Norm Contestation and Normative Transformation in Global Peacebuilding Order(s): The Cases of China, Japan and Russia

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Abstract

Focusing on the disconnect between mainstream "liberal" peacebuilding and the discourses and practices of "new" and "alternative" peacebuilding actors, this article develops a non-binary approach that goes beyond norm localization to capture the ways in which major powers influence the nature, content and direction of normative change. Within the context of their bilateral and multilateral contributions to the "global peacebuilding order," what forms and types of interventions are conceived by these actors as peacebuilding? How, in turn, has the substantive content of their peacebuilding practices (re)shaped norms and narratives in international peacebuilding efforts? Based on extensive empirical research of the peacebuilding policies and activities of China, Japan and Russia, this article analyses the way in which these "top-top" dynamics between norms embedded in the liberal narrative and major powers with competing visions can influence peacebuilding as practiced and pursued in host states. In doing so, it brings together research on global norms and peacebuilding studies and offers a simple yet analytically powerful tool to better understand the evolution of global peacebuilding order(s) and the role of rising powers in (re)shaping global governance.

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1. Introduction: Locating international peacebuilding

The global peacebuilding order has primarily been driven by the discourses and practices of developed industrialized states in North America, Europe and Australasia. The mainstream principles of the "liberal peace" have a decidedly Anglophone cast to them, steeped as they are in Cold War regime management strategies and the imperative for colonial and post-colonial administration (Kartas 2011, 201; Chandler 2017). Peacebuilding, as understood by UN agencies and major Western aid donors, is typically about constructing a lasting institutional environment in which the norms of liberal democracy, human rights, the rule of law and good governance can take root and thrive (Paris 2010; Richmond 2006).

Despite repeated critiques of a "liberal peacebuilding consensus" (Campbell, Chandler, and Sabaratnam 2011), there remains a tendency to conceive of the international peacebuilding community as a coherent and consistent set of like-minded actors. However, "peacebuilding" in Chinese or Russian or even in Japanese policy and practice does not necessarily resemble the vision of liberal peace privileged in Anglophone circles, and "there are critical differences among actors regarding its conceptualization and operationalization" (Barnett et al. 2007, 36). Distinct from the debate over rising powers and changing global orders (Call and de Coning 2017; Larson 2018), the existing peacebuilding literature fails to tackle the disconnect between Anglophone peacebuilding narratives and new state actors talking the talk but not necessarily walking the walk in practical peacebuilding interventions or national policies (Chetail and Jütersonke 2014).

While it may be true that "[n]o clear alternative model, ideology, or model of the state or peace is offered by the BRICS and/or other emerging powers" (Richmond and Tellidis 2013, 8), the discourses and practices of emerging "alternative" peacebuilders do diverge significantly from the Anglophone global mainstream. Myanmar, for example, heavily reliant on Chinese support, has consolidated its domestic political arena and is emerging as an investment hub in the Asia-Pacific region. Similarly, the stability of war-torn countries such as Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and the Philippines is buttressed by Japan's long-term commitment to empower central state authority in post-conflict settings. And assisted by Russian efforts favouring strong state institutions, Tajikistan appears to be keeping a lid on deep-rooted societal conflict, along with its neighbours such as Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Typically, "Western countries, which traditionally have been the chief actors in peacebuilding interventions globally, are losing leverage while the emerging powers are gaining influence over domestic developments in post-war countries" (Höglund and Orjuela 2012, 94).

Despite these developments, there are few systematic conceptualizations of how "alternative" peacebuilders relate to the mainstream Anglophone discourse, as well as of the national and subnational institutional settings within which global peacebuilding norms are adapted and practiced by these actors.[1] Within the context of their bilateral and multilateral contributions to the global peacebuilding order, what forms and types of interventions are conceived by these actors as "building peace," and what kind of "peace"

[1] In this article, norms are defined as "collective expectations for the proper behavior of actors with a given identity" (Katzenstein 1996, 5). As Hirsch and Dixon (2020,19) emphasize, norms are about collective/social *expectations* and should not be reduced to the aggregation of behavioral patterns.

do they envision? How, in turn, has the substantive content of their peacebuilding practices (re)shaped global discourses and practices, potentially creating a disconnect between the international norms as seen from New York and Geneva and peacebuilding practices in the field?

Guided by these questions, this article proposes a new matrix-based approach to analyze the evolution of global peacebuilding order(s). In doing so, we seek to bring together research on norms and peacebuilding. Following this brief introductory section, the second section highlights the parallel turning-points in both norm research and peacebuilding studies, and points out that norm contestation at the global "top-top" level – the global level of contestation involving the mainstream Western powers and "alternative" actors – remains relatively undertheorized. Building on these observations, the third section develops a "norms matrix" to examine the multidirectional processes of normative transformation. To illustrate the utility of our framework, the fourth section applies it to the cases of China, Japan and Russia, drawing from extensive fieldwork and nearly one hundred interviews conducted by the authors between 2018 and 2020 in the context of a collaborative research project. The final section highlights the article's major theoretical contributions and concludes with suggestions to stimulate further research.

2. The parallel worlds of norm research and peacebuilding studies

Cross-fertilization between norm research and peacebuilding studies remains thin, even though peacebuilding is fundamentally about establishing a particular normative order in conflict-affected communities. One reason may be that peacebuilding generally evolved in the tradition of peace research and "statebuilding," interacting with studies of multilateral organizations (in particular the UN). Norm research, by contrast, has followed the rise of social constructivism in IR scholarship (see Checkel 1998) and is rooted in studies of democracy promotion and human rights (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). Norm research has also occupied a major part of EU studies, which frequently frame Brussels as a liberal norm entrepreneur; but since the EU did not have a systematic approach to peacebuilding until recently (see Richmond, Björkdahl and Kappler 2011), the intersection between EU and peacebuilding scholarship is sparse. Overall, there are a limited number of peacebuilding studies that adopt a norm-based theoretical framework;[2] conversely, there are few norm studies that take peacebuilding as a thematic focus – with norms of intervention perhaps the closest fit (Capie 2012; Welsh 2013; Kenkel and de Rosa 2015; Fehl and Rosert 2020). Yet at the theoretical level, both norm research and peacebuilding studies have gone through (at least) three similar intellectual turns over the past three decades: the "universal" turn in the 1990s; the "local" turn in the 2000s and, most recently, the "illiberal" turn in the 2010s. These turns, however, generally elided the question of contestation, localization and divergence at the "top-top" level between major powers and the global order (an exception is Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2019).

[2] Exceptions include Zahar (2012); Alden and Large (2015); Björkdahl and Gusic (2015); Tholens and Groß (2015); Zimmermann (2016). In particular, Tholens and Groß (2015) analyzed the dynamics of norm contestation between international and local peacebuilders. Our analysis complements their analysis by focusing on norm contestation at the "top-top" level among and between different international actors.

The prospect of a genuinely global order only emerged at the end of the Cold War, since prior claims to universal norms (liberal versus socialist internationalism) remained at most hemispheric or rooted in spheres of influence. Aspirations for the universalization of liberal values meant that the early literature on norm diffusion mostly focused on "how 'good' global norms promoted mainly by Western norm entrepreneurs would or did displace 'bad' local ideas and practices that are mainly found in the non-Western world" (Acharya 2013, 468). It was generally assumed that certain norms prevail because they are morally and technically superior to others, as well as being grafted onto the interests and influence of the dominant liberal powers. The main contributions from this literature were the development of schematic models of a "norm cycle" and the identification of norm entrepreneurs and advocacy networks as agents of norm diffusion (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Risse-Kappen, Ropp and Sikkink 1999). Norms are then "cascaded" through processes of persuasion and pressure at both international and domestic levels, to the point where their overall salience is accepted by a critical mass of states (Sikkink 2011), and internalized and institutionalized in domestic policies and practices.

Initial peacebuilding studies in the 1990s paralleled the development of the norm literature. Although there was scant mention of social constructivism, norm cascades, or norm entrepreneurship, peacebuilding research portrayed a familiar picture: with its expanded peacekeeping mission mandates, the UN, propelled by like-minded liberal powers, intervened in conflict and post-conflict settings with a broad mandate to promote good practices designed to ensure peaceful transitions and the building of liberal institutions in the economy, law, politics and society. The assumption was that the norms and institutions of Western liberalism could be transplanted into war-torn, post-conflict states – what Roland Paris (2002) then aptly termed the "*mission civilisatrice*" of peacebuilding endeavors. Thus inter-state "democratic peace theory" was supplemented with the so-called "liberal peace" paradigm implicitly assuming that liberalizing processes would build peace within and between societies and states (see Campbell et al. 2011).

While the first wave of norm research laid important groundwork, its model of universal norm diffusion came under criticism for neglecting international power dynamics and local agency. For one, "best" practices may not automatically prevail globally, as demonstrated by research on international standardization processes: certain standards prevail over others not because they are technically superior, but because they are backed by powerful international actors or simply fit better with pre-existing local standards. Moreover, the implicit dichotomy between legitimate global norms and illegitimate local norms left little space for the agency of local actors who are basically treated either as resisters or as passive "norm takers". The first generation of norm research, along with peacebuilding studies of the time, essentially viewed norm diffusion and peacebuilding as a top-down process in which local actors are socialized to embrace universal standards of peace, whereas the critical question of who gets to decide these universal standards remained untouched (see Newman et al. 2009; Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013).

Against this backdrop the second wave of norm research, spearheaded by the work of Amitav Acharya (2004), emphasized the social dynamics of resistance and contestation through which the adoption of global norms is negotiated and/or counteracted, or where global norms are adapted to local contexts through "localization". From this perspective, "[q]uestions about norm diffusion in world politics are not

simply about whether and how ideas matter, but also which and whose ideas matter" (Acharya 2004, 239). Norms are not accepted or rejected simply on their congruence with pre-existing ideas, but are *reconstructed and adapted* to fit local identities, experiences and existing normative frameworks. Such work has continued in, for example, Antje Wiener's analysis of the dynamics and cycles of norm contestation and constitution, where contestation is understood "as a social practice of objecting to or critically engaging with norms" (Wiener 2018) by which both norms are generated and global governance is constituted (Wiener 2014).

The emphasis on local agency in the second wave of norm research resonated with similar trends in peacebuilding studies' own "local turn" (see Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013; Leonardsson and Rudd 2015). As in norm research, the local turn in peacebuilding began by addressing "local resistance" (Mac Ginty 2011) to the (perceived) imposition of the liberal peace. The research program incorporated perspectives from sociology and anthropology to investigate everyday forms of security provision and "peace-doing" by local communities (Mac Ginty 2014). The analysis of local agency also placed an emphasis on hybridity, via the notions of "hybrid political orders" or "hybrid peace governance" (Belloni 2012), which sought "to make sense of a complex reality in which international and local, state and nonstate, formal and informal, public and private actors, practices and institutions not only co-exist, but may well be in a variety of symbiotic relationships with one another" (Chetail and Jütersonke 2014, 11). In this sense the local turn in peacebuilding is sometimes conceived as the "hybrid turn" (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2016) focusing on state/society relations in conflict affected contexts.

The apparent failure of liberal values and practices to diffuse smoothly in places as diverse as Sri Lanka, Ukraine, Timor Leste and Burundi prompted scholars to look towards local forms of resistance to the international efforts at promoting aspects of the liberal peacebuilding agenda (Barnett and Zürcher 2009). Yet as critics pointed out, this focus on the local-international interaction assumed the singularity of the "international." As locally-oriented research revealed the complex network of cleavages in the local-international axis, scholars began to point out that just as liberal external actors mobilize local agents to advance the liberal cause, "illiberal" external actors (including civil society actors) mobilize local agents to advance "illiberal" peacebuilding projects (Höglund and Orjuela 2012; Lewis, Heathershaw and Megoran 2018; Smith et al. 2020).

In norm research, some scholars also turned to the role of "illiberal" actors in obstructing or even reversing the spread of liberal norms. If the local turn found the principal obstacle to liberal norm diffusion in local resistance, the "illiberal turn" finds it in the presence of illiberal regional/global powers (see Risse and Babayan 2015). In this vein, the failure (or limited success) of democratization is now associated with "autocracy promotion" (Burnell and Schlumberger 2010) or "authoritarian diffusion" (Ambrosio 2010) undertaken by Russia, China, Turkey, Iran, Venezuela and other "gravity centers of authoritarian rule" (Kneuer and Demmelhuber 2016). As Alexander Cooley (2015, 50) emphasizes, "The truth is that norms privileging state security, civilizational diversity and traditional values over liberal democracy now enjoy significant backing, and they are reshaping the international environment."

3. The multi-directional transformation model

While the three paradigmatic turns discussed above have offered illuminating insights, recent research on norm contestation emphasizes the need to move beyond conventional binaries (e.g. acceptance/rejection, local/international, liberal/illiberal) prevalent in the existing research to take seriously the multiplicities, contradictions and ambiguities in global normative dynamics (see e.g. Acharya 2013; Wiener 2014, 2018; Terhalle 2011; Pu 2012; Bloomfield 2016; Jinnah 2017; Johnston 2019). In light of this, the intersection of norm research and peacebuilding studies needs to address three remaining theoretical deficits.

First, the research agenda on the normative architecture of global peacebuilding requires a decentered stance that does not place the "liberal" at the center of analysis. Particularly in the emerging literature on "illiberal peacebuilding," the position of "obstacles", "spoilers" and "resistance" once occupied by locals is now simply replicated at the international level, in what is arguably a repetition of "the noble west and the dirty rest" mind-set (Börzel 2015; Lewis 2017, 34). As a result, external actors who do not promote liberal norms are generally not understood as practicing peacebuilding, and thus are framed as operating outside of the peacebuilding community. Of course, non-liberal views should not be uncritically accepted as legitimate normative discourses devoted towards building peace. But if we are to overcome binary thinking, we need to acknowledge the diverse aims and intentions that can govern "peacebuilders' practices" even when the label peacebuilding is not explicitly used by alternative actors. Such a broader approach would enable researchers to capture a fuller spectrum of norm contestation in global peacebuilding order(s).

Second, the neat dichotomy of acceptance/rejection or norm shaper/taker is too simplistic. As recent research on norm contestation points out, most international actors – and especially non-hegemonic ones – pursue a dual strategy of conformity and differentiation (Sabrow 2020), seeking to "deconstruct and reconstruct global norms in order to make them fit domestic beliefs and identities" (Prantl and Nakano 2011, 205; see also Contessi 2010). This has been apparent in the global peacebuilding arena, where "all five BRICS and most other emerging donors agree with some (but not all) aspects of the liberal peace architecture that existing donors focus on: a stable bureaucratic state with control of the means of violence and varying degrees of capitalism … BRICS member states have operated both within and outside the spectrum of the liberal peace" (Richmond and Tellidis 2013, 2). Rather than treating this duality and complexity as incoherent, one should investigate how new peacebuilding actors are (re)shaping global norms with their own normative visions and interpretations, thus influencing the multidirectional processes of global normative transformation.

Third, the focus of mainstream peacebuilding scholarship on the role of international organizations (e.g. UN missions/programs) has meant that it "often overlooks the significance of geopolitical, inter-state dynamics in structuring war-endings and peace processes" (Selby 2013, 81; Wallis and Richmond 2017, 1). While we should be cautious not to revert to exclusively state-centric scholarship that emphasizes geopolitical motives, the transformation of global peacebuilding order(s) cannot be fully understood without taking into account the role of emerging actors (and their interests) who influence peace and conflict dynamics on the ground. When such an actor is a powerful one such as China, Japan or Russia, in what ways,

and through which mechanisms, are the global dynamics of normative transformation affected? Our aim is thus to draw upon recent advances in norm research to further our understanding of how global norms, when adopted, adapted or contested by diverse peacebuilding actors, become embedded and reflected in their foreign policy practices. In turn, we also ask how this affects the evolution and substantive content of norms at the global level, providing alternative "models" to be adopted or emulated by states and societies subject to post-conflict interventions.

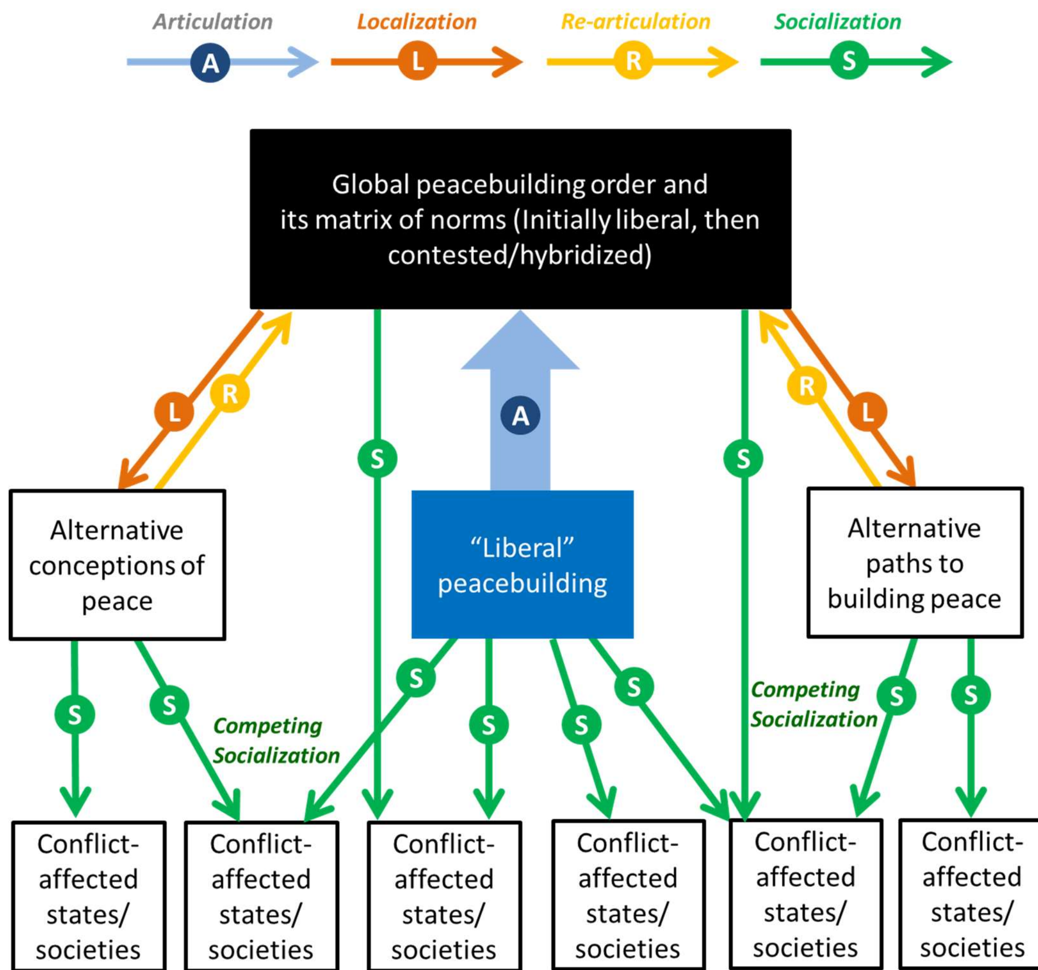
To cut through some of this complexity and chart a path forward, we conceptualize an integrated framework to theorize the multidirectional dynamics of global normative transformation, summarized in Figure 1. The global peacebuilding order represents the overarching ensemble of peacebuilding norms and practices that are shaped, negotiated, diffused and communicated in the UN and/or other multilateral forums. It can shift over time (from liberal peacebuilding to stabilization, for example), and include competing and/or overlapping norms (see below). Here, we need to capture the orientations of different external actors that intervene with policies and practices designed to manage or resolve conflicts in conflict-affected and/or fragile states/societies. These policies and practices may not (indeed are often not) labelled as peacebuilding *per se*, but follow a logic of order-creation that is informed by identifiable norms (either alternative conceptions of "peace" or alternative conceptions of how to achieve it). The norms may be rooted in domestic political practices and experiences, or be adapted, reinterpreted and institutionalized versions of norms circulating at the global level.

Building on existing research on norm contestation, the diagram also integrates four intertwined processes of normative transformation that can take place along the arrows in Figure 1:

1. ***Articulation***: (Initial) norm development, entrepreneurship and advancement at the global level and participation in this process;
2. ***Localisation***: Norm localization at the national level to fit the global norms to national contexts and understandings;
3. ***Re-articulation*****:** Norm change and modification either via national understandings of new peacebuilding actors feeding back into the global normative order, or through endogenous evolution at the global level;
4. ***Socialization/competing socialization***: Norm transmission from the global peacebuilding order and/or national actors via policies and practices to conflict-affected states/societies (and with resistance and hybridization at the local level).

The framework extends the concepts of "norm diffusion loop" (Prantl and Nakano 2011, 205) and "norm circulation" (Acharya 2013) to look at how relatively powerful actors can feed their localized norms both upwards to the global level and downwards through their activities in conflict-affected states/societies.

Figure 1. The Multidirectional Model of Transformation in Global Peacebuilding Order(s)



The primary focus of this article is to theorize and illustrate plausible ways in which global normative transformations may be taking place. In essence, the framework hopes to shed light on how new peacebuilding actors receive and re-interpret key ideas about peacebuilding and then reinject these ideas back into global debates and practices. There are undoubtedly other exogenous factors and events that can influence the process of global normative transformation, although these are not our primary theoretical concern.

In order to theorize how this works in the global peacebuilding order, our next step is to adopt a matrix-based approach to capture the substantive content of the peacebuilding norms at play.[3] To transcend binary framings, this article builds on norm research that emphasizes the holistic nature of normative orders as the *constellation* of norms and their interrelationships (see e.g. Jachtenfuchs, Diez and Jung 1998; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 891; Youngs 2015; Lantis and Wunderlich 2018; Winston 2018; Fehl and Rosert 2020). For analytical and heuristic purposes, our model starts with two ideal-typical peacebuilding orders: *pluralism* and *statism.* To simplify, a pluralist peacebuilding order prioritizes

[3] For earlier prototypes of the norms matrix, see Kobayashi (2016, 2018). See also Morrow (2014) for a matrix-based approach to analyze the dynamics of norm violation.

horizontal/decentralized governance with diffused authority and participatory mechanisms, while a statist peacebuilding order prioritizes the construction of a strong state with hierarchical/centralized governance. This distinction is for analytical purposes: pluralism/statism should not be seen as an "either-or" approach for external peacebuilders. While China, Japan and Russia may often prioritize a statist approach, statism is not an exclusive property of "non-Western" powers: the cases of Iraq, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo show that American and European peacebuilders have sometimes adopted a comparable statist approach involving "illiberal, coercive, and undemocratic strategies" (Belloni 2012, 23; see also Smith et al. 2020, 3).[4] Similarly, one should not assume that non-Western powers inherently oppose pluralist approaches. For example, given that Russian and Chinese principles of political order are quite popular in Central Eurasia (Omelicheva 2015), and that many African leaders regard Beijing in a positive light (Moyo 2009), democratization in conflict-affected states may in fact benefit Russia and China in certain situations as it can bring pro-Russian/pro-Chinese parties to power by elections (see Way 2016). Likewise, the promotion of pluralist politics can bring to power illiberal forces: attempts to construct a liberal peace in Lebanon benefited Iran by empowering Hezbollah, which won a majority in the 2009 elections (Zahar 2012, 80).

It is equally erroneous to assume that the norm of human rights is an exclusive property of the liberal peace. Any peacebuilding order that does not involve a serious consideration of rights would have difficulty legitimizing itself. The question is hence not if a statist approach *opposes* human rights, but *which rights* it prioritizes (see also Pouliot and Thérien 2018, 57). Panebianco (2006, 144) observes that "In the Chinese vision of human rights, economic collective rights are more important than individual political and civil rights, with the right to development and subsistence as state priorities to be granted to the citizens." Similar patterns of prioritization are observed in Russian and Japanese approaches (see below). A key feature of the statist peacebuilding order is in fact the (assumed) priority of collective economic, social and cultural (ESC) rights, or of order maintenance over individual rights to, for example, free expression (Bindman 2013; Romanova 2016, 5). The essence of the contestation is thus over which rights to prioritize, with different relative rankings of norms instantiated in a particular normative order – what Legro (1997, 59) called "the hierarchy of legitimate beliefs" – playing a critical role in determining its overall justification and legitimation of particular peacebuilding practices.[5]

Human rights promotion is only one dimension of any peacebuilding order. Of course, incorporating more dimensions increases sensitivity to nuance and descriptive richness, but it also decreases parsimony. Informed by prior peacebuilding scholarship and our own research into the Chinese, Russian and Japanese cases (detailed below), this article develops three normative dimensions in Table 1. Rather than focusing on specific substantive programs (such as security sector reform, rule of law and transitional justice, election promotion, macro-economic reforms and so on), we focus on the broader macro-norms that orient particular practices of peace and conflict management at the policy and program level.

Table 1. Norms of Peacebuilding Orders

[4] On the merits and limits of statism, see Devetak (2007); Jackson (2014).

[5] For example, some Chinese scholars hold that liberal norms only apply at a certain stage of development, and are incompatible with the unconsolidated nature of contemporary African states (Li 2003; He 2017; Li 2019).

Pluralist understandings	Dimensions	Statist understandings
[*Conditional Sovereignty*] • Sovereignty as responsibility; • Shared/pooled sovereignty; • Permissibility of intrusion into domestic affairs; • Local (people's) ownership.	State Sovereignty	[*Classical Sovereignty*] • Sovereignty as self-determination and external independence; • Sovereign equality; • Domestic non-interference; • National (state's) ownership.
[*Participatory Governance*] • Bottom-up, participatory governance; • Decentralization and power-sharing ; • Good governance (limited government) and the rule of law (transparency and accountability). • Empowerment of civil society as constraints on state power.	Governance Model	[*Hierarchical Governance*] • Top-down, hierarchical governance; • Centralization and stabilization; • Good government (strong government) and the rule by law (civic compliance); • Empowerment of civil society as service providers/collaborators of the state.
[*Political and Civil Rights*] • Political and civil rights; • Civil liberties and electoral integrity; • Promition of media freedom and the right to free expression; • Peacebuilding as the realization of political liberalization and emancipation.	Human Rights	[*ESC Rights*] • Economic, social and cultural (ESC) rights; • Multiculturalism, multilingualism, and coexistence; • Fulfilment of basic human needs (BHNs); • Peacebuilding as the realization of the right to development and modernization.

While each of these macro-norms is important by itself, the global peacebuilding order is an *organic constellation* of these elements, with potential variation on each axis. As Finnemore and Sikkink (1998, 891) emphasized, what matters is not the absence or presence of a single norm, but instead "collections of norms and the mix of rules and practices."[6] As such, "[w]hat matters primarily is not the presence or absence of one particular practice, but the broader *repertoire* or *constellation of practices*" (Adler and Greve 2009, 66; emphasis in the original). In light of this, the working definitions above provide a minimal basis to differentiate the content of different normative orders, although norms ultimately acquire meaning in relation to one another. Hence, our framework theorizes the global peacebuilding order as a *holistic system of norms* involving: (a) the range of legitimate discourses and practices specified by each norm (*content*); (b) the relative strength among these norms (*ranking*); and (c) the overarching logic specifying interrelationships among them (*constellation*). Following Legro (1997, 3), who argues that "[n]orms are seen as continuous, rather than dichotomous, entities: they do not just exist or not exist but instead come in varying strength,"

[6] The authors thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this important point.

we differentiate three degrees of norms in Table 2 below: *marginal*, *present* and *prominent*.[7] Since our aim is not to measure precisely the presence/absence of individual norms embedded in normative orders, we treat each norm's degree of prioritization as a range.

Table 2. General Guidelines for the Differentiation of Norms

Degrees	Standards of Differentiation	Observable Implications
Marginal	Reference to and the practice of a norm is marginally observed and/or the norm is absent/rejected.	• Reference to a norm is absent or denied in discourse and practice. • No formal/informal mechanisms exist to guarantee the adherence to a norm, although actors may call for more attention to it.
Present	Reference to and the practice of a norm is generally observed and adherence is understood as necessary.	• Reference to a norm is generally observed in discourse and in practice. • Formal/informal mechanisms exist to guarantee the adherence to a norm, but the implementation of these mechanisms may be limited and/or incomplete.
Prominent	Reference to and the practice of a norm is almost always observed and adherence is understood as compulsory.	• Reference to a norm is systematically observed in discourse and in practice. • Formal/informal mechanisms exist to guarantee the adherence to a norm, and the implementation of these mechanisms is widely observed.

Bringing together Tables 1 and 2 leads to the norms matrix (Figure 2) below that enables us to illustrate overall trends of global normative transformation in an comprehensible way through qualitative comparisons (graphically illustrated). The variety of normative orders is expressed in terms of the overall constellation of the different norms, each of which can have varying strength. Thus a pluralist peacebuilding order is marked by the predominance of pluralist norms over statist norms in most dimensions, while a statist normative order would be marked by the predominance of statist norms in most dimensions. In theory, there is a large number of equally plausible combinations of norms; however, the variation one would expect to observe across actors and over time would likely converge into a few prototypes, falling somewhere between the two ideal-typical orders.

[7] Our three-degree differentiation of norm strength is similar to the model developed by Hirsch and Dixon (2020, 7), which distinguishes low, moderate and high degrees of norm strength. However, our scheme is more parsimonious since the Hirsch- Dixon model entails different dimensions of norm strength (i.e. concordance and institutionalization). The authors thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this point.

Figure 2. The Norms Matrix of the Global Peacebuilding Order

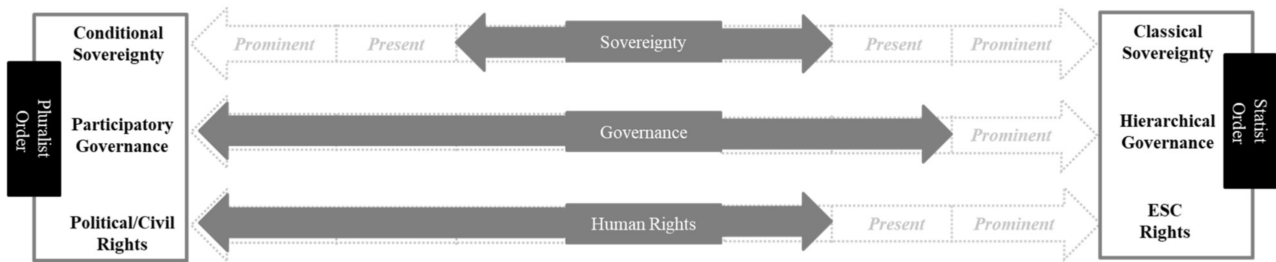
Pluralist Order								Statist Order
Conditional Sovereignty	*Prominent*	*Present*	*Marginal*	Sovereignty	*Marginal*	*Present*	*Prominent*	Classical Sovereignty
Participatory Governance	*Prominent*	*Present*	*Marginal*	Governance	*Marginal*	*Present*	*Prominent*	Hierarchical Governance
Political/Civil Rights	*Prominent*	*Present*	*Marginal*	Human Rights	*Marginal*	*Present*	*Prominent*	ESC Rights

This theorization of global orders as a matrix of norms enables one to transcend binary thinking and to conceive normative transformation and contestation as an ongoing process involving a shifting prioritization among related norms. The norms matrix can graphically illustrate how an actor may advance simultaneously both pluralist and statist norms, but how and to what extent these norms clash with each other depends on specific local contexts and may not be logically deduced from the matrix alone. Empirically, these shifts can be in part captured by scrutinizing key policy texts (such as resolutions and deliberations at the UN Security Council (UNSC), the UN Peacebuilding Commission and other relevant multilateral platforms). It is equally important to pay attention to the networks and partnerships that embody different prioritizations of global norms. The case studies below offer comparative examples that demonstrate how the processes theorized in the multidirectional model play out in practice. It must be also emphasized that global/UN, liberal, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, or any other approaches to peacebuilding are all subject to gradations of pluralism and statism, with different degrees of internal inconsistencies and contradictions.[8] In light of such complexity, the norms matrix is best understood as an analytical took to capture macro-patterns in normative prioritization for each actor. This article couples its theory-building focus with case studies of different peacebuilding approaches, and thus offers a first attempt to validate the complex ongoing processes of global normative transformation.

To demonstrate the utility of the norms matrix, we apply it first – and in a telegraphic fashion – to the evolution of the liberal global peacebuilding order, before our case studies. As noted above, the liberal peacebuilding order emerged during the universal turn of the early 1990s. Initially, liberal peacebuilders emphasized the importance of participatory governance and political/civil rights in constructing a positive, liberal peace in post-conflict societies. At the same time, the initial formulation of liberal peacebuilding included modest attempts to embark on statebuilding and stabilization as a means to establish effective hierarchical governance (e.g. Cambodia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo). While liberal peacebuilders did not fully reject the classical notion of sovereign non-interference in internal affairs, the liberal peacebuilding debate at the time focused more on the appropriate parameters of interventions and hence the question of (classical) sovereignty remained marginalized (Paris 2004). An illustration of the initial liberal peacebuilding order is shown in Figure 3.

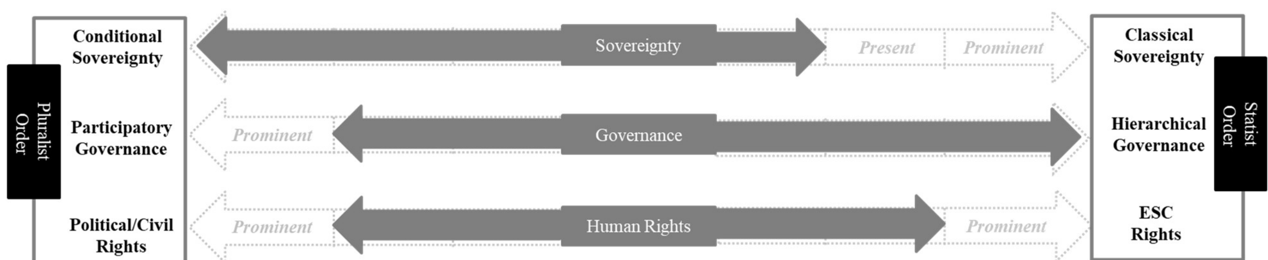
[8] The authors thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this point.

Figure 3. An Illustration of the Liberal Peacebuilding Order (1990s)



With America's global "war on terror" in the early 2000s, liberal peacebuilding shifted to emphasize the importance of effective hierarchical governance through statebuilding, stabilization and counter-terrorism (e.g. Afghanistan and Iraq), while retaining (at least rhetorically) a moderate emphasis on participatory governance and political/civil rights (e.g. neoconservative democracy promotion). Many of the contemporary criticisms of the liberal peace appear to be directed against this "deformation" of liberal peacebuilding in the period after 2001, rather than against the core norms of liberal peacebuilding itself. This underlines also why one needs to unpack the normative transformation of the liberal peace order over time, rather than assuming its timeless universality.[9] Mainstream peacebuilding activities also began to pay closer attention to the norm of ESC rights, as economic alienation was identified as a key driver behind the surge of terrorism. All of these trends led to more intrusive policy interventions and a further erosion of the norm of classical sovereignty. In the meantime, many liberal peacebuilders actively supported the rise of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, which reconstructed the meaning of sovereignty as responsibility (see Badescu and Weiss 2010). The liberal peacebuilding order in the 2000s can thus be captured schematically in Figure 4.

Figure 4. An Illustration of the Liberal Peacebuilding Order (2000s)

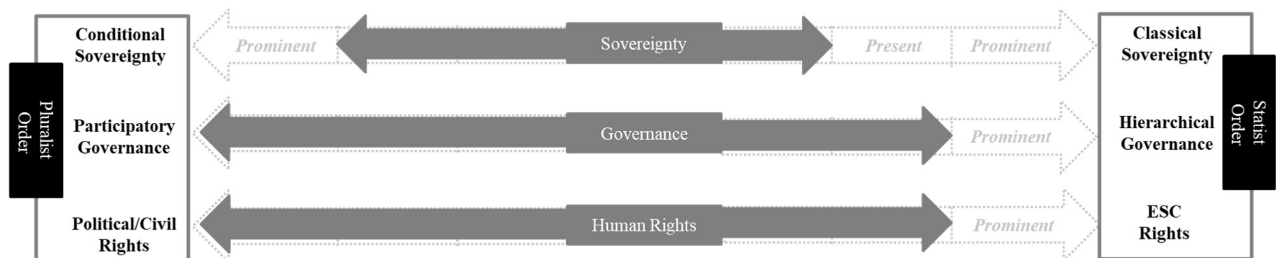


The new emphasis on hierarchical statebuilding and the rise of more intrusive interventions prompted strong criticisms of the liberal peace paradigm in the last decade. While the debacle in Libya put a serious damper on the use of R2P as a way of justifying "humanitarian" intervention, most liberal peacebuilders still retained the commitment to the norm of conditional sovereignty. As the limitations of the global "war on terror" became apparent, the overt emphasis on promoting hierarchical governance receded. As a result, the liberal peacebuilding order reprioritized (at least discursively) participatory governance and

[9] The authors thank an anonymous reviewer for highlighting this point. For more detailed analyses, see Karlsrud (2019), Smith et al. (2020, 8).

political/civil rights in recent years, with a greater sensitivity to local contexts and grassroots politics. To be sure, the "local peacebuilding" agendas embraced by liberal peacebuilders seldom led to the genuine empowerment of citizens and civil society, and often reinforced the power of existing political and economic elites.[10] Luciani (2021) for instance shows that the promotion of local civil society activism actually resulted in a more subtle form of governmentality where control is exerted through a hegemonic civil society that represents parochial elite interests rather than grassroots agendas. Nonetheless, we can still observe a clear normative evolution (at least at the macro-level) where the discourse of local ownership gained prominence in recent years. An illustration of the current liberal peacebuilding order is shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. An Illustration of the Liberal Peacebuilding Order (Present)



The matrix approach not only highlights a specific hierarchy for peacebuilding norms that is advanced and practiced by certain actors, but it can be also used to compare and contrast various approaches *within* the liberal peace itself (and changes over time); it can moreover accommodate various hybrid forms. In the next section, we demonstrate how Chinese, Japanese and Russian approaches to peacebuilding can shed light on norm contestation, and has driven normative transformation in the global peacebuilding order.

4. Chinese, Japanese and Russian approaches to peacebuilding

China: Development as Peacebuilding

Without a specific doctrine or policy framework labeled as peacebuilding, China's increasingly active engagement in conflict-affected states/societies has raised concerns over its "reframing of established (liberal) norms on security and development" (Alden and Large 2015, 123; see also Contessi 2010; Job and Shesterinina 2014; Strating 2020). Indeed, China's peacebuilding discourses and practices diverge substantially from those of mainstream liberal actors, although these differences are becoming more nuanced as Beijing switches from an outright rejection of "Western norms" to a strategy combining selective acceptance with re-articulation and reprioritization.

The norm of classical sovereignty has guided China's peace-related engagement, as expressed in the 1954 Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, the 1964 Eight Principles for Economic Aid and Technical Assistance to Other Countries and the 2020 White Paper on Thirty Years of Participation of China in UN Peacekeeping Operations (Information Office of the State Council 2020). In aid provision, China frames

[10] The authors thank an anonymous reviewer for highlighting this point.

itself an equal partner for all states receiving Chinese aid – be they fragile or not (see Yuan 2020). In doing so, Beijing eschews the implicit distinction between legitimate and "less legitimate" sovereigns that often prevails in liberal circles. Moreover, since its market-oriented aid reform in 1995, China has developed a request-based and "mutually beneficial" approach to development cooperation that prioritizes self-reliance and non-conditionality (Information Office of the State Council 2014). Similar to the Japanese approach, it distances China from what it conceives as hegemonic interventionism under the banner of liberalism (Hirono, Jiang and Lanteigne 2019; Sørensen 2019).

When it comes to peacebuilding activities, China holds that "post-conflict countries bear the primary responsibility for peacebuilding" and hence "the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) and international community should fully respect the will of the Governments and the peoples concerned and provide assistance in accordance with national conditions and key priorities determined by the countries themselves" (Permanent Mission of the PRC to the UN 2014). Chinese leaders have strongly emphasized this point regarding Angola, Sudan, South Sudan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Syria, Libya and elsewhere. Cautioning against the new norm of conditional sovereignty, China – which has become a significant financial and personnel contributor to UN peace operations – consistently insists that peacekeeping operations must be consent-based, non-military and UN-authorized (Hirono, Jiang and Lanteigne 2019). In light of this, the habitual grouping of China and Russia along a single "illiberal" axis thus misses Beijing's consistent position on sovereignty: while Russia has regularly intervened in post-Soviet conflicts (often with military force), China has for the last two decades never resorted to the use of force as a means to stabilize regional conflicts, and hence more consistently defended the statist norm of classical sovereignty.

A more flexible reinterpretation of non-interference is starting to emerge in China, however, under the banner of "creative involvement" (Wang 2017). Although Chinese diplomats and scholars have been receptive to R2P (particularly Pillars I and II as articulated in reports of the UN Secretary-General, see Liu and Zhang 2014), there is still an intense debate in China on the operationalization of R2P and the legitimate use of force in peace operations. Since 2012, Chinese scholars have advocated the notion of "responsible protection," which sets more restrictive conditions for military interventions (see Ruan 2012; Garwood-Gowers 2016). Such re-articulation finds a strong resonance with Brazilian notion of "responsibility while protecting" (Kenkel and de Rosa 2015; Stefan 2017), and is also globally supported by major non-Western democracies (see Stuenkel 2014).

With respect to governance, Chinese leaders consider the political system, security arrangements and the choice of leaders "critical internal affairs" of a country and therefore *not* a primary concern of peacebuilding programs (Sørensen 2019, 600). Beijing's aid programs tend to be independent of regime characteristics (Dreher and Fuchs 2015, 1019), although Chinese assistance often ends up bolstering the norm of hierarchical governance by empowering central(ized) state authorities. Beijing's repeated claim that the peoples of Africa have full "ownership of, and agency in defining and pursuing, their solutions according to their circumstances" (Alden and Large 2015, 35) can be understood as an alternative to donor-driven social re-engineering in conflict-affected states. Most recently, this position is echoed in China's support for "Afghan-led and Afghan-owned" negotiations in the Afghan peace process (Permanent Mission of PRC to

the UN 2019a). Accordingly, Chinese engagement in post-conflict contexts primarily aims to build strong state capacity in providing public goods, security and basic human needs (BHNs) (Permanent Mission of PRC to the UN 2019b), rather than promoting the norm of participatory governance in the image of liberal peacebuilders (Zhao 2011; Li 2019).

At the same time, China is now more aware of the concerns of non-state actors in partner states, leading to embryonic policy experimentation that seeks to partner Chinese government-organized NGOs (GONGOs) with African civil society actors in aid projects. However, the NGOs involved are almost exclusively service-oriented, and this should not be taken as a gesture towards inclusive participatory governance. In fact, it constitutes a meaningful act of re-articulation: rather than rejecting the relevance of civil society, China reinterprets the role of civil society as the *supporter and collaborator* of a "good government" (i.e. a strong state). This reinterpretation reflects its domestic experience since the 1990s, in the sense that the Chinese government becomes adept at instrumentalizing civil society to enhance its performance-based legitimacy (Spires 2011). While such reinterpretation finds little resonance among most liberal peacebuilders, the statist understanding of civil society as an integral part of – and not in opposition to – the strong state is gaining traction in many conflict-affected contexts, especially in Africa and Asia (see Brenner 2012). The socialization of African states into the "Chinese" norms of development and peacebuilding (Hodzi 2018), suggests that these are nascent global norms, as the statist understanding of civil society promotion also finds a wider resonance among policy practitioners in Japan, Russia and elsewhere (see below).

While human rights used to provoke suspicion and outright hostility from China due to its purported tension with classical sovereignty, contemporary China has become more comfortable with using and reconceptualizing human rights discourses. Rather than rejecting human rights promotion as a Western norm, Beijing has sought to reprioritize the right to subsistence and the right to development (along with other ESC rights), insisting that these are primary and universally-valued human rights and the advancement of ESC rights as the most crucial factor in peacebuilding. Political rights are secondary and context-specific, especially in fragile and conflict-affected states/societies (Information Office of the State Council 2016). With this reinterpretation, China declared poverty eradication as a major achievement for its "human rights record" (Information Office of the State Council 2018). Chinese representatives at the UNSC habitually frame China's resource investments, large-scale infrastructure projects and the construction of schools, hospitals and agricultural facilities as meaningful "peacebuilding" efforts, with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) being no exception (Abb 2020, 14). Political rights might eventually be attained, but "only as a possible outcome of" – rather than the means to promote – economic growth and social stability (Kinzelbach 2012, 327-328; Alden and Large 2015, 135; Abb 2020, 12).

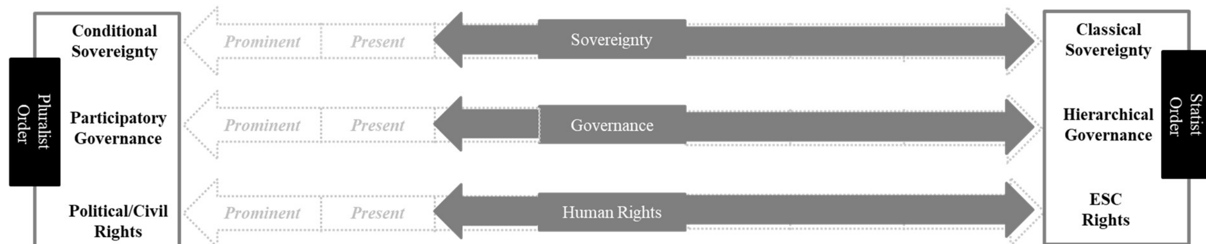
Such reinterpretation finds limited resonance among liberal peacebuilders, who note that poverty reduction, material progress and the myopic promotion of ESC rights can be used as a tool to justify authoritarian governance models. Yet this approach – sometimes summarized as the "developmental peace (*fazhan heping* 发展和平)" (He 2017; Wang 2018) – resonates among conflict-affected states (Singh 2017; Hodzi 2018), who also note that the current liberal peacebuilding order neglects ESC rights. For instance,

the discourse of developmental peace forms the basis of the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and the China-Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security. Based on 55,000 field surveys, the China special edition of the Afrobarometer (2016) demonstrates that 63% of Africans deem China to have an overall positive influence in their country, while the Chinese development model is considered almost as attractive as that of the U.S.

Beyond Africa, China's developmental peace approach has also received the support from conflict-affected European states such as Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Eastern Europe, Ukraine has recently embraced the developmentalist discourse by opening a BRI Trade and Investment Promotion Centre. Concurrently, Ukraine has also emerged as China's second largest arms provider (Nikkei Asian Review 2019). In the first Ukrainian government-sponsored investment forum held in October 2019, President Volodymyr Zelenskiy proposed the implementation of massive infrastructure development plans as a means to build a durable peace, which included a Chinese-invested port infrastructure in Mariupol (Radio Free Europe 2019).

In sum, the Chinese approach to peacebuilding emphasizes the norms of classical sovereignty, hierarchical governance and ESC rights. It seeks to delegitimize the pluralist norm of conditional sovereignty by reprioritizing the principles of sovereign equality and non-interference. Meanwhile, it re-articulates the role of governance and human rights in conflict-affected settings in such a way so as to promote the statist understandings of these norms. The overall Chinese approach is captured in the matrix in Figure 6.

Figure 6. China's Approach to Peacebuilding



Japan: A Statist Peacebuilder in Pluralist Clothing

Japanese overseas development assistance (ODA) amounted to USD 15.5 billion in 2019, the fourth largest among OECD countries (OECD 2020). Although actively collaborating with mainstream liberal peacebuilders, Japan has been seen as a "deviator" – or even a "rogue" donor (Ogawa 2019) – by Western OECD members. Since the 1950s, Japan defines international aid as win-win, mutually beneficial cooperation under the principle of self-help, advancing a "commercial aid" model that emphasizes the role of loans and the trinity of aid, trade and investment (see Kondoh 2015). Foreign assistance requires an explicit request from a recipient government (*youseishugi*), and is provided to foster self-reliance; foreigners should refrain from intrusive interference into others' domestic affairs and fully respect the autonomy and national ownership of recipients (Fukuda-Parr and Shiga 2016, 23).

In the Japanese political lexicon, state sovereignty is defined as *shuken* (sovereign rights), respect of which forms the basis of democracy and *jinken* (human rights). Japan's insistence on the sovereign rights of post-war states is rooted in its own historical experiences. In 1968, Kiichi Miyazawa, Minister of the Economic Planning Agency (and later Prime Minister between 1991-93), noted in a congressional debate that "[u]nfortunately, Japan also received foreign aid after the defeat in the War, and we still remember that we experienced a rather bitter feeling about imposed conditionalities and preaching [by the Western governments]" (quoted in Fukuda-Parr and Shiga 2016, 19). Based on this worldview, Japan strongly supports the classical, statist understanding of sovereignty while tending to reject stringent aid conditionality and the pluralist norm of conditional sovereignty. For this reason, Japanese leaders tend to express extremely cautious – if not entirely negative – views on humanitarian intervention and R2P's Pillar III (see Prantl and Nakano 2011).

Japan generally supports the pluralist norm of participatory governance and has financed and implemented democracy promotion programs in conflict-affected states, including Bosnia Herzegovina, Cambodia, Nepal and the Philippines. Nevertheless, Japan also strongly supports the statist norm of hierarchical governance. The Japan International Cooperation Agency's (JICA) slogan of "Building a Resilient State" prioritizes the (re)construction of functional state authority, respect for sovereign rights and national ownership and defusing conflicts through the provision of inclusive public services and socio-economic development. Ever since Japan's "developmental state" (Johnson 1995) successfully legitimized its statist political system after 1945, Japanese policymakers are receptive to the developmentalist promise that post-conflict legitimacy comes from economic growth, the inclusive provision of public services and the fulfillment of BHNs (see Shinoda 2013, 77).

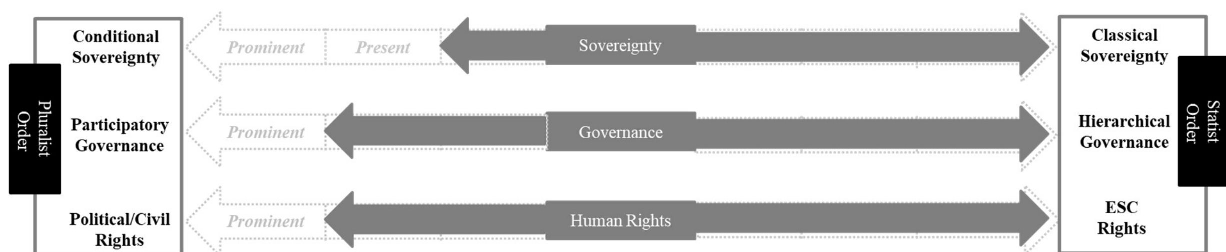
Indeed, many JICA officials see themselves as development specialists, with liberal peacebuilding constituting a potentially intrusive activity that might better be avoided. The 2009 JICA report on peacebuilding warned that rapid democratization in post-conflict countries can amplify local instability (JICA 2009,16), noting that "when the state remains fragile, direct assistance to NGOs bypassing the state structure could further weaken the state authority" (ibid., 27, authors' translation). In conflict-affected settings, Japan's media and democracy support projects often focus on empowering state-owned national media (Ichihara 2019, 19), with the aim of helping central governments consolidate an effective state authority and communicate coherent narratives to its citizens. As a major international donor to Ukraine, for instance, Japan financed and implemented a joint peacebuilding project partnering with UNDP in the Donbass, which focused on the enhancement of social-service provision and capacity-building of the separatist regional governments (Japanese Embassy in Ukraine 2018). JICA has also implemented a media nationalization project, through which 32 public and private media outlets were merged into a consolidated National Public Broadcasting Company of Ukraine in 2017 (JICA 2019).

While Tokyo generally supports the pluralist norm of political rights, the statist norm of ESC rights often takes precedence. In 1998, Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi announced that human security would be a guiding concept of Japanese foreign policy, and became instrumental in the establishment and financing of the UN Trust Fund for Human Security. While Japan's leadership in championing human security is broadly

consistent with the liberal peace, it also entails a subtle – if not subversive – contestation of the liberal peacebuilding order by heavily prioritizing socio-economic development and the fulfillment of BHNs (Acharya 2001; Honda 2017, 98), mainly through its Grant Assistance for Grass-Roots Human Security projects. Indeed, internal regulations specify that human security grants are prohibited from funding "political" projects (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2016, 5). In light of this, Japan's "civil society empowerment" often prioritizes actors complementing – and not directly confronting – central governments in conflict-affected states/societies. In Sudan, for instance, Japan completed "The Project for Strengthening Peace through the Improvement of Public Services in Three Darfur States", which was driven by the logic that efficient delivery of public services and the fulfillment of BHNs formed the essence of a durable post-conflict order (JICA 2020). Japan has taken similar approaches in Timor-Leste, Iraq, Haiti, South Sudan and elsewhere (Uesugi 2014). Japan has also been active in promoting its approach to peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Nepal and the Philippines.

Based on "the philosophy of Japanese policymakers and aid workers that socio-economic development was a key to peace consolidation" (Uesugi 2014, 220), Japan has subtly attempted to shift the focus of peacebuilding from political interventions to non-intrusive, non-political domains of social, economic and infrastructural reconstruction. In this sense there is some congruence between Japanese and Chinese peacebuilding perspectives (Shimomura and Ohashi 2013). In line with this, the Japanese-led Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) actively promotes addressing peace, conflict and development issues by trade, investment and commercial loans. Tokyo has also been an enthusiastic supporter of the Northeast Asia Development Cooperation Forum, which institutionalizes quadrilateral development cooperation among China, Japan, Russia and South Korea. Despite this, Japan is mostly not seen as an outright "challenger" to the liberal peace paradigm because Tokyo merges its advancement of the statist norms of classical sovereignty, hierarchical governance and ESC rights with the (rhetorical) commitment to the pluralist norms of participatory governance and political rights. Figure 7 illustrates how one might map Japan's approach within the norm matrix.

Figure 7. Japan's Approach to Peacebuilding



Russia: A Force for Peace or Peace by Force

In official documents, Russia's approach to conflict-affected states generally aims at stabilizing, rather than resolving, conflict dynamics. This practice, which is conceptually similar to the current emphasis on "stabilization" (Karlsrud 2019; Newman 2010), has been termed *zamorazhivaniye konflikta* ("conflict-

freezing") and it prioritizes the norm of hierarchical governance and, to a lesser extent, classical sovereignty and ESC rights (see Richmond and Tellidis 2014, 572; Nikitina 2015, 98; Bratersky 2018).

Unlike China and Japan, Moscow's stance on the norm of classical sovereignty is rather ambiguous when it comes to conflict-affected states (see Deyermond 2016). One the one hand, the Russian government advocates the importance of national ownership and cautions against "hegemonic interventions" in fragile and conflict-affected states (e.g. Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Libya, Syria, Sudan, the Central African Republic, Myanmar and Venezuela). At the UNSC and other multilateral forums, Russian representatives strongly emphasize the norm of classical sovereignty and categorically reject the norm of conditional sovereignty – the position termed Russian "sovereignism" by Marlene Laruelle (2020, 123). On the other hand, for conflicts in the post-Soviet space, Russia has often sided with anti-government forces demanding greater political and cultural autonomy, if not outright secession (e.g. Ukraine, Georgia or Moldova). Arguably, what distinguishes Russia from other emerging peacebuilders like China and Japan is the permissibility of military solutions in conflict management. As a result, "Russia does not behave very differently from the EU (France and the UK) and the USA" when it comes to peace enforcement missions (van der Lijn and Avezov 2015, 72; Cooley 2019, 607). Indeed, since the 1990s, Russia-led peace missions in Transnistria and South Ossetia performed policing, law enforcement, security provision and other robust functions (see Nikitina 2015, 88), which are not fully consistent with the norm of classical sovereignty.

In the Russian view, "for democracy to progress the state has to provide the necessary conditions, including peace and order, and […] the urge for freedom has to comply with the imperatives of political stability" (Tsygankov and Parker 2015, 80). In 2018, Russia's UN envoy Vassily Nebenzia (2018) emphasized that "[p]riority in cooperation between a UN mission and a Host Country should be given to communication and interaction with the Host Government, rather than with the local population and civil society organizations [in peacebuilding activities]". At first sight, Russia's dismissal of participatory governance in favor of hierarchical governance in conflict-affected states is antithetical to the liberal peace, and serves Russian geopolitical interests. However, the prominent emphasis on hierarchical governance does not constitute a categorical rejection of democratic rule *per se*. For instance, with Russian mediation efforts, the 1997 Tajik peace agreement signed in Moscow promoted a power-sharing regime that allocated 30% of the newly elected parliamentary seats to the anti-government opposition (Kluczewska 2020, 553-54). Tajikistan's post-war parliamentary elections in 2000 coincided with the withdrawal of Russia-led CIS peacekeepers, followed by the UNSC's decision to establish the UN Tajikistan Office of Peacebuilding (Center on International Cooperation 2006, 140-41). And in Syria, Moscow pushed the Assad regime to accept the legitimacy of the UN-led Syrian Constitutional Committee. Although presumably driven by strategic calculus, the Kremlin thus appears open to pluralist political experimentations, at least far from its borders.[11]

Discursively and practically, Russia's "conflict freezing" approach marginalizes the norm of promoting political rights, but it also pays moderate (albeit not prominent) attention to ESC rights. In fact,

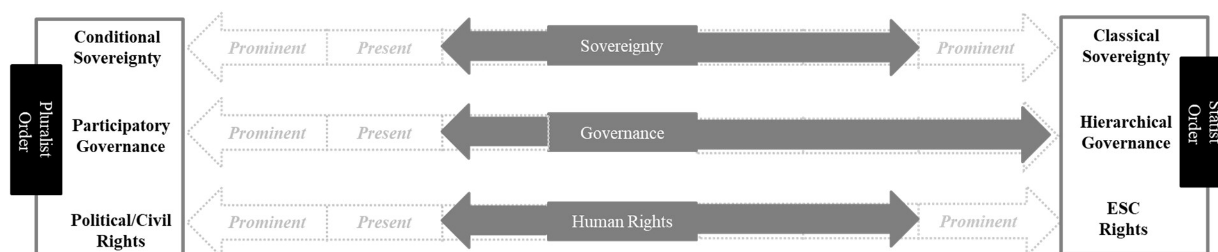
[11] Within the Russian Federation, Russian policymakers have also experimented with "legal pluralism" to allow for the multiplicity of legal systems in the conflict-affected North Caucasus (see Lazarev 2019).

Russia has increasingly adopted European standards in economic development assistance, including the unilateral internalization of the OECD aid reporting system and the endorsement of key OECD aid declarations. In recent years, Moscow established the Russia-UNDP Trust Fund and the Russia Education Aid for Development (READ) Trust Fund (supported by the World Bank), both of which prioritize inclusive economic development. This shows a certain degree of localization, socialization and Russia's integration into the global peacebuilding order (see Makarychev and Simão 2014; Gray 2015).

In Eurasia, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (led by Russia) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) (led by Russia and China) also established new partnerships with the UN. In 2018, CSTO Deputy Secretary-General Valery Semerikov and UN Assistant Secretary General for Rule of Law and Security Institutions Alexander Zuev participated in a joint workshop to develop a roadmap for "Creating the Conditions for Using the CSTO Peacekeeping Potential in the Interests of the UN Global Peacekeeping Activities" (CSTO 2018). UNDPPA and the UN Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia maintain regular contact with SCO officials; since 2017, UNDPPA dispatches a liaison officer at the SCO headquarter in Beijing. In 2019, Moscow launched the Russia-Africa Summit in partnership with the African Union. Under the slogan "For Peace, Security and Development", all African states (including forty-seven heads of state) and eight African regional organizations participated in the Summit (Shubin 2019). Through these new global and regional partnerships, Russia is adapting to mainstream norms, but it also projects its own understanding of peacebuilding. As Yulia Nikitina (2015, 102–03) points out, the legitimacy of the conflict-freezing approach has been gradually accepted by some UN officials and local leaders. Staffan de Mistura, the UN's chief mediator for Syria, remarked in 2014 that the conflict-freezing approach was "a new way for approaching the de-escalation of violence" and "if that 'freeze' works in one place, we can replicate it elsewhere….then this could be a building block for a political process and certainly this is not a substitute to what is a political solution but it certainly is an incentive in that direction" (UN News 2014).

In sum, Russia's advancement of its conflict-freezing approach prioritizes the norm of hierarchical governance through stabilization. For this reason, it has been criticized as a challenge to the liberal peace and democratic governance (see Lewis, Heathershaw and Megoran 2018). Yet the binary framing of Russia as a spearhead of the "axis of autocracy" (Brands 2018) against the democratic world obscures the complex cleavages of global norm contestation. Here it is worth highlighting that India – the world's (self-proclaimed) largest democracy – has been Russia's trusted military partner for half a century, while the majority of democratic states in Asia, Africa and Latin America also have constructive partnerships with Russia. In the wake of the Libyan, Syrian and Ukrainian conflicts, major democratic powers such as Brazil, India and South Africa have been supportive of the Russian position against Western interventionism (Stuenkel 2014; Abdenur 2016, 120). Rather than confronting the liberal peace paradigm head on, Russia is subtly re-articulating the global peacebuilding order by advancing statist understandings of global norms and promoting alternative partnerships (see also Morozova 2018). Figure 8 illustrates how one might map Russia's approach within the norm matrix.

Figure 8. Russia's Approach to Peacebuilding



5. Conclusion

Offering a simple yet analytically powerful matrix approach to visualize some of the macro-norms of the global peacebuilding order(s), this article suggests that normative transformation should not be conceived solely as a top-down process involving stronger and weaker actors (i.e. the international-local), but simultaneously as a multi-directional process involving a diverse array of international actors. To date, research has assumed that the liberal peacebuilding order has evolved over time chiefly by endogenous mechanisms such as internal policy learning by liberal peacebuilders. This article offers an alternative perspective, suggesting that the evolution of the peacebuilding order since the 1990s is in part (re)shaped by the increasing activity of China, Japan and Russia (among other potential contesters and contributors). Our case studies demonstrate that the eroding prominence of the conditional sovereignty norm appears to be driven by Russia's and China's attempts to delegitimize the norm in the UN and/or other multilateral forums. Liberal peacebuilders' growing attention to the norm of ESC rights in peace processes also coincides with Chinese and Japanese promotion of "peace through development", which has gained wide-ranging support from conflict-affected developing countries. Though this article does not trace in detail the mechanisms by which alternative peacebuilders have reshaped the global peacebuilding order, the perspectives it articulates are a starting-point for more fine-grained research on global normative transformations with a variety of methodological approaches, including process-tracing.

Going beyond conventional binaries, the case studies presented above point to significant variations in peacebuilding perspectives adopted by some "non-Western" powers not usually included in the liberal peace mainstream. Although Japan is often considered a part of the liberal donor community, its approach to peace and development may have more in common with the Chinese approach. Moreover, the coherence within the Russian-Chinese "illiberal" axis appears to be exaggerated, as Russia is more flexible when it comes to the respect for classical sovereignty and China is more comfortable in framing peace and development within the discourse of ESC rights. The profiles also suggest that the dichotomy between "norm shaper" and "norm taker" may be misleading: for various strategic and ideational reasons, alternative peacebuilders may practice and advance their own (re-)interpretation of a particular norm without explicitly rejecting or "internalizing" mainstream understandings of it.

Beyond the specific policy domain of global peacebuilding, this article contributes to the advancement of norm research by developing the analytical tool of a norms matrix. While our analysis

focused on the role of alternative state actors in global peacebuilding, the matrix has wider applicability. In addition to its focus on the interactions of global actors, it can also be used to decipher the dynamics of contestation and/or complementarity among local and non-state actors in particular conflict-affected settings. As shown in the third section, the matrix also enables scholars to trace the evolution and transformation of global normative orders over time. Finally, the matrix can be used to compare and contrast different normative visions and approaches *within* a single actor: for example, examining how different foreign policy actors within China (e.g. the central government, the People's Liberation Army, state-owned enterprises, GONGOs, etc.) or the United States (State Department, USAID, Defense Department) approach issues of peacebuilding and conflict resolution. In order to capture the complexity of norm contestation and normative transformation, there is a need to develop and consolidate non-binary approaches that enable researchers to better understand the evolution of global normative order(s).

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