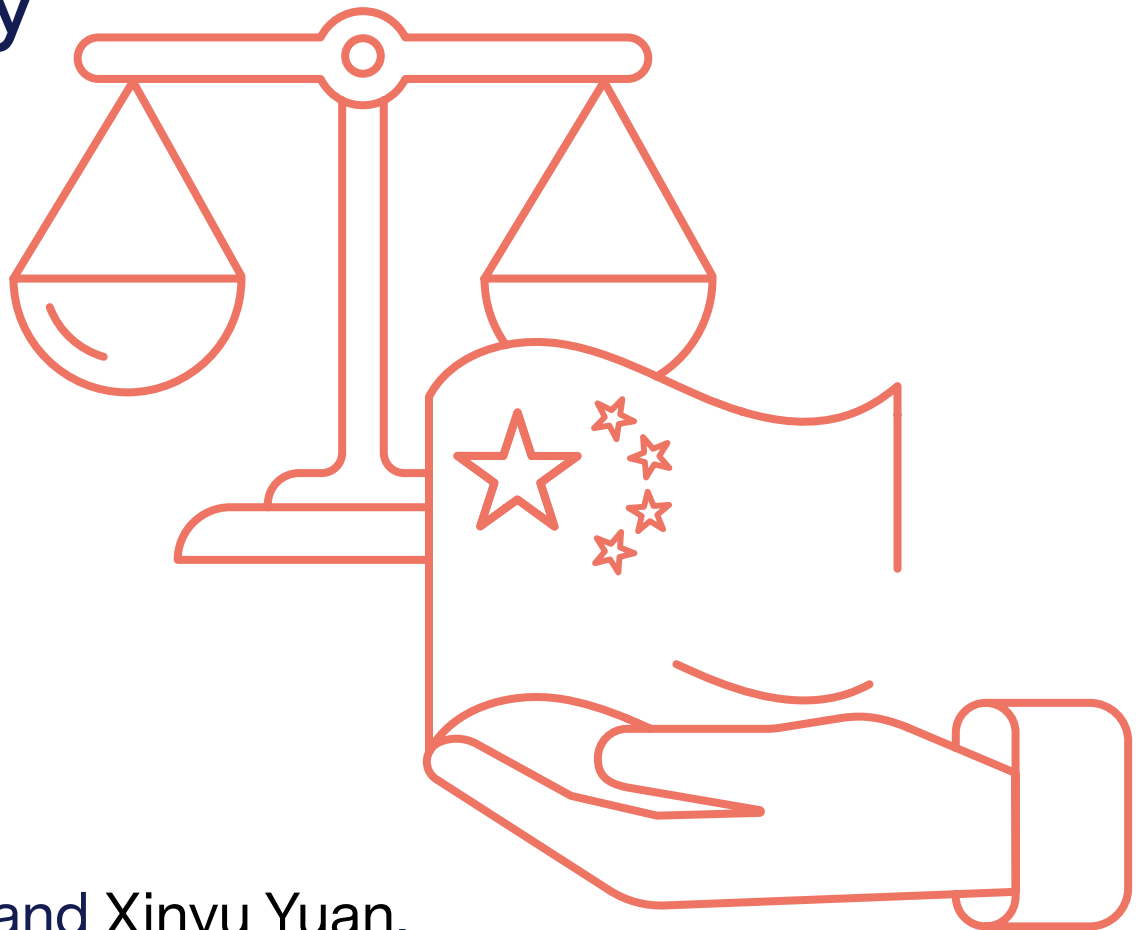


Chinese Conceptions of Peace

Historical foundations
and implications for
contemporary conflict
agency



Pascal Abb and Xinyu Yuan,
Peace Research Institute Frankfurt

List of abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CNI22	China Nuclear Industry 22nd Construction Co
CPC	Communist Party of China
F-FDTL	Timor-Leste Defence Force/Forcas de Defesa de Timor Leste
GDI	Global Development Initiative
IR	International Relations
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PKO	Peacekeeping Operation
PRC	People’s Republic of China
R2P	Responsibility to Protect
UN	United Nations
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNTAET	United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor

Executive summary

Over the past 25 years, as it has risen to the status of a great world power, China has become deeply enmeshed in attempts to manage global conflicts. It has emerged as a major participant in UN peacekeeping operations, engaging in diplomatic conflict mediation and providing significant developmental assistance to conflict states. However, China’s approach to peacemaking and conflict management differs significantly from that pursued by Western states. As a traditional champion of state sovereignty, China has insisted that interventions can only be undertaken with the consent of host states and should refrain from pushing them towards political reforms. China advocates a “developmental peace” approach that prioritizes economic development and capacity-building, arguing that development leads to peace by becoming a cause on which deeply torn societies can find common ground. This is positioned as an alternative to Western-sponsored programs in which “liberal peace” is based on political inclusion.

This report explores the development of China’s approach to peace across traditional Chinese philosophy and modern political doctrines, showing how this intellectual history has shaped contemporary Chinese peace agency. It finds that the “developmental peace” concept is mainly influenced by two factors: China’s own experience of creating domestic stability through economic growth, and the lingering influence of Marxist thought on economic determinism. It is largely unconnected to China’s rich philosophical traditions and declines to take on board international scholarship on the often-controversial nature of development.

Nevertheless, China’s growing interest in peacebuilding and overlapping aims in state stabilization can create spaces in which opportunities for cooperation with European actors can appear, while opening channels for a deeper engagement on the theories and practices of peace. We make four practical recommendations on how this can be achieved:

- Expand European engagement in UN peacekeeping, creating practical learning opportunities through joint deployments with China;
- Promote exchanges between Europe and China on peacebuilding in war zones, exploring shared aims in stabilization efforts;
- Promote conflict sensitivity in development cooperation by inserting these practices into joint development projects with China;
- Support peace and conflict studies in China, disseminating international scholarship on this issue and encouraging the development of a more complex and grounded Chinese approach to peace.

Table of contents

List of abbreviations

Executive summary

I.	Introduction	5
----	--------------	---

II.	Historical Chinese peace discourses	7
-----	-------------------------------------	---

Legalism

Daoism

Confucianism

Mohism

III.	Contemporary Chinese peace discourses	14
------	---------------------------------------	----

From revolution to stability-seeking

Summary: traditional and modern Chinese peace thought

IV.	The rise of “developmental peace” in the 21st century	18
-----	---	----

V.	Chinese peace in practice	22
----	---------------------------	----

Case study: Chinese engagement in Timor-Leste

VI.	Conclusions	28
-----	-------------	----

VII.	Recommendations	30
------	-----------------	----

Literature

Imprint

Introduction

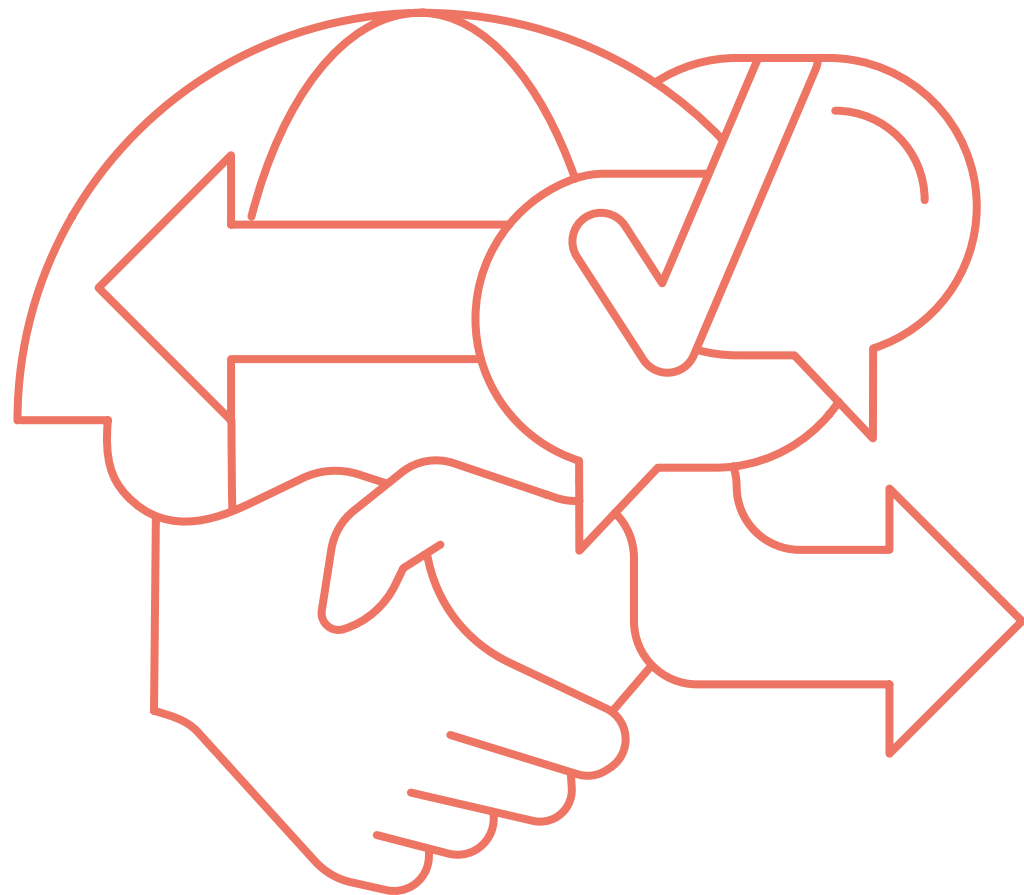
Over the past 25 years, as it has risen to the status of a great world power, China has become deeply enmeshed in attempts to manage global conflicts. It has moved from opposing to supporting United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions and now contributes more peacekeeping troops than any other permanent member of the UN Security Council (Hirono and Lanteigne 2013, Fung 2016). It has also become increasingly engaged in diplomatic mediation: Chinese special envoys have conducted shuttle diplomacy in conflicts ranging from Ukraine to Myanmar, and in 2023, China hosted the final round of Saudi-Iranian talks that yielded a breakthrough agreement to reopen diplomatic relations (Baghernia 2024, Sun and Zoubir 2018). China’s “Belt and Road” (BRI) and Global Development (GDI) initiatives have also seen it emerge as a key provider of developmental assistance in conflict-affected states, mainly due to its unique willingness to offer large-scale investment in high-risk areas (Abb, Swaine and Jones 2021), with over \$60 billion committed to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor alone.

In all these efforts, China has stressed an approach to peacemaking and conflict management that differs significantly from that pursued by Western states. China finds interventionism of any kind difficult to reconcile with its traditional insistence on upholding state sovereignty as the core norm of international relations (Garwood-Gowers 2016). Likewise, rather than exercising political pressure to reform a host country’s institutions, Chinese peacebuilding practices are aimed at strengthening the capacities of whatever governments they find in place. Above all, Chinese agency is marked by a reliance on developmental efforts, informed by a belief that economic and political stability are inextricably intertwined (Yuan 2022).

This emerging paradigm, which Chinese theorists have named “developmental peace,” is juxtaposed with the Western notion of a “liberal” peace (He 2017, Kuo 2020); a concept that has also increasingly featured in Chinese statements at the UNSC (Xinhua 2019). This program is often grounded in China’s own success in achieving development and overcoming periods of political instability, as well as lessons learned from its experiences in African conflict environments. It is also a product of contemporary Chinese national interests and strategies – the maintenance of China’s own illiberal regime, the global acquisition of resources, the advancement of sovereigntist international norms, and its quest for leadership among states in the Global South that are also weary of liberal transformation efforts. However, an angle that has received relatively little interest is its rootedness in a distinct cultural attitude towards peace and conflict: China’s basic conception of “peace”, understandings of the causes of conflict, and pathways to conflict prevention and resolution are all shaped by specific Chinese traditions of political thought and practical statecraft.

This report aims to disentangle the practical considerations, strategic imperatives, ideological constraints, and cultural notions that inform contemporary Chinese conflict agency. This will help us to understand how Chinese power is unfolding in this field, which practices are likely to persist, where there is potential for cooperation with international initiatives – and where both sides are pursuing fundamentally incompatible aims. This practical information is relevant for anyone pursuing peacebuilding, diplomatic, or developmental initiatives in the same space as Chinese actors, whether they seek to coordinate or compete with their offers.

The report begins with an overview of classical Chinese discourses about peace and conflict, focusing on how major schools of thought developed these concepts and where they differ from Western understandings. This is paired with a discussion of the role these concepts play in the modern political landscape, and how they are shaped by the ideology and governance of the Communist Party of China (CPC). This is followed by a detailed examination of China’s contemporary “developmental peace” doctrine, showing how these strands of thought inform it. The report concludes by examining how China’s current peace and conflict agency works in practice and offers several recommendations for how Western peacebuilding actors can relate to it.



Historical Chinese peace discourses

Chinese political thought and popular narratives are deeply shaped by classical philosophies from the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods (c. 770–221 BCE); a time when China experienced constant warfare, the collapse of feudalism, rising territorial sovereignty, and volatile inter-state relations¹ (Hui, 2004). This section provides a brief overview of the key peace-related ideas from major philosophical schools of the period, including Legalism, Daoism, Confucianism, and Mohism. Although these traditions did not formulate systematic theories of peace, they engaged with foundational concepts such as order (*zhi* 治), unity (*he* 合), security (*an* 安), tranquillity (*jing* 靖), and harmony (*he* 和). These notions, especially the Confucian concept of harmony, continue to inform contemporary Chinese political discourses on peace and security, though often in selective and syncretic ways, and detached from their original emphasis on a coherent moral order extending from the individual to inter-state relations.

Legalism

Legalism was a prominent school of thought during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, serving as a guiding framework for governance in certain periods of ancient China. However, Legalist thinking has rarely discussed the concept of peace, as it primarily focuses on how to strengthen state power and secure dominance within an inherently hostile interstate system.² Since Legalism assumes that lasting peace at inter-state level is elusive, it prioritizes the security and survival of a state through military power (Yan 2009). At the intra-state level, it emphasizes order and impartial rule by law, envisioning the ideal state as one where “the people dwell in peace and prosperity...society is effectively governed...and the army is strong.”³ In this vein, Legalism is preoccupied with state power, particularly military strength, rather than with peace as an end in itself.

Legalist thinkers see material scarcity as a fundamental cause of conflict, as it drives violent competition over limited resources. For instance, the Legalist philosopher Han Fei (c. 281–233 BCE) argued that resource scarcity, when coupled with population growth, inevitably generates conflict. He wrote: “When the people are few and resources are abundant, they do not contend... When the people are many, but goods and resources are scarce, their labour is toilsome and their means of subsistence meagre; therefore, they contend.”⁴ Han Fei further held that this resource-driven conflict could not be resolved through institutional mechanisms such as punishment and reward.⁵

At the inter-state level, Legalism concentrates on securing military and strategic advantages over one’s rivals. Within the state, it offers two primary mechanisms for preventing conflict which are closely associated with both a materialistic understanding of conflict drivers and an overriding emphasis on law-based domestic order. The first mechanism is the promotion of livelihood production, particularly food, to prevent the type of disorder which is driven by famine and poverty. Guan Zhong (d. 645 BCE), a Legalist thinker and statesman, argued that securing people’s basic subsistence needs was the foundation of morality and social stability.⁶

Rulers should therefore prioritize agricultural productivity and ensure well-stocked granaries to maintain food supplies.⁷ The second mechanism is the impartial enforcement of law, which prevents conflict through a rigid system of rewards and punishments rather than individual virtue or loyalty.

Han Fei argued that to achieve order and stability, “an enlightened ruler should provide ranks and stipends to incentivize the people [...] and use punishment to instil fear among subordinates.”⁸ Moreover, law enforcement (by rulers and officials) should uphold strict impartiality, free from the influence of personal relationships, emotions, or subjective moral judgments.⁹ Legalism also emphasizes the need to identify and suppress the roots of disorder, particularly subversive writings (singling out Confucian teachings) and the private armed forces of roaming knights (*youxia* 游侠), both of which were seen as undermining the concentration of state power and the imposition of top-down order.¹⁰

Daoism

For Daoism, peace is embedded in a much broader notion of *Harmony* (*he*和), a holistic ideal that spans interpersonal relations, societal order, body-mind balance, and interactions between humans and nature (Lee, Yang, and Wang 2009).

In Daoist thought, harmony (*he*和) arises from an alignment with Dao (the natural order of the universe) in which *yin* and *yang* are balanced, the natural course of development is followed, and forced interference is restrained. It reflects a profound tolerance for difference (Lee, Yang, and Wang 2009), acknowledging not only the interdependence of diverse entities but also their relativity and potential for mutual conversion¹¹. Building on this view of relativity and interdependence, Daoism sees conflict as a disruption of the natural order caused by excessive policies, institutions, regulations, and moral teachings.

Zhuang Zhou (c.369 – c.286 BC), a Daoist philosopher and author of the classic text *Zhuangzi*, argued that overbearing institutions can generate conditions for large-scale disorder. In *Zhuangzi- Quxie*, he suggested that the rise of sages, with their elaborate rules and moral prescriptions, paradoxically gave birth to “great thieves” (*dadao* 大盗), or powerful disruptors of social order. In this view, sages and disruptors are mutually entangled: so long as there are sages, there will be “great thieves.” Order cannot be restored by penalizing these disruptors; only by relinquishing the very moral and institutional burdens that give rise to them.¹²

In Daoism, the pursuit of harmony embodies a quiet resistance to the quest for power, fame, wealth, and the use of violence. To prevent conflict, it advocates for self-imposed isolation and a return to an idealized pastoral life with minimal material needs and social interactions. This ideal is vividly captured in the *Daodejing*: “A small country with few people... though there are tools and vehicles, they are unused; though there are weapons and armour, they are not displayed... Neighbours can see each other, hear each other’s roosters and dogs, yet the people grow old and die without ever visiting one another.”¹³ The path to peace and harmony lies through *Wu wei* (无为, non-intervention in the unfolding of the natural order, or *Dao*). Similarly, the *Zhuangzi* argues that: “when a noble person must engage with the world, it is best to do so through non-intervention [...] through non-intervention, one preserves the natural integrity of life.”¹⁴

Confucianism

While Confucianism engages substantially with the concept of peace, also as part of the broader notion of harmony (*He*和), its understanding of harmony differs from the Daoist emphasis on natural order and non-intervention. In Confucian philosophy, harmony is concerned with orderly, norm-based social interactions and peace, in this context, is not merely the absence of war but is closely tied to a positive vision of an orderly and harmonious society.

Confucian harmony represents a universal ethical, political, and social ideal. A harmonious order is grounded in internalized social norms regarding an individual’s positions, roles, and obligations toward family, friends, and the state. Hence, the micro-foundation of harmony lies in morally cultivated individuals (Kang, 2014: 56). Achieving harmony requires citizens to internalize ethical norms through education, self-reflection, and the observance of rites, thus accepting their socially designated roles and refraining from pursuing other people’s positions or interests (Kang, 2014). Moreover, a ruler’s exemplary conduct is particularly crucial in setting the standards for moral behaviour and social harmony (Fu, 2015). Rulers who display moral virtue and follow behavioural norms secure the legitimacy of their governance and elicit voluntary respect from others.¹⁵

At the same time, Confucian *harmony* (*he*) is a multi-layered and holistic concept, encompassing individuals, families, societies, and the world under heaven (天下 *Tianxia*), with each layer mutually reinforcing the others (Kang, 2014). Harmony requires coherence across all levels: macro-level order cannot exist without micro-level harmony, and vice versa. It also entails both horizontal and vertical dimensions: horizontally, it requires peaceful coexistence among states (协和万邦 *xiehe wangbang*)¹⁶; vertically, it emphasizes the willing acceptance of orders from above. For example, “when orders are issued and the people rejoice, that is called harmony” (发号出令而民说, 谓之和).¹⁷ Like Daoism, Confucianism emphasizes that harmony (和) does not mean uniformity or the elimination of differences. For Daoism, different entities are inter-dependent and co-constitutive of the natural order¹⁸; while for Confucianism, the maintenance of distinctions (异别) is essential to an orderly society.¹⁹ Harmony, in this sense, signifies peaceful coexistence in diversity rather than enforced sameness (Kang, 2014).

Confucianism also recognizes that conflicts can be driven by shortages in staples such as food, clothing, or housing (Yan, 2009). However, unlike Legalism, Confucian thinkers interpret material scarcity as symptomatic of a failure of benevolent governance (仁政 *Renzheng*). Confucian writings explicitly criticize exploitative and harsh rule (苛政 *Kezheng*), which is characterized by excessive punishments, heavy taxes, and forced labour, which undermine agricultural productivity and people’s well-being. According to Confucian theory, these harsh conditions inevitably lead to unrest and the collapse of social order.²⁰

To prevent conflict, Confucianism emphasises the importance of securing people’s basic livelihoods while fostering moral cultivation. Mencius, the Second Sage (次圣) of Confucianism, paid particular attention to ensuring the subsistence of disadvantaged groups such as the elderly, orphans, and those who had lost their primary means of support.²¹ He elaborated on the relationship between steady possessions (恒产, *Hengchan*) and a steady mind (恒心, *Hengxin*), arguing that an absence of the basic necessities of life will lead to social disorder and undermine the legitimacy of governance.²² According to this view, fundamental conflict prevention strategies include guaranteeing people’s basic means of subsistence, providing support during difficult times, and averting starvation and displacement.²³

While Daoism emphasizes a retreat into nature and minimal social engagement as the basis for peace, Confucianism advocates achieving harmony through morally guided social interactions.

More specifically, Confucianism identifies four fundamental virtues that are essential for order and harmony, namely 仁 (benevolence toward family/subordinates), 义 (righteousness and respect), 礼 (ritual propriety),²⁴ and 智²⁵ (the wisdom to understand and uphold the other three virtues). These virtues define societal positions and obligations within a hierarchical kinship-based order. People lose clarity about their social roles when these norms break down, leading to power struggles that dissolve into chaos and disorder (Yan, 2009). Confucianism therefore holds that harmony can only be achieved by establishing a moral order grounded in the four virtues. Within this order, rulers and those in superior social positions exemplify these virtues, benevolent governance (仁政) is practiced, and conduct is regulated through propriety and the observance of rituals (礼乐). Rulers are expected to lead by moral example, fostering voluntary compliance with their rule without resorting to coercion (Kang 2014).

It is worth noting that Confucian philosophers typically do not follow the linear understanding of peace processes found in contemporary literature, which progresses through the stages of conflict outbreak, escalation, resolution, and peace consolidation. They are more likely to adopt a cyclical perspective in which peace and conflict alternate or coexist in varying degrees. For instance, Mencius (c. 371 – c. 289 BC) observes that “Since antiquity, the world has alternated between order and chaos”.²⁶ From this perspective, Confucianism sees the risk of conflict as ever-present and considers the pursuit of peace to be an ongoing, enduring endeavour.

Mohism

Mohism, which also emerged in the Spring and Autumn period, emphasizes ethics, logic, and rationality. It views peace as integral to an ideal society; namely one that promotes prosperity and universal love (兼爱, *Jiān'ài*) while earning genuine respect and moral admiration from others. Mozi (c. 470 – c. 391 BCE), the founder of Mohism, describes an ideal rule as a place where: “The hungry are fed, the cold are clothed, and the disturbed have order [...] the world is harmonious and the people prosperous. Those nearby feel content, and those far away are drawn.”²⁷ For Mozi, people’s material well-being and satisfaction are fundamental components of peace.

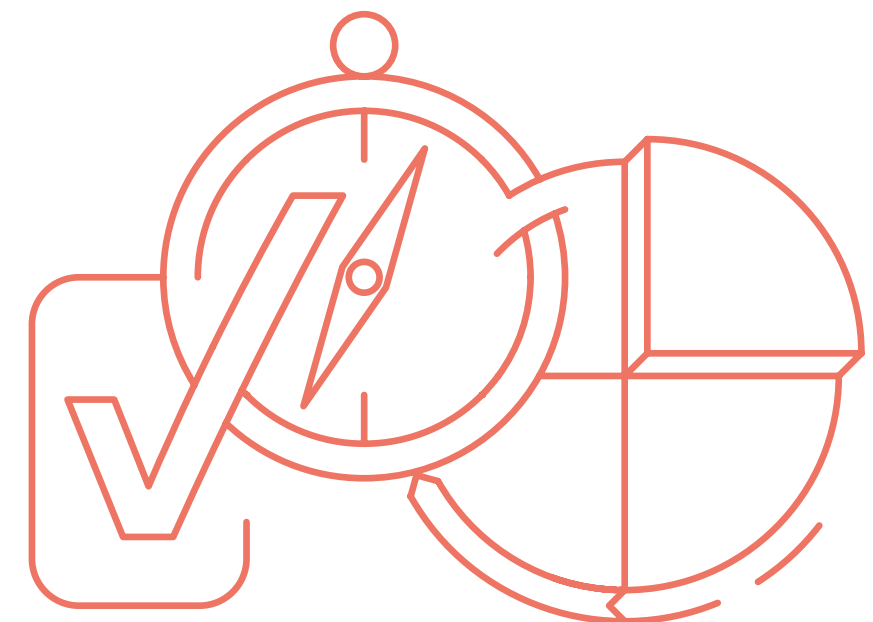
Mohism attributes conflict to an absence of compassion and universal love (兼爱),²⁸ arguing that humans are naturally self-interested and lack an innate compassion for others. This lack of universal love (兼爱) leads “the strong to exploit the weak, the rich to oppress the poor, the majority to oppress the minority, the honoured to disdain the humble, and the cunning to deceive the simple”.²⁹ Mohism therefore advocates for a mutual and universal love where all individuals care equally for one another regardless of status or kinship.³⁰ This principle is expressed in the doctrine of “loving one another impartially and promoting mutual benefit” (兼相爱, 交相利).³¹ In this regard, Mohism strongly opposes the Confucian ideal of moral order grounded in social stratification and distinctions of status or kinship.³² From a Mohist perspective, practicing mutual love restrains selfishness, fosters mutual respect for each other’s interests, and prevents conflict from arising. Like Confucianism, Mohism maintains that rulers have a primary duty to uphold these principles as moral exemplars,³³ although the specific values that the two traditions emphasize are different.

In addition to promoting mutual love, Mohism emphasizes the principle of non-aggression (非攻 *feigong*) in dealing with inter-state relations and condemns all forms of offensive warfare as inherently unjust and destructive. Mozi equates war with mass murder and underscores its criminal nature, arguing that: “The murder of one person is called unrighteous and incurs the death penalty. By this reasoning, the murder of a hundred persons (in war) is a hundred times more unrighteous and should incur a hundred death penalties.”³⁴

Mozi also emphasizes that war contradicts a state’s rational interests as it leads to enormous economic and human costs (including widespread death), the disruption of agricultural production, and the depletion of national resources.³⁵ Therefore, war is not only morally unacceptable but also counterproductive to a state’s long-term interests. To prevent violent conflict, Mozi advocates the collective moral condemnation of aggressive wars by other states, rejecting both the passive tolerance and active endorsement of aggression.³⁶ In this sense, Mohism emphasizes restraint in the use of force and the internalization of a “non-war norm” as essential pathways to achieving peace.

In conclusion, classical Chinese philosophical schools, particularly Daoism, Confucianism, and Mohism, advance diverse conceptions of peace and the conditions necessary to achieve it. For these traditions, peace is often embedded within a broader ideal that is characterized by harmony, moral virtue in social interactions, material well-being, and the peaceful co-existence of differences. While Daoism adopts an isolationist approach, envisioning peace through an alignment with the natural order and a minimization of social engagement, Confucianism and Mohism are more proactive, articulating normative principles to guide peaceful social interactions through kin-based norms in Confucianism and universal love in Mohism. However, these norms and moral virtues cannot be imposed from above; according to Confucianism and Mohism, they must be cultivated through education, exemplary conduct, and self-reflection. Except for Legalism, these schools generally denounce military power and coercion, favouring order and stability through moral example and voluntary compliance.

These schools identify the lack of basic necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter as key drivers of conflict, with some viewing it as a root cause and others as a symptom of failed governance. Certain traditions, notably Confucianism and Mohism, closely associate the emergence of conflict with the decline of social norms and individual moral conduct, particularly that of rulers. While they emphasize the importance of justice and legitimacy for achieving a peaceful and lasting order, they link these concerns to the moral qualities of rulers and advocate for compassionate policies. Although they do not develop systematic theories of conflict prevention they do identify key conditions for peace, including secure livelihoods, a moral social order, and benevolent leadership. These classical ideas continue to be selectively mobilized in contemporary Chinese political discourse, justifying an emphasis on poverty eradication and non-coercive governance, while being reinterpreted within a sovereignty-centred international system.



¹ Note that the “states” discussed in the classical thought were fundamentally different from modern sovereign states, existing within a hierarchical, tributary, and kinship-based order.

² For a more detailed analysis of Legalist theory on international relations, see Yan X. (2009).

³ Han Feizi, Youdu (韩非子· 有度). Paragraph 2. Originaltext: “能去私曲就公法者，民安而国治；能去私行行公法者，则兵强而敌弱”. See Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/legalism/ens?searchu=%E6%B2%BB>

⁴ Han Feizi, Wudu(韩非子·五蠹) :Paragraph 2. Original-text: 人民少而财有馀，故民不争.... 人民众而货财寡，事力劳而供养薄，故民争， See Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/hanfeizi/wu-du/ens>.

⁵ Han Feizi, Wudu(韩非子·五蠹) :Paragraph 2. Original-text:虽倍赏累罚而不免于乱. See Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/hanfeizi/wu-du/ens>.

⁶ Guanzi, On Shepherding the People (管子•牧民). Paragraph 1: “When the granaries are full, the people will know propriety and moderation; when clothing and food are sufficient, they will know honour and shame... When the four cardinal principles are not upheld, the state will perish” (倉廩實，則知禮節；衣食足，則知榮辱 [...] 四維不張，國乃滅亡). See Chinese Text Project: <https://ctextorg/guanzi/mu-min/zh>.

⁷ Guanzi, On Shepherding the People (管子•牧民). Paragraph 1: “Any ruler who holds land and shepherds the people must focus on the cycles of the four seasons and secure stability through well-stocked granaries” (凡有地牧民者，務在四時，守在倉廩). See Chinese Text Project: <https://ctext.org/guanzi/mu-min/zh>.

⁸ Guanzi, Ming Fa Jie (管子, 明法解). Paragraph 4. “In the governance of an enlightened ruler, ranks and stipends are bestowed to incentivize the people; Punishments are instituted to instil fear among subordinates; Without ranks and stipends, the ruler would lack the means to motivate the people; without punishments, he would lack the means to command the multitude. Hence, when ministers behave properly and obey orders, it is not out of devotion to the ruler, but to secure benefits and avoid harm. Likewise, when officials uphold the law without corruption, it is not out of love for the ruler, but to obtain rank and reward while avoiding punishment.” Original text: 明主之治也，縣爵祿以勸其民；故無爵祿則主無以勸民；無刑罰則主無以威眾；故人臣之行理奉命者，非以愛主也，且以就利而避害也。百官之奉法無姦者，非以愛主也，欲以受爵祿而避刑罰也。 See Chinese Text Project: <https://ctext.org/guanzi/ming-fa-jie?searchu=%E5%A5%89%E6%B3%95&searchmode=showall#result>.

⁹ Guanzi, Renfa (管子, 任法). Paragraph 8: “In orderly governance, distinctions of kinship, status, or personal virtue are set aside, and judgments are made solely according to objective standards. Punishment does not breed resentment, nor does reward engender gratitude, for both are administered through impartial law, as unselfish as Heaven and Earth. In such a system, officials advance no private claims, scholars no private arguments, and the people no private opinions; all open themselves fully to receive guidance from above.” (“治世則不然，不知親疏遠近貴賤美惡，以度量斷之，其殺戮人者不怨也，其賞賜人者不德也。以法制行之，如天地之無私也，是以官無私論，士無私議，民無私說，皆虛其匈以聽於上”). See Chinese Text Project: <https://ctext.org/guanzi/ren-fa?searchu=%E4%BA%B2%E7%96%8F&searchmode=showall#result>

¹⁰ Han Feizi, Wudu (韓非子• 五蠹). Paragraph 8: “Confucians subvert law with their writings, and knights transgress prohibitions with their arms” (儒以文亂法，俠以武犯禁). See Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/hanfeizi/wu-du/zh>.

¹¹ Dao De Jing, paragraph 2: “it is that existence and non-existence give birth the one to (the idea of) the other; that difficulty and ease produce the one (the idea of) the other; that length and shortness fashion out the one the figure of the other; that (the ideas of) height and lowness arise from the contrast of the one with the other; that the musical notes and tones become harmonious through the relation of one with another; and that being before and behind give the idea of one following another. ” (故有無相生，難易相成，長短相較，高下相傾，音聲相和，前後相隨). See Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/dao-de-jing>

¹² Zhuangzi- Quxie (庄子·胠篋), paragraph 2: “With the advent of sages, great thieves emerge. Only by dispelling the authority of sages and abandoning the pursuit of thieves can true order begin. [...] when the sages are gone, great thieves will not arise. The world will then be tranquil and free of disturbance. But so long as sages remain, great thieves will never disappear” (圣人生而大盜起.” 埶击圣人，纵舍盜賊，而天下始治矣... 圣人已死，则大盜不起，天下平而无故矣。圣人不死，大盜不止). See Chinese Text Project: <https://ctext.org/zhuangzi/cutting-open-satchels/ens?searchu=%E4%B9%B1&searchmode=showall#result>.

¹³ Dao De jing, Paragrah 80. Original text: “小国寡民。使有什伯之器而不用；使民重死而不远徙。虽有舟舆，无所乘之，虽有甲兵，无所陈之.... 邻国相望，鸡犬之声相闻，民至老死，不相往来。”(xiaoguo guamin.shi you shibo zhiqi er buyong; shi min zhongsi er bu yuanxi.suiyou zhouyu, wusuo cheng zhi,suiyou jiabing, wusuo chen zhi [...] linguo xiangwang, jiquan zhisheng xiangwen.minzhi laosi, buxiang wanglai).

¹⁴ Zhuangzi, Letting Be, and Exercising Forbearance (庄子·在有 Zhuangzi Zaiyou). Paragraph 1: “故君子不得已而临邪天下，莫若无为。无为也，而后安其性命之情.” See Chinese Text Project <https://ctext.org/zhuangzi/letting-be-and-exercising-forbearance/ens?searchu=%E7%84%A1%E7%82%BA&searchmode=showall#result>.

¹⁵ 《论语 子路》：“上好礼，则民莫敢不敬；上好义，则民莫敢不服；上好信，则民莫敢不用情。”

¹⁶ Shangshu, Canon of Yao. (尚书- 尧典. Paragraph 1. Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/shang-shu/canon-of-yao/ens>.

¹⁷ Liji, Jingjie经解 paragraph 4. Chinese text project. <https://ctext.org/liji/jing-jie/ens>

¹⁸ Wenzi (文子), Daoyuan (道原). Paragraph 6: “The way of the Universe is that existence and non-existence give rise to each other, and difficulty and ease complement each other.” (故天之道有无相生, 难易相成 gu tian zhi dao youwu xiangsheng nanyi xiangcheng). See Chinese text project. <https://ctext.org/wenzi/dao-yuan>.

¹⁹ Liji (礼记). Royal Regulations (王制 Wang Zhi). Paragraph 79: “The six ceremonial observances [...] maintenance of distinctions” (六礼: 异别). See Chinese Text Project: <https://ctext.org/liji/wang-zhi/ens>.

²⁰ Liji, Tan Gong II (礼记·檀弓下). Paragraph 193: “Oppressive government is more terrible than tigers” (苟政猛于虎也). Chinese Text Project. <https://ctextorg/liji/tan-gong-ii/ens>.

²¹ Mengzi, Liang Hui Wang I (孟子• 梁惠王上). Paragraph 3: “persons of seventy wearing silk and eating flesh, and the black-haired people suffering neither from hunger nor cold” (七十者衣帛食肉，黎民不飢不寒). <https://ctext.org/mengzi/liang-hui-wang-i/ens>.

²² Mengzi, Teng Wen Gong I (孟子•滕文公上). Paragraph 3: “In the way of the people: those who have a stable livelihood will have a stable heart; those without a stable livelihood will not have a stable heart [...] If there is no steady heart, then they will indulge in lawlessness, depravity, excess, and indulgence—there is nothing they will not do.” (民之为道也，有恒产者有恒心，无恒产者无恒心...苟无恒心，放辟邪侈，无不为已”. See Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/mengzi/teng-wen-gong-i/ens>.

²³ Mengzi, Liang Hui Wang I (孟子•滕文公上). Paragraph 7: “If the people's livelihood cannot serve their parents, and cannot support their wives and children, even in good years they live in constant hardship, and in bad years they cannot escape death. Then they are merely struggling to survive, fearful of not making ends meet. How could they possibly have the leisure to practice propriety and righteousness?” (今也制民之产，仰不足以事父母，俯不足以畜妻子，乐岁终身苦，凶年不免于死亡。此惟救死而恐不赡，奚暇治礼义哉?) See Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/mengzi/liang-hui-wang-i/ens>.

²⁴ Book of Rites, The State of Equilibrium and Harmony (礼记·中庸). Paragraph 20: “Benevolence is the characteristic element of humanity, and the great exercise of it is in loving relatives. Righteousness is the accordance of actions with what is right, and the great exercise of it is in honouring the worthy. The decreasing measures of the love due to relatives, and the steps in the honour due to the worthy, are produced by the principle of propriety” (“仁者，人也，亲亲为大；义者，宜也，尊贤为大. 亲亲之杀，尊贤之等，礼所生也”). See Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/liji/zhong-yong>.

²⁵ Mencius. Li Lou I (孟子·离娄章句上). Paragraph 27: “The richest fruit of benevolence is this: the service of one's parents. The richest fruit of righteousness is this: the obeying one's elder brothers. The richest fruit of wisdom is this: the knowing those two things, and not departing from them. The richest fruit of propriety is this: the ordering and adorning those two things.” (“仁之实，事亲是也；义之实，从兄是也；智之实，知斯二者弗去是也；礼之实，节文斯二者是也.”). See Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/mengzi/li-lou-i>.

²⁶ Translation from the original text: “天下之生久矣，一治一乱” (*Tianxia Zhi Sheng Jiu Yi, Yi Zhi Yi Luan*). Mencius, Teng Wen Gong II (孟子·滕文公下). Paragraph 14: “Since antiquity, the world has alternated between order and cha See Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/mengzi/teng-wen-gong-i>.

²⁷ Translation from the original text: “饥者得食，寒者得衣，乱者得治...天下和，庶民阜，是以近者安之，远者归之”. Mozi, Exaltation of the Virtuous III (墨子·尚贤下). Paragraphs 4 and 6. See Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/mozi/exaltation-of-the-virtuous-iii/ens>.

²⁸ Mengzi, Universal Love I (孟子·兼爱上) . Paragraph 2: “Suppose we try to locate the cause of disorder, we shall find it lies in the want of mutual love.” (當察亂何自起?起不相愛). See Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/mozi/universal-love-i/ens>.

²⁹ Translated from the original text: “天下之人皆不相爱，强必执弱，富必侮贫，贵必敖贱，诈必欺愚。凡天下祸篡怨恨，其所以起者，以不相爱生也.” Mengzi, Universal Love II (孟子·兼爱中) . Paragraph 2. See Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/mozi/universal-love-ii/ens>.

³⁰ Mengzi, Universal Love III (孟子·兼爱下), paragraph 6: “The love is so wide and universal that it is like the sun and the moon shining upon the world without partiality” (兼爱天下之博大也，譬之日月，兼照天下之無有私也). See Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/mozi/universal-love-iii/ens>.

³¹ Translated from the original text: “兼相爱, 交相利”. Mengzi, Universal Love II (墨子·兼爱中), paragraph 4. See Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/mozi/universal-love-ii/ens>.

³² Mohism explicitly opposed the core doctrines of Confucianism, with an entire chapter titled “Against Confucians” (非儒), in which it particularly criticized Confucian beliefs in fatalism, status and kinship-based order, and the excessive emphasis on ritualism.

³³ Mozi. Universal Love II (墨子·兼爱中). Paragraph 4: “Whoever loves others is loved by others; whoever benefits others is benefited by others; whoever hates others is hated by others; whoever injures others is injured by others. Then, what difficulty is there with it (universal love)? Only, the ruler fails to embody it in his government and the ordinary man in his conduct.” (“夫愛人者，人亦從而愛之；利人者，人亦從而利之；惡人者，人亦從而惡之；害人者，人亦從而害之。此何難之有焉，特上不以為政而士不以為行故也). See Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/mozi/universal-love-ii>.

³⁴ Translated from the original text: “杀一人谓之不义，必有一死罪矣，若以此说往，杀十人十重不义，必有十死罪矣；杀百人百重不义，必有百死罪矣.” Mozi, Condemnation of Offensive War I (墨子• 非攻上). Paragraph 2. See Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/mozi/book-5/ens>.

³⁵ Mozi, Condemnation of Offensive War II (墨子· 非攻中). Paragraph 2: “If it (war) is in spring, it will take people away from sowing and planting; if it is in autumn it will take people away from reaping and harvesting. Should they be taken away in either of these seasons, innumerable people would die of hunger and cold. And, when the army sets out, the bamboo arrows, the feather flags, the house tents, the armour, the shields, the sword hilts -- innumerable quantities of these will break and rot and never come back.”(“春则废民耕稼树艺，秋则废民获敛。今唯毋废一时，则百姓饥寒冻饿而死者，不可胜数。今尝计军上，竹箭羽旄幄幕，甲盾拔劫，往而靡坏糜烂不反者，不可胜数.”). See Chinese Text Project: <https://ctext.org/mozi/condemnation-of-offensive-war-ii/ens>.

³⁶ Mozi, Condemnation of Offensive War I (墨子· 非攻上). Paragarah 2: “when a little wrong is committed people know that they should condemn it, but when such a great wrong as attacking a state is committed people do not know that they should condemn it. On the contrary, it is applauded, called righteous. Can this be said to be knowing the difference between the righteous and the unrighteous?” (“今小為非，則知而非之。大為非攻國，則不知非，從而譽之，謂之義。此可謂知義與不義之辯乎?” See Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/mozi/book-5/ens>.

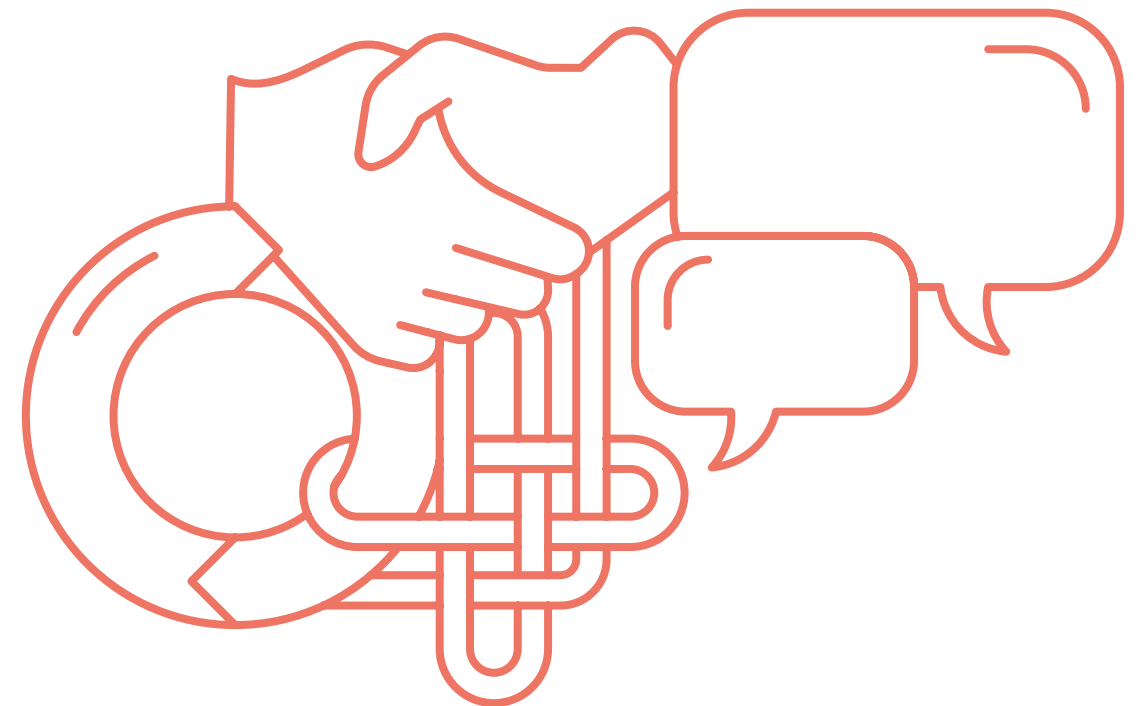
Contemporary Chinese peace discourses

The ascent of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 led to a radical break with many of the traditional elements of Chinese political and social thought. Chinese Communism traces its roots back to the May Fourth Movement in the early 20th century, which embraced Western-inspired modernity as the only salvation to China's humiliation at hands of imperialist powers. As a result, the new ruling elite sought China's rapid transformation from its traditional agrarianism to an industrial economy. In foreign policy, the PRC embraced a program of decolonization and support for world revolution, initially in close alliance with the USSR (Garver 2015). The PRC's intervention in the Korean War (1950-1953) brought it into direct conflict with the US and its allies and a UN peacekeeping operation under the auspices of the UN, while it subsequently emerged as a global sponsor of left-wing revolutionary movements from Cambodia to Angola (Jackson 1995). Under Mao Zedong's rule (1949-1976), China's approach to domestic and international affairs was a radical break with the past. While "banishing exploitation and poverty in a peaceful way" and "striving for the noble cause of world peace" were officially enshrined as state aims in the 1954 PRC constitution (NPC 1954), in practice the CPC believed that the conditions for peace had first to be established by revolutionary violence where necessary.

To understand Mao's – and the early CPC's – outlook on peace and violence, it is important to recall the conditions under which it was forged. From 1927 to 1949, the CPC was continuously embroiled in civil war and international conflict. Following Lenin, its leaders saw the 20th century as an era of "war and revolution", where imperialist warfare was the inevitable result of capitalist competition. The best example of conflict thought in early sinified Marxism-Leninism can be found in Mao's seminal 1937 essay "On Contradiction" (矛盾论 *maodun lun*), which linked metaphysical theorizing to applied war strategy (Mao 1937). In Mao's view, contradictions are not only an inherent property of all things and social phenomena; they are the drivers of continuous development. In social affairs, contradictions are manifested in the form of class antagonisms over the possession of economic resources, spurring successive revolutions until eventually being resolved in a classless society. Although class conflict is usually the "principal" contradiction, it can be temporarily superseded by imperialist aggression that necessitates short-term cooperation among otherwise antagonistic forces – the basis for the CPC's participation in a united front against Japan during WW2 (ibid.).

Two points are important here. Firstly, war is conceptualized as an epiphenomenon of underlying economic structures, and (socialist) revolution is seen as the only human action that can resolve its contradictions – capitalism begets war, war begets revolution, revolution overcomes capitalism, and this enables peace. Secondly, in this understanding, domestic and international conflicts are not seen as something bad but as an inevitable part of social progress; similarly, violence is both inherent in the capitalist system and justified in its overthrow. These principles not only shaped PRC domestic policy in the Mao era; they also inspired a global program of mobilizing the world's populous "rural areas" – Asia, Africa, and Latin America – against its wealthy "cities" in North America and Europe (Lin 1965).

In line with this doctrine, China firmly rejected all attempts by the United Nations to manage international conflicts; a principled stance reinforced by the fact that the Communist government was not recognized by the UN until 1971 and excluded from its decision making. For example, it denounced a 1960 UN mission to the Congo as an 'illegal invasion by US imperialists' that 'threatened the independence of the Congo and of African states in general, as well as peace in Africa, Asia and the world' (PRC State Council 1960).



From revolution to stability-seeking

The change in leadership from Mao to Deng Xiaoping led to CPC ideology shifting momentarily from utopian communism towards a more pragmatic and incrementalist governance that sought to enhance the party’s legitimacy by boosting economic performance. Among many other changes, the Constitution that was passed at the CPC’s 12th Party Congress in 1982 reinterpreted its commitment to “proletarian internationalism” (无产阶级国际主义 *wuchan jieji guojizhuyi*). From now on, imperialism was to be “opposed” (反对 *fandui*) instead of “overthrown” (打倒 *dadao*), and the party’s global agenda shifted from “eliminating the system of human exploitation on earth” (在地球上消灭剥削人的制度 *zai diqiu shang xiaomie boxue ren de zhidu*) to “maintaining world peace and human progress” (维护世界和平, 促进人类进步 *weihu shijie heping, cujin renlei jinbu*) (CPC 1977, 1982). As part of this changing vocabulary, CPC rhetoric also increasingly identified “hegemonism” rather than “imperialism” as the most important root cause of international wars.

Compared to the revolutionary fervour of the Mao era, Deng-era thought on peace and conflict was far more status-quo oriented, marked by the prioritization of better domestic living standards and a more optimistic expectation for maintaining international peace in the medium term. Its cornerstones were established in Deng’s speech to a delegation of visiting Japanese businessmen in March 1985, in which he named peace and development as the two “major issues” (世界两大主题 *shijie liang da wenti*) facing the world, with the first being marked by East-West tensions and the second by a North-South divide (Deng 1985). In this situation, Deng identified a shared interest between China and capitalist countries across Europe and Asia in promoting economic development and opposing superpower hegemonism: China’s need for foreign capital and the developed countries’ need for new markets were economically complementary, while the mutual desire to avoid wartime disruption brought them together as “forces for world peace” regardless of differences in their economic systems (ibid.). In this situation, China’s own development could make a further contribution to world peace by strengthening the peace camp. While the dynamic of this new paradigm remained economically driven, it turned its predecessor on its head: instead of war resulting from capitalist competition, and revolution being the only possible way of resolving its underlying economic contradictions, “development” was now regarded as a universal good that should be cherished across all political divides and would form a powerful incentive for peace.

Although the Deng era represented a decisive shift away from the socialist utopianism of the early PRC, it retained fundamental Marxist-Leninist assumptions about the connection between economics and politics; specifically, the assumption of economic determinism, which identifies economic relationships (including conflicts) as the deeper level of social reality and politics as its “superstructure”. This thinking still informs the CPC’s strategy of legitimizing its domestic rule by achieving political stability through economic growth (Holbig and Gilley 2010). It also deeply shapes China’s approach to international and intrastate conflicts and how it interprets its own role in them. In the United Nations, its stance on peace operations has shifted from principled opposition to passive acceptance and, in 2002, active participation (Abb 2021, Hirono and Lanteigne 2013). This also gave China an opportunity to actively shape how the UN manages conflicts. In debates on these missions, it frequently stressed economic deprivation and inequality as the root causes of conflicts and proposed development as the primary means of mitigating them. For example, in an open debate at the UNSC in November 2019, China’s then UN envoy Zhang Jun stated that “most international and regional hotspot issues find their root causes in poverty and underdevelopment” and that “development is a master key to all problems” (Xinhua 2019).

Summary: traditional and modern Chinese peace thought

Traditional and modern strands of Chinese thoughts on peace are separated by thousands of years, and arose from different political contexts, challenges, and intellectual motivations. As a result, they differ across several dimensions, which are briefly summarized as follows:

First, traditional Chinese philosophy conceptualizes “peace” in broad, abstract, and occasionally vague terms which are naturally more inclusive and resemble modern notions of a “positive peace” (Galtung 1969) or “just peace”: peace is a coordinated co-existence of differences within a social order underpinned by widely accepted norms of mutual respect. Compared to this, the modern Chinese definition of “peace” is much narrower, based on a simple juxtaposition with violent conflict.

Second, traditional Chinese thought on peace argues that personal virtues and interpersonal obligations are the basis for harmonious coexistence. Society-wide peace springs from the mutual practice of such virtues and cannot simply be imposed from above. This diverges from Marxist-Leninist notions of peace and conflict, which see the latter as rooted in structural conditions such as class contradictions that can only be resolved through fundamental changes in society.

Third, both strands diverge on the conditions for peace, with traditional Chinese philosophy taking a moralist and idealist stance, and modern-day party doctrine adhering to a materialist understanding. Specifically, the latter focuses on material well-being as the key condition for peace, and its absence as the *root cause* of conflict. While traditional thought also recognizes the supply of basic needs as important for a stable society, it held that individual morality could still mitigate the strife that results from their absence (especially if practiced by a just ruler).

Fourth, while neither traditional nor modern philosophies systematically developed ideas for conflict prevention, these can be extrapolated from the conditions for peace that they do name: in the first case, the cultivation of individual morality and benevolent, people-oriented governance (especially in Confucianism and Mohism); and in the second, the creation of non-exploitative, egalitarian economic systems both domestically and internationally.

Since the thoughts on peace presented above are predominantly drawn from relatively abstract philosophical and strategic thinking, they are necessarily a step removed from practical present-day policies. However, as the next section shows, they represent the intellectual well from which contemporary Chinese peace theorists still (albeit selectively) draw inspiration.

The rise of “developmental peace” in the 21st century

The concept of developmental peace emerged in the early 2010s amid two key shifts in China’s international engagement: a re-evaluation of its principle of non-interference in response to its increasing involvement in conflict settings, and deliberate efforts to distinguish its approach from Western-style interventionism.

The rise of China in the 2010s prompted internal debates about its growing international responsibilities and potential tensions with its longstanding non-interference principle, which had been a cornerstone of China’s foreign policy since the reform and opening-up era. Scholars questioned whether China should continue to rigidly uphold this principle or reinterpret it to enable a more flexible and constructive global engagement. In 2011, prominent Chinese International Relations (IR) scholar Wang Yizhou introduced the concept of “creative engagement” (创造性介入 *chuangzaoxing jieru*), advocating for China to take a more proactive role in addressing regional conflicts. This approach emphasized conflict mediation, economic assistance, and technical cooperation, all without the imposition of political conditions (Wang 2011). Around the same time, Zhao Lei (2011) articulated a framework for China’s global peace engagement based on two core pillars: participation in UN Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs) and development-centred post-conflict reconstruction. Zhao highlighted the key principles that guided China’s approach, namely state consent, UN authorization, the non-use of force, and a strong focus on development, and argued that these are consistent with China’s long-held commitment to non-interference. Proactive engagement in global peace and security was no longer seen as a breach of the non-interference principle, but as a fulfilment of China’s responsibilities as a rising power. Crucially, it saw engagement that respects a state’s sovereignty and the priorities they determine as being compatible with the non-interference doctrine. As several Chinese experts noted during interviews conducted by one of this study’s authors in 2019, “There is a growing expectation for China to ‘do something’ ... Beijing is now engaging constructively rather than interfering in the domestic affairs of other countries.”³⁷

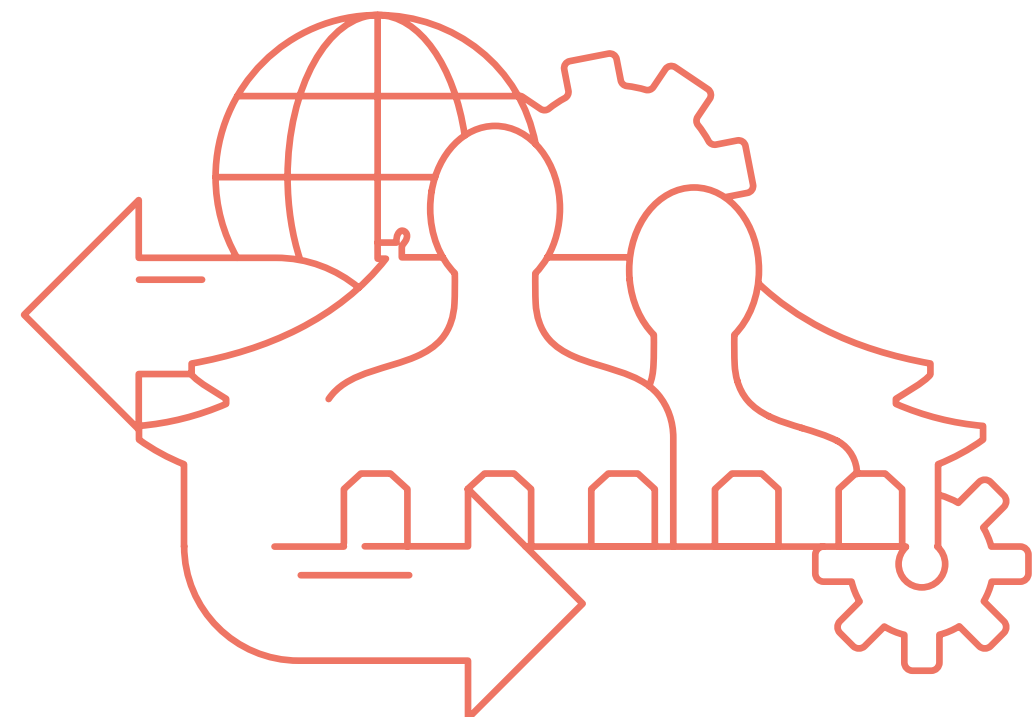
Concurrently, China’s growing involvement in conflict-affected settings, particularly in Africa and Southeast Asia, prompted inquiries into how its role aligns with or diverges from the dominant Western liberal peace paradigm. In this context, Wang and Liu (2013) first coined the term “developmental peace” to characterize China’s distinctive approach to peace and security in Africa. They argued that this approach mirrors China’s domestic post-reform era experience that sustainable stability is built on a foundation of economic and social development. While political and social reforms are acknowledged as necessary, they are seen as secondary and should be pursued incrementally — and only after economic foundations are secured — in ways that reinforce, rather than undermine, state sovereignty and national autonomy.

Since then, the concept of developmental peace has gained increasing traction in scholarly discussions on China’s global peace and security engagements (Wang 2018; Kuo 2015; Xue 2018; Yuan 2020). In 2017, former Chinese police peacekeeper turned academic He Yin further defined and elaborated the concept, presenting it as an alternative to (rather than a replacement of) the prevailing liberal peace model.

This has stimulated a growing body of research aimed at systematically comparing developmental peace with liberal peace (Jütersonke et.al, 2021), examining their respective components, underlying norms, and implications for the governance and ordering of conflict-affected societies.

Although the term developmental peace remains primarily restricted to the academic discourse and its distinctiveness remains the subject of debate, Chinese diplomatic actors have increasingly adopted the concept of *development-led peace* in official statements at both bilateral and multilateral fora. This rhetorical incorporation has lent further visibility and momentum to the idea, signalling China’s efforts to articulate a normative framework that is distinct from the liberal peace paradigm and rooted in its own model (Yuan 2020).

The developmental peace approach is grounded in three core elements: state sovereignty, governmental capacity, and infrastructure-led economic-social development (Jütersonke et.al 2021). While traditional Chinese philosophies — particularly Confucianism — stress that peace is founded on personal virtue and interpersonal harmony, the developmental peace discourse shifts the focus toward the structure of the international system. It underscores the primacy of state sovereignty as a precondition for sustainable peace at both inter and intra-state levels. This sovereignty-centred view is deeply shaped by China’s historical experience of an exploitative and imperialist international order during the so-called “century of humiliation” from the mid-19th to mid-20th centuries. Territorial loss, state breakdown, and widespread human suffering under foreign imperial predation instilled a strong and enduring political and societal impulse toward safeguarding sovereignty and territorial integrity. This sentiment persisted in the Cold War period and became intertwined with China’s socialist ideology. Even at the height of its alliance with the Soviet Union in the 1950s, the CPC consistently prioritized national independence and sovereignty as central tenets of its foreign policy.³⁸



In the discourse of developmental peace, peace is understood as a nationally owned process grounded in sovereign integrity and non-interference from external powers. Externally imposed solutions are often seen as exacerbating or prolonging conflicts and ultimately undermining sustainable peace (He 2017). As such, China maintains principled objections to expansive forms of international intervention such as sanctions, peace enforcement, or conditionality in aid. This approach is evident in its cautious interpretation of international norms such as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) (Liu and Zhang, 2014; Garwood-Gowers 2016) and the Protection of Civilians. In its vote explanations, particularly on contentious cases such as Syria, China consistently invokes the principle of sovereignty to justify opposition to measures perceived as precursors to regime change. In practice, however, China is not always consistent in its sovereignty-centric stance, as its silence on Russia’s clear violation of Ukrainian sovereignty shows.

Government capacity is another defining element of the developmental peace approach, which prioritizes the effectiveness of government in delivering public goods, particularly social stability, material well-being, and basic rights such as education, employment, and housing, over institutional legitimacy or accountability. China asserts that a competent, effective government is essential for preventing conflict and achieving durable peace, as it enables the efficient mobilization of resources, the implementation of development-oriented policies, and the delivery of public goods (Li 2019). This focus on government capacity partly resonates with Confucian political thought, which emphasizes the primacy of virtuous leadership and views the state as a moral custodian of the people’s well-being. However, whereas Confucianism emphasizes the moral character of rulers as the foundation of legitimate governance, the developmental peace discourse shifts this emphasis toward policy performance. It largely avoids questions of political legitimacy or how policies can be oriented toward the public good and does not engage with the risk that political elites might be(come) exploitative or predatory. Instead, it implicitly assumes that a capable government will inherently act in the collective interest. The developmental peace approach treats domestic governance as a sovereign matter, and external actors are neither expected nor entitled to promote institutional reforms.

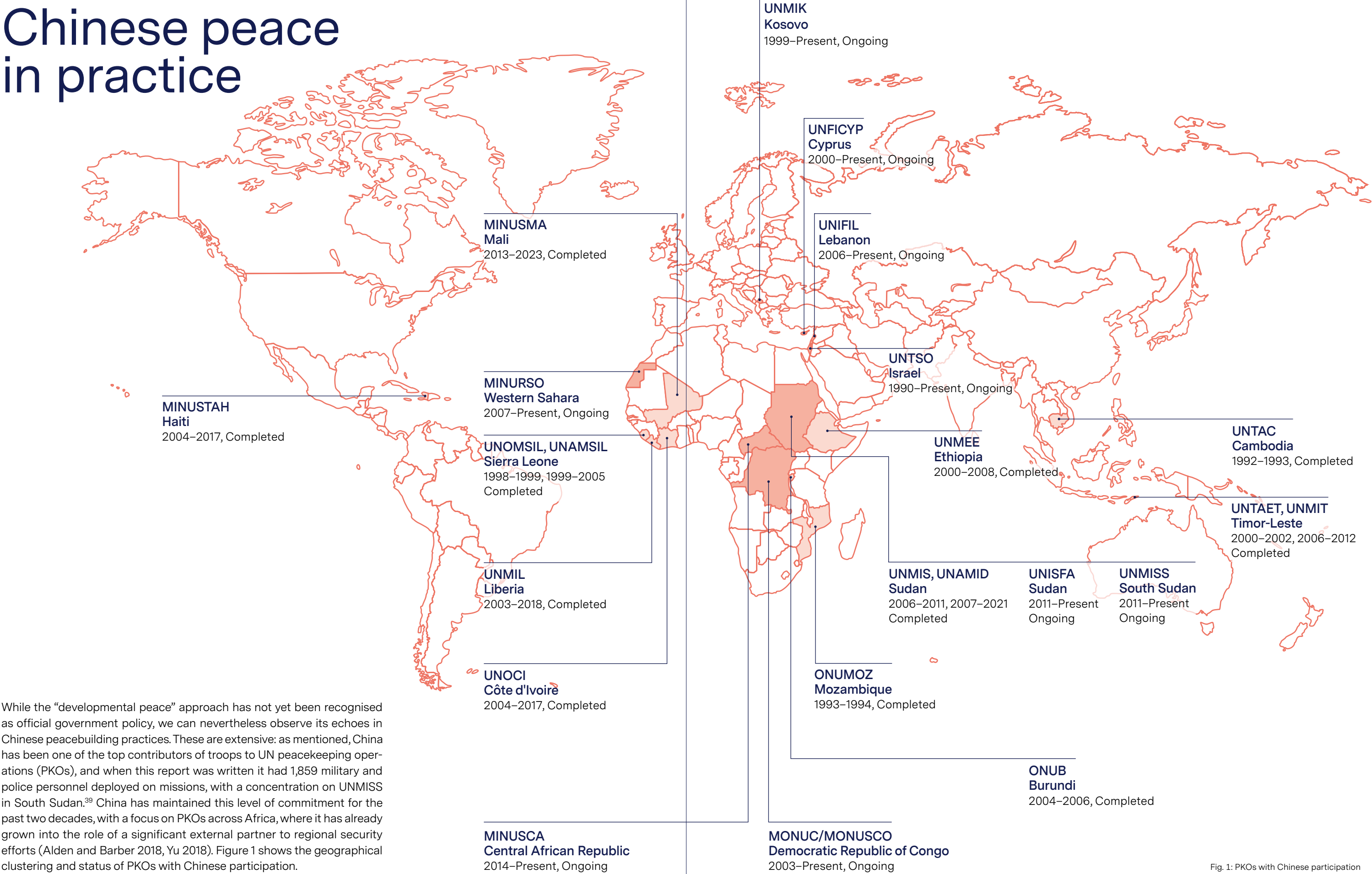
This focus on governmental capacity also aligns with contemporary Chinese political narratives that increasingly ground the legitimacy of the party-state not only in its ideological foundations but also in its policy performance (Yuan 2022), including historical achievements (national independence) and the ongoing delivery of economic growth, social stability, and public goods. From this perspective, core elements of the liberal peace doctrine such as democratization, rule of law, and a robust civil society are neither necessary nor sufficient for peace consolidation. Developmental peace discourse rejects the presumed linear causality between democratic governance and positive outcomes such as peace or prosperity. Some Chinese academic analyses and statements at the UNSC even portray democratization — particularly when it is externally driven or prematurely implemented — as destabilizing, arguing that “imposed democratization” erodes social cohesion, diverts resources from economic development, and in some cases, rekindles conflict (Li 2019).

Last, but not least, economic and social development are central to the developmental peace approach, which is grounded in both a materialist understanding of conflict drivers and the pragmatic convenience of rebranding China’s longstanding economic engagement abroad. Developmental peace theorists hold that poverty and economic inequality, referred to in the Chinese discourse as “insufficient and unbalanced development,” are the root causes of conflict. Accordingly, post-conflict peacebuilding should prioritize tangible improvements in food security, employment, and livelihood opportunities. This perspective echoes classical political thought, which often traced the causes of conflict to resource scarcity and poverty, which lead to uprisings or violent struggles for survival.

However, whereas traditional thought emphasized benevolent policies to support agricultural production, the developmental peace approach avoids prescriptive discussions of domestic policy and instead prioritizes investment in infrastructure. Moreover, contemporary Chinese political discourse frames the right to subsistence as the foremost human right and as the necessary precondition for the full realization of political and social rights (Jütersonke et.al, 2021; Yuan 2022).

This approach regards infrastructure as being a catalyst for economic development and a tool for peacebuilding (Abb, Swaine and Jones 2021). This includes both large-scale industrial and transport developments and small-scale infrastructure projects to improve livelihoods, such as schools, clinics, and water wells (Information Office of the State Council, 2014). Beyond their economic utility, infrastructure projects are also seen as having a potential for reconciliation. As one Chinese expert interviewed during fieldwork in 2019 put it: *“When roads are built, geographically separated communities can better connect to and understand each other”* (Yuan 2022). This has enabled China’s flagship Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), whose original aims were economic and strategic in nature, to be rebranded and promoted as a “road for peace,” based on its assumed economic and peace-promoting effects (Xi 2017). As Li (2021) notes, the surge in Chinese foreign aid and investment in infrastructural sectors (particularly energy, transport, and telecommunications) in the early 2000s was largely driven by a desire to internationalize Chinese companies. In this sense, the developmental peace discourse serves more as a convenient reframing of existing economic practices than a purpose-built peace strategy.

Chinese peace in practice



While the “developmental peace” approach has not yet been recognised as official government policy, we can nevertheless observe its echoes in Chinese peacebuilding practices. These are extensive: as mentioned, China has been one of the top contributors of troops to UN peacekeeping operations (PKOs), and when this report was written it had 1,859 military and police personnel deployed on missions, with a concentration on UNMISS in South Sudan.³⁹ China has maintained this level of commitment for the past two decades, with a focus on PKOs across Africa, where it has already grown into the role of a significant external partner to regional security efforts (Alden and Barber 2018, Yu 2018). Figure 1 shows the geographical clustering and status of PKOs with Chinese participation.

Fig. 1: PKOs with Chinese participation

These deployments have given Chinese peacekeepers extensive experience on the ground, much of which has come in the form of reconstruction efforts rather than front-line combat service. Indeed, the development-centric approach outlined above is evident in Chinese practices and rhetoric surrounding UN PKOs. Chinese representatives have made this explicit in debates within the UNSC, which has the authority to launch and extend PKO mandates, and the UN Peacebuilding Commission, which is tasked with developing long-term strategies for broader conflict management, stating that: “Development remains the top priority, as development is the master key to solving all problems. The most critical challenge to post-conflict countries is to grow the economy and improve people’s livelihoods” (PMPRCUN 2023a); “first, peacebuilding must insist on giving priority to development (...) Indeed, for many countries, development is the ultimate solution to their myriad challenges. Lack of development is an important root cause for many long-lasting unresolved hotspot issues on the agenda of the Council” (PMPRCUN 2023b).

China’s approach to peacekeeping can be summed up as follows: first, PKOs can only operate with the consent of the host country, and their mandates should not include activities that question host country sovereignty; second, PKOs should serve to strengthen the capacities of the host country rather than replacing or undermining them; third, PKOs should aim at providing material and developmental aid rather than pushing political transition and reform programs (unless agreed by the host); and fourth, their mandates should be restricted to core tasks and not expanded in subsequent extensions.

China has abstained from approving mandates - even for missions that it continues to support in the field - where these requirements have not been met, e.g. because Western-led coalitions in the UNSC have succeeded in including language in mandates that runs counter to Chinese notions of sovereignty, host state consent, and political non-interference. For example, in March 2023, China joined Russia in abstaining on UNSC resolution S/2023/188 which extended the mandate of UNMISS in South Sudan over concerns that the US-sponsored draft resolution placed undue blame and pressure on the South Sudanese government (UNSC 2023). In accordance with this doctrine, Chinese peacekeepers in situ have focused on activities that strengthen local development and governance capacities such as road construction, agricultural development, policing, healthcare, and education (Xue 2018).⁴⁰ While China may not always be successful at shaping PKO mandates at the UN level, its high level of active engagement does allow it steer their implementation in its preferred direction – which amounts to putting the “developmental peace” concept into practice.

A second pillar of China’s peace agency is developmental assistance, with the country now emerging as one of the world’s largest donors and the most significant source of funding outside of the OECD’s Development Assistance Council. As a result, this space is already significantly contested between Chinese and Western actors, and the Chinese practice of awarding assistance without political reform conditions has reduced the leverage for efforts to promote democracy in key regions such as Africa (Bräutigam 2011, Li 2017). The flow of Chinese developmental assistance shows no preference for the type of regime in a recipient country (Dreher and Fuchs 2015), making it an attractive alternative especially to those seeking to maintain authoritarian governance. Although such megaprojects carry apparent risks of political capture and corruption, which has caused frustration among some Chinese aid officials (interview 2019), these issues continue to be framed as domestic matters of sovereignty and have not translated into conditionality in Chinese aid policy. It is also crucial to note that while Chinese development aid can be used for peacebuilding purposes, it is in practice strongly interwoven with commercial and strategic aims and is usually awarded without the type of conditions that would incentivize local actors to participate in peace processes. Moreover, most Chinese aid does not come in the form of grants, but rather preferential-rate loans (Gelpern et al. 2021), reflecting a mixture of economic and political interests that is characteristic of Chinese agency in the fields of development and infrastructure.

Nevertheless, since it is marked by a pronounced willingness to undertake investments in high-risk areas, Chinese developmental assistance has become a major factor in many conflict and post-conflict environments (Abb 2024). Figure 2 breaks down Chinese development assistance and related financial flows between 2000 and 2021, aggregated into categories depending on the level of conflict risk in their respective destinations. As can be seen, there is a notable skew towards high-risk destinations, much of which is due to a conscious Chinese decision to acquire overseas resources and pursue ambitious infrastructure projects in highly unstable countries such as Angola, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, or Ethiopia. China has frequently resorted to resource-backed collateralization to mitigate the resulting risks, enabling it to seize the loan recipient’s natural resource exports in the case of a default (Malik et al. 2021).

Chinese development assistance by country risk category

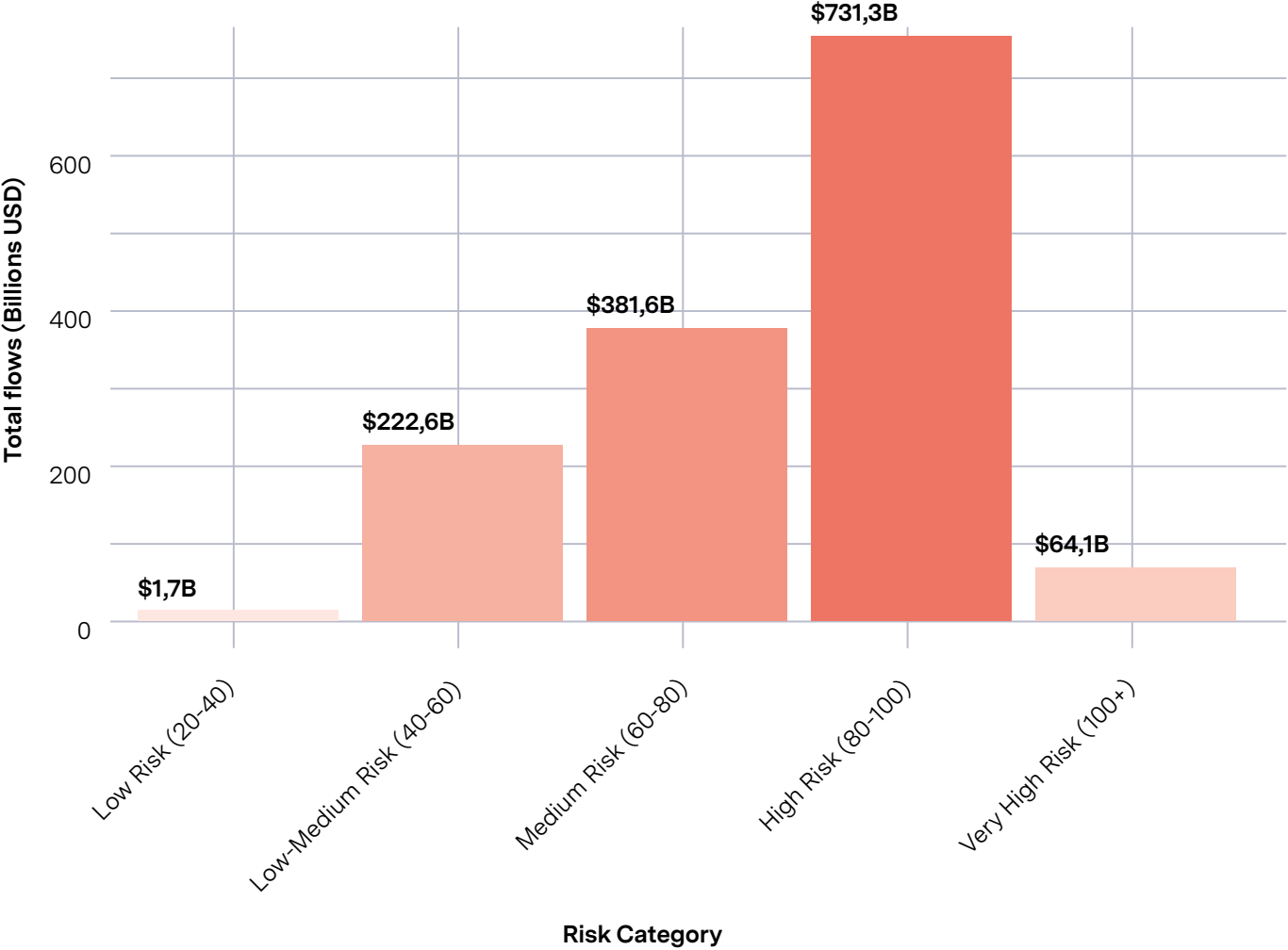


Figure 2: Chinese development assistance by recipient risk, 2000-2021⁴¹

These practices, along with a focus on infrastructure megaprojects that are often controversial, have seen Chinese developmental assistance become a highly politicized topic. On the one hand, it has made new funding for ambitious development schemes available to countries which have previously struggled to access other international capital sources. On the other, the resulting programs often fail to include stakeholders from communities that are already marginalised and can reignite existing distribution and centre-periphery conflicts (Abb 2024, Tower 2020). In practice, China’s large-scale infrastructure projects and their preference for non-conditional aid frequently entrenches existing political and economic elites. While such engagements may be framed as apolitical and sovereignty-respecting, in effect they can reinforce authoritarian governance and elite capture in certain contexts. This reveals a key weakness in the “developmental peace” concept: it assumes that “development” is a depoliticized, widely shared aspiration that can bring fraught societies together, when in reality, concrete development projects often come with uneven cost-benefit distributions that make them intensely controversial. A lack of conflict sensitivity and risk assessment capacities has frequently seen the Chinese actors who implement them underestimating the backlash which their activities can trigger (Chan and Pun 2020, Tower 2020).

Since Chinese peace agency brings together a wide spectrum of actors that can include the military, international development agencies, foreign ministries, state-run enterprises, private companies, and NGOs, its engagement in conflict settings is often fragmented rather than forming a coordinated national strategy. Some of these actors may be pursuing goals which are contradictory to both national priorities and peacebuilding aims, such as extracting profits or cultivating relationships with specific elite groups. A final reason for the attractiveness of the developmental peace approach among diverse Chinese interests might therefore be that it provides them with a shared set of assumptions that makes it easier to work together.

³⁷ Interviews 2019, conducted in Beijing for authors’ project on peacebuilding norm transformation.

³⁸ Conclusion of the “Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance”. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People’s Republic of China. Official website. URL: http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/ziliao_665539/3602_665543/3604_665547/t18011.shtml.

³⁹ Based on a review of the UN peacekeeping database, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>.

⁴⁰ United Nations Mission in South Sudan. <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/search/node/china>

⁴¹ Data on Chinese development assistance aggregated from the China Aid Data 3.0 dataset (Custer et al. 2023), data on country risk taken from the Fragile States Index 2023 (Fund for Peace 2023). Development assistance flows were aggregated first by country, and then by risk category according to their FSI score.

⁴² Ministry of Public Security of People’s Republic of China. 21 September 2021. <https://m.mps.gov.cn/n6935718/n6936559/c7367257/content.html>

⁴³ Permanent Secretariat of the Forum for Economic and Trade Co-operation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (Macao). 29 June 2020. https://www.forumchinapl.org.mo/en/economic_trade/view/5157.

⁴⁴ Global Chinese Development Finance. AidData. <https://china.aiddata.org/>

⁴⁵ Chinese Embassy in Timor-Leste donate to Ruak Foundation. AidData. <https://china.aiddata.org/projects/96517/>

⁴⁶ “These cooperative projects are the pride of the Timorese people and have achieved many firsts in Timor-Leste.” CRJ Online. 09 December 2023. <https://news.cri.cn/20231209/fab41450-8f60-bf8e-fb51-fbb2abc3a2f0.html>.

⁴⁷ Interviews suggest that these companies are driven by business opportunities.

Case study: Chinese engagement in Timor-Leste

Chinese engagement with Timor-Leste since it became independent in 2002 is a revealing example of China’s approach across three pillars: UN-led security assistance, modest development aid, and infrastructure construction. The elevation of bilateral ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in September 2023, following Timor-Leste’s ASEAN membership roadmap, underscores China’s rising strategic interest in the country’s peace and development path.

Although China was initially wary of UN peacekeeping involvement in Timor’s 1999 referendum, it shifted to a supportive stance after assurances were made that this mission would not set any precedents (Lanteigne, 2012). After voting in favour of PKOs and the extension of mandates, China also contributed peacekeeping personnel. Notably, China’s deployment of 15 civilian police officers to the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) in 2000 marked the first participation of Chinese police in a UNPKO, and this commitment was maintained throughout all subsequent missions in the country between 2000-2012.⁴² China has also offered direct yet limited assistance to Timor-Leste’s armed forces (F-FDTL).⁴³ Unlike Australia and Portugal, which have led extensive international programs on Timor’s security sector reform, China’s involvement has been narrowly focused on improving the working conditions and equipment of the Timorese armed forces, while avoiding deeper institutional engagement.

While China’s developmental assistance in Timor-Leste remains modest compared to major donors such as Australia and Japan, it reflects a distinct approach. Chinese aid, which is mainly delivered through bilateral channels and often outside of donor coordination frameworks (Berutti and Yuan 2025), focuses on projects requested by the government, such as government buildings (e.g., the Foreign Ministry, Defence Ministry, and Presidential Palace) which are constructed as turnkey projects and financed by grants.⁴⁴ These massive buildings are in stark contrast to the poverty that surrounds them, making the government’s presence highly visible. It also supports government capacity building and livelihood enhancement, including training in oil and resource management, agricultural training, construction of schools and sport facilities, and medical services. While China has recently begun contributing to multilateral mechanisms (e.g., the World Food Programme) and local elite foundations⁴⁵, it still avoids working with NGOs and the wider civil society.

Large-scale infrastructure projects in Timor-Leste have increased dramatically with the growing involvement of Chinese companies. Three flagship projects illustrate this trend: the national power grid (East Timor’s largest electricity infrastructure project), constructed and now operated by Chinese CNI22; the Suai Highway (Timor’s first expressway and largest transport project since independence), built by the China Overseas Engineering Group with loans from ExIm Bank; and the Tibar Bay Port (the country’s first modern international container terminal)⁴⁶ constructed by the China Harbour Engineering Company under a contract with the French firm Bolloré. These projects highlight China’s commercially driven engagement,⁴⁷ with some financed by Chinese policy banks and others involving Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) acting solely as contractors.

Conclusions

As China has assumed a bigger role on the international stage, and its interests have become genuinely global, it has increasingly grappled with questions of conflict management and peacebuilding. In this, both the Chinese conceptualization of peace and the ways in which it should be pursued in practice are distinct from Western or liberal notions, setting up a complicated and partially competitive future relationship between the two camps.

At a fundamental normative level, China's peace agency is driven by the same values and beliefs that remain at the core of its foreign policy: a strong emphasis on national sovereignty, an insistence that external interventions should not interfere with the domestic politics of other nations, and a willingness to accept existing regimes as legitimate no matter their pedigree. The focus is on enabling host governments to implement their nationally determined policy agendas by providing financial and technical resources while refraining from holding governments accountable to their citizens. Non-conditionality and request-based assistance are not only consistently practiced; they are also framed as the pillars of a sovereignty-based norm and as expressions of China's solidarity with developing countries.

This is in clear opposition to liberal peace thought, which seeks to establish peace through transforming political institutions in line with greater inclusivity and consideration for human rights. After a period of cautious engagement with more interventionist norms such as the "responsibility to protect" in the early 2010s, China has returned to a sovereignty-centric agenda, and the recent outcomes of Western interventions and liberal peacebuilding have only strengthened Chinese belief in the global validity of its own approach. This makes international peacebuilding efforts an arena for norm contestation between China and the proponents of a liberal peace, adding to splits within the United Nations.

This divergence is likely to continue, especially as China embraces the role of a great power and the influence over other countries that comes with it. China's peace agency is deeply rooted in distinct historical experiences, cultural beliefs, and current political considerations. Among these, the experience of emerging from a century of internal political turmoil and stabilizing its own society through a whole-hearted embrace of economic development is the most formative. Additionally, the illiberal character of China's own political system and the CPC's selective adoption of statist, order-oriented Chinese philosophy are major influences on how Chinese officials and intellectuals approach conflicts in other countries, and what prescriptions they offer for alleviating them. While historical Chinese thought offers a very broad and nuanced conceptualization of "peace" that also embodies notions of social justice and responsible governance, current Chinese practices are informed by a narrower, economically determinist thinking that tends to sideline political processes.

The "developmental peace" concept as presented above has not yet embraced current international scholarship on the downsides of development and lacks the conceptual richness of classical Chinese thought on peace and conflict. This is also its Achilles' heel: Chinese actors in conflict settings tend to underestimate how controversial their development efforts can be, and how easily they can reignite political tensions. China is increasingly aware of this problem – as reflected in its efforts to downscale the BRI – and this offers an opportunity for the concept of developmental peace to incorporate international expertise on conflict-sensitive development. An increased awareness of Chinese intellectual traditions on peace can help this dissemination by pointing out ways in which Chinese concepts overlap with other viewpoints and framing them in terms that are more familiar and acceptable to Chinese actors.

However, China's affirmation of national sovereignty and their enabling of ambitious development schemes also has a clear strategic advantage: they overlap with preferences that are widely shared among developing countries with a history of colonialism, as is the case for the vast majority of current peacebuilding efforts, and this offers a ready audience for China's international leadership ambitions. From a strategic perspective, a peacebuilding approach that facilitates good relations with host governments is an asset in China's quest for global influence. Another point of convergence is the enthusiasm for ambitious, infrastructure-led development projects, where China is an attractive role model – even if the experience of the BRI raises some doubts about the transferability of China's experience.

Despite clear differences in the aims and understanding of conflict dynamics, there is still the potential for cooperation. China's involvement in multilateral efforts organized by well-institutionalized systems – such as UN peacekeeping missions – have been marked by a cooperative, collegial, and pragmatic attitude. Missions that pursue limited stabilization have been relatively uncontroversial within the UNSC, and there is also no fundamental disagreement about this aim between adherents of developmental or liberal peace. Clashes tend to arise over subsequent mandate expansions, where different understandings of the root causes of conflicts emerge. The UN system offers numerous venues for discussing the progress of individual missions and its broader peace agenda, from the UNSC to the PBC, and even General Assembly. It is important to maintain these spaces for honest debates in the face of rising geopolitical tensions, and to have open exchanges about the successes and shortfalls of different peace approaches. This requires humility and a willingness to examine failures on both sides, including the limitations of the liberal approach.

There are also opportunities for development cooperation between Chinese and Western actors, which may grow as China reconsiders its implementation of the BRI. High-profile project failures and controversies have already triggered a rethink on the scope of Chinese developmental finance and the conditions under which it is awarded, with a recent trend towards downsizing and a greater consciousness of risk, including conflict risks. This may present an opportunity to introduce the conflict sensitivity paradigm into Chinese development practices, ideally through joint project management with international agencies that have already internalized it. Direct cooperation on smaller-scale projects, which are not as easily politicized, should be explored wherever possible. Ideally, lessons learned from these ventures could subsequently be incorporated into projects that remain exclusively under Chinese control.

China's emergence as a world power would not have been possible without a demonstrable capacity to learn and adjust its policies in response to setbacks. Its engagement with global conflict risks is a relatively recent phenomenon, for which it is drawing on lessons from its historic and recent past – but it may yet still incorporate knowledge generated by its international peers.

Recommendations

- **Expanding European engagement in UN PKOs.** Shaping and diffusing peacebuilding practices is only possible with a significant presence on the ground. In this regard, European countries – especially Germany – lag behind China, with contingents that are smaller and concentrated in a single mission (UNIFIL). Regardless of whether one sees peacebuilding as a competitive field or an opportunity for mutual learning, there is a need for overlapping presences.
- **Promoting European-Chinese exchanges on peacebuilding in host countries.** Beyond PKOs, there is a much greater geographical overlap between peacebuild-ing-relevant European and Chinese activities, mainly in the form of development efforts. Implementing agencies from both sides should be encouraged to engage in frank dialogues on their respective readings of local political situations and how this impacts their efforts. This would allow areas with overlapping aims, no matter how minimal, to be identified, e.g. stabilization efforts in areas close to Europe, revealing opportunities for cooperation which might be possible even where broader political interests diverge.
- **Promoting conflict sensitivity in development cooperation.** Joint development pro-jects in countries in the global south offer further opportunities to familiarize Chinese development efforts with conflict sensitivity practices, especially impact assessments and stakeholder consultations before projects are approved. This could be pursued under existing initiatives such as the Sino-German Centre for Sustainable Development.
- **Supporting peace and conflict studies in China.** Academic research on peacebuild-ing in China is underdeveloped, mainly due to a lack of specialized researchers and university curricula in peace and conflict studies. International peace thought and concepts are rarely taught in China, contributing to an intellectual disconnect and leaving decades of relevant findings unused. This could be changed by means of academic cooperation, student exchanges, supporting specialized professorships, and joint research programs.

Literature

Abb, P. (2024a). Is there a Chinese “developmental peace”? Evidence from the BRI’s impact on conflict states. *Journal of Contemporary China*, July 2024.

Abb, P. (2021). From “peaceful rise” to “peacebuilder”? How evolving Chinese discourses and self-perceptions impact its growing influence in conflict societies. *Journal of Contemporary China* 30(129).

Abb, P., Swaine, R & Jones, I. (2021). Road to peace or bone of contention? The impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on conflict states. PRIF Report 1/2021.

Alden, C., & Barber, L. (2018). Introduction: Seeking Security: China’s Expanding Involvement in Security Cooperation in Africa. In *China and Africa: Building Peace and Security Cooperation on the Continent* (pp. 1-10). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Baghernia, N. (2024). China’s marginal involvement in the 2023 Iran-Saudi Arabia reconciliation. *Asian Affairs*, 55(1), 34-51.

Bräutigam, D. (2011). Aid ‘with Chinese characteristics’: Chinese foreign aid and development finance meet the OECD-DAC aid regime. *Journal of international development*, 23(5), 752-764.

Berutti, E., & Yuan, X. (2025). The Peacebuilders Playground: Peacebuilding Practices in Timor-Leste. *International Peacekeeping*, 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2025.2524403>.

Chan, D. & Pun, N. (2020). Renegotiating Belt and Road cooperation: Social resistance in a Sino-Myanmar copper mine. *Third World Quarterly*, 41(12), 2109-2129.

Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/>

Communist Party of China (CPC, 1977). “Constitution of the Communist Party of China (approved at the 11th Party Congress on August 18th, 1977)”.

Communist Party of China (CPC, 1982). “Constitution of the Communist Party of China (approved at the 12th Party Congress on September 6th, 1982)”.

Custer, S., Dreher, A., Elston, T. B., Escobar, B., Fedorochko, A. F., Ghose, S., ... & Zhang, S. (2023). Tracking Chinese Development Finance: An Application of AidData’s TUFF 3.0 Methodology. Williamsburg, VA: AidData at William & Mary.

Deng, X. (1985). Peace and development are two major issues in the contemporary world (*heping yu fazhan shi dangdai shijie de liang da wenti*). *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, Volume 3. Beijing: Party Literature Research Center of the CPC Central Committee.

Dreher, A., and Fuchs, A. (2015). Rogue aid? An empirical analysis of China’s aid allocation. *Canadian Journal of Economics/Revue canadienne d’économique*, 48(3), 988-1023.

Fu Q. (2015) “Revisiting Sun Yat-sen’s Peace Thought from the Perspective of Confucianism (rujia sixiang shiyu zhong de sunzhongshan heping sixiang zairenshi).” *Qilu Journal (Qiushi)*, (03): 21–26.

Fund for Peace (2023). 2023 Fragile States Index. <https://fragilestatesindex.org/>.

Fung, C. J. (2016). What explains China’s deployment to UN peacekeeping operations? *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 16(3), 409-441.

Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3), 167-191.

Garver, J. W. (2015). *China’s Quest: The History of the Foreign Relations of the People’s Republic of China*. Oxford University Press.

Garwood-Gowers, A. (2016). China’s “Responsible Protection” concept: Reinterpreting the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and military intervention for humanitarian purposes. *Asian Journal of International Law*, 6(1), 89-118.

Gelpern, A., Horn, S., Morris, S., Parks, B., & Trebesch, C. (2021). *How China Lends: A Rare Look into 100 Debt Contracts with Foreign Governments*. Peterson Institute for International Economics, Kiel Institute for the World Economy, Center for Global Development, and AidData at William & Mary.

He Y. (2017). Developmental Peace: The China Solution to UN Peacekeeping and Peace Building (Fazhan heping: lianheguo weihe jianhe zhongde zhongguo fangan). *The Journal of International Studies (Guoji Zhengzhi yanjiu)*. No.4. p.10-32.

Hirono, M., & Lanteigne, M. (2013). Introduction: China and UN peacekeeping. In *China’s evolving approach to peacekeeping* (pp. 1-14). Routledge.

Hui VT. Toward a Dynamic Theory of International Politics: Insights from Comparing Ancient China and Early Modern Europe. *International Organization*. 2004;58(1): 175-205. doi:10.1017/S0020818304581067.

Information Office of the State Council, People’s Republic of China. (2014). White Paper on China’s Foreign Aid.

Jackson, S. F. (1995). China’s Third World foreign policy: The case of Angola and Mozambique, 1961–93. *The China Quarterly*, 142, 388-422.

Jütersonke,O., Kobayashi,K. Krause, K., and Yuan X. (2021). Norm Contestation and Normative Transformation in Global Peacebuilding Order(s): The Cases of China, Japan, and Russia, *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 65, Issue 4, December 2021, Pages 944–959, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqab060>.

Kang Y. (2014). On the “Aggregation” and “Separation” of Confucians Political Ethics in Qin Dynasty (Lun xianqin rujia sixiang zhong de he yu fen). *Theory and Modernization (Lilun yu xiandaihua)*. No.5. 56-62.

Kuo, S. C. (2015). Chinese Peace? An Emergent Norm in African Peace Operations. *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies*: 01:01, 155-181. <http://doi.org/10.1142/S2377740015500086>.

Kuo, S. C. (2020). *Chinese peace in Africa: From peacekeeper to peacemaker*. Routledge.

Lanteigne, M. (2012). A Change in Perspective: China’s Engagement in the East Timor UN Peacekeeping Operations. In M. Lanteigne & M. Hirono (Eds.), *China’s Evolving Approach to Peacekeeping*. Routledge. pp. 71–85.

Lee, Y.T, Yang, H.; and Wang, M. (2009) “Daoist Harmony as a Chinese Philosophy and Psychology;” *Peace and Conflict Studies*: Vol. 16: No. 1, Article 5. DOI: 10.46743/1082-7307/2009.1103.

Li, X. (2017). Does conditionality still work? China’s development assistance and democracy in Africa. *Chinese Political Science Review*, 2(2), 201-220.

Li, Y. (2019). “Beyond Liberalism: Debates on Diverse Paradigms of Peacebuilding [Chaoyue Ziyou Zhuyi: Jianshe Heping de Duoyuan Lunzheng].” *International Politics Study [Guoji Zhengzhi Yanjiu]* 1: 32–51. <http://www.jis.pku.edu.cn/docs/2019-04/20190403143329988590.pdf>(open in a new window).

Li, Y. (2021). Does Chinese Foreign Aid Work in Sub-Saharan Africa? An Empirical Analysis. *Chinese Political Science Review* 6, 285–319. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41111-020-00170-1>.

Lin, B. (1965). The International Significance of Comrade Mao-Tse Tung’s Theory of People’s War.

Liu, T., & Zhang, H. (2014). Debates in China about the responsibility to protect as a developing international norm: a general assessment. *Conflict, Security & Development*, 14(4), 403-427.

Malik, A. et al. (2021). Banking on the Belt and Road: Insights from a New Global Dataset of 13,427 Chinese Development Projects (AidData at William & Mary, 2021).

Mao, Z. (1937). On Contradiction. *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, Vol I*. Beijing: Foreign Language Press.

National People’s Congress of the People’s Republic of China (NPC, 1954). *Constitution of the People’s Republic of China*. English translation available at <https://www.lawinfochina.com/display.aspx?lib=law&id=14754&CGid>.

Permanent Mission of the People’s Republic of China to the UN (PMPRCUN, 2023a). Remarks by Ms. Gui Dan of the Chinese Delegation at the UN General Assembly debate on the Report of the Peacebuilding Commission. https://un.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/chinaandun/securitycouncil/thematicissues/peacebuilding/202308/t20230801_11120416.htm.

Permanent Mission of the People’s Republic of China to the UN (PMPRCUN, 2023b). Remarks by Ambassador Zhang Jun at the UN Security Council Open Debate on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace. https://un.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/chinaandun/securitycouncil/thematicissues/peacebuilding/202301/t20230128_11015067.htm.

Sun, D., & Zoubir, Y. (2018). China’s participation in conflict resolution in the Middle East and North Africa: a case of quasi-mediation diplomacy? *Journal of Contemporary China*, 27(110), 224-243.

Tower, J. (2020). Conflict Dynamics and the Belt and Road Initiative. *Brot für die Welt Analysis* 97.

United Nations Security Council (UNSC, 2023). Report on the 9281st meeting, S/PV.9281. <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/N2307595.pdf>.

Wang X. (2018). Developmental Peace: Understanding China’s Africa Policy in Peace and Security. In: Alden, C., Alao, A., Chun, Z., Barber, L. (eds) *China and Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-52893-9_4.

Wang X. and Liu Y. (2013). Domestic Experience and International Peace Involvement: Understanding China’s African Policies on Peace and Security (cong guonei jingyan kan zhongguo dui feizhou de heping anquan zhengce). *Africa Studies (Feizhou Yanjiu)*. p 42-50.

Wang Y.(2011). Creative Engagement: New Orientations in China’s Diplomacy (Chuangzaoxing Jieru: Zhongguo Waijiao Xin Quxiang). Peking University Press.

Xi, J. (2017). Work Together to Build the Silk Road Economic Belt and the twenty-first Century Maritime Silk Road. Speech at the Opening Ceremony of the BRI Forum for International Cooperation, May 14, 2017.

Xue, L. (2018), China’s development-oriented peace-keeping strategy in Africa. In: Alden, C. et al. (eds.), *China and Africa*, London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018, 83–99.

Yan X. (2009). Pre-Qin Thinking on the Politics of Interstate Relations and Its Implications (Xianqin guojia jian zhengzhi sixiang de yitong jiqi qishi). *China Social Sciences* (Zhongguo Shehui Kexue). N0.3. 87-108.

Yu, L. (2018). China’s expanding security involvement in Africa: A pillar for ‘China–Africa community of common destiny’. *Global Policy*, 9(4), 489-500.

Yuan X. (2020). Chinese pathways to peacebuilding: from historical legacies to contemporary practices. *Pathways to Peace and Security*. No 1(58). P. 26-45.

Yuan, X. (2022). The Chinese approach to peacebuilding: contesting liberal peace? *Third World Quarterly*, 43(7), 1798-1816.

Zhao, L. (2011). Two Pillars of China’s Global Peace Engagement Strategy: UN Peacekeeping and International Peacebuilding. *International Peacekeeping*, 18(3), 344–362. <https://doi.org/10.1080/135333312.2011.563107>.

Zhu, Y. (2011). “Performance Legitimacy” and China’s Political Adaptation Strategy. *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 16, 123–140.

Imprint

Publisher

FriEnt – Working Group on Peace and Development
c/o GIZ, Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 36
53113 Bonn
Germany
info@frient.de

Authors

Pascal Abb
Xinyu Yuan

Editors

Johann Ivanov
Barbara Kemper
Tony Arthur
Bettina Wolff

Responsible according to
German press law
Nana Odoi

Design

Eps51, Berlin

November 2025

FriEnt, the Working Group on Peace and Development, is an association of Brot für die Welt, Civil Peace Service Consortium, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), Misereor/Catholic Central Agency for Development Aid, Platform Peaceful Conflict Transformation, and Berghof Foundation.

