitute the 'foundational' literature of the English School: Bull, *Anarchical Society*; Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight (eds.), *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Politics* (London, 1966); Martin Wight, *Systems of States* (Leicester, 1977); Martin Wight, *Power Politics* (London, 1979); Hedley Bull and Adam Watson (eds.), *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford, 1984).

[31] See, e.g., Fred Halliday, *Rethinking International Relations* (London, 1994); Martin Shaw, *Global Society and International Relations: Sociological Concepts and Political Perspectives* (Cambridge, 1994).

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society. If it succeeds in these aims, it will both answer these critics and pose a challenge to them since it will, in effect, argue that the real deficiency is to be found in views of the state that take no account of international society.

The juridical conception of international society may be traced back to Europe's medieval disputes over authority between kings, barons and popes, with the first eventually winning out over their subnational and transnational challengers. Territorial authority came to be seen as residing, ultimately, with a sovereign individual (later a sovereign state), whose legitimacy was confirmed by other such individuals in association (or by international society). The underlying legal principle of sovereign equality gave rise to a system of international law and order that was unique in its decentralized nature and also in its substantive content, with institutions like diplomacy, international law, the balance of power, war and great-power concerts, a system whose obvious limitations were inseparable from its foundational principle of sovereignty. The history, problems and ramifications of international society thus conceived have been the concern of the leading figures of the English School.[32]

Their work has produced many elegant and scholarly contributions to knowledge, but it cannot be said to have added much to international theory. Essentially, the School has derived from the sovereignty principle a static model of the legal framework within which international relations take place. It does not tell us much about the dynamics of international relations, in particular about the material and normative sources of state actions and about how and why material or normative change occurs. Yet the English School perspective does contain the possibility of a more fully developed theory of international relations if international society is seen not simply as a juridical structure but as a context within which a particular type of social interaction takes place. States, therefore, may be seen not merely as legal entities but as social actors, capable of knowing, learning, valuing and ordering and, moreover, of doing all these things through an intersubjective process of socialization that is characteristic of their unique 'society'.

One obvious criticism of such a formulation of international relations is that it reifies the state by attributing to it qualities that in reality can be possessed only by people. There is, of course, an immense and mostly unresolved debate on this issue, from which I wish simply to extract and state briefly three broad counter-arguments that would, in a much longer article, form the basis of a defence of my formulation. The first is that the metaphor of the state as social actor is analytically useful. Particularly in the context of international relations, it enables an otherwise impossibly complex reality to be reduced to manageable proportions. Secondly, the metaphor corresponds in a number of respects to reality: imperfectly, perhaps, but sufficiently to justify its use. This is the central theme of many of the contributions to Peter B. Evans et al.'s seminal *Bringing the State Back In*, whose tone is set by Theda Skocpol's assertion that 'States conceived as organisations claiming control over territories and people may formulate and pursue goals that are not simply reflective of the demands or interests of social groups, classes, or society'.[33] It is also

[32] See, e.g., Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society* (London, 1992).

[33] Theda Skocpol, 'Bringing the State Back In: Strategies of Analysis in Current Research', in Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol (eds.), *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 9.

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an integral part of the burgeoning literature on social learning when applied to such matters as governmental learning.[34] There are also numerous acts, from the declaration of war to the signing of a treaty, which it makes little sense to portray other than as the acts of states. Thirdly, and of central importance for this article, states are reified by policy-makers and publics from other states: they are, in effect, 'socially constructed' in the course of their international relations. While, for example, US relations with Japan might, in reality, be made up of a myriad of separate perceptions, interests and actions on the part of countless groups and individuals, each state is conceived by individuals in the other as having a unitary identity. Partly because of such reciprocal identifications, individuals, especially those responsible for externally orientated policies, accept the role and identity they have been given by others: they perceive themselves as acting on behalf of their states.

As already suggested, the first and most obvious sense in which the state may be seen as a social actor is the juridical. States identify each other in terms of the possession of sovereign authority and conduct their formal relations with each other on that basis. Non-intervention in each other's internal affairs becomes the norm, while intervention requires special justification to the international community. The state's entitlement to a monopoly of legitimate authority within its own territory is likewise constantly reaffirmed in the course of a state's interaction with other states. The rules that states devise among themselves—both international law and less formal 'rules of the game'—are all ultimately derived from and refer back to the sovereignty principle. New states undergo a process of socialization in which they internalize this principal, juridical facet of state identity. Similarly, states that attempt to deviate from the juridical foundation of international society (for example, revolutionary states proclaiming a universalist ideology that purports to transcend sovereignty) find themselves labelled pariahs and outlaws and face various sanctions from other states.[35] But the fact that states are involved in constant social interaction means that the same interactive processes which tend to confirm the juridical norm of sovereignty may also in certain circumstances raise questions about it, at least on the margins. For example, the members of the European Union are engaged in an ongoing debate about the extent to which their sovereignty should be pooled in common institutions.

The state's social interaction with other members of international society is not only responsible for helping to form, confirm and reinforce its juridical identity; it plays a part in all other aspects of the state's identity formation. These include the most basic process of all: cognition. How a state 'knows' and how it 'learns' cannot be understood in isolation from its interaction with other states.[36] This is most

[34] See, e.g., George W. Breslauer and Philip E. Tetlock, *Learning in US and Soviet Foreign Policy* (Boulder, CO, 1991); for a review of the literature on foreign policy learning that resists the kind of reification I am employing here, see Jack S. Levy, 'Learning and Foreign Policy: Sweeping a Conceptual Minefield', *International Organization*, 48:2 (Spring 1994), pp. 279–312.

[35] Armstrong, *Revolution and World Order*.

[36] To repeat, the metaphor of states' 'learning' and 'knowing' is primarily an analytical convenience, but one that is frequently inescapable without resorting to tortuous convolutions and qualifications. Even Levy, who is hostile to such a usage in this context and attempts to situate 'learning' within a rational-choice/methodological-individualist framework, finds it impossible to avoid terms like 'foreign policy', which express the same underlying idea of a state that is capable in some meaningful sense of having a foreign policy that is more than the expression of some bureaucratic or other narrow interest. Jack S. Levy, 'Learning and Foreign Policy'.

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obviously the case where a state's 'knowledge' and 'learning' concern its relations with other states. Knowledge about such matters as diplomatic relations, military organization and trade is clearly acquired in the course of a state's participation in international society, but the process of state cognition is much more complex than that statement implies. Social practices such as war, trade and diplomacy help to define and shape a state's understanding of what it means to be a state, and even, as Tilly argues, originally to 'make' states.[37] But they also help to define and make mutually intelligible the social universe which states both inhabit and create. For example, by signing a treaty, a state confirms to itself and others its sovereign identity, but it also reaffirms through this mode of institutionalized interaction the rules, routines and symbols characteristic (and constitutive) of its social world: international society.[38] But the interaction between state and international society has cognitive implications that extend far beyond the obviously 'international' aspects of a state's identity. States constantly observe each other and in the process produce a social stock of knowledge, including 'best practices' and 'role models' in various areas that include most, if not all, of their domestic policies. Here, too, an ongoing process of secondary socialization is apparent, in which states, having first internalized the essentials of their identity as states (their primary socialization), learn and construct new modalities of statehood.[39] Many of the policies of deregulation, privatization and opening to markets that are seen as aspects of the inexorable force of globalization were products of such intersubjective exchanges about the meaning of statehood in the modern era, as also was the spread of ideas about democracy, human rights and other normative concerns.

Recent 'constructivist' writings have developed many aspects of this perspective. In the international context, constructivism is defined as follows by one of its leading American proponents:

> Constructivism is a structural theory of the international system that makes the following core claims: (1) states are the principal units of analysis for international political theory; (2) the key structures in the states system are intersubjective, rather than material: and (3) state identities and interests are in important part constructed by these social structures rather than given exogenously to the system by human nature or domestic politics.[40]

Another theorist points to the way in which fundamental transformation occurs in international systems through a process by which normative change in states is transmitted to the international stage:

> Any given international system does not exist because of immutable structures, but rather the very structures are dependent for their reproduction on the practices of the actors. Fundamental change of the international system occurs when actors, through their practices, change the rules and norms constitutive of international interaction. Moreover, reproduction of the practice of international actors (i.e., states) depends on the reproduction of practices of domestic actors (i.e., individuals and groups). Therefore, fundamental changes in

[37] Charles Tilly, 'War Making and State Making as Organized Crime', in Evans et al. (eds.), *Bringing the State Back In*, pp. 169–91.
[38] For a similar argument, see Dunne, 'Social Construction', p. 379.
[39] For the distinction between primary and secondary socialization, see Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York, 1966).
[40] Wendt, 'Collective Identity Formation', p. 385.

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international politics occur when beliefs and identities of domestic actors are altered thereby also altering the rules and norms that are constitutive of their political practices.[41]

Hence, for example, Gorbachev's 'new thinking', by altering the nature of the discourse through which the structure of international relations known as the Cold War was constituted, changed in turn the international system itself. All actors, including states, form identities—'relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about self'—through their interaction with others.[42] Such interaction takes place by means of the exchange of symbols that represent shared understandings about meaning. An institution, in turn, is 'a relatively stable set or "structure" of identities and interests'.[43] Therefore institutions also represent a shared understanding, or 'collective knowledge', and they 'have motivational force only in virtue of actors' socialization to and participation in collective knowledge'.[44]

Alexander Wendt develops his version of international socialization by borrowing from the more general literature on socialization to suggest that 'conceptions of self and interest tend to "mirror" the practices of significant others over time'.[45] Similarly he refers to 'reinforcement' mechanisms in social interaction, through which actors learn the types of behaviour and the cognitive bases of behaviour which are liable to be rewarded and those which are liable to be discouraged. The constructivist approach may be seen as offering the potential for a considerable theoretical advance beyond many of its competitors in international relations theory. However, its very high level of abstraction and the all-inclusive nature of its understanding of social interaction—almost the opposite of Waltz's famous 'parsimony'—leaves it open to the charge of explaining everything and therefore nothing. While it works perfectly well at the level of philosophy, it may be less effective as a research tool.[46] The amalgamation between the international society and the constructivist approaches that is attempted here may offer a more concrete and complete formulation of the social interaction among states and of the nature of the state as a social animal.

A synthesis of the two theoretical perspectives is particularly valuable in its contribution to explanations of change in international society. The classical conception of international society tends to assume an unchanging social structure, with rules, norms and institutions all firmly based on the principle of sovereignty. Yet, as we have seen, international society has come to acquire normative concerns, such as human rights and democratization, that go some way to contradicting a strict application of sovereignty and the closely related principle of non-intervention. In the case of the European Union, such an erosion of the sovereignty principle has gone even further. Seeing international society as an arena of social interaction suggests ways of conceptualizing such changes. In essence, whereas such otherwise

[41] Rey Koslowski and Friedrich V. Kratochwil, 'Understanding Change in International Politics: The Soviet Empire's Demise and the International System', *International Organization*, 48:2 (Spring 1994), p. 216.
[42] Alexander Wendt, 'Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics', *International Organization*, 48:2 (Spring 1992), p. 397.
[43] Ibid., p. 399.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid., p. 404.
[46] David Dessler, 'What's at Stake in the Agent–Structure Debate', *International Organisation*, 43:3 (Summer 1989), pp. 442–3.

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very different viewpoints as Marxism and Kenneth Waltz's neorealism postulate an international structure consisting of material elements (economic forces and power), a constructivist model of international society envisages an ideational structure. Ideas become institutionalized through constant reiteration in social practice, but they may also change in the course of social interaction. Such change may be a response to international events (such as the increased concern for the international protection of human rights after 1945), or it may originally emanate from purely internal developments (such as the way internal debate in the Soviet Union during the 1980s led to fundamental changes in the structure of superpower relations), or it may simply arise as part of an ongoing discourse among states (such as many of the developments in the European Union over the last ten years).

Globalization and the social state

The impact of globalization is frequently presented in terms of a series of dichotomous tensions: homogeneity–heterogeneity; universal–particular; global–local; uniformity–difference. Such representations tend to see globalization essentially as the latest stage in modernity: the process of displacement of traditional pre-capitalist practices and institutions. As Robertson and others have argued, such formulations oversimplify an immensely complex reality in which, for example, not only are *both* globalism and localism discernible, but each can be an aspect of the other: a global religion such as Buddhism takes on a local form in Japan, while the very conception of the local as something authentic and particular becomes a global idea, as in the UN movement to protect the rights of indigenous peoples.[47]

This perspective may also be applied to the constructivist model of international society that has been suggested here. The society of states is universal, but its foundational principle, sovereignty, is a celebration of particularity. It seeks uniformity in observance of the rules and norms relating to the *international* conduct of states, while preserving states' rights to be different in their conduct of their *internal* affairs. Hence, in one sense international society is not an entirely separate phenomenon from globalization. Indeed, it has even been an agency of one facet of globalization, since it has helped to universalize the most important politico-legal form in which people are organized. But international society and globalization are also distinct systems of social interaction, and their distinctiveness as well as their interconnection needs to be recognized. Each of these interactive systems is critically involved in the 'social organisation of meaning':[48] the emergence of mutually intelligible understandings about the nature of reality. The central claim of the globalization theorists is that the universal processes they postulate transcend existing social units (including states) and reshape the organization of meaning and hence peoples' social identities. Hence, while globalization theory draws attention to concrete manifestations of the phenomenon in markets and cultural practices, it is essentially a theory about consciousness and its construction and reproduction. A constructivist formulation of international society is also at root about conscious-

[47] Several of the contributors to Featherstone et al. (eds.), *Global Modernities*, argue along these lines.
[48] Friedman, *Cultural Identity*, p. 211.

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ness, meaning and identity. But it offers a very different perspective on international change from that deriving from the globalization hypothesis. Precisely why this is the case, and how globalization and international society interact to produce contemporary world politics, is considered shortly. First the constructivist model of international society needs to be outlined more fully, in particular its fundamental unit, the 'social state', and its central process of socialization, through which states adapt to their social universe.

In contrast to globalization, the classical international society perspective implies a relatively stable and enduring structure in which states conduct their international relations in accordance with well-understood rules, norms, institutions and practices. The constructivist refinement of this approach suggested here would retain this underlying conception, so that the world of states remains a formal structure in which states behave in a rational and self-aware fashion, but it would also see the exchanges among states as involving a dynamic social process in which new or amended formulations of both the identity of the actors and the meaning of their behaviour emerge. At the risk of oversimplification, international society concerns the formal *relations* among states, while constructivism concerns their informal *interaction*. For example, at one level the international debate about South African apartheid concerned the kinds of trading and diplomatic relations it was appropriate to maintain with South Africa, whether apartheid could be, as the South African Government maintained, entirely a matter within its domestic jurisdiction, and whether institutionalized racism could be regarded as violating a fundamental international norm. At another level, however, the interaction between South Africa and the international community helped to promote a process of change in South Africa itself, as well as a more general examination by international society of the normative basis of statehood and the limits of sovereignty in the contemporary era.

The South African case perfectly illustrates the workings of international socialization, which is suggested here as one of the central processes of a constructivist international society. Socialization involves the internalization by an individual of the norms and standard practices of the society within which he or she is situated. In the present context, it involves the internalization by states of the norms and practices of international society. But because a society is inter-subjectively constituted by the ideas and discursive practices of its members, the socialization of a state may also involve change at the international society as well as the individual state level. For example, the distinctive self-identity of the United States after independence increasingly impinged upon the normative basis of international society, notwithstanding the simultaneous socialization of the United States into such standard institutions of international society as diplomacy and international law. And this 'reverse socialization', in which international society itself changed at the margins, produced a further process of socialization whereby established members of the now Americanized international society internalized the new norms as pronounced, for example, by Woodrow Wilson or by American advocates of human rights, democratization, marketization and so forth after 1945.[49] The arrival of the world's first Marxist-Leninist state in 1917 similarly had an impact, for example in its promotion of anti-imperialist norms, although because the Soviet Union's socialization was only partial (and its power much less) its impact

[49] Armstrong, *Revolution and World Order*, pp. 42–78.

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was less than that of the United States.[50] Later, as already suggested, the deliberate attempt by Gorbachev's Soviet Union to abandon doctrines and practices that ran counter to the established norms of international society achieved a greater socialization of the Soviet Union but helped to spark a chain of events that led both to the demise of the Soviet Union and to structural changes in international society.

International socialization has two key aspects. First, it is essentially concerned with the identity formation of states. It confirms and reinforces their primary identity *as* states but also helps to spread changing ideas about the meaning and content of statehood through secondary socialization. Some of these new ideas may emerge as a consequence of globalization. A leading example is what Cerny terms the 'competition state': the notion that the state's role in the national economy is not primarily managerial or redistributive but to facilitate enterprise.[51] But because such new ideas are channelled and communicated through the process of socialization within international society, they become 'stateified': absorbed by the state, not a challenge to it. Globalization merely influences a particular conceptualization of what it means to be a state; it does not promote an alternative to statehood as such. As a recent World Bank report argues, globalization 'is a threat to weak or capriciously governed states. But it opens the way for effective, disciplined states to foster development and economic well-being'.[52] What the World Bank calls 'state credibility' may actually require a stronger state in certain areas. The essential point is that states do not respond individually and in isolation to the pressures of globalization but in their capacity as 'social states', exchanging ideas and experiences and reaching intersubjective understandings of how to restructure themselves and how to strengthen the institutions of international society to accommodate globalization.

Secondly, socialization should not be seen as a deterministic structure–agency interaction. Insofar as international society may be seen as a structure, it is, as already argued, an ideational one, and ideas, even institutionalized ones, are more fluid than material factors. In addition, because social ideas exist only in the consciousness of social units, the process of socialization is not simply a one-sided imposition of a behaviour pattern by a structure upon an agent. The internalization of an idea involves a process in which the social unit is consciously engaged and capable of reflection upon its experience. For example, international law confronted the Bolsheviks with certain propositions that could not be readily accommodated within a Marxist framework when they came to power in 1917.[53] For the Bolsheviks, law in general was part of the 'superstructure' that had its basis in a particular set of economic relations. Capitalist economic relations would give rise to one type of law, socialist economic relations to another. The idea of a law common to the two systems was a logical paradox. Law was also a means of maintaining the dominance of a particular class, whose interests it reflected. It was a bourgeois fallacy to regard law as a genuine means of promoting or maintaining social order or (in the case of international law) international order. Yet acceptance of international law was a necessary precondition for acceptance into international society as a full and equal member—something the Bolsheviks came quickly to desire when world revolution did not materialize. It took two decades of intense ideological debate for the Soviets

[50] Ibid., pp. 120–57.
[51] Cerny, 'Infrastructure of the Infrastructure?', pp. 223–49.
[52] *The Times*, 1 Jul. 1997, p. 14.
[53] The following discussion is drawn from Armstrong, *Revolution and World Order*, pp. 225–38.

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to arrive at an accommodation with international law. Moreover, their acceptance was qualified by their insistence on claiming (exaggeratedly but not entirely falsely) that they had played a part in the progressive development of international law. This may be seen as an instance of two conflicting sets of potentially globalizing norms (international law and Marxism-Leninism) being channelled through an interstate socialization process in ways that both confirmed the central identity of statehood and fed back into the normative basis of international society itself, which altered as a result of such 'reverse socialization'.

A more recent illustration of the same process concerns the increasingly powerful articulation in recent years of a new standard of complete statehood (or full membership of international society), in the form of norms of human rights observance, democratization and other components of 'good governance'. Good governance norms are now widely accepted, but state socialization in this area has involved a complex discourse and interplay of forces within international society. In particular, the most dynamic Asian states have embarked upon a collective process of self-examination in which they have considered the 'Asian values' that in their view have contributed to their success. Hence, while even such widely criticized states as China have absorbed some of the good governance agenda, they have maintained some control over the socialization process by imbuing it with distinctly Asian characteristics.[54] Moreover, here too there has been an element of 'reverse socialization' as the dominant Western members of international society have in turn considered whether their states should become more 'Asian' in their approaches to the economy, education, welfare reform and other areas. In other words, cultural and normative globalizing processes have not promoted significant alternative political arrangements to states, but have instead been mediated through interstate channels to become part of the ongoing process of state socialization. This in turn feeds back into the discourse accompanying globalization. Once again, it is the interaction between globalization and international society that needs to be understood for a fuller picture of the immensely complex changes currently under way in world politics to begin to emerge. One process tends to break down territorial boundaries and replace them with new, uniform configurations of power, money and culture. The other reconfirms territorial boundaries and the structures and processes contained by them, but also permits some change. The two exist in a relationship of dialectical tension and, given the evident strength of each, are likely to do so for the foreseeable future.

[54] This was a constant theme in my interviews with members of the Chinese Institute of Law, Beijing, April–May 1997. While the 'good governance' norm of the rule of law was coming to be generally accepted, even where it had clear implications for the previous norm of 'rule by the party', there was an equal insistence on giving law 'Chinese characteristics'. See also Ronald C. Keith, *China's Struggle for the Rule of Law* (London, 1994).

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