

BOOK REVIEW

Developmental Peace: Theorizing China’s Approach to International Peacebuilding

Wenting Meng. Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2023. 187 pp. €29.90; \$34.00 (pbk). ISBN 9783838219073

Courtney J. Fung

Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia

Email: courtney.fung@mq.edu.au

Wenting Meng’s book offers an account of “developmental peace,” an approach that contrasts “Chinese-style peace” and liberal peacebuilding. Discussion of “developmental peace” reflects PRC official discourse that “security is the bedrock of development,” as noted by Xi Jinping at the opening of the 14th National People’s Congress. Indeed, the academic discussion has clear policy implications for understanding conflict transformation, China’s growing role in global governance and its long-espoused principle of non-interference. Meng rightly notes that her research sits within a wider academic scholarship and policy discourse that discusses a “security-development nexus” and the interrelationship between “conflict, security and development.”

Meng poses two questions for her peacebuilding analysis: “whether China’s peacebuilding practices genuinely bring about peace in the affected regions” and if so, “what are the underlying theories and rationale behind China’s peacebuilding endeavours?” (p. 12). Her analysis primarily focuses on addressing the second question, informed by her professional experiences as a Chinese international civil servant. The book is structured with an opening theoretical discussion of “developmental peace theory,” a process that emphasizes “economic growth, effective government governance (political), and the human right to survival and development (social)” (p. 32). Meng then turns to a snapshot of “China’s primary means of global peacebuilding practices ... participation in UN peacekeeping operations, good offices and mediation, and economic projects and assistance in conflict or post-conflict areas focused on infrastructure development” (p. 32). The last substantive chapter focuses on China’s involvement in South Sudan’s peace process, where China has deployed UN peacekeepers and participated in conflict mediation. Meng builds upon an eclectic set of sources, including a rich literature review of Chinese-language sources and UN documentation, a novel survey of South Sudanese university students, and field research in Ethiopia, Kenya and South Sudan.

Ultimately, however, the text shies away from analysing contradictions or shifts in China’s international peace and security posture as other pioneering studies have (see Rosemary Foot, *China, the UN, and Human Protection: Beliefs, Power, Image*, Oxford University Press, 2020, or Andrea Ghiselli, *Protecting China’s Interests Overseas: Securitization and Foreign Policy*, Oxford University Press, 2021). For example, Meng analyses China’s participation in UN peacekeeping missions noting that China has dispatched security detachments to operations in Mali and South Sudan, where, in the latter, “infantry units ... mainly perform duties such as patrolling, guarding, defending, protecting, and separating conflict parties” (p. 93). However, the book only makes passing reference to the July 2016 “violent clashes” in Juba (p. 136), which led to the death of two PRC UNMISS peacekeepers – China’s first combat deaths since the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War. These two deaths sparked policy debate about China’s presence in conflict-affected areas

and its approach to non-interference. It would have been valuable to learn from Meng how this episode, amongst others, affected China's promotion of "developmental peace" in practice.

Despite leaving the reader wanting more rigorous analytical review, Meng's account of developmental peace is a welcome contribution to the academic debate. *Developmental Peace* will be of interest to students of China's evolving role in international peace and security, multilateral politics and conflict resolution.