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## **From Aid to Smart Power: Chinese Power Strategy in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan**

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# From Aid to Smart Power

Chinese Power Strategy in the United Nations  
Mission in South Sudan

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## Abstract

China's increased presence within the UN and its peacekeeping missions shows its will to be a responsible actor, whilst shifting away from the China threat theory that has fed Western thought. However, little research has been done on how power is perceived within this field. The state claims to be non-interventionist but still sent an increasing amount of combat troops to Africa. It is unknown if the end goal is to provide aid or if there is more to it. This study intends to research what China's model for peace and development within the mission of South Sudan entails, both theoretically and practically, and how it might use an underlying strategy of smart power. Herein, Nye's concept of smart power is a way for a nation to maximise its strength through a combination of hard and soft power.

In order to measure smart power, the components of military, economic, and affective and normative soft power were used. Military and economic power exist on as spectrum ranging from hard to soft power, whilst soft power is also devised into tangible and intangible assets. To research power, the thesis has used a variation of academic sources, databases, newspapers, and official governmental papers. These were chosen as to examine official reporting and factual outcomes. The results showed that the Chinese model for development contains soft power elements, whilst its activities in South Sudan employ both soft and hard power.

The results therefore suggest that China might pursue a smart power strategy to safeguard its own interests. The realist concept of power still holds up today and might prove valuable to research more areas of power in UN missions on the African continent.

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## List of Abbreviations

CHINBATT	Chinese Infantry Battalion
CNPC	Chinese National Petroleum Company
CPC	Communist Party of China
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
FOCAC	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
GPOC	Greater Pioneer Operating Company
MOF	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China
MOOTW	Military Operations other than War
PLA	China's People's Liberation Army
POC	Protection of Civilians
PRC	People's Republic of China
R2P	Responsibility to Protect
RP	Responsible Protection
SCIO	The State Council Information Office
Sinopec	China Petroleum and Chemical Corporation
SPLA	Sudan's People Liberation Army
SPLA-IO	Sudan's People Liberation Army in Opposition
SPLM	Sudan's People Liberation Movement
SPLM-IO	Sudan's People Liberation Movement in Opposition
SSNA	South Sudan News Agency
UN	United Nations
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
US	United States
USD	United States Dollar

## Introduction

China's global rise to power has shown itself in many factors and has taken place in different areas of influence. One such area is increased involvement within the United Nations (UN), as the country has involved itself quite heavily in contributing and participating in UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions. The People's Republic of China (PRC) currently situates itself as the second highest aid contributor, with 15.22% of the UN's budget being funded by its government (He 2019). In addition, China is also the largest contributor of troops among the permanent members of the UN Security Council. China's act of making the world a better and safer place can be interpreted as an attempt to abandon its image of being seen as a threat to the Western world with its growing power in the fields of not only its economic base, but also for its political, cultural, and military prowess. The Communist Party of China (CPC) has already put effort in changing this threat perception under the guise of China's peaceful rise as coined by former General Secretary Hu Jintao (2002-2012). This move towards a peaceful rise in the international community can still be seen today, moreover, China exerts the concept as a tool to provide less fortunate countries with ways to develop in a similar manner to the PRC. Being the largest developmental country, the CPC intends to guide large parts of the third world with its developmental plan for bringing not only development but also peace to conflict-ridden nations (SCIO 2019, 9). In a "public attitude" survey conducted in African nations where the UN's peacekeeping missions have seen a multitude of different approaches to reaching peace, China's model seems to be winning ground on the model that has been employed by the United States (US), whilst those of the former colonizers France and England are seen to dwindle further (Lekorwe et al. 2016, 2). However, China's policies in Africa have not always been positive and have been described as ways to exploit nations for their resources, which the country is still held accountable for today. The National Security Advisor to the US, for example, has described the Chinese interests on the African continent as a way to gain more power through its "predatory" practices (Borger 2018). This shows a continuation in the perception of the China threat theory which it is desperately attempting to overcome with its peacebuilding efforts.

This leads to the research question this thesis will attempt to answer: To what extent does China's model for peace and development, as implemented in its UN sanctioned peacekeeping

missions in South Sudan, reflect an exercise of smart power, despite promoting itself as a non-interventionist actor? As China is putting itself out there as a responsible actor in the UN peacekeeping missions, whilst inherently following non-interventionist policies shows a paradox in China's foreign policy. This thesis will therefore add to the existing literature of China's role in UN peacekeeping, and China's Africa policy, as well as literature on Chinese power and China's presence in South Sudan. Current literature has mostly revolved around the changing attitude of China towards UN peacekeeping or its motives for joining peacekeeping missions. Few scholars, with the exception of Kwon (2020) and Fung (2019), who similarly have researched the actions of Chinese peacekeeping troops, have delved into this subject, but none have done so from the perspective of power.

In answering this question, the thesis will be divided in a literature review which will expand on previous notions of Chinese peacekeeping and its aims and on the concept of power within the African context. Then the main part of the thesis will dissect the Chinese role in the UN and its developmental model, after which it will research how the peacekeeping process is formed in the country of South Sudan; and what the governmental and public response to this is in order to research if China's presence shows a smart power strategy. The case study of South Sudan is set up as follows: first, the case will receive a short overview of the country and the ongoing conflict that takes place, followed by an analysis of the military, economic, and attractive and normative aspects of power.

## Literature Review

The research question of the thesis has set out to provide an answer to whether China's method of peacekeeping can be considered to be an example of a smart power strategy exercised on the African continent. In accordance, the literature review has put its focus on prior academic research into Chinese peacekeeping and the controversies to the concept of intervention with the use of 'responsibility to protect' (R2P), looking at its different methods in aid provision from the more commonly used US or former colony models. As will be shown, this debate seems to be largely influenced by subjective visions emanating from the respective researchers and their philosophical traditions, and the topic seems to have been covered less over the years.

Furthermore, the academic research on the interplay of power dynamics within peacekeeping has been sparse and mostly focused on the role of soft power.

The literature review is structured in a largely thematic and chronological way to show the differences in argumentation between topics and the possible changes overtime. The first part will delve into the debates surrounding Chinese peacekeeping, more specifically the components of R2P and aid provision; and after that the previous notions on the spread of power within Sino-African relations forthcoming of the peacekeeping efforts and relations with China in more general terms.

### Responsibility to Protect

China's role within the UN peacekeeping missions has evolved sharply over the last two decades. Whereas the state was first reluctant to join the international community in their peacekeeping missions in the late nineties, their will to show their rise as a responsible nation has increasingly led to further commitment, which is clearly reflected in the academic debate. This increasing drive to participate in UN peacekeeping was naturally met with uncertainty within the international community as the traditional Chinese values, and with it its strong disapproval of intervention, stands in stark contrast to the interventionist role other countries play under the notion of the responsibility to protect. The R2P principle was introduced in an International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty report in 2001 with the purpose to "prevent, react, and rebuild" (Bose and Thakur 2016, 344). Over the years, contestation has emerged around the last element of rebuilding a nation after conflict instead often being seen as a tool to impose a certain "doctrine" upon a torn-up nation (Ibid. 2016, 345, 365). This problematic reinterpretation of this "third pillar" to achieve regime change is where China attempts to make a difference, as it counters the sovereignty principle of a nation (Garwood-Gowers 2016, 91).

In the early 2010's, there was little official reporting from China about their intentions within the UN Security Council to counter the R2P framework, which made it difficult for academics like Richardson to establish what the role of China would exactly entail with the increase of its participation and if it would join other UN nations in their praxes (2011, 294-295). Teitt reflects on this uncertainty in a similar manner to Richardson, but adds that China could



work from a duality of attempting to give the impression of being a cooperative nation to safeguard its own interests or that the country is indeed willing to commit to cooperation and show itself as a responsible power, but that it is held back by its position towards the R2P concept (2011, 310). It was even expected that China would shy away from its troop contributions to the UN missions in the cases that it was no longer needed (Richardson 2011, 295). Moreover, Richardson mentions that in order to remain a valuable actor within the realm of UN peacekeeping, China would therefore need to show some flexibility in its policy (2011, 286). Thus, both academics agreed upon the notion that for China to become a responsible power, it should move away from its non-intervention principles as it holds the nation back to intervene properly.

Chinese academic Zongze shows more trust in the Chinese peacekeeping effort, as it battles the rise of “new interventionism” by Western countries, which is said to be hidden under the guise of humanitarian intervention (2012, 19). Chen provides more insight as to why the R2P is considered a danger to states as the Chinese perspective fears for Western nations to use the concept to “overthrow sovereign governments”, thus, the stance that the Chinese government takes is to show their ability to not only be a responsible, but also a “positive” power (2016, 11). In a similar vein as Garwood-Gower’s (2016) critique on the revisionist character of the third UN nation, Zongze claims that China attempts to restore the UN peacekeeping missions to its core “purposes and principles” (Zongze 2012, 20). To counter new interventionism, Zongze asserts that rather than the Responsibility to Protect, China maintains a policy of Responsible Protection (RP) (2012, 37). RP is built on six pillars of which the first pledges to protect only those who are deemed to be “innocent”, thus, the general population rather than political parties or armed forces (Zongze 2012, 38). The following two principles are related to the sovereignty issue of R2P as they declare that the state’s government has the “primary responsibility” to protect its people, as well as, the UN Security Council; however, this has to be limited to diplomatic and political means as these will create better results than military intervention (Ibid.). Furthermore, protection should have a clear definition, and the “protectors” should put effort in rebuilding the state after conflict, moreover, the UN should supervise these attempts (Zongze 2012, 29). However, Zongze’s argumentation on China’s Responsible Protection, is not taken up in the

country's official foreign policy, thus, Chinese actions might contradict some of the principles stated.

In contrast to Richardson's (2011) rigidity argument of China's peacekeeping policy, the PRC has given consent for the usage of R2P in certain circumstances, like the "humanitarian crises" in Syria and Libya, whilst it still holds true to its values towards sovereignty and non-intervention (Chen 2016, 5). According to Huang's research, the cases in which China does validate the use of and supports others in the responsibility to protect is when "national security interests" are not directly in jeopardy, but as Chen argues, it counters these ideas if the R2P mission implies a regime change, no matter how China's image might be tarnished by not participating (Huang 2013, 267; Chen 2016, 12). These conflicting ideas therefore also cause confusion and complexity for its actual peacekeeping actions. As Huang mentions on the Chinese interests in Africa, it is difficult to establish China's behaviour and what their prospects are for its "emerging role" in the international community (Huang 2013, 268). This has become even more complicated with the addition of China sending its military as part of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). It currently frequently uses these forces for military operations other than war (MOOTW), which marks a new strategy for China (Lanteigne 2019, 644). Lanteigne predicts that these operations are only the beginning of a "larger strategy of Chinese comprehensive diplomacy" on the African continent (2019, 649). The addition of these extra military forces to the Chinese peacekeeping missions in Africa could therefore be interpreted as a discontinuation of the RP concept, however, with the inclusion of primarily MOOTW's the non-military intervention principle can still be upheld.

## Aid

The type of aid that is provided through Chinese peacekeeping is often frowned upon by the international community especially when China just embarked on their mission to provide support to nations in need. Naím, for example, clearly shows in his opinion on China's aid provision in Africa that he believes that China's interests are purely focused on its national priorities in order to "line their own pockets" as he calls the country a "rogue aid" provider profiting of natural resources African countries possess (2007, 95). According to proponents of

this thinking, China is not only resource hungry, but also supposedly wins over authoritarian African states, like itself, to gain more support for China in the international community (Carmody and Taylor 2010, 497). Carmody and Taylor conclude that China is not acting according to the responsibility to protect, but rather the “responsibility to profit” (2010, 512). This view can be problematic as most Western academics only look at the trade flows between countries without researching the impact on the African societies, and with it denying the agency of the African people in their view of a new Chinese colonization (Tan-Mullins et al. 2010, 859). This early and mostly negative Western reflection on the PRC’s involvement in Africa, has not gone unnoticed by Chinese academics. Junbo and Frasher, for example, contradict such accusations by arguing that the West only perceives China as a threat as it will strip away the resources the West wants to profit from themselves (2014, 199). Furthermore, although contested, while China might take these resources, they arguably return manufactured goods to the African public as a way of providing cheap and reliable products (2014, 194). China’s involvement, however, does not only strip the countries of resources, but revolves around building capacity and teaching Africans to build up their economy from the ground up. In this sense, China creates a win-win situation where China could increase its power within Africa, and African countries can increase their wellbeing and economic development in return (Tella 2016, 133-134). Rather than the realist view of Chinese power like Naím (2007), and Carmody and Taylor (2010), Tella maintains China’s soft power influence from a constructivist angle. Due to China’s sovereignty principles and their image of a developmental country, the actor can also be interpreted as a less predatory country which could win “the hearts and minds” of the African nations (Tella 2016, 134).

Even though, trade might not be a standard way of providing aid compared to other countries, UN peacekeeping has also “shifted its focus” (Benabdallah 2016, 20). As Benabdallah has witnessed in her research, instead of traditional conflict resolution in the form of military or political approaches, conflicts are increasingly approached from an economic or social understanding (Ibid.). China is seen to primarily focus on these aspects as it attempts to increase economic and social development of African nations, with good feedback as a result (Junbo and Frasher 2014, 199; Benabdallah 2016, 28). Junbo and Frasher describe China for this reason as a more “passionate investor” compared to the West, which will result in a deteriorating

relationship between the West and Africa (2014, 199). Thiombiano and Zhang offer a more nuanced picture to Junbo and Frasher's optimism. In their research on agency of African nations in their relations with China, they discover that the Chinese aid model is positively viewed as it does not meddle with domestic affairs. However, China is often used as a "bargaining chip" to receive more support from the West (2020, 9-10). Thus, even though China offers a good alternative model, it will not yet be widely accepted as the only peacekeeping model in Africa like Junbo and Frasher had hoped for (2014, 200).

### Chinese Power in Africa

China is well known for enforcing soft power across the globe with its Confucius institutes to promote Chinese culture and language. Peacekeeping can be another way for the Chinese nation to increase its reputation, with Africa being an "important stage" in doing so (Huang 2013, 250). Chen sees the "active participation" as a great opportunity to show the international community that China can be a great power (Chen 2016, 13). In Chinese academic circles the Chinese version of soft power is generally described as being "non-aggressive" and compassionate by nature, whilst American soft power, in the same vein as the Western concept of R2P, is seen as "cultural imperialism" and always being driven by power instead of compassion (Li and Rønning 2013, 103). Adopting this compassionate stance in their provision of aid is therefore a way to show that China can be a great and responsible power. With the addition of the critical stance towards the colonial powers and the US, China could exert its soft power influence in Africa relatively well (Li and Rønning 2014, 103). Whether this narrative is accepted by the African community is another issue. Academics researching the Chinese power dynamic have mostly done so by examining the soft power influence that China holds on to African countries through their developmental aid. Thus, it is more common to see evaluations on infrastructure and economic engagement. As Fijałkowski has argued, it might prove difficult for China to develop a strong soft power structure due to the African people being largely disenfranchised from their own governments already (2011, 231). However, Liang reasons that China has a better chance of doing so compared to the West since the PRC is still a developmental country itself and might reach the African people better with its focus on "infrastructure, health

care and education” (Liang 2012, 669, 680). On the other hand, the nature of the products that China brings back under the economic engagement, are often frowned upon in African community for the products being of bad quality and cheaper than the manufactured goods in their own countries (Liang 2012, 683). Junbo and Frasherri argue the contrary as they state that the goods imported by China are far superior, but neglect to mention the African industries (2014, 194). Reflecting on the two previous statements, more recent analysis shows that both opinions hold true. Whilst the cheap Chinese goods are widely accepted by the “very poor” in African countries, it causes bitterness towards China by the rest of the community (Morgan 2018, 403).

Nevertheless, soft power does not resolve solely around the acceptance of China but about the adoption of values. In Liang’s early research she concluded that China’s economic model lacks “widespread applicability”, which will not lead to African countries following their example (2012, 687-689). As China has become more involved, Coslovi sees the error in such statements due to the PRC being commonly supported by African nations, arguing that its soft power might have worked to gain this support (2018, 196). However, a smaller group of academics recognizes differing patterns in Chinese soft power production in Africa. Aside from the provision of cheap products to aid the African population, a more important soft power tool is the Chinese large-scale vocational training and capacity building (Benabdallah 2017, 496). Thus, China’s economic power is not the only tool it uses to increase their soft power. As Benabdallah notes in her study, the current focus on Chinese powerplays are mainly focused on these economic investments and China as a trading partner, though this eventually does not increase the “long-term attractiveness of soft power” (2017, 512). Capacity building and vocational training, on the other hand, are able to increase the production of knowledge within troubled countries, providing people with the tools to build their country back up themselves (Ibid.). Such practices have a greater chance of increasing the long-term attractiveness of Chinese soft power as it could create an emotional bond and a more positive rhetoric towards Chinese humanitarian aid.

This could be due to soft power, but also their lesser involvement in politics, as stated before, due to their non-intervention. Swedlund established that while China is “most influential” on development cooperation in Africa, it is not considered to be a threat to the agency of African

nations (2017, 395, 407). Yet, Sorensen perceives China's influence on African governments as a "carrot and stick diplomacy", meaning that China uses its power to promote and protect the Chinese interests (2019, 608). This has become a more possible prospect with the addition of MOOTW, which could be considered as hard power. Ghiselli maintains that MOOTW is inherently militaristic and that the Chinese interests are more and more focused on the MOOTW side of peacekeeping, however, it is difficult to say what kind of missions China will undertake in the future (2020, 430, 435).

## Conclusion

Reviewing the literature, it becomes clear that, like expected, the discourse on Chinese peacekeeping has changed over time and incorporates different facets. Western thought has evolved from an overly critical standpoint of seeing China as a nation who purely wants to profit, to China as a nation that wants to be responsible, but still has its own interests that are not entirely clear. Chinese academics are generally more positive on China's involvement, but since its foreign involvement is still relatively recent, Chinese academics have not conducted widespread research on the policies surrounding this aspect. In 2013, Huang already commented on this fact by stating that there is very little expertise towards this subject (2013, 267), but this does not seem to have been improved. A prime reason for this could be that most of the academic research on the topic is simply not written or translated into English. Soft power in Chinese peacekeeping in Africa is a relatively well researched subject, but research on hard power, and with it the combination of the two: smart power, is lacking in this respect.

## Research Design

### Theoretical Framework

As this thesis is set out to analyse the Chinese smart power usage in South Sudan it is necessary to take the different components of power into account for the different cases of UN peacekeeping missions that will be used in the paper. Power remains an important subject in international relations, but as Nye also states it is almost impossible to fully encompass as

everyone has a different definition or way of measurement (2011, 3). Researching the application of power through China's UN missions in Africa therefore adds to the wide field of research on China's rise as a global power. Africa is increasingly becoming an important stage in world politics, thus, reviewing China's involvement through its UN peacekeeping missions to increase its global influence with its power strategy could be a renewed exploration of Sino-African relations.

The literature review showed that China's Africa policies are often compared to the approach of both soft power and hard power. Whereas the early stages of Chinese involvement within Africa were perceived through a lens of hard power, more recently China's efforts have been seen to have evolved into soft power strategies on the continent. Most recent academics have, therefore, researched the economic soft power element in the form of Chinese investments as was seen in the literature review, since it is an important part of Sino-African relations. However, with the increase in actual combat troops being sent to the continent, the question remains what their exact role is in China's strategy in Africa.

In the past years, China has been seen to at least attempt to exert measures of smart power, combining both, in areas such as the South-East Asia in the territorial disputes (Lee 2019). With the increasing amount of military and economic power that is sent to Africa in the UN peacekeeping missions, smart power might be the new diplomacy China pursues to secure their particular strategic interests within Africa. However, it is unclear what these interests could be, is it purely meant to exert power and tip the balance of power further to China, is China putting itself out there as an honest and responsible aid provider within the confines of the UN, or is it a combination of both? Nevertheless, power always plays a role in this dynamic, the one that resembles China's actions in Africa the most, be it smart, or simply soft or hard power, will become clear from the research.

### *(Hard) Power*

In order to explain what the different types of power exactly entail, it is important to first outline the term of power itself as coined by Joseph S. Nye (1990), who has also created the ideas of soft, hard, and smart power. Simply put, power is "the ability to achieve one's purposes or goals", which was traditionally thought of as purely being able to be done through military or

economic prowess (Nye 1990, 25-26). Nye represents a realist interpretation on the sphere of International Relations as realism generally concerns itself with the concept of power and the struggle states go through in its pursuit thereof. These ideas have been prevalent throughout history and primarily attributed to the Athenian historian and strategist Thucydides in his accounts of the Peloponnesian War (1968), and the prominent structural realist Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations* (1948). In this never-ending conquest for power, nations have fought over the balance of power since their dawn.

These more historic forms of power acquisition can be associated closely with the ideal of Nye's qualification of hard power. Hard power entails the usage of military and/or economic power to coerce another actor to achieve the "outcome" you want to achieve, often by way of carrot and stick diplomacy, thus, entice them into coercion or threaten them to do so (Nye 2005, 5). Before globalisation hard power was the most logical manner to achieve a nation's goals, and is still used in many conflicts today, including the fight against terrorism. Therefore, hard power often comes in the form of a threat or representing a threat; be it with a large military force, and/or an increase in investing in it, or by paying bribes and/or sanctioning trade with the target country. In doing so the target country could be coerced into the desired outcome.

### *Soft Power*

However, there is another form of increasing one's power called "co-optive power" rather than coercive which, as the name suggests, places its priorities on the "attraction of one's ideas" which will influence others to follow their example (Nye 1990, 31). This is achieved through relying on the "intangible power resources" like one's values, culture, and way of thought (Nye 1990, 32). The co-optive form of power is known as soft power, as it is achieved by cooperation, rather than force, thus, a more gentle approach in comparison to hard power. Nye therefore also updated his definition of power to imply "the ability to influence the behaviour of others to get the outcomes one wants", which can be achieved via hard or soft power (Nye 2004, 2). However, employing soft power does not directly mean that the country that has employed it is also influential on the recipient country. Soft power is, therefore, difficult to measure in comparison



to hard power, as hard power can be measured through military expenditure and its force, or large payments in the forms of bribes. Instead, as Nye states, whether soft power works relies on the perception of the other (2004, 6). Thus, soft power can be measured by researching the opinions of the recipients. For that reason, soft power is a less direct way of gaining influence than hard power, but it can be a longer lasting one. As Nye also states: “hard power is push, soft power is pull” (2011, 20). The idea of attraction rather than repulsion is innately more desirable for the targeted actor or country. This is why China has paved its way by increasingly investing in its “quest to project soft power”, through its various international events and the Chinese funded Confucius Institutes with which they bring education about China’s culture, language, and ideologies to other countries (Blanchard and Lu 2012, 565). The UN peacekeeping missions are also a part of this, as it is a way for China to project the nation as a responsible international actor (Ibid., 574). Soft power is herein a way for China to show itself as a non-threatening and worthy great power.

### *Smart Power*

A nation can also opt to not exclusively use either the one or the other form of power acquisition by learning how to achieve power by uniting both soft and hard power into one balanced foreign policy strategy known as smart power (Nye 2004, 32, 147). What is important about the difference between using soft or hard power or the combination of the two is the goal of why the state needs power. In the past international relations was in a way more simplified. After the Second World War, the balance of power situated itself within a bipolar world, the US and the USSR were the only great states battling for power. The era of globalization which ensued after the Cold War has complicated this balance. The bipolarity of this balance shifted towards a multipolar balance; thus, many more countries must compete with each other in order to attempt to “maximise” a nation’s power, therefore, the 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen many more country participating in the diffusion of power. A smart power strategy is, therefore, more often used to compete or deal with the “rise of the rest” and the new challenges the increased interconnectivity brings (Nye 2011, 207-208). Nye details what the key components of a smart power strategy, specifically US power, are: (1) “Understanding the strengths and limits of power”;

(2) use of combination of hard and soft power to reach a level of attraction; and (3) to protect itself and its allies, preserving a strong economy, and “encouraging liberal democracy and human rights” (Nye 2011, 231-232). The thesis will use this definition to state whether China’s peacekeeping/peacebuilding efforts in Africa reflect an approach as such. However, due to Nye’s specific definition catered to US foreign policy, especially the last point cannot be fit to the description. Therefore, the spread of China’s developmental model will be used as a goal, instead of the notion of instating a liberal democracy.

A smart power policy is then a plausible way for the PRC to increase its power capacity and look less threatening in the process. Within East Asia, China has already been seen to employ soft power strategies whilst increasing its military capacity to deal with issues like the South China Sea conflict, thus, effectively deploying smart power within the region (Nye 2011, 23). These issues are naturally to decrease the power of the other actors within the conflict in order to protect the Chinese interests within the region.

In the case of the Chinese peacekeeping mission in Africa, the structure is inherently different as it is expected that the Chinese military force is not used to deter a country’s leadership, but rather the forces that undermine the wellbeing of the country. Nevertheless, the military resources that are used and produced within the UN missions can both belong to soft power or hard power, depending on how the military power is employed (Nye 2011, 48). It is much the same way for the economic power China brings to Africa. The economic power can range from co-optive to coercive, like military power. There is therefore a loosely defined range, but also an interpretative spectrum to what can be accounted as push and pull factors. Figure 1.1 shows how Nye has interpreted this spectrum.

Hard and soft power are not cut-and-dried concepts, due to the way the spectrum works and can also overlap, smart power, therefore, depends on whether both soft and hard power are perceived to be present (Nye 2011, 21). The way both of these notions will be measured will be more clearly explained in the methodology section.



Figure 1. Spectrum of Power Behaviours (Nye 2011, 21)

## Methodology

To recapitulate, the thesis sets out to answer the following research question: To what extent does China's model for peace and development, as implemented in its UN sanctioned peacekeeping missions in South Sudan, reflect an exercise of smart power, despite promoting itself as a non-interventionist actor? In order to research and answer the question the thesis will conduct a qualitative within-case analysis focused on the country of South Sudan. The within-case study that will be conducted focuses on a singular case in order to research in depth whether the UNMISS can be considered as a smart power play. The reason why the UN peacekeeping mission has been selected for this thesis, instead of any other regular Sino-African exchanges is because the peacekeeping model intends to show that China can be a responsible actor within the international community.

### *Case Study Choice*

The thesis will specifically research the country of South Sudan as it is a recent example of a nation that has received, in addition to aid, combat troops from the PRC. South Sudan was also chosen for its richness in resources, specifically its oil deposits as China's involvement is often criticized of being predatory. China would be more likely to emanate less soft power in a country with high resource wealth. Furthermore, South Sudan has struggled with a civil war and a loss of sovereignty since it split off from Sudan to become its own nation. Due to the Chinese sovereignty principle<sup>1</sup>, which lies at the heart of the Chinese model for peace, the loss of sovereignty is, therefore, another important reason for the selection of South Sudan. Consequently, the thesis research relies on a single case study design in order to explore the extent of China's application in a country that would historically be taken advantage of.

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<sup>1</sup> The sovereignty principle and the history surrounding China's UN participation will be further explained in the following chapter.



### *Economic Power*

When it comes to the spectrum of economic power, the interdependence of economic value and the level of sanctions are notable facets to research and discuss. With interdependence a larger country can manipulate a smaller country and gain more than the country itself, causing an asymmetrical interdependence (Nye 2011, 62). In the peacekeeping debate, if the greater country would take more than they receive, it can be considered to be hard economic power; whilst soft power reflects an equal dynamic between the two countries. A more important aspect of economic power is the use of positive versus negative sanctions. Positive reflecting soft power, negative hard power; however, as it is on a spectrum, there might be overlap or a positive sanction might look positive but could still contain a hard power element. Sanctions are generally used to encourage or discourage certain behaviour, be threatening or rewarding a country. Aid purely designed for development, thus, being a form of positive sanctions, could still be used to generate hard power in the recipient country and indirectly increase a country's own hard power if they are allies (Nye 2011, 77). This is accomplished by "building up" a country's "economic and administrative capabilities" generating, therefore, soft power and hard power at the same time (ibid.). However, soft power through aid can also not be accepted, which will leave the acting country without an increase in its power, due to resentment emanating from the target country's populace (Nye 2011, 79). To research both of the economic properties, the resources used come in the form of already processed data like information from newspapers or academic sources. The processed data will be used in support of raw data as provided by AidData, which has tracked underreported flows of financing stemming from less transparent countries like China. However, the dataset only limits itself to 2014, thus, it is to be expected that China has continued its flows in a similar manner.

### *Affective and Normative Soft Power*

Soft power entails more than just the military and economic power elements, but Nye has not created a framework to measure soft power to its full extent. Therefore, this thesis will use the framework as shaped by Jhee and Lee (2011). In their study on soft power within East

Asia they have recognized two aspects of soft power: “affective” and “normative” (Jhee and Lee 2011, 54). With the “affective soft power resource”, Jhee and Lee aim to research the increase of a country’s “attraction and facilitate emulation of its culture and economic and political systems” (Ibid.). This can be measured with the attitude a country possesses towards the greater country, through the feelings of its populace or elites. The “normative soft power resource” deals with the attitudes towards the promotion of legitimacy and sovereignty, and cooperation (Ibid.). Within the peacekeeping missions this also extends to the manner in which the rebuilding efforts of the PRC are received within the cases. This can be in the form of the above-mentioned facets but also how to Chinese aid has transformed tangible assets like education centres or infrastructure. Thus, it partially overlaps with the economic power, but delves into the reception thereof. These aspects, however, are more difficult to research as it depends on the data available on the feelings that the South Sudanese public and government officials hold towards China. Government officials are likely to have a different opinion towards China in comparison with the common public, which provides the official standing as it comes to China. The affective and normative dimensions are based mainly based on speeches in the case of government, and opinion pieces and editorials for the public.

### *Smart Power*

As a smart power strategy consists of a combination of using soft and hard power tools to acquire the purposes or end goals, both should be present in the analysis of the acquired data. However, the other goals of Nye’s smart power elements have to be met as well. To recapitulate on Nye’s key components of smart power strategy as altered to the Chinese peacekeeping debate are:

- 1) To understand the strengths and limits of power, which will be accomplished by creating an understanding of objectives that the Chinese discourse lays out for its peacekeeping mission and its model for peace. These will be discussed in the first chapter, which will reflect at the Sino-UN relations and the peace goals as outlined in the Chinese whitepapers.

- 2) The use of soft and hard power to reach attraction. This will be researched through the case studies as outlined above.
- 3) To protect itself and the population of South Sudan, creating a strong economy, and encouraging following the Chinese example to development.

The last component does overlap with component one and two, thus, if both are considered to be present, the third will be accounted for as well. In the case that not all of the components are present, it is possible that China's perceived strategy reflects a hard or a soft power strategy.

What is important to note for this research is that it is conducted without the possibility to visit the two researched countries. Therefore, what is perceived to be the case through the analysed data, could not be the case in reality, as data is naturally flawed for its portrayal or interpretation. Often it is coloured or portrayed in the way the portrayer wants it to be interpreted. China's white papers, for instance, naturally portray a colourful image of their work without any criticism. There are quite some limitations and difficulties to this paper. As mentioned above, the research has only been conducted on the available material online, which is often clouded in bias one way or the other. Considering the UN missions, it is difficult to distinguish what China performs within the Chinese mandated projects, and what happens aside of these, since they overlap frequently. The peacekeeping missions are, therefore, extended to also include certain events happening within the same time period. Furthermore, most of the material is of English origin, which might hinder a more detailed analysis. Nevertheless, even with the constraints there is still enough to research to create a compelling argument.

## Results

### Part I. From Contestability to Responsibility

China's position within the global sphere of cooperation is well recognized today as it situates itself in conflict-ridden countries across the globe. However, Chinese involvement in peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions was not always as involved as it is now. This chapter will briefly showcase China's change in identity to become more involved with the UN. Subsequently, it will examine the peace model that China employs to further the development of developing countries, and what this development model means for the liberal peace models

of the West. The turn of China's attitude will mainly be based on previous academic literature, whilst the Chinese model for peace will be established through researching their published whitepapers.

China has become increasingly more involved with international politics over the past 50 years and with it also its engagement with global institutions like the UN. Academics have prescribed different possibilities as to reason why China has strengthened its participation. Much like the views on Chinese early peacekeeping missions, these were mostly focused on preserving China's national interests. Academic Yin He proposes an engaging theory that China's increase in participation has much to do with its changing "national identity" (2019, 254). He sees a great change from China's international position in the 70s compared the 90s and the twentieth century (2019, 256). During the hardships, the country went through in its revolutionist period under Mao, China perceived itself to be a victim from the imperialist behaviour of the US and the Soviet Union. The country was therefore not concerned with following "the rules and norms of the international system" (He 2019, 256). With a change of leadership, however, and the opening up of China under Deng Xiaoping, the communist party sought to reach out to the global community. During the late 1970s, China developed better diplomatic relations with the West, and, more importantly, the US (He 2019, 256). Due to the "security environment" improving because of these newfound relations, the state could focus on self-reform and helping others, which is why it started to support UN peacekeeping (Ibid.). This shows that China was not feeling threatened anymore by outside imperialist powers, therefore, it could begin building up its own capacity and slowly move away from the status of a developing country. This international integration was further enhanced in the 1980s-1990s, but the UN peacekeeping support was still largely halted by its principles of non-interference, which showed its prominence ever since the 1950s, but considered to be opportunistic by the West (Aidoo and Hess 2015, 108). The opportunistic tendencies do show themselves in a conflict of interests with the non-interference foreign policy as the Chinese did start to allow the use of force in certain cases during the late 90s (He 2019, 258). In the twenty-first century, China has solidified its own position within the UN Security Council holding on to the core goals of the UN but has also exhibited their difficulties with other countries for bending the principles to their use in the Libyan and Syrian conflicts.



Especially the concept of the responsibility to protect does not always follow along the lines of the core principles of the UN. As the literature review has already mentioned, China has therefore created its own model to conflict resolution within peacekeeping, specifically its model for development.

### *The Chinese Model for Development*

China's peaceful development does not only mean that China itself strives for peace and development, but also their aim to spread their peace worldwide by ways of bringing development to those in need (SCIO 2011, 3). As China still sees itself as the largest developmental country in the world, it should be their task to take care of the others. According to Chinese traditional Confucian teachings, prosperity leads to a happier way of life, which is reached by providing everyone with work and "ample food and clothing" (SCIO 2016, 2). The way of thought is therefore that wellbeing is the prime notion of developing a country. Rather, than through a democratic process or the provision of security, the improvement of human rights is best combatted through alleviating the people from poverty (SCIO 2016, 3). Economic development is, therefore seen as a central task to guarantee the people's right to development (SCIO 2016, 9). However, the Chinese model does not only transfer funds to those countries in need. Its economic development entails more than money trails, as was also argued in the literature review. Instead, it helps developing countries in advancing their agriculture, enhancing the level of education, and improving medical and health services, in addition to building public welfare facilities (SCIO 2014, 3). Most of the work is therefore done by the people themselves. The State Council elaborates on the concept by quoting an ancient Chinese wisdom which states that it is more fruitful to be "teaching one to fish rather than giving one fish", thus, the people themselves can build up their own capacity for development (SCIO 2014, 7). This is inherently in the same way how the Chinese state was built up themselves. After being left as a broken country, China built itself up through sheer hard work, without assistance from outside actors. For this reason, the Chinese government sees its historical rise to power, and its current global position almost as a necessity to help others along on a similar journey towards eliminating poverty (SCIO 2019, 2-7).

As Zhang mentions, unlike the Western model which claims to incorporate “universal values”; the Chinese model searches for “common values” as a one-size-fits-all approach has historically been seen to not work in every country due to differing domestic issues and wishes (2019). The cases in which it didn’t work, the Western model failed to increase economic or political stability, instead creating social unrest, wars, or further economic downfall (SCIO 2019, 26). Therefore, the Chinese model does not want to copy the Western example, but improve on it (SCIO 2019, 7). Thus, according to the Chinese state, modernization does not equal Westernization. As the state organization explains, every country has had its own experiences, traditions, culture, history, and level of development; the approach should therefore be country specific (SCIO 2019, 26). Important to note herein, is that this comes with “mutual respect”. The official discourse mentions that due to this path dependency every country should be respected for whatever road they have taken, what their interests are, and how their country is built; the Chinese model is therefore not interested in interfering with a country’s domestic affairs (SCIO 2019, 34). The main way to do so is, therefore, to hold true to a developmental country’s specific values and the situation it finds itself in, to teach the population to build up their own capacity and invest in areas to support this. As such, China is trying to expand the metaphorical cake of development in order to create a mutually beneficial environment for each country.

### *Concluding Remarks*

The analysis of the several whitepapers outlining China’s model for development do show an enticing alternative to the normalized Western models for peace, which could attract affective and normative soft power production in the developing world. The discourse surrounding the Chinese model for development as described in the whitepapers published by the State Council Information Office put an incredibly positive light on accomplishing wellbeing and development in conflict ridden countries. The main goal, as outlined, could be considered to entail a soft power approach towards developmental countries. The model lacks a description of military involvement, be it coercive or co-optive as it is not focussed on the UN peacekeeping specifically, however, factors like economic co-optive measures together with an attempt at affective and normative soft power can be a factor that the Chinese state is striving to achieve. As the

methodology explained, soft power within the realm of economic power would reflect an equal dynamic between China and the recipient country, which is echoed in the Chinese model. Moreover, the aid that is provided, according to model, is meant to develop the country further and is largely there to build around improving a country's economy through capacity building and investments and trade, showing a form of positive sanctions. The affective and normative spaces of soft power are dependent on the attitudes of developing countries (and to a certain extent developed countries, as the Chinese model is intended to lead as an example), thus, it cannot be traced in the official documents.

## Part II. Chinese Power Plays in South Sudan

### *Background*

The country of South Sudan is a relatively young country within Africa. In 2011 it gained its independence from Sudan after a two-decade battle between the ruling government of Sudan and the rebel movement of the Sudan's People Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). This peace deal was in part reached with the help of the 2005 launched United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS). UNMIS was abandoned at the same time that the peace deal was reached, and the UN went on to establish the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) with an "initial period of one year" in order to develop and support the newly created government (UN 2021a). Whilst tribalism<sup>2</sup> was still a problem within the early years of the country, spawning several tribal conflicts, the real issue and the ensuing civil war started with an alleged coup d'état. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 2013, the president of South Sudan (and former vice-president of Sudan), Salva Kiir Mayardit, announced that his vice-president, Riek Machar, and some of his cohorts attempted a coup to overthrow Kiir as the leader of the ruling SPLM party (Johnson 2014, 300). The events that happened thereafter evolved quite rapidly with parts of the country siding with either the SPLM and the SPLA or Sudan's People Liberation Movement-in-Opposition (SPLM-IO) and its forces, the Sudan's People Liberation Army-in-Opposition (SPLA-IO). Moreover, the conflict also

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<sup>2</sup> Tribalism is a societal construct organized in tribes. It often runs contrary to ideas of nationality, as tribalism is focused more inwards towards the tribe itself, rather than the constructed nation. Since Africa's borders were drawn by Western nations, tribalism and with-it tribal interests often play a role in conflicts on the continent.

transformed to contain deeply rooted “ethnicized characteristics” with Salva Kiir, belonging to the Dinka ethnicity, cracking down on the ethnic group of the Nuer, to which Riek Machar belongs (Large 2016, 35). Most of the fighting took place over the control of different areas in the country, as well as strategic resources like its oil fields (Johnson 2014, 301). However, it has also been reported that Kiir’s forces have indiscriminately targeted Nuer people, but was officially disregarded to be the work of unruly troops chasing insurgents (Ibid., 307). After several failed peace deals, around 400.000 deaths, and 2,5 million people displaced; the conflict has finally come to an end with a new peace deal in February 2020 (BBC 2020; O’Grady 2018). The situation is more stable than before, but it is certainly not a guarantee for a peaceful future. The UN still sees the state of affairs in the country as a threat to regional peace and security, which is why the mission is still active to ensure that a civil war will not return (UN 2021b).

### *Military Power*

Whilst China has been active within UN peacekeeping missions; the evolving conflict in South Sudan marked the beginning of a new overseas policy for the PRC. Two years after the start of South Sudan’s tumult, with the situation only growing worse, the UN called out for further contributions to alleviate the burden of the small number of forces that were present. For its first time, China sent out an infantry battalion (CHINBATT) of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) consisting of 700 troops abroad to operate within the UNMISS (SCIO 2020, 4). The paper published by the State Council does not delve into detail on the exact role the Chinese peacekeepers have performed within the UN mission, but do provide a short summary of some of its projects. In the 5 years, that they have been there its main task is highlighted to consist of “51 long-range and 93 short-range distance patrols”, with over 30.000 hours in “weapons-free zones”. Furthermore, its troops have also performed 314 “armed escorts” (SCIO 2020, 5). The tasks seem to be in line as to what the troops were equipped for as they must abide to the UN requirements of bringing drones, armoured vehicles both for defence and offence, mortars and various other offensive equipment (Yang 2015).

Little was published on the Chinese peacekeeper’s actions in the first year with regards to the mission, until the failures that took place in South Sudan’s capital in 2016. Fighting broke

out between Kiir's and Machar's troops in which tens of thousands of civilians were either killed in the crossfire or displaced, and thousands of women and several aid workers raped. In the first two days of the siege, which also targeted the nearby UN compound, two Chinese peacekeepers lost their lives. The Ethiopian and Chinese troops, who were housed in the compound, were ordered to intervene, but according to reports the Chinese battalion refused and even abandoned their positions to look for safety, leaving their weapons behind (Burke 2016). Rather than protecting the South Sudanese civilians, the Chinese troops chose to save their own lives after losing two. It can be said that rather than having a co-optive or coercive form of military power, the forces showed that they possessed neither in this instance, except for their incompetence. However, as the image below shows, the Chinese have lost few UN peacekeepers in their time operating within UN missions, especially since their role as combat troops abroad is a new endeavour; it is to be expected that under particular circumstances a situation could go wrong. Nevertheless, it shows the adolescent nature of China's security policy in Africa. After the above-mentioned siege, little (English language material) has come out on the Chinese infantry battalion. In 2017, a patrol managed to save 7 UN civil servants who were held up in a hotel whilst a battle between the SPLA and the SPLA-IO was waging outside, but this pales in comparison to the Mongolian battalion who rescued 50 civilians as mentioned in the same article (Machrine 2017). In the same year, the battalion was applauded for their commitment with a special highlight on the women included in the battalion as a way to be more approachable by civilians, and their patrols at Protection of Civilians (POC) sites (Putsoa 2017). Kwon's (2020) study on the infantry battalion in South Sudan does provide more knowledge to the battalion's efforts mentioned in Chinese source material. From various sources, it becomes clear that the infantry battalion also performs in many humanitarian activities like providing free healthcare, donating supplies to schools, and generally forming ties with civilians through organizing football matches and presenting martial arts (Yang et al. 2016, Qin 2016, Zhou and Zhang 2017; in Kwon 2020, 431). What is telling is that the combat troops fulfil a role outside of their supposed purpose, in a soft power-oriented way. The Military Operation other than War is in this case focused on the

diffusion of soft power. Like the peacekeepers<sup>3</sup> already present in South Sudan before, the infantry battalion follows the same line of auxiliary activities.

### *Economic Power*

Apart from China's participation within UNMISS, China and South Sudan have links spanning far deeper than the current conflict. South-Sudan is inherently an oil-based economy, with its main investor being China. After the split with Sudan, China intensified its oil business with the newly founded country and in addition to that also invested heavily in new infrastructure programs (MOF 2014). The two parties that operate in South Sudan is the Greater Pioneer Operating Company (GPOC), which consists of the Chinese National Petroleum Company (CNPC) (as the largest stakeholder owning 40% of the consortium), Petronas of Malaysia, Indian Oil and Natural Gas Corporation, and Nilepet of South Sudan; and the Dar Petroleum Operation Company consisting of the CNPC (41%), China Petroleum and Chemical Corporation (Sinopec), Tri-Ocean, and the above-mentioned Petronas and Nilepet (Rapanyane and Sethole 2020, 6). Therefore, China has the highest stake in South Sudanese oil, but it is by no means the only stakeholder. When fighting broke out between the SPLA and the SPLA-IO over control of the oil fields, the oil companies had to close down and their staff needed to be secured (Johnson 2014, 301). CNPC and SINOPEC acted rapidly to extract Chinese nationals in this instance and did so in early 2015 before the infantry battalion arrived (Large 2016, 40). According to the Chinese representative of the Chinese Government of African Affairs, Zhong Jianhua, these oil fields needed to be protected in order to safeguard South Sudan's "economic future" (Wenting 2019). Through the UN, China was allowed to set up the oilfields as a POC, with part of its combat troops being able to patrol what essentially is their own interests (Rapanyane and Sethole 2020, 6). This is where the overlap in military and economic power takes place, whilst patrolling a Protection of Civilians site within a peacekeeping mission is generally a good thing, doing so in order to protect their own interests would be a more difficult situation to assess. Especially since South Sudan, only made up 5% of China's total oil acquisition in 2013, which dropped down to even less during the

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<sup>3</sup> For example, the UNMISS Chinese Engineering Company (CEC) which arrived with the first wave of peacekeepers. The CEC often organizes Chinese cultural events aside from their primary mission (UN 2012)

start of the conflict, it is hard to say if protecting their interests was the sole reason. A boost in oil production would not only benefit China but also South Sudan, whilst at the same time strengthening diplomatic ties as the official agreement signed in 2014 stipulated (Radio Tamazuj 2014). Furthermore, it is reported that 90% of the workers at the oil fields are recruited from local places, thus, building up the country's workforce (Wenting 2019). Whether the oil sector profits are greatly benefitting the South Sudanese people, however, is not clear. The government has recently announced that it is preparing an audit for the first time since South Sudan became its own nation, after the UN Security Council commented on the lack of "transparency" and "financial governance" as to whose pockets the revenue ends up in (Radio Tamazuj 2021). The audit will only have any concrete results in 5 to 9 years; thus, it is too early to gauge at this stage.

Tracing Chinese financing is another challenging task, as mentioned in the methodology this thesis will use the database created through tracking underreported financial flows by means of primary sources, government offices, NGO's and aid information (Dreher et al. 2017). Notable is that all currency movements fall under the category of Official Developmental Assistance (ODA), which is why it was used to fit into the peacekeeping/building debate. What is interesting is that out of the 21 financial flows between 2008 and 2014, only 4 comprise of a loan provided by the PRC (Ibid.). The remaining 19 transactions all come in the form of grants, thus, do not have to be paid back by the recipient country. The loans are primarily provided in order to increase South Sudan's trade, as a combined total of almost 280 million USD was meant for the renewal of Juba airport, geological surveys to determine untapped resources, and a general loan to increase commerce facilities (Ibid.). The grants are mostly to provide humanitarian aid to the people of South Sudan, in addition to funding towards better education and health care. To compare with the loans the grants amount to 73 million across these projects within the same time period (Ibid.). The grants do tie in with the Chinese (non-combatant) peacekeepers on the ground who are there to help facilitating the different projects. Unlike the Chinese infantry battalion, the engineering and medical companies of the Chinese UN peacekeepers were already in South Sudan when the nation was newly founded. The transactions mention UN peacekeepers constructing infrastructure projects to and from difficult to reach places, and training centres for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) which aims to support ex-militants in

returning to a normal life (Dreher et al. 2017, UNITAR 2021). Over the last couple of years, these projects have continued in a similar manner with repairing, building, and rehabilitating hundreds of kilometres of roads and bridges to ensure safer travel within the country and across borders, and increase South Sudan's trade opportunities (Choul 2017, Radio Tamazuj 2018, Ludanga 2019).

The last aspect of Sino-South Sudan economic relations, which intertwines with its military relations as well, is the arms trade. The arms trade is not part of the UN mission, but it was thought to be of importance to the Chinese power debate. It is not unknown that China is a relatively substantial arms supplier in Africa. It has been doing so since the '90s in Sudan. Sautman and Hairong show that the West often accuses China of being Sudan's leading arms seller, despite only accounting for 7% of Sudan's arms sales compared to Russia's 87% (2009, 757). Whilst relations between South Sudan and China were at first primarily focused on oil, it changed to include bilateral military relations as well when the civil war broke out (Large 2016, 40). In 2014, in a Bloomberg interview with South Sudanese Defence Minister General Juuk, it was revealed that China is selling weaponry worth 38 million USD to South Sudan (Gridneff 2014a). The country was buying weaponry from everyone willing to sell it to them to defend themselves, having spent over 1 billion USD since the war started (Ibid.). Shortly after, Norinco halted the arms trade to South Sudan as reports of the Chinese government deliberately interfering with the peace process were becoming more prevalent which was allegedly not the case (Gridneff 2014b). A 2015 UN interim report disclosed that the Norinco deal of 2014 was found registered by the South Sudanese Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning with a payment of 46.8 million USD, thus, more than was previously believed (Knopf et al. 2015, 17). The order included several thousands of missiles, millions heavy and small arms ammunitions, and rifles equipped with grenade launchers (Knopf et al. 2015, 20). However, China did not only support the government's SPLA forces, but supposedly also the SPLA-IO through airdrops in their controlled territories (Knopf et al. 2015, 22-23). Even though, the arms trade with Norinco was supposedly discontinued, there are traces that China might in fact still be selling weapons as the SPLA did report to have received surface-to-air missiles in 2016, which were transported from the port in Mombassa, Kenya through Uganda to South Sudan (Sudan Tribune 2016). The report does



mention that there are no official sources that China is the supplier as China neither confirms nor denies the accusation, but the Kiir opposition firmly supports this claim (Ibid.).

### *Affective and Normative Power*

To measure soft power, the thesis will dissect different types of media to establish whether attractive and/or normative power are present within the two different layers of society: government and public.

The governmental sources that will be used consist of a speech from South Sudanese president Kiir at the handover ceremony of the in 2017 newly built conference facility of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which was funded by China, official remarks between president Kiir and president Xi Jinping at the 2018 FOCAC, and a speech by the South Sudanese Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs at the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Day of Chinese Celebration in 2019. The first speech that will be tackled is the handover ceremony which was attended by high officials from the SPLM, people from the social sector and the Chinese ambassador, who said some words about their partnership as well. Kiir uttered his admiration for the Chinese aid efforts and called the country his “trustworthy friend and reliable partner” (MOF 2017). He mentioned that China is always there to represent them in the Security Council and is highly engaged in the peace process. Furthermore, Kiir touched on the subject of infrastructure, the importance of China’s support in “energy, capacity building, humanitarian aid, education and health”, and finally accentuated the contribution of the CNPC and how appreciative the people of South Sudan were for their presence (Ibid.). As a response, Chinese Ambassador to South Sudan He Xiangdong expressed the general common goals as specified in the Chinese model for development and stressed the importance of “development and prosperity” in South Sudan (Ibid.). The second documented exchange is between Kiir and Xi at the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-African Cooperation. Like He in 2017, Xi also highlighted the importance of supporting the peace process in South Sudan, and stated that more Chinese companies will make their way to South Sudan to benefit the country and its people (Xinhua 2018). In much the same way, Kiir entrusted China to develop Africa and stated his willingness to cooperate on a deeper level in international and regional affairs (Ibid.). The final official documentation at the Chinese National Day of celebration

is unsurprisingly also positive about the Chinese influence in South Sudan. Whilst Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Deng Dau Deng Malek praised China's Belt and Road Initiative, mentioned the various infrastructure projects, and the rebuilding of Juba airport which has helped South Sudan to be more interconnected (FOCAC 2019). Like Kiir, Deng Dau Deng thanked China for helping in the peace process, but added that China was the only member in the permanent UN Security Council who supported the South Sudan Revitalized Peace Agreement<sup>4</sup> and the only member contributing in the UNMISS (Ibid.). Lastly, he vowed to work closely with the PRC to build a "community with shared values", and also help to spread China's formula to economic and social development in order to ensure "lasting peace, universal security and common prosperity" (Ibid.). More so than Kiir, Deng Dau Deng emphasised affective soft power with this last statement as he committed to use China's developmental plan to increase not only South Sudan's wellbeing, but also to share this wisdom with others. The two speeches by Kiir, mostly stressed the importance of cooperation with the Chinese nation and the economic benefit the Chinese funds and constructions lend South Sudan, thus, can be categorized as normative soft power.

Measuring soft power among the South Sudanese public is a troubling undertaking as not everyone is able to have an internet presence and if they do it is most likely in Arabic. The next possible step is comments on news or newspaper editorials, but as Johanson in his research on soft power in South Sudan also established; these are "very rare" as he only found two opinion pieces that mentioned China (2016, 190). The reason for this lack of content is the absence of press freedom in the country and the ensuing fear that lives among journalists for speaking out against the regime or its ideas. This is the result of 7 journalists who were killed in 2015 and several independent newspapers being closed down (Rhodes 2015). The South Sudan News Agency (SSNA) seems to have avoided this fate, which is why their articles will be the main source to measure soft power of the public. The first article dating from 2014, thus, before China sends its combat troops already shows its critique towards Chinese intervention. Yongkier attacks the arms deal, and calls China an unreliable partner, who only has its own interests in its vision (2014). She cannot understand Kiir's stupidity in working with them, as she states that the Chinese are furthering their imperialistic campaign by placing Chinese in South Sudan, monopolizing its oil

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<sup>4</sup> This peace agreement was intended to revitalize the peace deal that was signed in 2015.

industry, and only fuelling the conflict so that more South Sudanese can die (Yongkier 2014). It is important to add that she is part of the SPLM-IO and calls for “brainy South Sudanese” to stand up against Kiir’s government (Ibid.). On the other side of the spectrum Sirir Gabriel Yiei Rut, a member of the SPLM Youth League, shares the same worries for Chinese imperialism. On the import of cheap Chinese goods, he argues that it will only provide more work for the Chinese, whilst the South Sudanese factory workers are sacked, and factories closed down, thus, effectively “shifting work to China” (2014a). Like Yongkier, he is also critical of Chinese exploitation as he is afraid that China will suck the country dry (Rut 2014a). Whilst he is not overly critical on the construction of infrastructure, he does argue that it will not mean anything to the future generations if there is nothing left (Ibid.). According to Rut, infrastructure should be “a result of economic growth and not the other way round” (2014b).

The debate around China has more recently shifted towards corruption. China supposedly does not directly intervene in government affairs, but on various occasions the newspaper mentions money disappearing like in 2019 when Kiir borrowed 600 million to pay its civil servants, which is why most countries do not entrust funding the South Sudanese government anymore (SSNA 2019b, Wuol 2019). As a result, Kiir accused the US, who was among one of the countries that stopped supporting him, for “working against peace in South Sudan (Wuol 2019). This “modern-day corruption” goes deeper as South Sudan and China made a deal in 2019 to trade oil (30.000 barrels per day) for road construction, which “many South Sudanese independent observers” deem to be illicit (SSNA 2019a). There is less direct criticism towards China in later news articles, but more in relation to its support of the Kiir government. Out of the articles above, it does not seem that China holds much soft power, be it affective or normative among the writers for that reason. It draws a sharp contrast between governmental and public opinion.

## Discussion

The thesis was set out to determine whether China exercised some form of smart power within its developmental model, by taking South Sudan as an example as it is the first and largest mission China participated in and the first of its kind where the PRC sent their combat troops. As the methodology explained, to decide whether China’s policies could be described as smart

power there were three steps, in brief: (1) What are China's goals with its development model, (2) What traces of soft and hard power can be found in its execution, and (3) Does it encourage the country of South Sudan to follow in China's footsteps?

First, what are China's goals with its model? The stated goals that the thesis has dissected from multiple whitepapers on development show China as a nation who wants to pursue a responsible and trustworthy place within the international community. The country's evolving role within the UN shows its aim to be an alternative to common Western standards which have been leading the debate since the international body's foundation. The side that China shows within its official white papers demonstrates that the Western model of development through democracy does not cater to every single country. In comparison, their approach to building up a path of development on a country-by-country level shows promise. The idea stems wholly from its non-interference principle in which the state supposedly does not want to interfere with the political affairs in a country. This, paired with capacity building over anything else, is what developmental countries would benefit from.

In the second part, the thesis examined Chinese military and economic power, and soft power within South Sudan. The Chinese military power, as exercised through the UNMISS, is at the surface level a positive yet evolving process. When comparing it to Nye's spectrum of military power, its type of behaviour would fit into the category of 'protection' as the UN combat troops' main function is patrolling the POC's to safeguard peace in South Sudan (Nye 2011, 47). This would place them on the co-optive military power side, as a coercive power approach would mean that China would be sending threats, which is unlikely in a peacekeeping mission. The modality category, meant to show their undertakings, fits category of 'alliance and peacekeeping'. It is the evident choice, considering that their combat troops have been sent there to partake in a UN peacekeeping mission. Though their alliance reaches beyond that as South Sudan has also received weaponry from China. The vertical relationship remains with the key qualities to strategic success. The research shows that the CHINBATT is still not fully developed, but they do show their capability in peacekeeping though their participation in not only combat related activities, but also MOOTW's. The final component of military power is shaped resources, and purely taking the UN peacekeeping mission, the Chinese military power within South Sudan

follows the same co-optive thread. On the other hand, if the Norinco arms deal is included in the military power China sends to South Sudan it deviates from the norm. Even though, it does not strictly belong to the UN peacekeeping mission, the arms deal was included for its detrimental effect on peace. In reality, this sphere finds itself between soft and hard military power. Continuing this general idea, as Nye explained, soft power elements can evolve into hard power in the way that infrastructure can both serve to be essential for development and for warfare capabilities (Nye 2011, 47). Chinese military power in South Sudan will be understood as a combination of both for this reason, as they did fuel the conflict initially by supplying both sides and likely that it still carried on.

The Chinese economic power does not deviate much from this idea either. China could have used the arms trade to delay the peace process and as a result made South Sudan dependent on the PRC's help. However, if South Sudan would refuse China's aid, China would lose its oil as well, creating an asymmetrical interdependence. Stability is, therefore, a more useful asset, which might be why the arms trade was halted or just became one-sided in supplying the SPLA. Nevertheless, in both cases it implicates their standing towards being a responsible actor with a non-interventionist stance. This remains the same in the oil sector. Even though China is actively engaging in positive sanctions to develop South Sudan, the fears of the public do show that there is a lack of trust. The utterings of Chinese colonialism were largely written before China intensified its presence in South Sudan, but it is possible that these are spoken from experience through China's previous involvement in Sudan. The positive sanctions do entail rewards in the form of aid and could be a tool to build up a nation, but with the news of corruption in the South Sudanese government it is likely that most of this economic development will never see the general public. Chinese funds are therefore only fuelling the government's abilities for hard power, as was seen to be a negative consequence of positive sanctions in the methodology. Considering most countries have pulled back on funding South Sudan, due to Kiir's corruption, it seems that China is only there for the win-win cooperation. The only one who wins in South Sudan, however, is Kiir and his allies. With the recently gained peace deal that brought Kiir and Machar to lead the country together again, the question is if more

funds will find its way to the general populace. For now, China has been able to create soft power among the SPLM officials, but not with the public until it receives the help it needs.

Having researched the above, it does seem likely that South Sudan will continue to follow in the footsteps of China and continue to be diplomatic allies, even if it might just be to receive funds or oil. It could also be that China is trying to be a responsible actor in the end, and that the arms deal was not approved by its government, or that it might hold back on fighting corruption due to its non-interference principle. In general, there might be a considerable problem to China's non-interference, especially when financial support ends up in the wrong hands. It is difficult to gauge whether China's soft power developmental model is really all it tries to accomplish, or whether there are more nefarious schemes lurking behind it. However, looking at the outcomes, it can be said that China has at least followed some form of a smart power diplomacy as both hard and soft power seem to be present in South Sudan, whether it will gain the public trust remains to be seen.

## Conclusion

This thesis aimed to research the usage of power in China's UN peacekeeping missions, specifically the United Nations Mission in South Sudan. Based on a qualitative within-case analysis of the presence of hard and soft power within different power dimensions of the peacekeeping mission, it can be concluded that China's model of development in South Sudan reflects a smart power strategy, despite promoting itself as a non-interventionist actor. The results show the goals for the model for development to be misaligned in comparison to the actual outcome when it is put to practice. Whilst the China threat theory is one of the main drivers for the PRC to show itself as a responsible actor, the research has shown that the outcomes do show a predatory insinuation, be it on purpose or not. The methodology already outlined that the dimensions of power are a vague concept, as hard and soft power often intertwine with each other or cause soft power to encourage hard power, and this has shown itself in the research. Using Nye's and Jhee and Lee's definitions to shed a light on the interpretation of the concepts and their individual components has helped this thesis to dissect these elements to make them workable. However, the research was also limited to the

information available. Both China and South Sudan lack transparency, which makes the process even more difficult. Nevertheless, by concentrating on the main connections and the affective and normative dimensions of soft power, the thesis was able to conclude the outcome of a smart power strategy. The thesis would have benefitted if the research were conducted in South Sudan or if I were able to use Arabic and Chinese sources, however, within the scope of the thesis and my own abilities this was not possible.

Referring back to the literature discussed in this thesis, the research has differentiated itself by exploring a different kind of aid than is usually studied. It also adds onto the existing literature on soft and hard power in Africa by examining a single country more in-depth and studying different sides of the conflict. Whilst the research shows that smart power is a way of looking at the developmental model for South Sudan, it raises the question whether this is the case in other countries as well. Comparing South Sudan with a country like Mali, which is devoid of resources or wealth of any kind, might show completely different results. Based on this question, it would be interesting to see more research on the realist interpretation of the use of power in peacekeeping missions and the differing interpretations of China's peacekeeping diplomacy.

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