

The Study of International Society after Watson¹

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Abstract

The paper begins with praise of Watson's historical work and goes on to criticize it for downplaying the agency of agents other than European great powers and the United States. The key point here is that entrants from Europe's periphery and beyond were not only 'expanded upon' by a growing international system but came to it with their own experiences of having been part of other systems. The historic memories of life before entry were kept alive by mnemonic techniques that also changed as a result of interaction with other members of the system. What ensued was not an effortless expansion of the international system, but a meeting of cultures that may be conceptualized as the intertwining of different narrative sociabilities emanating from different memories. This matters today, for entrants like China and Russia preserve memories of previous experiences, and these memories inform how these states read ongoing political developments.

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The Study of International Society after Watson

With Wight's (1977) pioneering *Systems of States*, Hedley Bull and Adam Watson's (1984) *The Expansion of International Society* and Watson's *The Evolution of International Society* (1992) launched the comparative study of state systems and international societies in International Relations (IR). To say that works are pioneering, is to say that a beginning has been made, and others have followed. Beginnings bring something new into the world, and exactly because they are new, we pay our respects to them by adding the elaboration that beginnings so often need. Wight, Bull and Watson all thought and wrote from what had until recently been the social and geographical centre of the world's largest empire. In and of itself that is not a problem – everybody writes from somewhere – but given that their topic is in some degree transhistorical and transcultural, it does mean that there is rather a lot of elaboration to be done. The present special issue is thus a timely one. In this article, I will concentrate on two challenges. The first is conceptual; rather than talking about the emergence of international society from the point of view of an already existing international society that expands or evolves upon something outside of itself, it seems more fruitful to salvage the social agency of what was once outside of international society only to end up inside it by talking about this change in relational terms (see also Banai's and O'Hagan's respective papers in this issue). The second, and related, challenge is an epistemological one; given that the changing of international society is a relational process, we need to discuss it from a rather more elaborate knowledge base than the one used by Wight, Bull and Watson. To demonstrate this, I include a case study of how Eastern Slavic polities entered European international society. In doing so, I want to demonstrate that what is at stake here is not only history as such, but also ongoing mnemonic politics. As will be readily seen already from President Vladimir Putin's weekly outpourings about Russian-Ukrainian relations as I speak, it matters for ongoing politics how Russian and other East Slavic leaders remember the history of becoming members of international society (the key source in this regard is Putin 2021). If we see the emergence of international society from its core only, as did Wight, Bull and Watson, these aspects of history and politics are lost.

Conceptual challenges

The study of international society since Watson has been fairly lively. Thirty years ago, Jennifer Welsh and I directed some friendly fire against the English School's conceptualisation of international society (Neumann and Welsh, 1991).² We tried to demonstrate how European international society was, from the very start, dependent on having internal and external Others in relation to which it could self-define. That insight was already there in the extant literature ('The greater the cultural unity of a states-system, the greater its sense of distinctness from the surrounding world is likely to be'; Wight 1977: 34), but we felt that the wide-ranging analytical and political effects of that insight were not acknowledged. In an important work, Edward Keene (2002) brought

² The theoretical inspiration for that attack was the post-structural conceptualisation of identity, where the key point is that any identity is predicated on delineation from something outside itself. The corollary is that the outside is constitutive of identity. I have further developed on this theme in Neumann, 2011 and Neumann and Wigen, 2018, works on which this article build.

post-colonial scholarship to the English School. In line with the rekindled interest in empires and imperial history, he saw international society's core as having been defined by what 19th century international law defined as the standard of civilization (comp Gong, 1984a). Paul Keal's (2003; also Epp, 1998) work further demonstrated how the forging of an international society does not only hinge on inclusion, but also on exclusion, among other things by demonstrating how international law's insistence on using state-like social organization as a criterion for recognition led to the exclusion of countless indigenous peoples. Barry Buzan (2004), Andrew Hurrell (2007) and Yaqing Qin (2010) brought non-Western great powers firmly into School discussions. Andrew Linklater's 2016 *Violence and Civilization in the Western States-Systems* brought the study of comparative international systems further into dialogue with overall social science debates by adding configurative sociological perspective. Shogo Suzuki, Yongjin Zhang and Joel Quirk's edited volume on non-European international societies (2014), Tim Dunne and Christian Reus-Smit's (2017) update of *The Expansion of International Society* and Filip Ejdus' (2017) edited volume sporting analyses of how a whole string of Central and East European states entered international society brought this specific debate up to speed with overall developments by focusing on globalization and post-colonial mnemonics, respectively.³

These general debates about how to conceptualise international society have a direct bearing on the specific question of how to conceptualise the processes which enlarge it, for they suggest that, regardless of whether we talk about system versus society, a core and an outer tier or the like, international society itself is a *layered* phenomenon. Joining it is not a digital question of being in or out, but an analogue question of the degree to which one is in. When theorists plunge for a two-tiered model of international society (rather than, say, a four-tiered one) and so re-digitalise the issue, it is simply out of convenience.

There is yet another development within the school that has a bearing on how we should conceptualise entry into international society. Building on Wight's (1977) historical work, the School has evolved what is now a reasonably-sized body of work on the comparative sociology of systems of states. In their book-length stock-taking of the School, Linklater and Suganami (2006: 189-222) very appositely allotted an entire chapter to the sociology of states-systems.⁴ Adam Watson (1992) hypothesised that world history oscillates between periods of empire and periods of state systems. Buzan and

³ All these attacks on the concept of international society for papering over how inclusion spells exclusion were also part of a rather extensive debate within the School about whether the concept of international society may best be understood as a stylization of historical sequences, or as a functional construct. James Mayall (1990: 151) saw it as basically historical, Alan James (1993) would see it as basically theoretical, whereas Barry Buzan (1993) once saw it as a hybridization, arguing that the emergence of international society may be understood as an ideational process turning on meaning that provides a core, but that is inextricably tied up with the functional emergence of an international system, which provides an outer tier. In a later work, Buzan (2004) did away with the distinction between the ideational and the functional altogether.

⁴ For them, however, this should preferably be a typically modernist and historiosophical undertaking sketching 'long-term historical processes in which visions of the unity of the human race influence the development of the states-system'; Linklater and Suganami, 2006: 190.

Little (2000) studied interaction between different polities over a period of 60,000 years. Furthermore, in addition to studies of how European international society expanded, such as Bull and Watson's (1984) and Watson's (1992) -- what an anthropologist would call diffusion studies -- we now also have some country studies of how specific states came to be 'expanded upon'.⁵

There are four major reasons why the time is ripe for a reconceptualisation of literature on international society generally and Watson's work within it specifically. First, there is a broad desire to move conceptualisation away from what Cindy O'Hagan (2002: 129, see also her article in this special issue) has characterized as the universalist overtones in Bull's discussion of international society. It is by now well established that it is simply too typically modernist homogenizing and too hagiographical in its occlusion of those marginalized and excluded by it. A focus on expansion does not invite studying in what degree other norms and practices than European ones made their mark on the resulting consensus. It also rules out a scrutiny of the degree in which such norms and practices are variously anchored throughout the system.

The second reason why the highlighting of how international society's constitutive outside constitutes that society seems a bit outdated is the empirical fact that we now actually have a number of studies that perform such scrutiny of how international society's norms and practices are variously anchored throughout the system. There is a third and perhaps more interesting reason why I think we need a new bout of theorizing of how European international society has expanded and is expanding, which is not to do with developments internal to the School itself, but with developments in social theory generally. Beginning with works such as Pierre Nora's (1996-1998) and taking its clue from classics of social theory such as Halbwachs's (1980) work, there has been a steady growth in studies of the role of memory, or more precisely of mnemonic techniques, in shaping social phenomena generally and identities specifically. One will recall how both Marx and Mill, together with most other 19th century thinkers, held that the Asian mode of production was static, suspended in time. One will also recall that Western modernity tended to think of having a history not only as having writing, but more specifically as having a state. Within social anthropology, such ideas have been shot down repeatedly. In a classic study, Leach (1954) discusses how 'structural amnesia', by which he means the social work of changing historical narratives, including their consecration in ritual and myth, is key to legitimizing rule. Particularly in societies that do not have the mnemonic technique of writing, history is bent to produce tales of how today's social world had 'always' been there. Eric Wolf (1982, compare Ruacan in this special issue) looked at the colonial encounter in a book aptly titled *Europe and the peoples without History*. Fabian (1983) delivered a blistering critique of social science for simply slotting the histories of non-European groups into a ready-made, one-size-fits-all form which meant that those histories were simply elided as sources of insight, with those political effects such a way of knowledge production would predictably have. So far, historical work on international

⁵ For China, see Zhang, 1991; for Russia, see Neumann (1996) 2017, 1999; for Greece, see Stivachtis, 1998; for Japan, see Suzuki, 2005. For Belarus, Bulgaria, Poland, Rumania, Serbia and Slovakia, see Ejodus 2017. See also Sharp, 2003.

society has not heeded work in the emerging subdiscipline of international historical sociology in a sufficient degree.

A fourth and final conceptual reason why we need to take another look at Watson's work is his general tendency not to integrate his concepts with general usage. Such usage invites isolation in academia overall and hampers IR's development as a fully-fledged social science. While later English School work stays clear of this problem – Buzan and Little's (2000, see also Buzan, forthcoming) world-historical approach is an excellent example of this – Watson tends to stay on a commonsense level. Nowhere is this clearer than in the work that is the major focus of this special issue, namely *The Evolution of International Society*. Since Darwin, libraries have emerged on what exactly the concept evolution is supposed to entail. In International Relations alone, we now (admittedly post-Watson) have lively debates about the relevance of biological evolutionary insights to our discipline, as well as what is distinct about social evolution and how it applies to our scholarship. Watson, on the other hand, seems to use 'evolution' simply as a synonym for change.

Epistemological challenges

While part one of this article focused on the conceptual problems of Watson's and others' approach to international society, this second part will try to substantiate the lack of attention paid to those 'expanded upon', and the consequences that this oversight entail. The problem goes beyond empirical superficiality and a neglect of the historical experience of those 'expanded upon'. It is, of course, key to establish correctly what happened, but given that what is politically key at any one point is the fielding of certain truncated versions of what happened, not what happened in and of itself, a social science focus on history can never stop at establishing what happened. It must go on to demonstrate how mnemonic techniques have been brought to bear on history in order to produce political active representations of history. In our case, this production is a relational one, in the sense that a state's memories of entering an international society will necessarily evolve among other things as a function of the ongoing experience of being a member of that international society. China's present production of a memory of having been humiliated by leading members of international society for a century would be a case in point, as would Russia's present production of a memory of only having been treated with respect by other memories of international society when the state was what the current regime thinks of as strong.

These concerns are not there in Watson's approach to entry into international society. By way of illustrating how entry was conceptualized by Watson, consider what he wrote about the background to Russian entry in *The Expansion of International Society*:

In the thirteenth century the Tatar Golden Horde swept westwards over the Eurasian plain. Moscow fell in 1238. Soon afterwards the Tatars destroyed Cracow, the spiritual capital of Poland, and pushed on into the heart of Europe. Pope Alexander IV summoned Latin Christendom to a crusade. The Poles took the lead in pushing back the Tatars, confirming themselves as the bulwark of the

Latin world against the East. The Tatars were driven out of Poland and western Russia; but they stabilized their immense suzerain empire from the Dniepr to the China Sea (approximately the territory of the Soviet Union), and embraced Islam. Their khans conducted sporadic negotiations with European sovereigns and married into the Byzantine and other royal families; but the subject principalities of their empire were substantially isolated from the rest of the world (Watson, 1984: 61).

This is one of the few places in which the IR literature touches base with one important part of the pre-history of the European states system (but see Buzan and Little, 2000). Watson's is a problematic *précis*. There are some problems of precision. The Golden Horde, or properly, the Khipchak Khanate, was established after the foray described, and did not exist before it. In 1238, Moscow was definitely one of the least significant of the many towns ruled by a prince. The Mongols were not pushed back, but retreated for reasons of their own, namely a mounting succession struggle focused on their capital of Karakorum. Mongol agency is being deflated here, with the result that European agency is being inflated (compare Banai's paper in this special issue; Neumann and Wigen 2018; Zarakol 2022). The Mongol empire maintained its full cohesion only for a couple of decades. Although some Mongols adopted Islam, others adopted Christendom, and those who stayed in the core areas around present-day Mongolia and were not assimilated by their subjects eventually adopted Lamaistic Buddhism. Mongol subject principalities were somewhat isolated from the rest of the world, but in the case of the Russian lands, that was among other things a result of decisions taken by Rus' princes. Let us put all that to one side. The problem that I want to address is Watson's conceptualisation of Russian entry into international society, which may be treated as emblematic of early English School work on the issue overall. To Watson, the polity of Muscovy and its Grand Dukes were

quicker than the other Russian principalities to adapt to and profit from Tatar suzerainty. [...] They learnt Tatar techniques of war and administration, and helped to extract the tribute due to the Khan from other Russian princes. Muscovy thus developed its statehood under the aegis of the Tatar system. Towards the end of the fifteenth century the grip of Tatar suzerainty waned. In 1480 Muscovy threw off the Tatar allegiance and established itself as a Russian successor state to the empire of the Khans [...] The area of Tatar dominion had become something of a power vacuum (Watson, 1984: 61-62; 17).

In light of the more detailed reading that I will give below, I think this is a very admirable summing up of what transpired. The problem is that the effects of Russian experience with and memories of having been part of the suzerain system of the Golden Horde do not come into play when Watson goes on to discuss how first Muscovy and then Russia become the passive object of the expansion of international society. Anterior Russian experiences are not acknowledged as being of much importance to the case of entry. To talk of '*The Expansion of International Society*' is to imagine a process taking place from a centre, and then to spread outwards from that centre. To Watson and the early English School, although there may be set-backs and even reversions, the conception is of a

process where one party imposes its order on the other, with little or no residue and without being itself changed by the experience. But if there were no residue, how to explain that Russia is still, some five hundred years after international society may be said to begin to congeal, in its outer rim, regardless of its traditional Christianity? I would argue that neglecting the fact that entry is a relational process may result in a partial understanding of the outcome of entry. To take another example, in his chapter on China in *The Expansion of International Society*, Gong (1984b: 180) approvingly quotes Mary Wright's book *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism* to the effect that China 'accepted and mastered the principles and practices of Western diplomacy and succeeded in using them as the main bulwark of Chinese sovereignty'. The thrust here is the same as in Watson's (1982) own book on diplomacy (compare O'Hagan's article in this special issue). Well yes, but if that were the whole story, with no residue left, then how to account for the fact that it is still an open question in what degree and in which contexts China accepts these principles and practices today? Are we really warranted in talking about a 'last stand' at all? In order to better understand these questions, I suggest that we turn towards a conceptualization of entry into international society as a *relational* process (Jackson and Nexon, 1999; Qin, 2018). A full relational account would have to account for how units emerge out of process. That is too much to ask from a *longue durée* account like this one, so my contribution for now is simply to point out that we are not looking at expansion of international society here, but also at the acquiescence and resistance of the other party, be that productive or otherwise.

One way to do that would be to generalize where new members come from. Although Watson explicitly acknowledges that Russia's predecessor polity Muscovy was part of a suzerain system, he and the other contributors to the volume nonetheless begin with a given analytical phenomenon – international society – on the one hand, and an empirically given polity – in this case the predecessor Russia -- on the other, and then proceed to tell a story of how the latter is 'socialised' by the former. There are other ways to proceed. According to Wight, there are only two primary kinds of international systems: sovereign and suzerain. If, with Wight, Bull, Watson and all other English School theorists known to me, we make the supposition that there has only been one sovereign system around for the last two long millennia, then it follows that by their lights, any new member entering European international society, which is conceptualized as sovereign, must have its background in a suzerain system.⁶ I suggest that we conceptualise the relationship between European international society on the one hand and entrants on the other by treating entrants as breakaways from suzerain systems, and then look at their interaction in terms of what we may call narrative sociabilities. This is a concept suggested by anthropologist Marshall Sahlins (1981) in order to capture how each type of situation where two or more parties meet have a set of categories and relationships that is pertinent to it. For example, there will exist a narrative about how a representative of another political entity should be heralded, received and treated by the head of a polity (for example as a diplomatic envoy). In Europe, if a person wholly unknown by appearance and name arrived at a community in the late 15th century, the situation would have a number of narrative sociabilities attached to it. The person could

⁶ The prerequisite is that it does not come out of a situation of non-system, or of heteronomy; the claim that there are only two categories in play here is Watson's, not mine.

be a pilgrim, a trader, an envoy etc. There would be sartorial and habitual categories with which to distinguish between these sociabilities. If the person were acknowledged as a diplomatic envoy, then that would set in train a number of specific practices for how to treat him. These would be culturally specific. Conversely, if the person were actually a European diplomat, he would share in European narrative sociabilities, and so have a number of specific expectations of what should transpire. Since people and cultures are often not self-reflective about their narrative sociabilities, there will be problems, and accidents will happen. If, as Watson rightly points out, Russians ‘learnt Tatar techniques of war and administration’, whereas Europeans did not, then we would expect there to be different narrative sociabilities in play where representatives of Russians and European polities meet.

This would not have mattered if we lived in a world without memory and other phenomena that make for non-rationalist action. As Dale Copeland (2000) notes, if the assumption of rationality held, then rising states (or, to generalize, newcomers to any social system) would keep their head down when entering the system, so that they could learn the ropes and build up relevant power resources as they went along. We know that this is not how newcomers behave. Newcomers to the system do not act according to a logic of interest maximisation, but rather according to a different logic, which partially grew out of those norms and those practices that they carried with them in memory from their previous setting with a suzerain system. There will be expectations on either side. Because these expectations are certain to have effects, a hermeneuticist would say that any meeting is always already situated. We may specify these expectations by saying that they will grow out of specific memories and specific mnemonic techniques that activate certain memories in certain contexts. Phenomenologists argue that any action draws, again consciously *as well as unconsciously*, on stuff that happened in the past (activated by way of mnemonic techniques) as well as on stuff that may happen in the future as a consequence of that action (an anticipation of consequences that is also by necessity limited). If so, then memories of previous systems are by necessity relevant for any entry into a new one. Former experience and present actions are tied together by the category of mnemonic techniques. Hypothetically, one would expect the importance of such memories at the point of entry to be a correlative of the degree of institutionalization of relations within the previous system, as well as of the perceived importance of those relations for questions of identity. Note that the importance of memories of the previous system for the newcomer will not only form the newcomer’s horizon of expectation of how the new system will work, but that memories will also inform actions in such a way that the newcomer will be very likely indeed to spend time in the outer circle of international society for as long as this condition lasts. Entries may last for a very long time. This is also the ground on which I would like to lodge the claim for contemporary relevance of the reconceptualisation offered here. Together with power shifts, emergent qualities of the system itself and the like, one factor that perpetuates the ‘inner circle/outer circle’ or core and outer tier quality of international society is indeed the existence of newcomers. That said, in principle there is no guarantee that a newcomer will *ever* leave the outer circle.

One more point seems in order before we proceed. There is a lingering sense in the extant literature that the international society which is to be entered is somehow a given. This is a point that may be attacked on ontic grounds – no social entity can be stable over time, any addition to a whole will necessarily change that whole etc. – but let it suffice here to stress that, regardless of whether we follow Wight (1977) in plunging for 1494 or 1648 as an (invariably problematic) shorthand, it is an historical fact that polities such as the predecessors of present-day Turkey and Russia were in some senses there in both instances. As will now be demonstrated, East Slavic state formations were in a very real sense among the constitutive outsides of international society from the very beginning.

The political history of Rus' from the beginning of the 11th century to the time of the Mongol invasion in 1237-1240 is the history of wave after wave of internecine fighting between male heirs of the polity's alleged founder, Rurik, for control of the dynasty. Every Rurikid male was a potential ruler, and every Rurikid head of a lineage with a patrimony (*otchina*) was a prince. Patrimony was a city, or a clutch of cities, complete with hinterland. There were many of them. They could be inherited (either by collateral seniority or primogeniture). They could be taken by force, or they could be given by the ruler of Kyiv, the 'mother of Russian cities' and traditionally the city of residence for the *primus inter pares* of the heads of the Rurikid lineages. Rus' should be categorized as a suzerain system of polities centered on Kyiv, rather than as a single polity. Note that neighbouring non-Christian nomads in the steppes to the east, particularly the Pecheneg and later the Kipchaks, served as regular allies and key players in the brotherly squabbles between Rus' princes. There was lively interaction between steppe peoples and Rus' from very early on. The Russia that Mongol forces reconnoitered in 1223 was a loose suzerain system of lineage-based polities characterized by a high level of conflict and open lines to allies from the adjacent steppe.

The size of the Mongol population at the time of Chinggis Khan has been estimated at 700,000 (Allsen, 1987: 5). Chinggis and his immediate successors continuously fed its ranks with conquered steppe peoples. The Mongols lay claim to universal sovereignty. They conceived the world as a Mongol empire to be, under Chinggis Khan's successors, known as the Golden Kin. All peoples were potential members of the universal Mongol empire.

The great khan had exclusive right to conduct relations with others on behalf of the empire (Allsen, 1987: 45). When Chinggis Khan died in 1227, he had not only instructed his sons to conquer the world, he had allotted parts that were not yet conquered.⁷ The extreme West of the Mongol empire was the preserve of Jochi. Jochi had already reconnoitered the lands, and established a fledgling polity called the White Horde somewhere north of the Caspian Sea. Jochi's reconnoitering in 1223 had also resulted in first contact between Mongols and the Rus'. The importance of Mongol superior strategy was in evidence already during this first clash. The Rus' princes, however, seemingly reckoning that the Mongols were simply another steppe nuisance, of the kind that they had encountered many times since the founding of the first Rus' polity, paid no more

⁷ A correspondence is often assumed between the four sons and the subsequent Mongol-led polities in China, Persia, Central Asia and Russia, but as pointed out by Jackson 1999, this is too neat.

heed to steppe affairs than before. That was a key mistake. In 1238, the Mongols returned with a vengeance. For the next two years, they effectively overcame all military oppositions from Bolgars, Khipchaks, the Rus', Poles and Hungarians. They established themselves in the Rus' and Hungarian lands, and had scouting parties as far west as Venice and Vienna. Once again, the campaign went according to plan. Cities which did not offer resistance were spared, cities that did were more or less destroyed. The result, here as elsewhere in the empire, was patchy destruction of the conquered areas (Morgan, 1986: 82).

There is no reason whatsoever to assume that, if they had forged ahead, the Mongols would not have subdued the rest of the landmass to their west and made it into part of the Mongol order in one way or the other. As it happened, news of the Great Khan's death back in the capital of Kharakhorum reached the extreme west of the empire in 1241. At this time, not only Batu, also other throne pretenders were there. The presence of three out of four Chingisid lineages was not by chance; the Western front was at this time the key area of new conquest, which meant that representatives of the different lineages were there to keep an eye on one another. Now, it rather became more important to keep an eye on one another in the Mongol heartland around Kharakhorum, where the succession would be decided. In the upshot, the two pretenders from non-Jochid lines left the Western frontier for the steppes. The focus of imperial politics turned away from the fairly narrow strip of land that remained to be conquered, namely Europe. This left the Jochids, led by Batu, alone in the West with his newly won Rus' possessions.

When Batu died in 1256, he had built a tent capital in Saray on the Volga (100 km north of today's Astrakhan) for his khanate, which came to be known locally as the Golden Horde. The Mongols destroyed Kyiv and established a new layer of Mongol overlordship to what was now becoming a suzerain system of Rus' cities within an imperial structure – that of the Golden Horde. The Golden Horde, which was itself still part of an imperial structure, continued to follow the standard operational procedures of Mongol rule. As summed up by Allsen, the basic demands that the Mongols imposed on all of their sedentary subjects were: '(1) the ruler must come personally to court, (2) sons and younger brothers are to be offered as hostages, (3) the population must be registered, (4) militia units are to be raised, (5) taxes are to be sent in, and (6) a *darughachi* is to take charge of all affairs' (Allsen, 1987: 114).

In 1304, the grand prince of Vladimir died. Three developments brought about a change in politics. First, the princes of Moscow and Tver' emerged as the key players in Rus' politics, among other things as a result of their population increase in the wake of the Mongol invasion, which was again to do with nice strategic location (with Moscow in particular being something of a hub of the river system).⁸ Secondly, among other things because of the now firmly established principle of primogeniture, these princes headed more clearly organized families, which served as a firm power base. Thirdly, the firm wedding between families and cities meant that the territoriality of this power base was now assured in a much higher degree than before. Following decades of struggle between

⁸ The two other cities to be ruled by Grand Dukes, Nizhniy Novgorod and Ryazan', came up short on both counts.

Moscow and Tver', Moscow emerged victorious and Ivan I was granted the title of grand prince of Vladimir by the Mongols in 1328. From Ivan I onwards, Moscow was the emergent centre of gravity of Rus' politics, and the home both of the great prince (who underlined his success by adding 'and of all Russia' to his princely title) and of the Metropolitan. Moscow remained completely dependent on the Mongols, however, to the point that brothers appealed to Saray and even traveled there in order to settle their succession struggles (Halperin, 1987: 58). Moscow took its time fighting down Tver' competition. In 1353, Novgorod supported the Tver' bid for the grand principality of Vladimir over the Moscow one by sending envoys to Saray to plead for Tver's case (Halperin, 1987: 51).

The grand princes of Moscow kept up their brilliance in playing the alliance game. Whereas Tver' looked West, to the rising power of Lithuania. Moscow stuck to the Mongols of the Golden Horde. This served them well, for they were able to stave off three attacks by Lithuania and Tver' between 1368 and 1372. As summed up by Halperin (1987: 54; for details, see Vernadsky 1953: 207; for general counterpoints, see Ruacan in this special issue),

the special relationship between the Golden Horde and Moscow was strengthened in the middle of the fourteenth century, when the Mongols faced a new challenge to their hegemony. Grand prince Olgerd of Lithuania struck deep into the Tatar orbit by bringing both Tver' and Riazan' into his sphere of influence and applying pressure to Novgorod. Olgerd's opposition to Moscow was not rooted in principle, and he played politics by the same rules as everyone else. Thus, with the eye on Moscow, he sent a delegation to the Golden Horde to negotiate a rapprochement. The Mongols, however, had decided, logically, to use Moscow as a counterweight to the growing power of Lithuania. The Muscovites were therefore successful in their attempts to undermine the Lithuanian embassy, and the Mongols, in a fine display of political delicacy, arrested the Lithuanian envoys and handed them over to Moscow. Olgerd was compelled to ransom his emissaries from his enemies.

The decisive Moscow victory over Tver' occurred in 1375. In 1478, Ivan III subdued Novgorod. Moscow owed its victory to the superior way in which they had played the alliance game *vis-à-vis* the Mongols compared to other Rus' polities. From this time on, in order to underline how Moscow was changing the suzerain system of Rus' lineages into a polity centred on Moscow, it is customary to refer to this polity as Muscovy. Muscovy was still subservient to the Golden Horde, and would remain so for another hundred years.

To sum up, the key political fact in the Rus' lands from 1240 to the end of the 15th century was the suzerainty of the Mongols, based in Saray. Rus' princes fought one another, and used Mongol backing as the key power resource in their internecine struggles. The Mongols lent their support to various princes with a view to upholding tribute. They also followed the same policy towards the Rus' princes that they themselves and other steppe peoples had experienced from the Chinese side: they played the Rus'

princes off one another so that no one of them should emerge as a uniting force that could challenge Mongol rule. As the Golden Horde started to fall apart from the mid-fifteenth century onwards, Moscow was nonetheless able to emerge as the key political centre, which proceeded to relativise Mongol suzerainty and, using techniques lent from the Mongols, unite first the Rus' lands and then the old lands of the Golden Horde (Kappeler, 2001). Muscovy seems to have stopped paying tribute to the Golden Horde some time around 1470, and made an alliance with the Western part of what was left of it in 1502. Muscovy effectively swallowed its partner, and in 1507, Sigismund of Poland-Lithuania was 'granted' the Western part from its last Khan. The Golden Horde was no more. Muslim polities like the Khanates of Khazan, Astrakhan and Crimea remained, however.

Russian memories

Throughout the Mongol period in Russian history, relations with Western Christendom continued. In the immediate aftermath of the invasion, and despite Aleksander Nevskiy's skepticism to Western powers and to Catholicism, pope Innocent IV nonetheless forwarded a Bull to him in 1248 (Fennell, 1983: 122n15). Rome followed what was going on in the Rus' lands. Note also that Aleksander's ally, Metropolitan Kirill, established a bishopric in Saray in 1261. The church's presence in Saray secured, among other things, a channel from the Rus' clergy and princes to the Byzantine empire, which had diplomatic relations with the Golden Horde (the Byzantine emperor married off his daughter to Khan Uzbek of the Golden Kin around 1330; Vernadsky 1953: 196). The Golden Horde also received diplomatic envoys from Rome. Even in the immediate aftermath of the invasion, 'trade with the West, either from or via Novgorod and Smolensk, both of which suffered no damage from the Tatars, seems to have been relatively unaffected' (Fennell, 1983: 89). Furthermore, the Golden Horde granted tax exemptions to the Hanseatic League, which continued its brisk trade with Rus' lands via Novgorod (Halperin, 1987: 81). Genoese economic and political relations with the Golden Horde were particularly active (Meyerdorff, 1981).

'Western Christendom' should at this time be understood as a loose system consisting of two sub-systems, one based on the continent, and one based on the Baltic Sea, with the density of contact between the two sub-systems being markedly lower than the density of contacts within them. The density of contacts between the two sub-systems only increased markedly during the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648). Rus' and Muscovy contacts were overwhelmingly with Northern polities, and not with Continental ones.

As seen from Europe, Muscovy was a bit of an unknown entity. Still, in what remains the standard work on early contacts between Russia and Europe, Marshall Poe (2000: 12-13) rightly notes that, 'Despite the lore of a long scholarly tradition, Russia was not "discovered" by Europeans in the first quarter of the sixteenth century', when early travellers like Sigismund von Herberstein arrived, for there had been continuous contacts between the east Slavs and the political entities around the Baltic since the time of the Vikings, and there had also been more scattered contacts with the continental powers. For example, Russia and Denmark formalised diplomatic contacts in 1493. Poe also stresses, however, that 'Muscovites knew little or nothing about "refined"' European customs

before the early sixteenth century' (Poe, 2000: 209-210), thus attesting to the absence of a common body of practices for official encounters. As a result, and as seen in the following example, the narrative sociabilities on either side were rather different.

In 1486, a noble knight by the name of Nikolai Poppel arrived in Moscow, carrying a letter from the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III. The Holy Roman Empire came to know Muscovy as a polity separate from the Polish-Lithuanian state. Upon Poppel's return to the Empire, he started to spread the word about the Russian state and about the riches and power of its ruler. Here is the official Soviet diplomatic history's version of what ensued:

In 1489, Poppel returned to Moscow, now already as the official agent of the Emperor of the Holy Roman empire. In a secret audience he suggested to Ivan III that he should petition the Emperor to confer upon him the title of king. From the point of view of Western European political thought, this would be the only means of legalising a new state and to introduce it into the common system of European states – and at the same time place it in a certain state of dependence of the empire. But in Moscow, another point of view held sway. Ivan III answered Poppel with dignity: 'By God's grace, we are the ruler of our land from the beginning, from the first of our ancestors, it has been given us by God, and as it was for our ancestors, so it is for us' (Zorin, 1959: 262).

Ivan III then launched a campaign to be treated as the *equal* of the Holy Roman Emperor (Neumann, 2008). If we ask what made that campaign possible, I think we are warranted in answering that it was a mnemonic technique made particularly for that purpose. A memory was made that also made the insistence on equality possible.

Where Ivan III went for equality, the Holy Roman Emperor's narrative sociability, on the other hand, was to insist on what he considered business as usual. Contacts were also hampered by more specific cultural practices. For example, Herberstein noted that non-orthodox Christians were considered unclean, which meant that rank-and-file Muscovites had a reason to stay away from them, and that the aristocrats which did meet with them and then followed the European custom of shaking hands, ritually washed themselves after the encounter.⁹ As late as the 1660s, when a number of European diplomats, soldiers and merchants had been invited to the realm, a key observer talked about their separate quarters as 'the diseased parts of the state and the body politic', and it was only during this decade that ambassadors were allowed to walk the streets of Moscow alone (Krizhanich quoted in Poe 2000: 83). Poe (2000: 41) stresses that 'Nonetheless, the Russian authorities realized that diplomacy and mercantile relations with European powers were necessary'. For the next two hundred years, which is the gestation period for the European states system, Russia was a peripheral presence. Attempts at marrying into European dynasties were thwarted by cultural practices such as an unwillingness to make paintings of prospective candidates (then as now, an important item of a well-worked-out contact ad) and insistence on conversion to Orthodoxy. I think we are warranted in

⁹ Russian borrowings from the Mongols were extensive, see Vernadsky, 1953: 127-130, 222-223, 333-390, Halperin 1987: 90-95, 149n7 and, for a maximalist reading Ostrowski, 1998 (also Ostrowski, 2000).

explaining the insistence on equality and the sticking to cultural practices in terms of memory; Muscovy was emerging from a suzerain system, and the narrative sociability that kicked in once the question of entering a new suzerain system emerged, was to avoid a subaltern position.¹⁰

All this sedimented in Russia, and these memories are still active. Russia's thwarted attempts at gaining an equal standing *vis-à-vis* the continental powers in the two centuries from the end of the 15th century onwards may be read as confirming the need for such equality for the Russians. Muscovy's gathering of the Mongol lands must, among other things, be seen as attempts to impress Muscovy's greatness on the European powers. As Andreas Kappeler (2001: 26) writes,

Of crucial importance for the qualitative leap that led to conquest and annexation was the new self-image that the young tsar and his court began to develop at this time. It revolved around a sense of their imperial mission, and this found expression both in the tsar's coronation in 1547, and in legends that traced claims to legitimacy back to Kiev, Byzantium and even to Rome. This imperial ideology was not, as historians used to claim in the past, based on the doctrine of 'Muscovy, the third Rome' and on the idea of a *translatio imperii* from Constantinople to Muscovy, but on the emphasis placed on the development of Rus itself, of the Rurikid dynasty and its successful expansion in the "gathering of the lands of Rus'. The sense of empire was increased by the struggle for the inheritance of the empire of the Golden Horde. Possession of Kazan and Astrakhan, the seats of legitimate rulers of the Genghis Khan dynasty, who were called tsars in Russia, considerably enhanced the nimbus and the imperial pretensions of the tsar of Moscow.

Kappeler's dismissal of the importance of the doctrine of 'Muscovy, the third Rome' is probably too quick (Østbø, 2016), but that aside, his highlighting of the *translatio imperii* from the Mongols does, I think, strike to the heart of the matter of how Russia came to be represented by the European powers. Moscow's imperial claims were also presented in terms of diplomatic practices that definitely hailed from the Mongols, and which therefore necessarily struck European interlocutors as Asian. As summed up by Halperin (1987: 92),

Given the importance of Russia's relations with its oriental neighbors, it is natural that Muscovy drew upon Tatar diplomatic practices in establishing its own. Accordingly, Muscovite diplomatic protocol was essentially Asian. Rulers communicated and exchanged gifts through envoys who were supported by the host country and allowed to engage in tax-free trading to supplement their subsistence. The envoy presented himself on his knees and left his weapons outside (a serious problem for sword-bearing Western nobles). Negotiations were preceded by lengthy greetings, questions about the journey and the rulers' health, and a ceremonial meal eaten without silverware. Not all the elements of the elaborate diplomatic etiquette were uniquely Asian. Still, it was sufficiently un-

¹⁰ The alternative is to postulate a universal *animus dominandi* whereby *all* polities would aim for the top.

European that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Muscovy and the Ottomans communicated with a facility neither could achieve in dealings with Europeans.

There is an interesting split in representations of Muscovite rule here, for as I have tried to demonstrate above, once the domestic work of establishing the basic continuation of Russia's legitimacy as a Christian power was done, Muscovy actually started propping up its claims to being an imperial power on a par with the Holy Roman Empire by invoking its conquests of the successor states of the Golden Horde, notably Kazan' and Astrakhan.¹¹ It was also quick to take over other practices, such as demanding tribute from sundry neighbours. When Livonians in the West refused to pay up, Muscovy started a war against Livonia in 1558 (it ended inconclusively in 1583). The pride that Russians took in being the key successor of the Golden Horde was also evident in the sixteenth century aristocratic fashion for tracing one's ancestry back to Mongols (Halperin 1987: 113). In a situation where Europeans knew little of Mongol or even Asian ways, Russia chose to base its claims for recognition partly on its Mongol connection. This is eminently understandable given the formation of Muscovy's memory-based narrative sociability as it has been laid out in this article. It is also eminently understandable that this narrative sociability put Russia at an enormous disadvantage in its attempts at gaining recognition from European powers.

Conclusion

I have attempted to demonstrate how a relational approach that pays particular heed to how polities employ mnemonic techniques that turn historical facts into historical memories that are politically active may give us a better handle on understanding the emergence of international society than does Watson's focus on expansion. In this reading, entry emerges as the intertwining of what we may call the emergent narrative sociabilities of the parties. These narrative sociabilities change among other things as a function of a polity's ongoing relations with other members of an international order. All this matters today. The memories under discussion here were routinely deployed by Russia in the period leading up to and during its 2022 war on Ukraine, both to legitimate claims that Kyiv was somehow Russian, and to legitimate that 'the West' had somehow 'always' denied Russia its rightful place as a great power on a par with Europe itself. However, none of this registers in Watson's work, for the simple reason that he does not pay heed to the historic knowledge and mnemonic practices that animate such late comers to international society as Russia, but privileges a view of international society from what at any one time is considered its core. We may remedy this by studying what kind of baggage newcomers brought with them when they entered international society, and how those memory matter today.

In addition to elaborating on Watson's work by allowing for a more relational approach, we may also add to it by evolving further a theme that was initiated from within the English School by John Vincent (1980) and taken further by Barry Buzan (esp. 2004),

¹¹ As late as the seventeenth century, the emigré Muscovite bureaucrat Gregorii Kotoshikin explained that the ruler of Muscovy was a *tsar*' by virtue of Ivan IV's conquest of Kazan'; Halperin, 1987: 100.

namely how an international society of states is embedded in a wider world society of multiple and diverse units.¹² The fact that cultural practices and political allegiance are increasingly bleeding into one another has been heavily accelerated by globalization. At the present juncture, it remains unclear whether the increased intertwining of narrative sociabilities will strengthen international society by adding to its foundation a number of cross-cutting allegiances that deter conflict, or whether the identity politics that tends to follow in its wake will lead to fragmentation of international society.

During the thirty years since Watson published *The Expansion of International Society*, our social worlds have expanded. New historical international societies are being excavated, and the history of our present global international society is being rewritten. A subdiscipline of comparative international systems and societies is coming into its own. We owe this development to pioneers like Adam Watson.

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¹² For a discussion of one possible outcome of this process, see McKeil in this special issue.

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