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An Alternative to Peace: A Case Study of China's Role in Liberian Post-War Reconstruction

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An Alternative to Peace: A Case Study of China's Role in Liberian
Post-War Reconstruction



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Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, demands for new multilateral peace operations and calls for international organizations, such as the United Nations, to handle humanitarian crises began to increase at the world stage (Paris, 2004, pp. 16-17). To address the various civil conflicts and humanitarian crises, the UN adopted a peacebuilding strategy based on liberal state practices — establishment of democracies, implementing free-market policies, and governance based on the rule of law — which have proven to be a successful experience for Western states in the past (Coning & Call, 2017, pp. 1-2). However, efforts to consolidate peace using this strategy have proven challenging. Past interventions in Angola, Cambodia, Rwanda, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala and Liberia saw renewed violence or the recreation of socio economic conditions that caused civil conflict due to hasty democratization and market liberalization (Paris, 2004, pp. 63-78, pp. 153-154). Even in countries where peacebuilding efforts were considered successful, such as Namibia and Croatia, “criminal violence, corruption, political exclusion, or continued instability” still plague the affected nations (Coning & Call, 2017, p. 2). The failures of liberal peace in these countries have greatly reduced the belief in the transformative powers of liberal peacebuilding and have raised questions on the efficacy and sustainability of the current approach to peacebuilding (Coning & Call, 2017, p. 2).

Against a backdrop of sustained economic growth in the past two decades, emerging powers such as China, India and Brazil have emerged as significant players at the global stage (Bisley, 2020, pp. 298-300). As they garner more political prominence, the role of these emerging powers in peacebuilding and security is broadening. As one of the main economic drivers in Africa, China’s engagement in Africa has mostly been characterised by a pursuit of economic interests and non-interventionism (Schiere, 2014, p. 47; Alden & Barber, 2018, pp. 1-2). Recently, however, China has begun to be increasingly involved in issues concerning African security and multilateral peacekeeping operations in Africa (Alden, 2014, p. 13). China has turned into one of the largest countries that contribute to UN peacekeeping missions in Africa in terms of both financial assistance and the deployment of Chinese troops (Mohan & Gippner, 2015, p. 48; Alden, 2014, p. 13). As China becomes an active contributor in the field of African security and peacebuilding, the evolution of Chinese security strategy offers an excellent study on whether China seeks to contradict or complement the established liberal strategy in peacebuilding. Hence,

this study puts forward the following research question: *what is Chinese peacebuilding and how does Chinese peacebuilding differ from Western peacebuilding?*

This study will be divided into several sections and will be structured as follows. First, this study will review relevant existing literature on the subject of peacebuilding. This is followed by a description of this study's theoretical framework and an elaboration of relevant concepts. The following section will outline the methods of the study and provide justifications for research design, method of analysis, and case selection. Thereafter, this study will present a case study regarding Liberia's civil conflict and China's involvement in Liberian post-war reconstruction. The case study will also examine the perception Liberian civil society has towards Chinese peacebuilding. Afterwards, this study will conduct an analysis of the Liberian case study. The final section will present concluding remarks of the study.

Literature Review

Development of Peacebuilding

The term 'peacebuilding' was initially familiarized in the United Nations (UN) by Boutros Boutros-Ghali through his 1992 report, *An Agenda for Peace* (Cheng-Hopkins, 2010, p. 5). At the time, peacebuilding was defined as an "action to solidify peace and avoid relapse into conflict" (Cheng-Hopkins, 2010, p. 5). The definition of peacebuilding further evolved in the *Brahmini Report* where it is later defined as "activities undertaken on the far side of conflict to reassemble the foundations of peace and provide the tools for building on those foundations something that is more than just the absence of war" (Cheng-Hopkins, 2010, p. 5).

The definition put forward in the Brahmini Report highlights the fact that peacebuilding is not simply associated with conflict management, rather it becomes an umbrella term for everything that needs to be done following the creation of a peace agreement (Özerdem, 2020, pp. 45-46). Contemporary literature on the subject has further developed the conception of peacebuilding to focus on the individual. Özerdem (2020) states that the aim of peacebuilding is not only to change the institutional and social structures, rather it should also focus on changing people's behaviours, attitudes, and perceptions (pp. 48-49). In response to the notion of focusing more on the people, many scholars have promoted local ownership as an important feature of peacebuilding. Many academics have suggested that local populations understand the local

context best and, therefore, are best suited to create strategies for peace and conduct peacebuilding programmes (Özerdem, 2020, p. 49; Lemay-Herbert, 2011).

Current Approaches to Peacebuilding: Liberal Peace vs Developmental Peace

As previously mentioned, following the end of the Cold War, many global actors began carrying out interventions, peacekeeping operations, and peacebuilding initiatives across the world (Paris, 2004, pp. 16-17; Cavalcante, 2014, p. 146). However, Cavalcante (2014) noted that UN activities in the field of peace and security are greatly influenced by the concept of liberal peace. According to Cavalcante (2014), the liberal peace framework builds upon the democratic peace hypothesis and argues that liberal constituted societies tend to be more peaceful than illiberal ones (pp. 143-146). Since the fundamental purpose of peacebuilding is to achieve stable and lasting peace, advocates of liberal peace argue that liberalization is a reliable remedy for civil conflict. The UN has strongly embedded the concept of liberal peace in its current approach to peacebuilding as it explicitly assumes a “direct and unequivocal relationship between the promotion of democracies and peace” in the 1992 Report to the Secretary General, *An Agenda for Peace* (Cavalcante, 2014, p. 145). To this end, peacebuilding efforts that are based on the liberal peace framework provide material and technical assistance to recipient governments in return for the promotion of democratic values and human rights, direct or indirect reform in the security sector, and support for reconciliation efforts (Cavalcante, 2014, p. 146).

Given that the notion of liberal peace is built upon the pursuit of liberal societies, liberal peace is viewed as a top down approach that “often ignores or neglects the everyday needs and socio-economic realities” in a post-conflict state (Cavalcante, 2014, p. 146). Although liberal peacebuilding efforts would manage to provide a short-term military solution that ends armed conflicts and reduces violence, these interventions fail to dismantle war economies and create the conditions for sustainable peace (Cavalcante, 2014, p. 146; Madlala-Routledge & Liebenberg, 2004, pp. 125-126). Consequently, interventions based on liberal peace have only attained limited success since “conflict often breaks out as soon as the peacekeeping forces withdraw” (Xuejun, 2018, p. 2).

The concept of developmental peace evolved from the idea of multi-dimensional peacebuilding and argues for a “post-conflict reconstruction intervention that aims to achieve sustainable levels of human security through a combination of interventions aimed at accelerating capacity-building and socio-economic development” (Olivier et al., 2011, p. 66). Unlike liberal peace, the concept of developmental peace places a strong emphasis on development as a determinant of peace operation successes (Xuejun, 2018, p. 3). Advocates for developmental peace argue that existing interventions focus too much on the security of the state, failing to take into account the “full extent of human security, resource-based conflicts and war economies” (Madlala-Routledge & Liebenberg, 2004, p. 128). Consequently, those who support the concept of developmental peace argue for development and reconstruction efforts to be conducted as soon as possible, even with ongoing conflict, with the aim of dismantling conflict systems and replacing it with “competitive peace economies” (Olivier et al., 2011, p. 67; Xuejun, 2018, p. 3). In essence, instead of requiring recipient states to conduct liberal institutional reform, developmental peace prioritizes speedy economic recovery to ensure human security-i.e., the security of individuals and communities as opposed to the security of the state (Madlala-Routledge & Liebenberg, 2004, pp. 127-128).

Rising Powers as New Actors in Peacebuilding

In recent years, countries such as China, India, and Brazil have attracted much attention due to their rapid economic development, increase in material power sources, and diplomatic leverage (Dal, 2019, 2208-2209). Recent studies have begun to take note of the importance of rising powers. However, most of the studies concerning rising powers mainly focus on international conflict management and security (Ghimire, 2018; Dal, 2019). Only a very limited number of studies have dealt with the role of rising powers in peacebuilding. In their book, De Coning and Call (2017) examines whether the growing relevance of rising powers may alter the conception of peacebuilding. Other authors explore the role of specific rising powers in peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions (Call, 2019; Schiere, 2014; Tjonneland, 2014).

As rising powers, these states may try to expand their political, ideological, and economic spheres of influence in ways that may collide with the interests of established powers (Schweller, 1999, pp. 3-6). The past decade has shown that rising powers are trying to disrupt the current

status quo established by the West. Russia's invasion of Georgia and later Crimea was the first time since WWII that European borders have changed due to force of arms (Bisley, 2020, p. 298). In Asia, China has laid claim on over 3000 acres of contested territory in the South China Sea (Bisley, 2020, p. 298). Additionally, an important force that has propelled the significance of these rising powers is their growing economic capabilities. In the span of a lifetime, China transformed itself from being a country that was economically underdeveloped into one of the world's largest economies that sits at the centre of many global production chains (Bisley, 2020, p. 298). Peacebuilding is yet another field in which rising powers can fuel their ambitions to gain more international influence. In this context, while examining China's foreign policy towards the continent of Africa, Kuo (2013a) identifies an ideological competition between China and the West in Africa (p. 50). According to Kuo (2013a), China's willingness to aid and provide investments to Africa without any conditions of human rights and good governance represents a challenge for the Western consensus on good governance and development (p. 50).

Theoretical Framework

This study follows the approach of developmental peace in peacebuilding as suggested by Olivier et al. (2011), Xuejun (2018), and Madlala-Routledge & Liebenberg (2004). However, in applying the developmental peace approach to this study, the understanding of underlying concepts and theories underpinning developmental peace must first be expanded to provide a sufficient background to developmental peace. This section will also further explore the Chinese approach to peacebuilding and the developmental peace framework.

Human Security

The concept of human security is initially mentioned in the UN Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report where it uses the expressions "freedom from want" and "freedom of fear" (Olivier et al., 2011, p. 15; Newman, 2020, pp. 33-34). The idea behind these expressions is to promote a people centered approach to security, instead of a state centered one (Olivier et al., 2011, p. 15). Although human security advocates for security to be oriented around the individual as the main beneficiary, human security also links security with development and broadens the identification of possible threats and actors responsible for

insecurities (Newman, 2020, p. 33; Olivier et al., 2011, p. 15). In essence, human security aims to protect the vital core of human lives by enhancing freedoms and human fulfillment.

As a non-traditional approach to security, the scholarship of human security challenges the notion of 'high politics' in security analysis and policy while promoting individual experiences in security (Newman, 2020, p. 35). According to Newman (2020), this does not imply that human security is in conflict with state security; in a human security framework, the state remains the central provider of security, however state security will not be in direct conflict with human welfare (p. 35). In fact, Olivier et al. (2011) argues that national security and human security are mutually supportive as a state's ability to promote and protect the welfare of its people are "precondition[s] for strengthening the legitimacy, stability and security" of the state (p. 17). Despite the state being the main actor that protects its citizens, the human security framework also entails international and regional organisations to intervene and work together with civil society to create sustainable transformation in the formulation and execution of conflict prevention and peacebuilding (Olivier et al., 2011, pp. 17-18).

Although scholars mostly agree on the aforementioned concepts of human security, the current state of the literature surrounding human security can be divided into four different approaches based on policy concerns. The first approach is the broad approach to human security; this approach considers all threats to human welfare and relies mainly on normative persuasion instead of analytical precision (Newman, 2020, pp. 35-36). The second approach focuses on the human impact of armed conflict and situations of state failure (Newman, 2020, p. 36). According to this approach, traditional security analysis on civil conflicts fails to take into account the realities of armed conflict and, therefore, this approach emphasizes the importance of driving forces of armed conflict and the implications of armed conflict on forced migration (Newman, 2020, p. 36). The third approach uses human security as an umbrella concept that includes all non-traditional security issues that threatens human welfare, such as terrorism, narcotics, small arms, and HIV/AIDS (Newman, 2020, p. 36). Although this approach does not contribute much to the theory of human security, this approach is the most popular among scholars engaged in policy as it raises the visibility of neglected problems and its influence on policy (Newman, 2020, p. 36). The final approach of human security concerns itself with integrating the concept of

human security into the wider security studies debates (Newman, 2020, pp. 36-37). This approach explores the nature of security threats, sources and responses to insecurity, institutions that provide security, and the interests of actors as it relates to security (Newman, 2020, pp. 36-37).

Developmental Peace and The Current Understanding of Chinese Peace

Recognizing the significance of human security in peacebuilding, the international community began to realize that social and economic developments are fundamental to establish internal order and stability (Xuejun, 2018, p. 70). In response to the growing importance of the relationship between security and development, some scholars have put forward the concept of developmental peace missions (DPMs), which is defined as a “post-conflict reconstruction intervention that aims to sustainable levels of human security through a combination of interventions aimed at accelerating capacity building and socioeconomic development” (Xuejun, 2018, p. 70). Although developmental peace missions may differ from country to country, the concept of DPMs is rooted in several assumptions: integrated efforts is necessary for effective peace missions, development and security is linked to one another, and that launching a rapid development and reconstruction effort can be a major incentive for peace (Xuejun, 2018, p. 71). In essence, developmental peace missions should be interpreted as a reconstruction intervention that aims to achieve sustainable levels of human security by instigating military and civilian initiatives that advances socioeconomic development within a state (Xuejun, 2018, p. 71).

As the concept of developmental peace missions begin to gain traction among Western scholars, it is interesting to note that many of the concepts underlying developmental peace coincides with China’s experience in maintaining internal order and stability (Xuejun, 2018, p. 71). According to Xuejun (2018), China’s increasing involvement in peacebuilding in Africa and its international peace intervention policy acts as a reflection of its own domestic peace experience on other countries (p. 71). By doing so, China is trying to spread its own ‘normative product’ to other countries and emphasize that a rising power, or a great power, should constructively set agendas outside of the rules set by other nations (Lei, 2011, p. 351). Since China is opposed to peacebuilding operations which are conflated with military actions, regime change, and state-building operations, China endeavors to counterbalance Western influence in peacebuilding

policies and create its own brand in peacebuilding operations (Lei, 2011, pp. 351-352; Kuo, 2015, p. 166). In terms of China's normative perspective and soft power projection, China is keen to present its approach to peacebuilding based on three characteristics: sovereignty, stability, and state directed economic development.

The first characteristic of Chinese developmental peacebuilding is sovereignty. Starting from the Mao Zedong era, Chinese diplomacy upheld the principles of sovereignty and self-reliance to eliminate the legacy of imperialism and avoid being dominated by the dominant powers during the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union (Xuejun, 2018, p. 74). Wang (2010) further elaborates that Chinese sensitivity on the conception of sovereignty is built upon its own experience with colonialism and imperialism (Wang, 2010, as cited in Kuo, 2015, p. 168). In that sense, Western powers do not "feel empathy toward developing countries" on the issue of sovereignty as they have not been subjected to colonialism (Wang, 2010, as cited in Kuo, 2015, p. 168). Because of this, China's contemporary position on collective security and peace operation differs greatly from Western peace intervention policies as China's policy still hinges on the concept of sovereignty (Xuejun, 2018, p. 75). China's support for the principle of sovereignty and non interference is further strengthened by its concern that increasing interventionism may create a precedent for foreign interference when it comes to the issue of Taiwan (Kuo, 2015, p. 166). In recent years, despite its strong support for the principle of sovereignty, China has welcomed the increasing role the UN plays in preventive diplomacy (Lei, 2018, p. 85). China currently believes that the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is the only international body that could assume the role of issuing a legitimate international intervention as conferred by the UN Charter (Lei, 2018, pp. 85-86).

Another characteristic of Chinese peacebuilding is its prioritization of political stability. Based on China's experience of development under Deng Xiaoping, China stresses the importance of development on promoting peace and stability within a country (Xuejun, 2018, p. 78). According to Xuejun (2018), China believes that political reform, such as democratic reforms, has made little progress in achieving security and stability; development has thus become the "most basic means to maintain and consolidate regime legitimacy" (Xuejun, 2018, pp. 72-73). Building from China's own experience of maintaining regime legitimacy through development, current Chinese

aid to Africa acts as an externalization of China's own domestic political experience when analyzing security issues (Kuo, 2015, p. 169). China's current position on peacebuilding continues to reiterate this doctrine of political stability and development as China contends that uprooting the causes of conflict requires the handling of internal matters of a country, such as economic development and the eradication of poverty, by the people of the country (Guofang, 2001, as cited in Kuo, 2015, p. 170).

The third characteristic of Chinese peacebuilding is the need for a state directed economic development. Influenced by their past experience of development, "Chinese aid and economic cooperation emphasized infrastructure, production, and university scholarships" (Brautigam, 2009, as cited in Kuo, 2015, p. 171). Similar to China's doctrine on political stability, the Chinese developmental model represents an externalization of its own experience with development which results in a development model that combines basic property rights with heavy government intervention and a non-interference approach (Kuo, 2015, pp. 171-172). In this respect, China's model provides the freedom for recipient governments to decide infrastructure priorities by themselves instead of adhering to conditions set by traditional Western aid and assistance (Kuo, 2015, pp. 171-172). This characteristic of Chinese developmental peacebuilding policy further accentuates the difference between Chinese and Western development policies as some Western donors, such as the United States and Australia, maintains that developmental aid should instead complement their military and foreign policy (Lei, 2018).

Concepts

Sustainable Peace

This study will utilize the definition of sustainable peace as it is conceptualized by the UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution on sustaining peace as it best reflects the conceptualization of sustainable peace by UN member states. In April 2016, a UNSC resolution broadly defined peace as the following:

“a process to build a common vision of a society, ensuring that the needs of all segments of the population are taken into account, which encompasses activities aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, addressing

root causes, assisting parties to conflict to end hostilities, ensuring national reconciliation, and moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development.” (S/RES/2282, pp. 1-2)

This definition not only highlights the fact that the UN now recognizes the links between development, peace, and security, the provisions from this resolution also provides a framework of what constitutes sustainable peace. Sustainable peace entails the cessation of armed conflicts and that peacebuilding efforts do not exacerbate or create new conditions which could spark the resurgence of a civil conflict within the host state. According to Mahmoud and Makoond (2017), the effective implementation of reconstruction and development, as stated in the UNSC resolution, requires peacebuilding efforts to be based upon positive peace, which according to Galtung (1969) is the absence of structural violence (p. 2; p. 183). Thus, positive peace requires strengthening factors and institutions that are already working while also contextually building new infrastructures to foster peace (Mahmoud & Makoond, 2017, pp. 2-3).

Methodology

Research Design and Method of Analysis

The focus of this study is to examine the differences between Chinese and Western peacebuilding via the developmental peace framework. Given the fact that there is a limited number of cases where the developmental peace framework is implemented during an intervention, this study will do so by using a single case study. The use of a single case study will provide an opportunity to assess the applicability of concepts and theories developed in one context to a different context (Halperin & Heath, 2017, pp. 214-215). Additionally, a single case study also functions to provide contextual description of a certain phenomena, thereby providing a rich, holistic account of the peacebuilding operation which would be less amenable to other measures and tests (Halperin & Heath, 2017, p. 215). Thus, this study believes that a single case study is the best option to conduct an intense examination of the implementation and practice of developmental peace by China.

This study will also use an interpretive approach as a method of analysis. An interpretive analysis is a method of analysis that allows “concepts and patterns to emerge for the purpose of building new theories or expanding existing ones” following a systematic analysis of the collected evidence (Bhattacharjee, 2020). Instead of employing a positivist analysis that tends to

be reductionist in its approach, an interpretive analysis is holistic and provides a unique avenue for this study to examine the case study in a context-specific manner (Yanow, 2006, p. 11; Adcock, 2006, p. 60). Additionally, since interpretive research involves the observation of the subjective perspectives of participants, an interpretive analysis will provide a thick description and a narratively rich story of the phenomenon being observed (Bhattacharjee, 2020). To this end, the use of an interpretive analysis in this study will provide detailed, contextual inferences that allows for an understanding of the dynamic process underlying Chinese peacebuilding in Liberia.

Case Selection

This study will be assessing China's role in Liberia's post-war reconstruction as the case study. The Liberian experience on peacebuilding is unique in that it is a country that experienced the practice of developmental peacebuilding in a context where liberal peace is already entrenched. Consequently, the Liberian case study will be able to provide a significant on-the-ground assessment of Chinese peacebuilding and liberal peacebuilding that can be used to provide a comparison between the two approaches. Moreover, since Chinese peacebuilding is purported to be a more people oriented approach to peacebuilding, as compared to the state oriented liberal peacebuilding, the Liberian case study provides an opportunity to assess the benefits and shortcomings of Chinese peacebuilding based on local perspectives. As this study is aimed at understanding what is Chinese peacebuilding and how it compares to Western liberal peacebuilding, the unique history and local perspectives of the Liberian case study will provide a critical perspective of Chinese peacebuilding.

Case Study

Background to the Civil Conflict in Liberia

In 1980, a group of indigenous army officers initiated a violent coup that overthrew the existing government and installed Master Sergeant Samuel Doe as Liberia's new head of state (Paris, 2004, p. 90). Although the coup was initially welcomed, it soon became clear that Doe's government was authoritarian and self-serving (Paris, 2004, p. 90). Doe's government only benefited his own ethnic group, the Krahn, which constituted only 4% of the total pre-war population in Liberia (Paris, 2004, p. 90). As animosity grew against the Doe government,

alongside a fraudulent election conducted in 1985, Charles Taylor started a rebellion against Doe in December 1989 (Paris, 2004, p. 91). The rebel force led by Taylor, quickly gained support and were able to besiege the capital by July 1990 which caused the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to intervene and deploy a “cease-fire monitoring group (ECOMOG) comprised of approximately four thousand troops from Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone” (Paris, 2004, p. 91). Despite the intervention, the fighting did not stop and President Doe was brutally killed in 1990 (Paris, 2004, p. 91). Following the death of Samuel Doe, rebel forces fragmented into multiple tribal militia factions, each with their own warlord, that fought against one another (Paris, 2004, p. 91). The interfactional violence was categorized by “widespread atrocities against civilian populations and an abandonment of all rules and conventions of war,” and, in the span of 7 years, one tenth of the pre war population of Liberia died (Paris, 2004, p. 91). The fighting eventually stopped when ECOWAS and the UN successfully negotiated the signing of the Abuja Accord in 1996 (Paris, 2004, p. 91). The agreement helped disarm and demobilize factional forces and created a power sharing government until the 1997 elections, which was supervised by ECOMOG and the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) (Paris, 2004, p. 91).

Following the 1997 Liberian election, Taylor’s faction, now rebranded as the National Patriotic Party (NPP), proceeded to win the election in a landslide, winning the election with 75.3% of the total vote (Paris, 2004, p. 92). Despite the consensus interpretation that the public had voted Taylor as president due to fear, following the election the UN and ECOWAS “declared their mission a ‘success’ and withdrew most of their personnel from the country” (Paris, 2004, p. 93). Although the intervention successfully implemented an election which ended a seven year old civil war, it soon became clear that Taylor was no different from his predecessor as he began utilizing the so-called ‘Anti-Terrorist Unit’ to suppress and attack his political rivals (Paris, 2004, pp. 93-94). Furthermore, “abuse of power, corruption, manipulation of ethnic division, abject poverty, alienation, oppression of a large sector of the population, and hopelessness of the youth were still rampant” in Liberia (Hizkias Assef as cited in Kieh, 2009, p. 9). The tenuous nature of Liberia’s peace following the first civil war caused Liberia to descend into civil war once more.

In April 1999, a new rebel force, called Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), began to launch attacks from Liberia's Northern border with Guinea (Kieh, 2009, pp. 7-8). As the fighting between the Liberian armed forces and LURD intensified, Taylor issued a national state of emergency under which government forces began widespread arrests of anyone deemed untrustworthy (Paris, 2004, p. 95). In 2003, a second rebel group emerged from the borders of Côte d'Ivoire called the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) (Kieh, 2009, pp. 8-9). Together with LURD, both rebel factions quickly overwhelmed the Liberian armed forces, and by July 2003 they were besieging the capital city of Monrovia (Gberie, n.d., p. 63). On 11 August, 2003, Taylor resigned and soon after the Liberian government signed a comprehensive peace agreement with rebel forces in Accra (Gberie, n.d., p. 63). Shortly after the agreement, ECOWAS troops, also called ECOWAS Mission in Liberia (ECOMIL) arrived in Liberia to begin peace operations in Liberia (Gberie, n.d., pp. 63-64). In September 2003, the UNSC adopted resolution 1509 and established the UN mission to Liberia (Kuo, 2015). ECOMIL would later be joined by the UNMIL with the mandate to carry out a demobilisation, disarmament, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDRR) programme (Gberie, n.d., p. 64). UNMIL was also given the mandate to protect civilians, provide security at key government installations, and facilitate the provision of humanitarian aid (Gberie, n.d., p. 64).

China's Involvement in Post-War Reconstruction and Peacebuilding

China's initial involvement in Liberian peacekeeping and peacebuilding started with its participation in UNMIL. Beijing voted in favour of UNSC resolution 1509 which authorized the creation of UNMIL and, following the resumption of diplomatic ties between Monrovia and Beijing in 2003, China sent its first contingent of troops to Liberia in November 2003 (Kuo, 2013b, p. 10; Moumouni, 2014, p. 8). The 724 strong Chinese contingent is composed of military personnel, such as infantry, engineers, and medical units, policemen, and also experts (Moumouni, 2014, p. 8). In addition to being China's largest mission anywhere in the world, the Chinese contingent in UNMIL provided "[provided] transport, engineering, and medical support to UN peacekeepers as well as providing police officers" for Liberia tasked with "human resource management, police support, information collection, criminal investigation, traffic management, and emergency responses" (Kuo, 2015, p. 174; Kuo, 2013b, p. 10). Furthermore, Chinese peacekeepers working in Liberia do not carry weapons, opting instead to focus on

highly visible activities such as the construction of infrastructure or providing medical assistance (Kuo, 2013b, p. 10). The engineering unit in the Chinese contingent helped with the renovation and maintenance of more than 500 kilometers of roads in Liberia and, together with contingents from Pakistan and Bangladesh, reconstructed 2,000 kilometers of roads, bridges, and related basic infrastructure (Moumouni, 2014, pp. 8-9).

Outside of its involvement in UNMIL, China also provided Liberia with developmental aid that covers multiple socio-economic sectors, such as education, health, agriculture, infrastructure, and investments. As a participant of the Liberian Reconstruction and Development Committee (LRDC), the Chinese government disbursed funds across various sectors to the Liberian government to ensure the successful implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), Liberia's post-war reconstruction plan aimed at creating a "rapid, inclusive and sustainable growth and development during the period 2008-2011" (Kuo, 2015, p. 174). In the education sector, China and Liberia signed a cultural cooperation agreement which resulted in approximately 500 Liberian students and 2000 civil servants or journalists receiving education and training in China (Moumouni, 2014, p. 9). Additionally, China also spent \$23 million to build the Fendell Campus for the University of Liberia as well as three rural schools (Moumouni, 2014, p. 9). China also made significant contributions in Liberia's health sector, donating over \$10 million to build a hospital while also providing training to the Liberian medical personnel (Moumouni, 2014, p. 10). In response to a Malaria outbreak, China also sent antimalarial drugs and built an anti-malaria centre in the capital, Monrovia (Moumouni, 2014, p. 10; Kuo, 2015, pp. 176-177). In the agriculture sector, China sent agricultural equipment and experts to Liberia while also constructing the China Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centre in Maryland County, Liberia (Moumouni, 2014, p. 10). Furthermore, China has also undertaken several multiple social and economic infrastructure projects in Liberia. Ever since the establishment of a diplomatic presence in Monrovia, China has provided hospital maintenance, constructed a sugar factory and created a rice development project, and assisted in the establishment of a countrywide network coverage for both television and radio (Moumouni, 2014, p. 10). Overall, China's bilateral contributions to Liberia fall under three of the four pillars of the Poverty Reduction Strategy which are infrastructure and basic services, economic revitalization, peace and security, and governance and rule of law (Kuo, 2015, p. 174; Moumouni, 2014, p. 10). Table

1 breaks down China's contributions to Liberia's poverty reduction strategy during the period 2006-2011.

Table 1. Chinese aid to poverty reduction strategy programmes 2006-2011 (in \$ millions)

Pillars	Pledged	Contribution	Percentage of contribution
Infrastructure and basic services	68	68	77%
Economic revitalization	14.2	14.2	16%
Peace and security	6.2	6.2	7%
Governance and rule of law	0	0	0%
Total	88.4	88.4	100%

Note. Adapted from *China and Liberia: Engagement in a Post Conflict Country 2003-2013* (p. 10), by G. Moumouni, 2014, SAIIA.

In terms of investments, China made several investments in extractive industries in Liberia, most notably the Bong Mine Agreement. Wooed by the prospect of tapping into Liberia's abundant natural resources, mainly the mining sector, China, operating through its subsidiary China Union Investment Company Ltd, signed an agreement with the government of Liberia to renovate and mine an area known as the Bong Range deposit for the next 25 years (Moumouni, 2014, pp. 12-13). Although initially the agreement was viewed positively as it would benefit both parties in lieu of the 2008 financial crisis, it soon became apparent that the agreement led to "a number of shortcomings detrimental to Liberian government and society" (Moumouni, 2014, pp. 13-14). First of all, China failed to pay the initial payment of \$20 million following the signing of the agreement and paid only after the Liberian government threatened to repeal the agreement (Moumouni, 2014, p. 14). A second look at the agreement also shows that the Bong Mine Agreement disproportionately advantages the China Union Investment Company. The agreement provided China with tax exemptions on high yield projects and reductions on corporate income tax while also having the Liberian government relinquish its stake from all mining operations conducted by the China Union (Moumouni, 2014, p. 15). Due to the 2008 financial crisis, the agreement also overlooked the price recovery of iron ore, which makes for a substantial shortfall for Liberia in the span of the 25 year contract term (Moumouni, 2014, p. 15). Moreover, despite

agreeing to fund social development programmes for Liberians, the China Union also exacerbated the local socio economic situation by providing poor pay and egregious labour relations which resulted in sporadic riots and strikes (Moumouni, 2014, p. 19). Finally, further examinations of the expected profits both China and Liberia are set to gain from this agreement shows that “the expected benefit ratio between Liberia and China Union is almost 1 to 4” (Moumouni, 2014, p. 15). Moumouni (2014) estimates that by the end of the contract, Liberia will gain \$2.7 billion while China is estimated to acquire \$10.6 billion (p. 15). Despite the social contributions promised by China, it is clear that China’s investments in extractive industries will, in the near future, generate significant royalty payments for itself that is greatly disproportionate to that received by the Liberian state (Schiere, 2014, p. 50).

Local Perceptions of Chinese Peacebuilding

Many studies have begun to examine the perceptions of African civil society on China’s growing involvement in Africa. Vaes and Huyse (2013) provided the most comprehensive study that covers responses from 11 different African countries and 76 African civil society organisations (p. 5). Through the interviews they conducted, Vaes and Huyse (2013) found that interviewees appreciate the mutually beneficial South to South cooperation between their own individual countries and other developing countries, especially China (p. 45). However, they also show ambivalence towards cooperation driven by Chinese commercial interests and resentment towards the unequally divided benefits received by donor countries (Vaes and Huyse, 2013, p. 45). Furthermore, despite supporting the emphasis on non-interference and local ownership of infrastructure, Vaes and Huyse (2013) notes that there should be a fundamental rethinking of political conditionality as some of the respondents believe that the absence of all political conditionality undermines the fight for human rights and good governance (pp. 46-48).

Kuo (2015) also conducted semi-structured interviews to determine the local perception of Chinese peacebuilding and Western peacebuilding in Liberia. Kuo (2015) found that there “is widespread discontent among Liberian civil society with liberal [Western] peace” (p. 179). On the other hand, Liberian civil society welcomes the speedy Chinese infrastructure construction and the positive impact it has in meeting the everyday needs of Liberia’s citizens (Kuo, 2015, p. 179). By focusing on infrastructure and economic development, and given the history of

colonialism in Africa, the Chinese are making themselves welcomed by Liberian civil society (Kuo, 2015, p. 179). Some interview participants also differentiate Chinese and Western peacebuilding by highlighting Chinese non-interference in domestic affairs along with the fact that “the Chinese work in [local] communities and interact with the people” which is different from Western peacekeepers and aid workers (Kuo, 2014, p. 179).

Analysis

From observing the case study, it is clear that China’s bilateral assistance to Liberia criss-crosses with its multilateral participation within the larger Poverty Reduction Strategy implemented by the Liberian government in conjunction with other international donors. At first glance, China seems to be an active contributor and participant in UNMIL. In fact, China’s assistance in UNMIL was pivotal in helping normalise the political and socio economic situation and in bringing a degree of capacity building in Liberia (Moumoni, 2014, p. 17). However, a closer examination at China’s bilateral involvement shows that China has a different understanding of peacebuilding.

China practices its distinctive approach to peacebuilding by “focusing its contribution overwhelmingly on infrastructure rehabilitation and economic revitalization programmes” (Kuo, 2013a, p. 190). This is reflected on the fact that China’s contributions and developmental aid prioritizes economic activities that have quick results and high levels of visibility (Kuo, 2013a, p. 190). China’s approach of economic revitalization is further augmented by the additional bilateral aid that China provides Liberia in various sectors, such as agriculture, education, and health. By providing basic services, reviving basic infrastructure and placing development cooperation at the heart of its strategy in Liberia, China highlights the notion of peace through development and the need for economic and social development as a precondition to sustainable peace in Liberia. As the liberal peace became discredited in Liberia, China’s developmental peace approach is welcomed by Liberian civil society as an alternative to Western hegemony that provides mutual benefits to both parties, albeit an unequal one.

Chinese peacebuilding also distinguishes itself from its Western counterpart by focusing on the principles of sovereignty and non-interference. As previously mentioned, China has concerns

over increasing Western interventionism dressed as humanitarian intervention (Kuo, 2015, pp. 166-167). Consequently, China does not disburse any funds to any programmes involving governance and the rule of law in its involvement in Liberia; evidence that it does not believe that hasty democratic reforms is a necessity to ensure sustainable peace. In addition to not disbursing funds to change the internal affairs of aid recipient countries, Chinese support for the principles of sovereignty and non-interference is also reflected in the fact that it opposes the use of coercive measures to contain violence and maintain peace. As seen in Liberia, Chinese peacekeepers do not carry weapons and the Chinese government will only send experts to help the host state (Kuo, 2013b, p. 10). Moreover, China also incorporates its strong sense of sovereignty and non-interference within its developmental approach to peacebuilding. Directed by the concept of developmental peace, China emphasizes the importance of autonomy, local ownership and social economic development in post-war reconstruction (Xuejun, 2018, p. 75). As a result of the emphasis China places on these aspects, China has distinguished its approach to peacebuilding from traditional notions of Western liberal peace. Their post-war reconstruction efforts in Liberia indicate that China seeks to showcase and project an externalization of its own values and experiences as a more suitable alternative to liberal order in the developing world.

In practice, however, China's economic interests trump its willingness to promote autonomy and sovereignty in Liberia. As evident in the Liberian-China Bong Mine Agreement, it is clear that, despite the social contributions promised by China, Chinese investments in extractive industries in Liberia was purely motivated by financial interests. Contrary to China's talks of promoting local ownership and capacity building, the Bong Mine Agreement demonstrates that bilateral aid from China may result in detrimental drawbacks for Liberian society. Additionally, Chinese bilateral aid should be further reexamined since, to achieve quick and efficient results, China does not hand any funds to the Liberian government directly. Instead, the Chinese government handles the entire project management through its own embassy, thus limiting the social and economic impact and creation of jobs these projects would have otherwise made (Kuo, 2013a, p. 199). The Liberian experience indicates that China's relation with Liberia, and potentially other countries in Africa, may not conform with the theoretical expectations and general understanding of the Chinese peace discourse.

Despite China's investments in extractive industries, the current local perception on Chinese peacebuilding still remains positive. Due to the abrupt elections that were held following the first Liberian civil war and quick withdrawal of peacekeepers soon after, there is widespread discontent among Liberian civil society with the liberal peace thesis. The post-war reconstruction of the first Liberian civil war failed to address the driving forces of the conflict, such as poverty, ethnic division, and corruption within the country; creating an unsustainable, fragile peace subsequently after the election of Taylor into office. Hence, China's developmental peace approach during the post-war reconstruction of the second Liberian civil war was welcomed by Liberian civil society. Liberians appreciate China's focus on speedy infrastructure construction, as well as various other social and economic contributions, as it has a direct beneficial impact towards the livelihood of Liberian citizens. Nevertheless, some Liberian citizens express concern that China's lack of conditionality, stemming from its support for sovereignty and non-interference, in bilateral aid may undermine progress for good governance, democracy and respect for human rights (Vaes & Huyse, 2013, p. 46). In essence, China has provided a people centered approach to peacebuilding and security in Liberia despite its ambivalence towards governance, the rule of law, and democracy.

Conclusion

It is evident that China's strong presence and its emerging role as an active contributor in African security has huge implications on current and future peacebuilding efforts in Africa. Based on the assessment and analysis of the Liberian case study, this study has found that Chinese peacebuilding is essentially developmental peacebuilding with a strong focus on sovereignty and non-interference. Chinese developmental peace in Liberia suggests that social and economic development are preconditions for sustainable peace. Placing the notion of peace through development at the center of its strategy during the post-war reconstruction of Liberia, China demonstrates this idea through the rapid construction of infrastructure and Chinese contribution to various sectors of the Liberian economy. In the Liberian case study, China's developmental peace was welcomed by the Liberian civil society as speedy Chinese infrastructure construction brought with it a positive impact to the daily lives of Liberia's citizens. However, the Liberian case study also showed that, in practice, China's interests in Liberia are still inherently economic and may result in slanted agreements between the two countries.

In an effort to compare and contrast Chinese and Western peacebuilding approaches, this study has found that, unlike the liberal peacebuilding, the Chinese developmental approach focuses on economic development and a focus on sovereignty and non-interference. Liberia's experience with liberal peace showed that proponents of the liberal peace theory insisted that the speedy implementation of an election and the establishment of a democracy were enough to create sustainable peace in Liberia. Unfortunately, this approach failed to address the underlying issues of the conflict and led to the Second Liberian Civil War. Unlike liberal peace, the Chinese government is critical towards the notion of hasty democratization and liberalization of markets being the cornerstone of sustainable peace. Instead, Chinese developmental peace focused on economic and social development as evident through the construction of infrastructure and contributions in the health and education sectors. China's involvement in Liberian post-war reconstruction also displays China's adherence to the principles of sovereignty and non-interference. Beijing refrains from using its presence and influence in Africa to interfere with internal matters of the state. In Liberia, China demonstrates their focus on sovereignty and non-interference by providing financial aid and services without any political conditionality. China further distinguishes themselves from liberal peacebuilding by refusing to disburse funds that are related to governance and the rule of law.

The findings of this study are, however, limited. Firstly, although this study examines the perspectives of Liberian civil society on Chinese peacebuilding, this study is reliant upon semi structured interviews conducted by Kuo (2013a, 2015) and Vaes and Huyse (2013). Despite obtaining significant inferences that indicate the Liberian civil society's positive disposition towards overall Chinese peacebuilding, the analysis may be skewed and create unfair judgements when analyzing the Liberian case study. Additionally, given the contextual nature of inferences in interpretive research, the inferences found in this research may have issues towards replicability or generalizability. Future research could, for instance, conduct structured or semi-structured interviews with representatives of Liberian civil society to further assess the local interpretation of Chinese peacebuilding. Such research could contribute to the understanding of participant experiences to provide a thick description of Chinese peacebuilding

in Liberia and provide researchers more opportunities to potentially identify patterns or inferences that can be extrapolated from the study.

Many changes have taken place in terms of the African security environment and peacebuilding since the end of the Cold War. As liberal peace becomes more discredited among countries recovering from civil conflict, China's distinctive developmental peacebuilding acts as an alternative to Western normative ideas of liberal peace. By practicing Chinese peacebuilding in Liberia, China is externalizing its own values and experiences as being more suitable in the developing world and other post-war situations. With this approach China can add weight behind the arguments for multilateral peacekeeping operations that maintain principles of sovereignty and non-interference with a focus on economic development.

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