

# Book Review: An Introduction to the English School of International Relations by Barry Buzan

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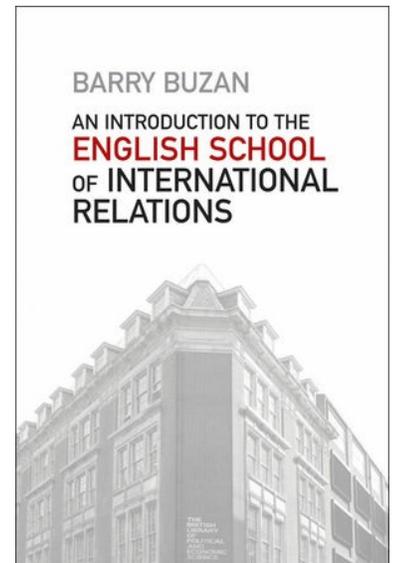
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Written by leading ES scholar **Barry Buzan**, this book aims to guide readers through the English School's formative ideas, intellectual and historical roots, current controversies and future avenues of development. **Adrian Gallagher** finds that this is an outstanding contemporary overview of the English School, a must read for all those interested in using, or critiquing, the ES approach. It sits at the apex of the pyramid of ES introductory scholarship.

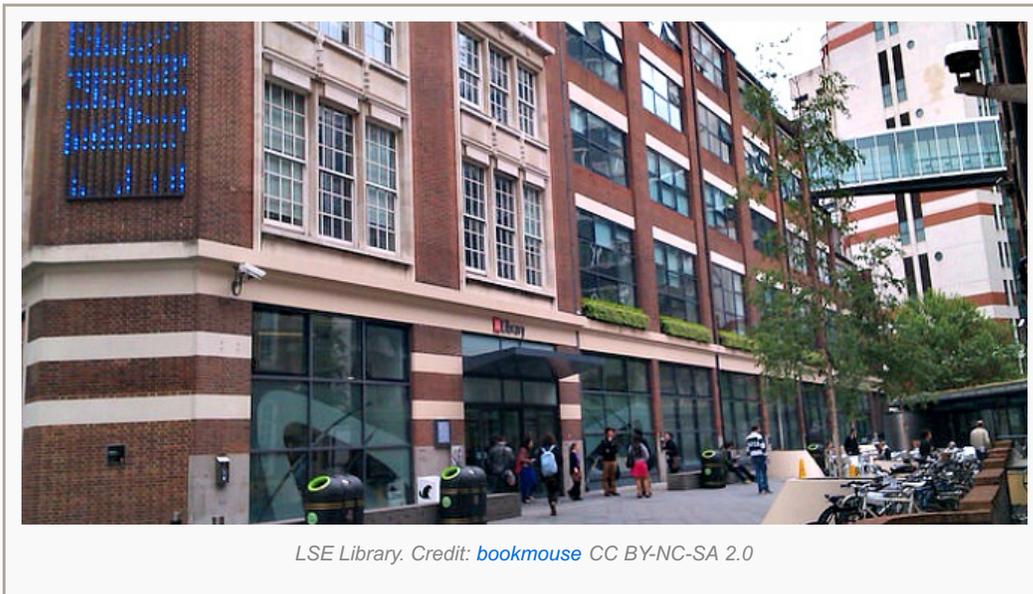
**An Introduction to the English School of International Relations. Barry Buzan. Polity Press. 2014.**

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Barry Buzan has been at the vanguard of the English School (ES) renaissance since his seminal call to reconvene the ES at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In that time, a small number of excellent introductory texts on the ES have been published by seminal scholars in the field (see *International Society and Its Critics* edited by Alex Bellamy; *The English School of International Relations: A Contemporary Reassessment* by Andrew Linklater and Hidemi Sugunami; and *Theorising International Society* edited by Cornelia Navari). Even with such exemplary texts, however, as a Lecturer in Theories of International Relations (and an ES scholar for that matter), this reviewer has always been conscious of the need for an ES teaching text. This problem is now solved. Buzan provides an outstanding overview which, primarily, provides an easy accessible introduction to the ES and, secondarily, guides the reader step-by-step into more complicated material.



To begin with, it is necessary to outline the structure of the book which is split into three main parts and a conclusion. Part I, 'Background and Context', explains the evolution of the ES, key concepts, theories and methodologies. This provides the reader with a) a history of the ES which develops into contemporary links, for example, to the 'Chinese School', b) an understanding of concepts such as primary and secondary institutions, and c) the methodological moorings of the ES which will be discussed in more detail below. Part II, 'The Historical/Structural Orientation', explores the ES relationship with history through a focus on the *evolution* and *expansion* of international society. The former is discussed through an analysis of the classic ES texts produced by Wight (1992) and Watson (1997) which in turn will introduce students to the relevance of historical periods that they may not have encountered before. The latter draws on a range of authors whilst highlighting the work of scholars such as Paul Keal, who shed light on the darker side of international society. Part III, 'Normative Orientations: Pluralism and Solidarism', details classical pluralism/solidarism, their successors, and analyses both caps in a historical perspective. Again, there is a strong engagement with contemporary debates within ES thinking, for example, the work of John Williams on the pluralist foundations of world society pose important questions that will undoubtedly shape future ES thinking. The conclusion, Chapter Ten, spends twenty pages outlining 'Ongoing Debates and Emergent Agendas', with the latter focusing on contemporary ES debates over primary institutions, types of international society as well as the potential for a merger between international society and international security which is illustrated through a focus on the security consequences for both insiders and outsiders of international society. Structurally, each section is top and tailed with a clear and concise introduction and conclusion and overall this is meticulous in its organisation and execution.



It is important to note that the book is much more than 'just' a teaching text. As Buzan explains:

*It was conceived as a teaching text, but it has become more than that. It explains not only what the English School is, where it came from and how it is placed in the wider canon of IR, but also what its key concepts and ideas are and what is distinctive about them (p. vii).*

The statement captures three important points that underpin the book. First, although this is a brilliant teaching text, it actually goes deeper than this. Even those with a good knowledge of the ES will undoubtedly be pushed to engage with new issues and questions which arise as Buzan engages with contemporary debates. Second, the book helps explain the role of ES as a *via media*, as it explains what it is and what it is not in relation to other IR approaches such as Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism, Marxism, Feminism, and Post-Colonialism. Third, it goes beyond merely identifying the ES as a *via media*, as it clearly sets out the independent contribution that the ES makes in its own right. Unable to go into all these aspects within the context of a review, it is necessary to focus on key aspects.

One of the most notable, and helpful contributions, is Chapter Three, 'Theories and Methodologies'. As it is well documented, the ES has often been criticised for its lack of explicit engagement with research methods which is why Cornelia Navari's edited volume *Theorising International Society* is so important. However, at around £60 it carries quite a heavy price tag. Buzan's book is therefore far more accessible, at least in terms of cost. It provides the reader with a clear explanation on how the ES relates to the other approaches. From a teaching perspective this is extremely helpful. For example, Buzan's six points of difference between the ES and Regime Theory (pp. 30-31) is about as concise as any lecturer could hope for. At the same time, it delves deeper into cutting edge debates. For instance, Buzan outlines a variety of views regarding the potential compatibility of the ES and Constructivism. Here we see short yet invaluable overviews. Moreover, Buzan highlights the lack of ES research on areas such as gender and in so doing, highlights the need for future research to be conducted. I would particularly recommend this chapter to any PhD student looking to better understand ES research methods.

Overall, this is an outstanding contemporary overview of the English School, a must read for all those interested in using, or critiquing, the ES approach. It sits at the apex of the pyramid of ES introductory scholarship.

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