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Ryan Mitchell's research focuses on public international law, legal history and theory, comparative law, and Chinese law. His scholarship has appeared in leading academic journals including the Harvard International Law Journal, the Harvard Human Rights Journal, the Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law, and the Asian Journal of Law and Society, and his commentary on legal, political, and cultural topics has also been published in numerous venues. In current research he situates the origins of modern doctrines of sovereignty in the context of late 19th – early 20th century globalization, and examines systemic implications of China's increasingly active role in international institutions.

Professor Mitchell holds a B.A. from the New School, a J.D. from Harvard Law School, and a Ph.D. in Law from Yale University, where he was also an Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Humanities Fellow. While pursuing his doctoral studies at Yale, he taught courses on the history and theory of international law and received the Archaia Qualification in the Study of Ancient and Premodern Cultures and Societies. His dissertation was passed with distinction, and a monograph adaptation is forthcoming from Cambridge University Press under the title "*Recentering the World: China's Reception and Contention of International Law*".

## **International Law as Project or System?**

Classical authors on international law tended to understand it as an immanent system of norms, emerging either from natural reason or from customary state behavior. This view largely held well into the Vienna System era of multilateral diplomacy, indeed becoming more conceptually clear even as the language of natural law grew increasingly marginalized. By the early 20th century, however, international law had turned into a domain for intentional legislative projects on a global scale. Ultimately, this new legislative function of international law was endowed to permanent organizations focused on norm-development in specialized areas.

With this transformation, international law's forms of legislation and, later, also of interpretation and adjudication transitioned from assuming "unwilled" to "willed," intentional norms. This Article traces the conceptual history of this shift in the self-understanding of legal actors. It also argues that the now-prevalent epistemic model of international law as a collective project may obscure questions, including those rooted in Third World critique, as to whose project it is in practice. Finally, it suggests that international law's "problem of authorship" requires further explorations of project and system as a conceptual dichotomy of equal, if not greater, importance as compared with the traditional trope of a shift from natural law to positivism.