Introduction

International orders do not last forever. Throughout history, rulers have struggled to cultivate amity and contain enmity between different political communities. From ancient Rome down to the Sino-centric order that prevailed in East Asia as recently as the nineteenth century, the impulse for order was most often realised via the institution of empire. The rulers of the Greek city-states, their Renaissance counterparts and the feuding kings of China's Period of Warring States alternatively secured order within the framework of sovereign state systems. The papal–imperial diarchy that prevailed in Christendom from the eleventh century to the early sixteenth century provides yet a third form of international order, which was neither imperial nor sovereign but rather heteronomous in its ordering principles.

Their great differences notwithstanding, two features unite the orders mentioned above. First, in each instance, international order was secured through the mobilisation of both authoritative and coercive forms of power. Both practices of communicative action and practices of organised violence have worked in uneasy combination to cultivate co-operation between polities, while simultaneously corralling conflicts between them within manageable bounds. Secondly, each of the aforementioned orders eventually proved finite. Rome's fall, Christendom's collapse and the Sinosphere's liquidation all testify to international orders' impermanence. Equally, the sorry fate of orders past should remind us of the fragility of the present world order, and caution against the conviction that history has definitively ended with the emergence of a global system of sovereign states.

What are international orders, what accounts for their transformation, and how can they be preserved in the face of violent challenges to their integrity? These are the three questions that drive this inquiry. The problem of order has long preoccupied international relations scholars, who have acknowledged both the necessity and the frailty of ordering institutions in world politics.[1] In the

[1] The *locus classicus* on this subject remains H. Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A study of order in world politics* (London: Macmillan Press, 1995), but see also J. A. Hall, *International Orders* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996); and M. Wight, *Systems of States* (London: Leicester University Press, 1977).

face of challenges ranging from terrorism and failed states through to an accelerating global ecological crisis, the fragility of institutions first forged to combat the twentieth-century horrors of the total state and total war has become painfully apparent. This discrepancy between ordering institutions and emerging threats to world order has in turn prompted speculation about the state system's future.[2] In this study, I bring a new perspective to debates on international systems change by anchoring them firmly within a comparative historical account of international orders' transformation. My concerns in undertaking this study are simultaneously theoretical, historical, practical and ethical in nature.

Theoretically, the discipline's focus on the problem of order in world politics invites two questions. First, what are international orders and how are they maintained? And secondly, how are international orders destabilised, contested and eventually transformed? I address both of these questions in this study. In the last decade, several landmark constructivist studies have collectively enriched our understanding of international orders' culturally and historically variable character.[3] But while these studies have undermined the sparse and asocial conceptions of the international realm that once dominated the discipline, they nevertheless serve in this book as both foils and inspirations. For while I reaffirm constructivist claims regarding international orders' socially constructed character, I also seek to correct the excessive idealism of constructivist accounts of international orders' constitution and transformation. Practices of communicative action and shared authoritative institutions are undeniably crucial in sustaining international order. But international order is equally sustained by corresponding practices of legitimate organised violence. In placing disproportionate emphasis on the former, I contend that existing constructivist accounts have provided us with an artificially bloodless account of international orders' constitution and operation. Conversely, in according equal significance to authoritative and coercive institutions, I aim to provide a conception of international orders that more accurately captures the paradoxical essence of international politics, as a realm in which the struggle for power and the pursuit of the good remain irreducibly important and unavoidably intertwined spheres of action.

[2] See for example the collection of essays in K. Booth and T. Dunne (eds.), *Worlds in Collision: Terror and the future of global order* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002). See also C. Kennedy-Pipe and N. Rengger, 'Apocalypse now? Continuities or disjunctions in world politics after 9/11', *International Affairs*, 82(3) (2006), 539–52.

[3] See M. Bukovansky, *Legitimacy and Power Politics: The American and French Revolutions in international political culture* (Princeton University Press, 2002); R. B. Hall, *National Collective Identity: Social constructs and international systems* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); D. Philpott, *Revolutions in Sovereignty: How ideas shaped modern international relations* (Princeton University Press, 2001); and C. Reus-Smit, *The Moral Purpose of the State: Culture, social identity, and institutional rationality in international relations* (Princeton University Press, 1999).

Whereas my analysis of international orders' constitution serves as simultaneously a confirmation and corrective to established constructivist studies on international order, my points of reference on the question of orders' transformation are more eclectic. For while constructivists have convincingly demonstrated the centrality of ideational factors in driving great transformations in international politics, these insights have recently been complemented by the works of scholars who have alternatively stressed the materialist and institutional dimensions of international political change. In addition to the constructivists cited above, my thinking on great transformations in world politics has been heavily influenced by these more recent contributions, most particularly by the arguments of Daniel Deudney and Daniel Nexon.[4] Given these eclectic influences, my task in conceptualising the dynamics of international orders' transformation has been one of synthesis and integration rather than either the outright ratification or refutation of existing frameworks. Accordingly, my explanation for international orders' transformation accords equal primacy to the ideational, institutional and material drivers of international systems change, offering an account that remains sensitive to the particularities of each case, while nevertheless identifying a common causal constellation underpinning otherwise disparate episodes of historical change.[5]

My theoretical and historical preoccupations with regard to the question of order transformation inevitably overlap, and are explored empirically through a comparative investigation of the transitions to sovereign international orders in Reformation Europe and nineteenth-century East Asia. Conventional accounts of European and Asian transitions to sovereignty have emphasised the dissimilarities distinguishing these cases, with the dynamics of the state system's genesis regarded as being fundamentally different from those underwriting its subsequent export to the non-European world. In the following pages, I tell a different story, illuminating the startlingly similar dynamics that underpinned these transitions. In both Europe and East Asia, a combination of military innovation and religiously tinged ideological polarisation destroyed the material and normative bases of existing international orders. Equally, the transition to a sovereign international order in both Europe and Asia was also completed only after imperial alternatives were decisively foreclosed. That such parallels manifested themselves in environments as culturally and historically distinct as those of early modern Europe and nineteenth-century East Asia suggests a common logic of international systems change that demands explication. In

[4] See D. Deudney, *Bounding Power: Republican security theory from the polis to the global village* (Princeton University Press, 2007); and D. Nexon, *The Struggle for Power in Early Modern Europe: Religious conflict, dynastic empires and international change* (Princeton University Press, 2009).

[5] This eclecticism is consistent with that recently advocated by Georg Sorensen in G. Sorensen, 'The case for combining material forces and ideas in the study of IR', *European Journal of International Relations*, 14(1) (2008), 5–32.

retracing the processes through which the modern state system was forged in Europe and then exported to East Asia, I seek to illuminate broader continuities in European and Asian political development that have hitherto remained largely unacknowledged and unexplored in the discipline of international relations. More broadly, my goal is to advance a general account of the dynamics of international change that both improves our understanding of the modern state system's genesis and expansion, while also enabling us to better comprehend its contemporary challenges and long-term prospects.

This study's concerns are predominantly conceptual and historical, but I have undertaken this inquiry with contemporary concerns firmly in mind. At the practical level, this study is driven by the necessity of better comprehending a global security environment that has been radically reshaped by processes ranging from the growth of transnational terrorism and religious fundamentalism, through to widespread post-colonial state failure and the accelerating spread of weapons of mass destruction to both state and non-state actors. In the wake of 9/11, many commentators have invoked these challenges to justify their advocacy of fundamental revisions in the practice of sovereignty, most notably including the adoption of a more permissive regime governing the use of force than that presently authorised under the UN Charter.[6] Conversely, the international community's rapid post-9/11 counter-mobilisation against Al Qaeda suggests that the state system may be capable of responding to these challenges without fundamentally compromising its liberal principles.[7] Whether or not world leaders will successfully adapt to the new security environment depends critically on their ability to comprehend the origins, nature and magnitude of emerging threats. In situating contemporary developments within a historical frame, I hope to delineate with greater precision the vectors of change with which the international community will need to contend if the present order is to be preserved.

Finally, this project is framed by an ethical concern for the state system's future. For all of its manifold imperfections, the international order forged after 1945 institutionalised a host of moral advances worthy of preservation. The global generalisation of the sovereignty regime; the institutionalisation of norms of non-aggression and non-intervention; the articulation of human rights covenants curbing the arbitrary exercise of state power – each of these

[6] From a neoconservative perspective, see for example D. Frum and R. Perle, *An End to Evil: How to win the war on terror* (New York: Random House, 2003); and more generally C. Krauthammer, 'The unipolar moment revisited', *The National Interest*, 70 (2002/03), 5–17. From a liberal perspective, see for example L. Feinstein and A.-M. Slaughter, 'A duty to prevent', *Foreign Affairs*, 83(1) (2004), 136–50; and A. Buchanan and R. O. Keohane, 'The preventive use of force: A cosmopolitan institutional proposal', *Ethics and International Affairs*, 18(1) (2004), 1–22.

[7] On this point, see generally B. Mendelsohn, *Combating Jihadism: American hegemony and interstate cooperation in the war on terrorism* (The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

is justly celebrated as having contributed to international stability in the post-war era. But in the face of endemic state failure, an unprecedented spread of destructive capabilities to anti-systemic actors, and resurgent religious fundamentalist hostility to the present order, the long-term durability of these principles is far from assured. In emphasising the impermanence of past orders and the fragility of the present one, I hope to lend added urgency to the search for solutions to contemporary threats that reconcile the timeless desire for order with the historically contingent task of preserving the liberal principles upon which the present world order has been built.

The argument

Conceptual building blocks and methodology

Already, I have introduced concepts into this discussion that demand definition. The most important of these is the concept of *international orders*. International orders are defined here as the constellation of constitutional norms and fundamental institutions through which co-operation is cultivated and conflict contained between different political communities. This conception of international order, while consistent with that advanced by many constructivists, nevertheless differs from them in two ways.[8] First, while my focus lies with the order-producing norms and institutions that define international orders, I also acknowledge that international orders depend on the existence of an order-enabling material context. This acknowledgement informs my argument that transformations of international order are propelled by a combination of ideational and material forces, rather than being driven by the force of revolutionary ideas alone.

Secondly, I argue that international orders are inherently dualistic in their constitution, incorporating both positive and negative (or alternatively, Aristotelian and Augustinian) dimensions into their animating purposes. On the one hand, international orders seek to advance a normatively thick and culturally and historically contingent vision of the good. The moral values that inform these visions inevitably reflect the perspectives of the dominant actors within international orders. However, in stable orders these values generally secure wide assent among the order's constituent polities. Simultaneously, however, international orders are also dedicated to the more basic objective of containing violent conflict between different polities within manageable bounds. Of necessity, these positive and negative dimensions of international order inform one another, an observation that is reflected in international orders' fundamental institutions. International orders are sustained through a

[8] See for example Hall, *National Collective Identity*; Philpott, *Revolutions in Sovereignty*; and Reus-Smit, *The Moral Purpose of the State*.

combination of authoritative institutions, which attract agents' compliance through their concordance with shared standards of legitimacy, and coercive institutions, which compel agents' compliance through the application of authorised practices of organised violence. In giving equal primacy to authoritative and coercive institutions in sustaining international orders, I hope to 'bring violence back in' to accounts of international change, without abandoning constructivists' emphasis on the centrality of shared legitimacy concepts in conditioning international orders' purposes and fundamental institutions.

International orders can be distinguished from one another along the following axes: (a) principle of differentiation – the organising principle that governs relations of authority between different political communities; (b) purposive orientation – the particular vision of the good that an international order seeks to advance; (c) institutional form – the precise combination of authoritative and coercive institutions upon which an international order relies to promote co-operation and contain enmity between its constituent communities; and (d) distribution of capabilities – the distribution of material capabilities (particularly capabilities for organised violence) among the different actors inhabiting a given order. These axes of comparison inform my conceptualisation of different types of *international systems change*. At the lowest level of magnitude, international orders may be buffeted by instances of *positional change*, whereby the relative distribution of power and prestige between different political units is altered, but in which an international order's fundamental institutions, constitutional values and principle of unit differentiation all remain unchanged.[9] France's relative decline vis-à-vis Britain following the Seven Years War, which marked a dramatic shift in the global balance of power without witnessing any substantial changes to the constitutional values or fundamental institutions of the international *ancien regime*, stands as a clear example of positional change. Conversely, *institutional change* entails significant revisions to an international order's fundamental institutions, and would therefore encompass developments such as the establishment (in both 1918 and 1945) of permanent universal conferences of states as mechanisms of international order maintenance.

Purposive changes in an international order's constitution in turn involve both a transformation of its underlying moral purposes and a comprehensive revision

[9] My conception of positional change is roughly comparable to Robert Gilpin's conception of systemic change, which he defines as entailing 'changes in the international distribution of power, the hierarchy of prestige, and the rights and rules embodied in the system'; see R. Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 42. However, whereas Gilpin conflates changes in the international distribution of power and prestige with alterations in the rights and rules of the international system, thus assuming that changes in the distribution of power unproblematically translate into changes in rights and rules, I see the relationship between the two as being contingent rather than necessary, hence my distinction between positional and institutional change.

of its fundamental institutions.[10] Historically, purposive change is embodied most distinctly in the protracted transition from an Absolutist state system grounded in monarchical sovereignty, towards a state system predicated on popular sovereignty.[11] Finally, international orders may experience *configurative changes*, whereby an order's principle of unit differentiation changes along with its constitutional values and fundamental institutions. The transition from the heteronomous order of Latin Christendom to a Westphalian sovereign state system stands as the classic instance of configurative change in modern European history.[12] Unless otherwise stated, when I refer to the *transformation of international orders*, this term refers to instances of configurative change only.

Despite their profound differences, I argue that both Christendom and the Sinosphere were transformed as a result of structurally similar configurative crises. These crises were driven by a combination of institutional decay, the collapse of prevailing social imaginaries and the accompanying emergence of anti-systemic ideologies, and increases in violence interdependence both within and between political communities. Given the importance of these concepts to my argument, a brief definition of each follows. *Institutional decay* refers to a decline in both the capacity and the legitimacy of an international order's fundamental institutions. While the exact causes of institutional decay historically vary, the manifestations of decay are similar across each of my cases. These symptoms of decay include rising ideological dissent, increasing popular dissatisfaction with existing governance structures, and a decrease in rulers' ability to manage violent conflicts within existing institutional forms. Institutional decay is protracted in character, and provides the permissive context for the operation of the macro-processes that then actively propel international orders towards transformation.

International orders collapse as a result of concatenating ideational and material transformations operative at a systemic level, which simultaneously rob fundamental institutions of both their legitimacy and their practical effectiveness in managing violent conflict between political communities. Turning first to the ideational aspect of my argument, I contend that international orders are purposive rather than merely practical associations, and are undergirded by a coherent set of 'thick' constitutional values. These values articulate a shared vision of the good that binds otherwise feuding polities together, while also providing the normative glue that imbues fundamental authoritative and coercive institutions with the legitimacy necessary for them to maintain a modicum

[10] Both the distinction between purposive and configurative forms of systems change and the terminology distinguishing the two types are drawn from Reus-Smit, *The Moral Purpose of the State*, pp. 164–5.

[11] On this transition, see generally *ibid.*, Ch. 6.

[12] On the dynamics underwriting this episode of configurative change, see generally J. G. Ruggie, 'Territoriality and beyond: Problematizing modernity in international relations', *International Organization*, 47(1) (1993), 139–74.

of order. Transformations of international order are catalysed in part through a breakdown of the consensus values that sustain these fundamental institutions. This breakdown manifests itself in several ways. At the level of consciously articulated beliefs, it entails the emergence of anti-systemic ideologies that explicitly contest either part or all of the normative complex underpinning the existing international order. At a more holistic if also a more tacit level, this process of normative breakdown also entails the collapse of the prevailing social imaginaries that make communicative action – and thus the articulation of shared visions of the good and their accompanying fundamental institutions – possible in the first instance.[13] The significance of social imaginaries in providing the conditions of possibility necessary for international orders to emerge will be explored in subsequent chapters. For now, it is necessary to briefly canvass the more direct role that ideological schisms play in tearing international orders apart.

The term *ideological schism* refers to the emergence of an anti-systemic ideology that explicitly repudiates the existing order's animating purposes and constitutional norms. Anti-systemic ideologies subvert international order in two ways. First, they destroy the normative consensus necessary to sustain the operation of fundamental institutions, effectively paralysing collective capacities to manage and contain violent conflict. Secondly, they polarise polities both internally and internationally between defenders and opponents of the existing order. In Latin Christendom, an ideological schism was precipitated by the outbreak of the Reformation, and culminated in the Wars of Religion, which in turn catalysed the establishment of a sovereign international order. In East Asia, by contrast, the Sinosphere's normative coherence was compromised first by the intrusion of Western 'standards of civilisation', before then being challenged internally with the eruption of first millenarian and then revolutionary nationalist rebellions against the Chinese Confucian social order.

The lethal interplay of institutional decay with crises of social imaginaries and ideological schisms was compounded in each of my cases by technologically driven increases in the scale and scope of violent international conflict. Following Daniel Deudney, I refer to this phenomenon as an increase in *violence interdependence*.[14] Increases in violence interdependence arise from broader technological improvements that increase the scope for both peaceful and violent kinds of interaction between polities. Nevertheless, central to the concept of violence interdependence is the development of qualitatively more

[13] The concept of social imaginaries invoked here derives from the works of Charles Taylor, as expounded for example in C. Taylor, 'Modern social imaginaries', *Public Culture*, 14(1) (2002), 91–124.

[14] This concept of violence interdependence is taken from Deudney, *Bounding Power*, p. 18. The materialist dimension of my account of transformations of international order draws much of its inspiration from Deudney's work in this area.

destructive forms of warfare than existed previously. In Christendom, increasing violence interdependence was already corroding the old order's material foundations prior to the Reformation. Nevertheless, it was ultimately Christendom's religious polarisation combined with the advent of Europe's first 'military revolution' that condemned Christendom to destruction.[15] Similarly, in East Asia, international order had historically rested upon China's uncontested hegemony as Eurasia's most successful 'gunpowder empire'.[16] The industrialisation of warfare beginning in the mid nineteenth century finally permitted the Western powers to force China open to foreign commercial and cultural influences. This forced opening and the destabilisation that it wrought in turn catalysed a cluster of internal rebellions that gravely weakened the Qing Empire, thereby enabling East Asia's subsequent incorporation into a Western-dominated state system.

Having laid out my core concepts, a brief note on my methodological and theoretical orientation is necessary before I proceed to my analysis. Throughout this inquiry, I abjure exclusive commitments to any single theoretical paradigm in international relations. Instead, I favour an analytically eclectic approach to the study of complex social phenomena, one that has become increasingly popular within the discipline in the past decade.[17] This commitment to analytical eclecticism flows in part from my conviction that the processes through which international orders are constituted, maintained and destroyed are too complex to be adequately captured through singular adherence to any one theoretical framework. The rise of insurgent belief systems and forms of collective identity, processes of institutional decay and breakdown, and material increases in agents' destructive capabilities each plays vitally important roles in the making and unmaking of international orders. Moreover, these processes concatenate in intricate and varied ways at different stages of international orders' evolution, precluding attempts at analysis that afford causal primacy to any single factor.

Considerations of causal complexity thus warrant an analytically eclectic stance for pragmatic reasons. However, my attachment to analytical eclecticism stems equally from its compatibility with my hybrid realist–constructivist theoretical orientation. This book's central argument, derived from a problem-

[15] On the nature and consequences of Europe's early modern military revolution, see generally G. Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military innovation and the rise of the West 1500–1800* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[16] The concept of 'gunpowder empires' is drawn from W. H. McNeill, *The Age of Gunpowder Empires 1450–1800* (Washington DC: American Historical Association, 1989).

[17] On analytical eclecticism as an approach to the study of international relations, see for example generally J. J. Suh, P. J. Katzenstein and A. Carlson, *Rethinking Security in East Asia: Identity, power, and efficiency* (Stanford University Press, 2004); and R. Sil and P. Katzenstein, *Beyond Paradigms: Analytic eclecticism in the study of world politics* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

driven engagement with the question of international orders' transformation in both Western Europe and East Asia, is that international orders depend on both authoritative and coercive fundamental institutions for their constitution and operation. These fundamental institutions remain anchored in shared visions of the good and an order-enabling material context for the duration of their existence, and international orders are transformed when the permissive ideational and material conditions that underpin their fundamental institutions cease to obtain. The conceptual framework underpinning my inquiry thus defies easy categorisation within the discipline's dominant theoretical paradigms, both because of its dualistic emphasis on political orders' authoritative and coercive aspects, and also because of its equal incorporation of the ideal, institutional and material drivers of international systems change. Nevertheless, as I will shortly argue, the constitutional dualism at the heart of my framework is not without precedent, finding diverse antecedents in ancient Western and Eastern political philosophy and the classical realist canon, as well as much more recently in an emerging literature on 'realist constructivism'.[18] This book is thus unapologetically eclectic in its mode of analysis, its theoretical orientation and its intellectual pedigree, reflecting the irreducibly complex and contradictory social realities I have sought to capture in the following pages.

Plan of the book

This study seeks to account for international orders' constitution, transformation and preservation. Accordingly, the book is organised in three parts to engage respectively the study's conceptual, historical and contemporary concerns. In Part I, I critique existing treatments of international order before advancing my own alternative. Central to my approach is a desire to transcend the established polarity between realist and constructivist accounts of international order. These approaches have respectively privileged either the conflictual or the co-operative dimensions of international politics, and have further emphasised respectively the causal force of either material or ideational factors in accounting for international orders' constitution and transformation. Opposing these approaches, I demonstrate that international orders have historically been designed for the two purposes of cultivating co-operation and managing enmity between different political communities. These purposes have been realised through a complementary reliance on both authoritative and

[18] Examples of realist constructivist scholarship include J. S. Barkin, 'Realist constructivism', *International Studies Review*, 5(3) (2003), 325–42; and H. R. Nau, *At Home Abroad: Identity and power in American foreign policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002). For an outstanding argument concerning the centrality of values and identities in informing realist conceptions of politics and the implications of same for international orders, see also generally R. N. Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).