

Emerging Powers in Post-Conflict & Transitional Settings: **The New Politics of Reconstruction**

“How is China Supporting Peace and Development?”

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Introduction

The ascension of China in a globalized world presents a number of challenges and opportunities in the sphere of conflict prevention, post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding. While focusing on this particular field of inquiry, we are proposing potential ways in which the international community could approach the rise of China. We do so primarily by analysing a number of common assumptions about China’s involvement in conflict prevention, post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding, and through the identification of the most recent dynamics. It has commonly been argued that the demand for natural resources in growing economies such as China fuels conflict in war-torn nations through neo-colonialist practices. While such assertions should not be disregarded, we assert that the emergence of China and other rising powers in ‘the new politics of reconstruction’ does not represent as grave a threat as it has been portrayed by some.

The expansion of the Chinese military and the recent South China Sea dispute have been regarded as the uniquely accurate indicators of China’s outward political posture. We argue instead that China’s increasing efforts to contribute to international peace and security should be taken as an opportunity rather than a threat. China has recently been pursuing its “desire to be seen as a responsible power” by upholding the principle of non-interference and committing extensively to UN Peacekeeping and supporting the African Union. In the changing geo-political security environment, established and rising powers alike ought to develop frameworks for cooperation that can mitigate the tensions associated with new power dynamics. By doing so, the international community can foster the successful integration of emerging powers in the management of post-conflict and transitional settings and the prevention of future violence.

China’s Global Ambitions

China’s growing prominence in preserving international peace and security stems from its simultaneous ambition to expand both its economy and its influence. Among Chinese policymakers and academics, there has been a shift in the conceptualization of the relationship between security, development and economic cooperation. The newly-arisen awareness that economic growth and international political stability are intrinsically linked

has caused the Chinese foreign policy establishment to pursue a strategy of “pacifying its extended geographic periphery” (Ferchen: 2016).

Since the early 2000s, China’s foreign policy has centred on peaceful development. In the economic realm, this has culminated into extensive Chinese governmental support for outward foreign direct investment in particularly Africa and Latin America. Chinese private and state-owned enterprises have been able to gain a foothold in the natural resource industries of African and Latin-American countries through subsidies. Affordable Chinese development loans, labour, technology and infrastructure projects have proven to be highly attractive exchange goods, not the least to regimes with disputed reputations in terms of upholding human rights and democratic freedoms (Obi: 2013). Nowadays, large scale Chinese infrastructure projects are being realized all over the developing world. Previously, these were unimaginable under the auspices of Western donors. For China, these economic initiatives rapidly pay off as countries in Africa and Latin America intensify trade relations. In addition, the upsurge of the renminbi vis-à-vis other global currencies and its recent validation by the IMF as an international reserve asset further strengthens Chinese financial influence (IMF: 2015).

Paramount to these Chinese forms of economic cooperation is the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs of other countries. Combining non-interference with extensive multilateral collaborative efforts, some scholars assert that China is opting for a policy of ‘selective multilateralism’. As has been pointed out by Wu (2007: 8), “selective multilateralism means that there are areas in which China does not want to be bound by multilateral diplomacy, and where it likes to continue to employ a bilateralist and even a unilateralist approach.” Instruments of foreign policy, including finance and economic cooperation regimes, are increasingly being leveraged by China to transform economies across the globe and solidify its position as a global economic power.

In the Asia-Pacific region in particular, China has recently forged a more robust economic posture to provide counterbalance to – among others – the American-led Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Most notably, the country’s relationship with ASEAN improved over the years, and numerous additional (economic) cooperation regimes were set up, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the One Belt One Road (OBOR) Initiative.

The Organization of China’s Overseas Assistance

Within the framework of Chinese global ambitions, the country’s overseas assistance is organized in a variety of ways. In essence, four government units are in charge of overseeing China’s overseas assistance efforts: the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, select line ministries and the International Liaison Office of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee. While the organisation of China’s overseas assistance is

frequently understood to be highly centralized, in reality there is a multitude of non-state actors involved as well, including civil society, academia and the private sector.

More recently, China has also been investing heavily in the formation of various multilateral cooperation forums. In Africa, the Forum for China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) is one of the most prominent initiatives in the realm of peace and development. Under the umbrella of FOCAC, Chinese financial pledges to Africa have increased from \$5 billion in 2006 to \$60 billion in 2015. At last year's summit, President Xi proposed 10 overarching plans for Sino-Africa cooperation, covering almost all aspects of mutual economic ties: industry, agriculture, infrastructure, environment, trade facilitation, poverty alleviation, and public health (Sun: 2015). In addition, the China-Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security has been designated as a security initiative as part of FOCAC, which seeks to mitigate drivers of conflict. Achieving this objective will require further discussions on "how Beijing could move beyond rhetoric and support inclusive economic growth and development that could concretely contribute to reducing known root drivers of conflict" (Moller-Loswick et al: 2015).

The Chinese vision on peace and development has been shaped profoundly by a long-standing history of foreign interventions and occupations by other nations. Indeed, with regard to China's view on post conflict reconstruction, much of the country's activity is a fine balancing act between principle and pragmatism (Campbell et al. 2012). By all means, Chinese peacebuilding efforts are supposed to be distinct from the Western liberal peace paradigm, so as to successfully exert its soft power overseas. Media aligned with Chinese interests are assigned a subtle, yet influential, role in the positive framing of Chinese overseas assistance in Sudan, Chad and other conflict-ridden states.

In domestic academic discourse however, there has been little research on the Chinese role in peace and development. Although a shift is taking place towards a broader discussion, a lack of knowledge as well as the political sensitivity of security issues has been at the source of this state of affairs. Among Chinese scholars and officials, there is a general consensus that underdevelopment is the root cause of conflict, and that therefore socio-economic development is considered a top priority wherever the Chinese set foot on land (Jiang: 2010, Yu & Wang: 2008). It remains to be seen to what extent China's post conflict reconstruction efforts benefit societies at large as opposed to favouring a handful of local elites.

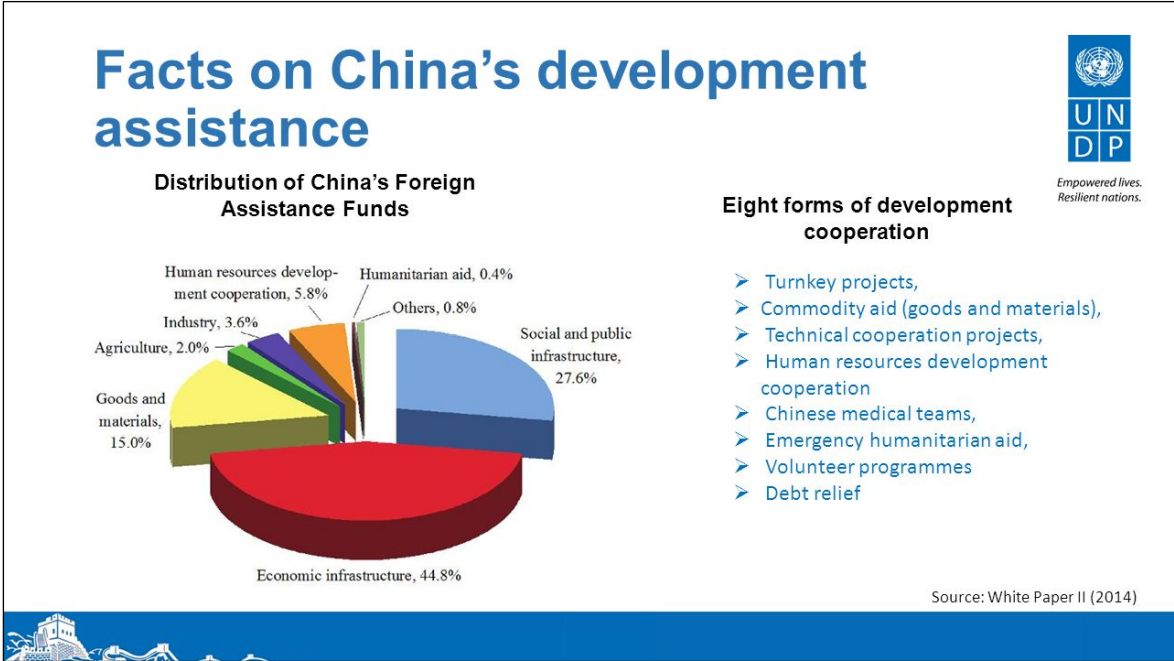
Facts and Figures on Chinese Assistance

China's overseas assistance to conflict-affected countries has increased significantly over the past couple of years, most of which has been realized through economic infrastructure projects. At the same time, a number of African and Western aid experts have raised concerns about China's recent tendency to opt out of global aid reporting systems established by Western powers. Chinese development assistance has been labelled, among others, as "rogue aid" (Dreher & Fuchs: 2011). Little exact information has been given by

Beijing on Chinese overseas development figures. While this in turn has caused critics of China’s development assistance to remain highly suspicious, researchers affiliated with AidData suggest that the Chinese aid strategy and implementation is “highly comparable to their Western counterparts” (Dove: 2016). In addition to a lack of accurate statistics, Lum et al. have highlighted problems concerning the appropriate demarcation of China’s foreign aid activities across the globe:

“Some Chinese foreign assistance partially resembles official development assistance (ODA) as defined by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), but in other aspects shares characteristics of foreign investment. In terms of development grants, the primary form of assistance provided by major OECD countries, China is a relatively small source of global aid. However, when China’s concessional loans and state-sponsored or subsidized overseas investments are included, the PRC becomes a major source of foreign aid (Lum et al., 2009: 1).”

A RAND analysis published in 2015 suggests the following regional shares of total pledged Chinese assistance from 2001 through 2014 (in billions): Africa (\$330), Latin America (\$298), East Asia (\$192, excluding the bulk of China's aid to North Korea), the Middle East (\$165), South Asia (\$157), and Central Asia (\$69). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has produced a comprehensive overview of the figures relating to Chinese overseas assistance:



On the African continent, a multitude of countries have been impacted by Chinese post-conflict reconstruction assistance, including: Angola, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Sudan and Zimbabwe. Next to debt cancellations, zero-interest loans, infrastructure reconstruction and

public services provision, the boosting of employment has also featured in the wide array of Chinese post-conflict reconstruction methodologies. Fragile conditions of peace and security however pose significant risks to Chinese engagement in these areas, despite considerable support from Beijing.

To China, the relationship with Latin America is of less significance than China-Africa ties, considering the geographical distance, the United States' great influence, weak economic ties, cultural differences, and a lack of ground transportation (Li & Yanzhuo: 2015). Compared to Africa and Asia, China depends less on multilateral frameworks in Latin America and instead focuses on four resource-rich countries: Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina and Ecuador. Slight fluctuations in Chinese political and economic engagement on other continents can be explained by the variable presence of other actors, the operating environment, as well as the relative importance of Chinese interests in these areas.

China's Increasing Role in UN Peacekeeping

In the realm of international peace and security, China's global ambitions have recently also started to permeate UN Peacekeeping endeavours. China's increased involvement in UN Peacekeeping should be regarded as an official expression of its commitment to the UN Charter and its security functions (Zhongying 2005: 87). The overarching Chinese rationale however is the preposition that without contributing to the 'democratization of interstate relations', China will not be able to successfully leverage its global economic and political influence. Prior to the turn of the century, China had been approaching UN Peacekeeping with caution as the potential for international interference in Chinese domestic affairs (e.g. Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang) had been a deterrent factor.

Concurrent with its desire to be seen as a responsible power, China is now becoming increasingly involved in the formulation of peacekeeping mandates and consequently metamorphoses from a norm-taker into a norm-maker (Lanteigne & Hirono 2013: 9). Certainly, recent Chinese troop contributions to the UN have been exemplary of this ongoing metamorphosis. During the UN General Assembly of 2015, China's President Xi Jinping announced that the country will contribute 8.000 troops to a UN peacekeeping standby force. Currently, China's largest contingent of peacekeepers is stationed in South Sudan, where it has considerable interests in the local oil industry.

The upsurge in Chinese peacekeeping troops can also be regarded as an act of consent towards the wish of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA), which seeks to become more involved in non-combat military efforts such as humanitarian relief missions. In South Sudan, the combined deployment of Chinese infantrymen, medical personnel and engineers is therefore also supposed to win the hearts and minds of the local citizens.

On the other hand, China's peacekeeping aspirations are being hampered by traditional views of state sovereignty and non-interference, as well as a lack of bureaucratic capacity

and political will. Some scholars have identified China's multifaceted status as a great power and Global South state as the key cause of Chinese motivations for heightened engagement in UN Peacekeeping (Fung: 2015). Others have argued that China steps up its engagement in UN Peacekeeping as an alternative to the establishment and maintenance of military bases similar to those operated by the United States (Campbell-Mohn: 2015).

In the long haul, China's expanding contribution to UN Peacekeeping could instigate a number of profound changes. UN Peacekeeping as an institution can potentially revert back to its traditional conception, and steer away from peace enforcement as a consequence of Chinese aversion to international interference in domestic affairs. Alternatively, the current Chinese position of non-interference might evolve over time, and peace enforcement may be continued without a Chinese veto (Kuo: 2015). It is a good example of whether the rest of the world will see China's increased commitment as an opportunity or a threat.

Chinese Civil Society, Peace and Development and Goal 16

China has been on a path to reform since 1978. In trying to promote economic activity and growth, the Chinese government has gradually relaxed many controls over Chinese society and the daily life of its citizens. This has also created new space for social innovation and the way citizens can interact. Economic growth has contributed to a decline in poverty, but at the expense of greater inequalities. There are growing gaps between rich and poor or between urban and rural areas. Administrative and governing systems that were established for the planned economy no longer match this new social reality. Other challenges are created by the need to focus on safety and environmental sustainability. The Chinese government is thus facing the challenge how to manage and continue its overall success, while accommodating and responding to a number of problems. Overall, the approach of the government towards Chinese civil society aims to develop a systematic framework to manage social problems (Watson 2008).

Within this context, the Chinese government has started to enable a space for different forms of social organizations, however, with various levels of state control still being exercised. Chinese civil society can thus be perceived as an organized civil sphere that comes into being by gradually 'growing away' from the state, as it increasingly obtains different levels of independence. Historically, this is a path of civil society development opposite to many western countries, where there was often an independent civil sphere before nation states were formed, as well as countries where civil society has been a sphere to organize civil concern and identity in the face of colonial oppression.

From a legal perspective, social organizations are normally subject of registration and dual administration. Any social organization must register at the level of government within which the organization operates (i.e. national organizations at the national level, provincial at the provincial level and so forth). In addition, it is required to register both with the designated registration authority (the Ministry of Civil Affairs system) and with a professional supervisory unit. An organization wishing to work for a mission related to health care must register, for example, with a hospital; an educational organization with a University etc. The professional supervisory organization is commonly known as the 'God Mother' of a social organization. Recently, the Government has started to experiment with a single administration system, in which social organizations do no longer need a 'God Mother'.

There has been a very rapid growth of social organizations in China. At the moment, there are about 600.000 registered social organizations, fulfilling a host of different developmental functions. They represent 9,7% of GDP and have created 12 million jobs (CANGO).

A new foreign NGO Law has recently been approved by the National People's Congress, and stipulates that "any group wishing to operate in China must register with public security officials (Phillips: 2016)." The law is seen in western media and human rights organizations as yet another example of more repression. However, a different review of the law and its implications is also possible, pointing at how the law can be perceived as a tactical move in a long term strategy for the state to gain as much benefit, and minimize as much risk, from the NGO sector as possible. More regulation of the NGO sector is often seen as a potential threat to fundamental freedoms. Regulation can also mean inclusion in the system and thus acknowledgement (Teets & Hsu: 2016). The question is again whether to perceive the actions of the Chinese government as creating an opportunity or a threat?

The shift from the Multilateral Development Goals (MDGs) to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) allows for a useful framing to discuss the role of Chinese civil society in supporting the new 'peace goal' in the SDGs. Between 2000 and 2015, China made very significant progress on most of the MDGs. The success of the MDGs globally can to a large extent be attributed to the success of China. This contrasts sharply with most conflict-affected countries that showed the opposite; they did not manage to make much progress on achieving the MDGs. It gave birth to the mantra that there can be 'no peace without development'. In China this is seen as underlining the relevance and success of the Chinese experience in the past decades.

Chinese society has experienced major violent conflicts and upheavals in the past 100 years, including external invasion, civil war and widespread domestic political unrest. The current Chinese leadership has a collective memory of the Cultural Revolution. There is thus a strong and widely shared sentiment grounded in recent history of the risks that come with the use of violence and the suffering and costs that violence may incur.

The careful approach to violence is reflected in the use of language. Some would say this is inspired as well by a dominant Confucian culture that is inclined to stress harmony rather than dissent. As a result, much of the language used at international levels to describe violent conflict is rarely used in China. The word "conflict" itself and related terms like "conflict prevention" or "conflict management" are not part of the common vocabulary. Instead, Chinese discourse will emphasize words like "stability", "healthy social relations", or "the promotion of a harmonious society". The term "building peaceful and inclusive societies" can be connected to this discourse and thus adds to the truly universal appeal of Goal 16, the importance of which can hardly be underestimated.

The recent Chinese government position paper on the implementation of Goal 16 is quite explicit in stressing 'peaceful development' as the first general principle, and calling for the inclusion of civil society as part of an 'all-round partnership' with governments, international organizations and the private sector (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China: 2016). Finally, it is worthwhile noting that the role of civil society and the preservation of

religious rights will also be crucial in ensuring the success of the aforementioned economic cooperation regimes (Meyer: 2016).

Conclusions and Recommendations

This policy brief has sought to shed light on the rise of China and the challenges and opportunities it creates in the sphere of conflict prevention, post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding. Initially providing an overview of China's global political and economic ambitions, the main focus has been on examining the role of China in contributing to international peace and security. Across the globe, China has forged several multilateral frameworks aimed at improving political and economic ties, while stepping up its commitment to established multilateral institutions such as the United Nations. In China, but particularly abroad, disagreement continues to exist on how to interpret these new geopolitical dynamics. Primarily Western observers have asserted that China's benign framing of its foreign policy agenda is merely a cover-up for an aggressive attempt at safeguarding China's national interests.

The validity of such arguments can however be questioned when one considers the intent of Western foreign aid initiatives and their connectedness to national interests. According to many African countries, China and Western countries ultimately tar with the same brush. China's approach to foreign aid however also differs from Western countries in some ways. The Chinese focus on peace and development is grounded in a balance between principle and pragmatism, with a focus on non-interference in the domestic affairs of other countries. As China sets up new cooperation regimes while side-lining other initiatives, some have designated the Chinese strategy as 'selective multilateralism'. The country has pledged hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of development assistance, as well as major troop contributions to UN peacekeeping. While Chinese foreign aid intentions are likely to be more altruistic than outside observers would like to admit, it remains to be seen to what extent normal citizens in conflict-affected regions will benefit from these initiatives as opposed to local elites.

Most importantly, a more nuanced understanding of China's approach to peace and development is required, particularly in the West. Rather than viewing Chinese efforts to support peace and development as a threat, they deserve to be regarded as an opportunity. In our view, continuous dialogue between Chinese and foreign policymakers is needed to ensure the prospects for improved cooperation. Ultimately, the successful integration of China in international peace and development discourse, and in effective multilateral institutions, will be of great benefit to all stakeholders involved. There is ample room for civil society collaboration and engagement with these dynamics, to contribute to a shared responsibility that can have a significant impact on preventing violence and the prosperity of conflict-affected states, rising powers and established powers alike.

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