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Research Article

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Statebuilding Beyond Western Interventions: Rising Powers, Emerging Modes of Institution-Building, and the Implications for Peace Studies

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Abstract

Over the last three decades, statebuilding, or the process of building political institutions in conflict-affected states (CAS), as a part of a negotiated peace settlement, has been associated with peacebuilding interventions supported by Western states. Non-western rising powers, in turn, are seen to disengage from statebuilding given their ambivalence towards the liberal peacebuilding agenda, and support for the norm of sovereignty. Challenging this dominant narrative, this article examines how India and China have shaped political institutions central to the peace process, such as federalism and inclusion, in two CAS in their regional neighborhood, Nepal and Myanmar, despite not pledging to the international statebuilding agendas. It firstly argues that India and China have influenced the institutional design of political institutions in three ways: *directly* through coercive diplomacy and economic incentives, *indirect*ly as CAS borrow from the domestic experience of India and China to design their political institutions, and *unintendedly* as a by-product of their large-scale infrastructures and investments, which alters the distributional consequences of the postwar institutions. Secondly, the article asserts that such institution-building experiences of non-Western states challenge three established scholarly canons in peace studies: *role of coercion in peacebuilding* by highlighting how illiberal and coercive modes of institution-building can foster liberal outcomes, *the Eurocentricity or the "West" as the source of influence for institutional design* by outlining how CAS increasingly look to the domestic institutional experiences of non-Western states to emulate, and need to broaden the *scope of what constitutes institution-building* to include physical infrastructures that significantly shape political institutions.

Resumen

En las últimas tres décadas, la construcción del Estado, es decir, el proceso de construcción de instituciones políticas en Estados afectados por conflictos (CAS, por sus siglas en inglés), como parte de un acuerdo de paz negociado, se ha asociado con intervenciones de consolidación de la paz apoyadas por los Estados occidentales. A su vez, existe la percepción de que las potencias emergentes no occidentales se desvinculan de la construcción del Estado debido a su ambivalencia con respecto a la agenda liberal de construcción de paz, y a su apoyo a la norma de soberanía. Este artículo desafía esta narrativa dominante y estudia cómo India y China han dado forma a instituciones políticas

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fundamentales para el proceso de paz, tales como el federalismo y su inclusión, en dos CAS de su vecindad regional, Nepal y Myanmar, a pesar de no comprometerse con las agendas internacionales de construcción del Estado. El artículo argumenta, en primer lugar, que India y China han influido sobre el diseño institucional de las instituciones políticas de tres maneras: *directa,* a través de la diplomacia coercitiva y los incentivos económicos, *indirecta*, debido a que los CAS toman prestada la experiencia interna de India y China con el fin de diseñar sus instituciones políticas, y *no intencionada* como subproducto de sus infraestructuras e inversiones a gran escala, lo que altera las consecuencias distributivas de las instituciones de posguerra. En segundo lugar, el artículo afirma que tales experiencias en materia de construcción institucional por parte de Estados no occidentales desafían tres de los cánones académicos establecidos en los estudios de paz: (1) *el papel de la coerción en la construcción de la paz*, destacando la forma en que los modos iliberales y coercitivos de construcción de instituciones pueden fomentar resultados liberales, (2) *el eurocentrismo, es decir "Occidente" como fuente de influencia para el diseño institucional*, esbozando cómo los CAS buscan, cada vez más, las experiencias institucionales internas de los Estados no occidentales con el fin de emularlas, y (3) la necesidad de ampliar *el alcance de lo que constituye la creación de instituciones* con el fin de incluir las infraestructuras físicas que dan forma significativa a las instituciones políticas.

Résumé

Ces trois dernières décennies, l'on associe la construction étatique, ou le processus de construction d'institutions politiques dans les États touchés par un conflit (ETC), dans le cadre de négociations d'accords de paix aux interventions de consolidation de la paix soutenues par les États occidentaux. L'on constate que les puissances émergentes non occidentales, quant à elles, se détournent de la construction étatique, étant donné leur ambivalence à l'égard du programme libéral de consolidation de la paix et leur soutien à la norme de souveraineté. Remettant en cause ce narratif dominant, cet article examine comment l'Inde et la Chine ont conçu des institutions politiques centrales au processus de paix, comme le fédéralisme et l'inclusion, dans deux ETC qui leur sont voisins, le Népal et le Myanmar, malgré leur non-affiliation aux programmes de construction étatique internationaux. Il affirme d'abord que l'Inde et la Chine ont influencé la conception institutionnelle des institutions politiques de trois façons: *directement,* par la diplomatie coercitive et les incitations économiques; *indirectement*, car les ETC s'appuient sur l'expérience nationale de l'Inde et de la Chine pour concevoir leurs propres institutions politiques; et *involontairement*, comme un corollaire de leurs infrastructures et investissements de grande échelle qui modifie les conséquences distributives des institutions d'après-guerre. Ensuite, l'article affirme que ces expériences de construction étatique d'États non occidentaux remettent en question trois canons académiques établis dans les études de la paix: *le rôle de la coercition dans la construction étatique*, en soulignant comment les modes illibéraux et coercitifs de création des institutions peuvent encourager des résultats libéraux, *l'eurocentricité ou l' "Occident" en tant que source d'influence sur la conception institutionnelle* en soulignant que les ETC se tournent de plus en plus vers les expériences institutionnelles nationales des États non occidentaux pour les imiter, et le besoin d'élargir *le champ d'application constitutif de la création d'institutions* afin d'inclure les infrastructures physiques qui façonnent de façon importante les institutions politiques.

Keywords: statebuilding, rising powers, peace studies, nepal, myanmar

Palabras clave: construcción de estado, potencias emergentes, estudios de paz, nepal, myanmar

Mots clés: création étatique, pouvoirs émergents, études de la paix, népal, myanmar

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Introduction

Over the last three decades, peacebuilding and statebuilding interventions in conflict-affected states (CAS) have prioritized institution-building, or the process of creating or reforming political and administrative institutions to make them efficient, inclusive, and compliant with liberal values of market economy, democracy, and equality (Bargués-Pedreny 2018; Lee 2022). Multilateral institutions like the UN, and Western states, as a part of the broader peacebuilding package, have supported such institution-building through funding, technical assistance, policy advice, proposing policy reform, monitoring peace agreements, and even enforcing them (Ginsburg 2019). Such statebuilding support is based on the idea that inclusive and legitimate institutions in post-conflict contexts are key to preventing state collapse, addressing exclusion-related grievances of the conflict parties, and promoting sustainable peace (Newman 2009). The institutions supported by such peacebuilding projects ranged from transitional administrations led by the UN to executive powersharing between conflict parties, transition to federalism, electoral reform, police reform, and human rights monitoring bodies (Barma et al. 2017).

Reflecting on the policy framework, scholarly discourse has largely focused on whether peacebuilding operations have succeeded in building effective institutions and have implicitly or explicitly associated “post-conflict institutions” in CAS with Western-financed liberal interventions. This focus on the West-supported statebuilding projects has been further heightened by the “liberal bias” in peace studies and its underpinning Eurocentrism (Richmond 2009; Sabaratnam 2011), enhancing the marginalization of the perspectives, experiences, and engagement of non-Western states in shaping post-conflict institutions in CAS. The association of non-Western rising powers with strong commitment to principles of sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs, as well as their ambivalence towards peacebuilding, has additionally enabled erasing of non-Western experiences in statebuilding (Call and de Coning 2017). The inference, thus, is that states like India and China refrain from institution building and only seldom cooperate with the international community when they do so (Lei 2011; Parlar Dal 2018).

However, such insights in peace studies stand divorced from increasing evidence in area studies on Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sri Lanka, and Angola, which demonstrate how the engagement of countries like China, through infrastructure financing, trade, and investments in CAS, are influencing broader post-conflict political settlements and institutional modalities (de Oliveira 2011; Höglund and Orjuela 2012). For example, the credit lines issued by China to a post-war Angola in 2004, for oil sector reconstruction, allowed for “constructing a hegemonic order,” emboldening Presidential control over the state and economy, in defiance of the liberal precepts of democracy, inclusion, and equality (de Oliveira 2011, 288). While a burgeoning scholarship has highlighted the increased engagement of non-Western states, such as India, China, Russia, and Brazil, in peacemaking and peacebuilding, (Richmond and Tellidis 2014; Call and de Coning 2017; Kuo 2020; Adhikari 2021), the scholarship is yet to systematically examine how such broader engagement impacts and shapes post-conflict institutions in CAS specifically.

This article attempts to contribute to this gap to examine how and in what ways rising non-Western states are influencing post-conflict institutions in CAS, despite these states not formally subscribing to the international statebuilding agenda. The article draws on the scholarship on *transnational diffusion of institutions*, and combines it with the insights from peace studies on *non-Western engagement in conflict management* to articulate the various ways in which states shape institutions internationally (Simmons et al. 2008; Börzel and Risse 2016). Empirically examining how India and China shaped the institutional design of federalism in Nepal and Myanmar, the article outlines how India and China have influenced the institutional design of political institutions in three ways: *directly* through coercive diplomacy and economic incentives, *indirect*ly as CAS borrow from the domestic experience of India and China to design their political institutions, and *unintendedly* as a by-product of their large-scale infrastructures and investments, which alters the distributional consequences of the postwar institutions. In analyzing the specific ways through which India and China have influenced institution-building, this article contributes to reassessing three dominant canons in critical peace scholarship. Firstly, countering the current orthodoxy in critical peace studies that illiberal coercive *strategies* lead to illiberal *ends or outcomes*, it empirically evidences that illiberal and coercive intervention by India fostered a profoundly liberal institutional outcome that accommodated the aspirations of one of the marginalized groups in Nepal for inclusion. Secondly, CAS today are increasingly abandoning liberal templates, and there is increased institutional learning and borrowing from the domestic experiences of non-Western rising powers. It also highlights that the domestic experiences of India and China provide both illiberal and liberal templates for CAS to emulate, and thus, such learning can either strengthen calls for inclusive institutions in the peace

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process or make the institutions more exclusive. Third, while the extant scholarship depicts institution-building largely as focusing on political and administrative structures in CAS, the practices of non-Western states highlight that physical infrastructure-building, from roads to ports, needs to be seen as modes of "institutional" interventions that have social and political impact in the peace process. Physical infrastructure building by China deeply shaped discussion on federalism, a key agenda in the peace process of Nepal and Myanmar, highlighting how such large-scale infrastructures create winners and losers in CAS by transforming their center-periphery relations and associated power relations between the often-marginalized communities in the periphery and elites at the centre.

In proposing the arguments, the article initiates a research agenda that recognizes the emerging ways in which non-Western rising powers shape institutions in CAS, which has both scholarly and policy relevance. Such emerging modes of institutional building by non-Western states have the potential to impact or even disrupt statebuilding efforts by Western states, while also leaving a salient impact on CAS. Methodologically, the article draws on two in-depth case studies of Indian and Chinese engagement in the peace processes of Nepal and Myanmar and draws on long-term fieldwork between 2017 and 2018. To map the changes in how India and China engaged with Myanmar, after the coup in February 2021, ten additional interviews were conducted with key stakeholders—international and domestic—working on various dialogue initiatives and experts on foreign policy in Bangkok between February–March 2024 and November 2024. Nepal and Myanmar both undertook a well-institutionalized peace process, which saw engagement of both international peacebuilders and regional powers, India and China, respectively. As bordering states, with immediate stakes in security, and in economic and political developments in the region, India and China's engagements with such countries in the regional periphery are likely to demonstrate the scope, impact, and influence on peace and political processes. The author conducted semi-structured elite interviews in Myanmar (39) and Nepal (21), including mediators, political leaders, members of parliaments, diplomats, bureaucrats, journalists, and civil society actors. Interviewees were non-randomly selected based on their roles in the peace process and negotiations and engagement with Chinese and Indian representatives during the peace process. The transcripts were coded for qualitative content analysis. While institution-building was not the focus of the larger research, an inductive coding highlighted the importance of Indian and Chinese engagement in shaping political institutions in varied ways. For instance, 38 of 39 interviewees in Myanmar, when asked about Chinese engagement in the peace process, at least once mentioned about physical infrastructures—the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)—as motivating Chinese engagement in Myanmar or as impacting the peace process in implicit and explicit ways. In addition to these interviews, the article also relies on document analysis of all peace agreements, notably provisions on different political and administrative institutions, based on PAX dataset (https://www.peaceagreements.org/). The dataset covers all peace agreements between 1990 and 2022, both national and local agreements. Here, it needs to be noted that while the coup in Feb 2021 in Myanmar aborted the peace process and negotiations, some groups that signed the peace agreement, the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, stuck to it while others did not. As a comprehensive peace process to cohere the multiple conflict parties has been more difficult after the coup, both India and China have continued to engage with the military government at the centre, pursued wider infrastructure and trade-related projects, while engaging with different ethnic resistance movements in the borderlands (Adhikari and Hodge 2024). This stands in sharp contrast to Western states that have continued sanctioning the military regime while engaging on limited fronts such as humanitarian and governance-related assistance. The complexity of the post-coup context in Myanmar makes the examining of China and India's engagement in CAS on statebuilding even more pertinent.

Within the broad scope of statebuilding projects, which support multiple types of institutions, this article will focus on federalism, an institution aimed at territorial powersharing, to promote inclusion of excluded groups. Given that exclusion based on ethnicity, religion, region, and language is often at the heart of most civil wars, inclusive powersharing institutions, like federalism, are explicitly committed to and referenced in peace agreements, interim constitutions, and other legal arrangements (Sisk 2013; Bell and Pospisil 2017). Inclusive powersharing institutions, including territorial powersharing, often manifested in the form of federalism, are seen to build legitimate peace by devolving power away from the dominant elite networks to marginalized groups, and enhancing their representation in provincial and state institutions (Hirblinger and Landau 2020). In the peace process in Nepal (2005–2015) and Myanmar[1] (2011–

1 The peace process was interrupted by the coup by the military in February 2021. However, even after the coup, the military has continued to call upon different ethnic armed organisations for peace dialogues.

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2021), where the root causes of conflict were defined as the political, social, and economic "exclusion" of a number of marginalized groups (Breen 2018; South 2018), inclusion-related institutions, notably federalism, became central to the discussion in the peace process as evidenced by its mention in respective peace agreements (Bell et al. 2017).

The remainder of this article is divided into four sections. The next part situates non-Western forms of institution-building, their pathways and motivations, within the wider discussion on peacebuilding and statebuilding, forming the conceptual basis for the article. The third part unpacks the empirical case studies from Nepal and Myanmar. The fourth part discusses what such non-Western forms of institution-building in CAS mean for key canons in peace studies, before moving to the conclusion.

Situating Institution-Building Beyond Western Statebuilding Interventions: Mechanisms and Motivations

Supporting the building or strengthening of political and administrative institutions has evolved to be a centerpiece of the international community's peacebuilding efforts in CAS. In 1992, the UN introduced the policy framework on peacebuilding defining it as a policy response to support "structures that might tend to strengthen and solidify peace, in order to avoid a relapse into conflict" through the Agenda for Peace report (Boutros-Ghali 1992). The policy was premised on the argument that liberal institutions, including market economy, democracy, human rights, and civil and political rights, were pathways for peace and stability (Jahn 2007). While even the earliest peacebuilding missions, like Cambodia, focused on building political institutions, the spree for building political institutions in CAS escalated in the aftermath of the failures of peacebuilding interventions in Rwanda, Somalia, and Yugoslavia to respond to massive violence leading to the realization that the "state must be brought back in" (Balthasar 2017). By 1995, the UN's supplement to the Agenda for Peace report attributed the challenges of these peacebuilding debacles to the "*collapse of state institutions*" (Chesterman 2005) and called for mandates to extend beyond democratization and humanitarian tasks to include the "the reestablishment of effective government," laying the foundation for statebuilding projects, where "institution-building" focused on building and reforming political and administrative institutions became central.

This focus on statebuilding was heightened with the attack on the United States on September 11, 2001 with fragile states posited as global threats, in need of international support to enact their statehood (Fukuyama 2004). A minimally functioning state with effective institutions was seen to be a pre-requisite for any form of peacebuilding (Ghani 2008). The focus was no longer centered on building liberal societies but on strong states and institutions, with much greater attention devoted to building up the state's capacity to monitor, prevent, and respond to security threats (Barnett 2006; Duffield 2014; Menkhaus 2014). Over time, despite distinct origins, peacebuilding and statebuilding have been adopted by international projects in CAS as mutually reinforcing and inseparable, operationalized through a range of interconnected initiatives, including security sector reform, constitution writing, rule of law initiatives, and macro-economic reforms (Goodhand and Sedra 2013). An analysis of peace agreements from 1990 to 2016, reveals political institutions, including executive powersharing arrangements, transition to federalism, establishment of transitional administrations, and rebuilding administrative structures, were the most frequent provisions inducted into peacebuilding projects in CAS, followed by security sector reform (Pospisil 2018).

The failure of such peacebuilding projects to bring sustainable peace, despite their policy salience and significant mobilization of resources, exposed the strategy to a wide array of criticism, which has defined the contours of critical peace studies. Such critiques have highlighted, for example, the inappropriateness of "Western" Weberian institutions being transplanted by peacebuilders to non-Western contexts (Lemay-Hébert 2009), the normative underpinnings of institutional building and its impact on the principle of sovereignty (Zaum 2003; Chandler 2008); the coercive nature of statebuilding initiatives (Richmond and Franks 2009); the ineffectiveness of these institutions in addressing local needs (Mac Ginty 2011; Simangan 2018); and finally the ways in which elites in conflict-affected states co-opt institutions (Barnett and Zürcher 2008; De Waal 2009; Barma 2017). Despite critique of the Western model of statebuilding in CAS, alternative modes have largely focused on forms of statebuilding by non-Western societies locally (Bliesemann de Guevara 2010), sidelining the exploration of institution-building by non-Western rising states.

An expanding scholarship acknowledges the increased engagement of non-Western rising states, including China, India, and Turkey, in CAS, through diplomacy, development aid, military force, and political cash (Carothers and Samet-Marram 2015), and outlines how such approaches differ from liberal peacebuilders on fun-

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damental norms and practices (Peter and Rice 2022). Unlike norms of inclusive democratic institutions and peace underpinning liberal peacebuilders, motivating factors for non-Western rising powers are seen to be cross-border and regional stability and securing investments (Adhikari 2021).

Yet, the extant works on non-Western approaches to peacebuilding (Smith 2014; Lewis 2017) have yet to systematically analyze how, and in which ways, such non-Western engagement in CAS influence and shape post-conflict institutions. Rather two contrasting assertions on institution-building by non-Western states have been advanced. On the one hand, a much-repeated thesis holds that non-Western states do not engage in interventionist institution-building, or cooperate with the international community in doing so, given their strict adherence to the norm of sovereign equality and non-interference in internal affairs (Parlar Dal 2018). On the other hand, however, studies on individual non-Western states highlight that their engagement in CAS—while not centered on long-term "peacebuilding"—is focused on stability and ending physical violence by supporting "strong institutions" in CAS (Jütersonke et al. 2021). Scholars highlight how China supports the building of strong state institutions as a means of increasing its capacity to provide public goods in CAS (He 2019; Kuo 2020), while Russia has prioritized a strong state to quell internal dissent and bring political order internally (Lewis 2022), and India has focused on the capacity-building of state institutions in CAS (Aneja 2014; Choedon 2021). Invariably, this focus on "state institutions" and "state capacities," through development assistance, infrastructure building, loans, defence cooperation, and capital flows, shapes political and administrative institutions, both directly and indirectly.

To systematically conceptualize and theorize distinct pathways of influencing and shaping institutions, beyond the liberal statebuilding blueprint, insights from the literature on transnational diffusion of institutions and norms are instructive (Simmons, Dobbin, and Garrett 2008; Börzel and Risse 2016). How norms, institutions, and social policies cascade down or diffuse to different states has been a subject of rich scholarly engagement, though not adequately cross-fertilized within peace studies. Constructivist scholarship has evolved in phases, from discussing *top-down accounts* of norm diffusion enabled by norm entrepreneurs such as powerful states, international organizations, and translations networks working to transfer norms of human rights and women's suffrage to transnational settings (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Greenhill 2010) to more *agentic or "multidirectional"* accounts where recipient states not only resist global norms but actively influence and shape such global norms. The scholarship also appraises the "hard" ways used by states and international organizations through funding, partnerships, and technical assistance to promote certain policies and institutions, as well as "soft" ways through greater interaction and socialization (Martens and Niemann 2022) to promote norms and institutions. Newer scholarship has foregrounded the agency of norm receiving states, who are not mere passive recipients but rather actively contest, resist, or "localise" norms by "actively borrowing and modifying transnational norms in accordance with their preconstructed normative beliefs and practices" (Capie 2008; Acharya 2014). The latter works on transnational norm diffusion also highlighted how non-Western states and organizations have been key source or protagonists of some global norms and impacted global governance regimes (Acharya 2014; Sikkink 2014; Nash 2021).

Within this voluminous literature on the transnational transfer of norms and institutions, Börzel and Risse's work focuses on distinct pathways—the "direct" and indirect mechanisms—through which European institutions have diffused or themselves been adapted globally. Combining insights from their work, along with broader literature on transnational diffusion of institutions, and the scholarship on non-Western approaches to peacebuilding, the following section makes an initial attempt to articulate an integrated framework to understand pathways, tools used by non-Western states, and the motivation factors for *Statebuilding Beyond Western Interventions* in CAS (figure 1).

Direct mechanisms of influencing institutions manifest when an "agent," or state, actively promotes certain policies or institutional models when engaging with another set of actors. Broadly, such direct influence or shaping of institutions has relied on coercion, either through the power of threats or with inducement as the power of rewards (Gippert 2018). Inducements to confirm to certain institutions cover a spectrum of strategies, ranging from persuasion to diplomacy to development assistance, whilst coercion includes active armed intervention, sanctions, and conditionality (Tholens and Groß 2015). Situating inducements and coercion in the context of CAS, scholars highlight that given the asymmetries and the leverage international donors have to incentivise or coerce CAS, in such contexts, there is an implicit pressure built in to adapt liberal institutional prescripts (Mac Ginty 2011).

Similar asymmetries are evident in the relationship between non-Western rising powers and CAS in their regional neighborhood, where the former has power, leverage, and economic inducements to get CAS to comply.

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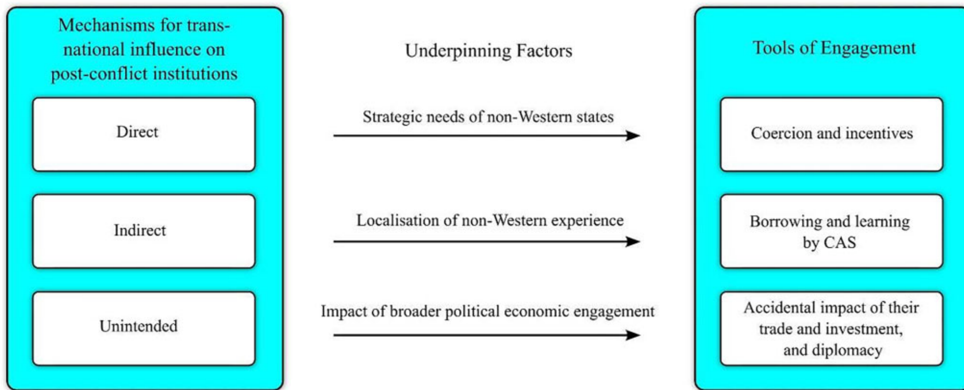

Figure 1. Mechanisms of influencing post-conflict institutions, underpinning factors and associated tools

Historically, direct forms of persuasion and coercion applied by India, China, and Russia has shaped the contours of post-conflict institutions in CAS in the regional neighborhood. India's use of peacekeeping forces in f1987 to monitor the ceasefire agreement in Sri Lanka centered on regional devolution of power (Kelegama 2015), and Russia's pressure on the Tajik government to sign the peace agreement and push for the powersharing arrangement with the United Tajik Opposition (Iji 2001) highlights the use of coercive mechanisms, such as militarized peacekeeping, diplomatic pressure, and persuasion to shape institutional outcomes. However, as these states rise, the ability to invest politically, economically, and diplomatically in either promoting rewards or coercion influencing such institutions in the region has soared (Destradi 2010).

However, unlike liberal peacebuilders, non-Western states do not subscribe to a certain institutional template and only promote institutional designs to promote their strategic interests (Jütersonke et al. 2021). Thus, international promotion of a certain institutional design is not driven by the pursuit of peace or inclusion, to address conflict-related grievances, but rather seen to be motivated by a parochial desire to safeguard political and economic interests (Parlar Dal 2018; Uesugi and Richmond 2021). Indeed, non-Western states have been detached from agendas in the peace process including rule of law, transitional justice, powersharing, when it does not have a direct bearing on them (Ghimire 2017; Adhikari 2022). Institution-building by non-Western states thus remains selective, centered largely in their respective region, instrumental, and pragmatically driven by competing political, economic, and foreign policy logistics (Parlar Dal 2018; Lewis 2022). Scholarship on non-Western rising powers notes how deploying coercive diplomacy to reinforce their strategic interests around their sphere of influence has been a time-tested strategy (Breslin 2013; Padukone 2014). And while championing respect for sovereignty in global forums like the UN, India and China have rarely respected the same in their regional periphery.

Indirect mechanisms for influencing institutions are processes centered on socialization, or "emulation" (Börzel and Risse 2016), where states change their preferences by interacting, socializing, or emulating others—which have long been discussed in International Relations (Johnston 2007). Such indirect mechanisms resonate with what Acharya refers to as "localization," or the actions by "which norm-takers build congruence between transnational norms and local beliefs and practice" (Acharya 2004, 241). Acharya further argues that the success of a particular norm depends on opportunities it provides for localization.

When invoked in the context of post-conflict institutions, "localisation" shifts the agency towards CAS, which actively select norms and institutional models suited for their context. The post-conflict environment, where competing political groups are seeking to renegotiate the political distribution of power through new or reinforced institutions, creates an enabling environment in which to "localise" institutional design from other contexts (Menocal 2015). Here, there are multiple examples where CAS have sought "institutional or constitutional borrowing" from other developing and non-Western rising states. Instances include authoritarian regimes looking "eastward", i.e., to Russia, China, and Singapore, for models of constitutional government (Dixon and Landau 2019), and Cambodia borrowing from Thailand and China to shape their political insti-

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tutions (Lawrence 2021). Scholars have also examined how various African states are increasingly referencing, or borrowing from, China's alternative norms, such as economic liberalization without political freedom, and "developmental peace," or economic development, as a core pathway for conflict resolution, rather than political liberalization (Halper 2010; Hodzi 2018; Jütersonke et al. 2021).

Indirect mechanism of influence is motivated by the recognition amongst CAS that non-Western states that rose from "similar conditions" are likely to have institutional models that contextually fit post-conflict contexts (Baldwin, Carley, and Nicholson-Crotty 2019). Non-Western emerging states are aware, and state, that their domestic experiences can and have been emulated by others (Ministry of External Affairs, India 2008; Ramo 2009). However, there is no active promotion of their institutional models (Peter and Rice 2022), as will be empirically unpacked in the section below. Such indirect ways of influence through borrowing have also been facilitated by the growing critique of Western-supported peacebuilding projects and elites introducing liberal models untailored to the needs of CAS (De Waal 2015).

"Unintended" mechanisms: Alongside direct and indirect mechanisms, insights from area studies on rising powers and CAS, as well as non-Western approaches to peacebuilding highlights "unintended" mechanisms, that emerge as a by-product of investment, diplomacy, and large-scale infrastructure financing by non-Western rising powers in CAS, which alters the distributional consequences (who gets what) of postwar institutions (Lee 2022). Such unintended mechanisms are motivated by specificities of non-Western rising powers' approach to peacebuilding, which is centered on prioritizing engagement with the central state, focusing on economic development through infrastructure building, and large-scale investments (He 2019; Choedon 2021; Uesugi and Richmond 2021). The uneven distributional consequences of such investments are seen to skew the power relations between conflict parties, and become a key point of contention during peace processes when various conflict actors work to renegotiate the political distribution of power in CAS.

Such unintended mechanisms here refer to any influence on institutions in CAS that was not intended by non-Western states' active engagement, or planning, but emerged unintentionally, as the consequence of their actions in other domains (Aoi, De Coning, and Thakur 2007). Such unplanned consequences have been observed in peacekeeping missions, where, despite the intentions of UN peacekeeping missions centered on promoting peace, inclusion, and democracy, multiple unintended consequences in the form of sexual abuse and exploitation, negative impact on civil-military relations, and corruption and a lack of transparency have emerged (Cunliffe 2018).

More specifically, unintended institutional influence of non-Western states has been noted across scholarship in area studies, from Pakistan, Angola to Myanmar. For instance, China's Belt and Road Initiative, which is pitched by China as an example of "developmental peacebuilding," has unintendedly impacted the federal institutional setup in Pakistan, where various minorities occupying Pakistan's periphery (the Gilgit-Baltistan, Khyber-Pakthunhwa, and Balochistan regions) have sought to counter the centralizing efforts of the national elites comprised largely of ethnic Punjabis. Despite Balochistan shouldering the "burden" of BRI in Pakistan, as a national-level project, not only were Balochs not involved in the discussion on the project, but decisions on the corridor have largely been based on China's negotiation with the central state and not provinces, escalating apprehensions about whether the province will reap benefits for peripheral regions (Boni and Adeney 2020).

Such unintended mechanisms are amplified by the rising powers' absence of understanding of the legal, social, and political complexity of peace processes (Rawski and Sharma 2012; Roy 2020), and their overlooking the impact (intended or unintended) of their engagement in CAS. The fact that non-Western rising powers do not have any articulated policy on peacebuilding (Wong 2021) means that there is no institutional or policy framework to assess the impact brokered by their engagement in CAS.

Empirical Illustrations from Nepal and Myanmar

The following section empirically illustrates how such direct, indirect, and unintended mechanisms have manifested in Nepal and Myanmar.

Direct Modes of influence: Rethinking the Practice and Concept of Coercion

In Nepal and Myanmar, unlike Western states, China, and India, have not relied on technical assistance or capacity building of civil society or other conflict parties to assert direct post-conflict influence, but rather on diplomacy, persuasion, and economic sanctions. In Nepal, where India and China are competing for influence, both perceive themselves as being affected by federal reforms in Nepal, as the creation of new states in bordering regions are likely to have implication for cross-border se-

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curity. Both desire fewer provinces on their border, as this reduces having to discuss security issues with multiple provincial actors, often with variable capacity (Bogati and Strasheim 2019). To achieve their aims, both countries have used direct modes of influence, such as persuasion, high-level diplomacy, and development aid. However, they have also resorted to coercive methods, including border blockades (Bhattarai 2018).

India was generally ambivalent about broader normative ideas of inclusion but used its diplomatic leverage to influence debates on federalism in Nepal (Bhattarai 2018). Within India's engagement on federalism, its role is associated with facilitating the rise of Madeshi parties in southern Nepal, primary proponents of the federal agenda in Nepal. After the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, on the grounds that the Interim Constitution had only committed to an "end of unitary state," without any specific commitment on federalism, violent protests led by a Madhesi group, the Madheshi Janadhikar Forum (MJF), started. The Madheshis share deep cultural ties with people in northern India and have been marginalized by the Nepali state on grounds of race, region, language, and citizenship (Lawoti 2016). These protests aggravated India's existing security concerns. The open border, cross-border kinship links, concerns about violence advancing across the border, collusion between the Maoists and Indian Naxals across the open border, and possible Chinese engagement across the border: all of these were increasingly tied to its security interests (International Crisis Group 2007). Consequently, in the peace process, India encouraged a number of Madheshi leaders to quit established political parties and form new Madheshi political parties (Sharma 2019). India funded these parties during the elections, which allowed them to campaign, establish entrenched patronage networks, and win (Jha 2014). All of this helped them emerge as a credible political force, as well as bolstering their campaign for federalism. In addition, India provided moral support, by mediating between Madheshi leaders and traditional political groups. India also legitimized Madheshi demands, by advising, cautioning, and even threatening traditional parties, and frequently lobbying for acknowledgment of the Madheshi demand for inclusion. This was witnessed in India's warning to Nepal's political elites, during the 2015 Constitution writing process, to take "disgruntled" Madheshi factions on board.[2] Similarly, in a rather unprecedented manner, after the 2015 promulgation of the Constitution, India raised the issue of ethnic discrimination and violence in Nepal at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in November of that year (Hindustan Times 2015).

The most significant coercive mechanism deployed, however, was the economic blockade of the India-Nepal border. Dissatisfied with the provisions of the 2015 Constitution, Madhesi groups blocked the key transit road networks, disrupting trade and movement from Nepal to India, to pressurize the Nepali government to amend the Constitution and grant greater guarantees to the Madheshis. India supported the blockade, restricting exports from the country (Sharma 2019). As a landlocked country, Nepal is dependent on India for trade and transit. India's actions severely constricted and damaged the economy of Nepal, just as it was reeling from the humanitarian impact of the 2015 earthquake.

In a less coercive fashion, China was also concerned that with Nepal's transition to federalism, its newly formed provinces would not be able to guarantee China's core security concerns, including ensuring that the border across the Tibetan Autonomous Region would be well-patrolled, the flow of Tibetan exiles across the border to Nepal curbed, and the accompanying "free-Tibet" mobilizations stopped (Karki 2013, 408). China, accordingly, denounced identity-based federalism in Nepal (Shakya 2014). To that end, China reportedly lobbied to have fewer provinces across its border in Northern Nepal (Bhattarai 2014). China cautioned and sought to persuade the chief of the Maoist party and former Prime Minister, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, to rethink patterns of center-state relations in a federal system, and factor in the possible disintegration, and chaos, which federalism could herald (Ghimire 2013).

India's economic blockade and China's active lobbying have shaped the federal map of Nepal. The blockade, and the accompanying paralysis of the economy of Nepal, pressurized the elites to amend the constitution, granting more extensive guarantees to the Madheshis. The political mobilization of the Madhesh movement has been credited for its success, relative to the other groups (Tamang 2017), which in part can be attributed to India's political, diplomatic, financial support, and coercive diplomacy. This success is evidenced by the results of the first post-conflict elections at the provincial level, in 2017, where apart from the dominant Caste Hill Hindu Elite (CHHE) group, the Madheshis remain the only group over-represented relative to their population, all of which demonstrates the success of coercive diplomacy in promoting inclusion (Paswan 2018). Similarly, China's demands to avoid an identity-based federal structure and a single identity-based province across the Northern Nepal-China borderlands were also accommodated (Muni 2015).

2 Interview with scholar-diplomat, October 2, 2018, New Delhi

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Indirect Modes of Influence

Indirect modes of influence are evident in their practice and discussion of emulating, adapting, or drawing lessons from certain non-Western constitutional and institutional designs. Nepali delegations made well-documented study visits to other countries, such as Switzerland and Canada, to study federalism,[3] but multiple delegations of politicians, bureaucrats, and civil society leaders also traveled to India to study federalism in practice.[4] Indian federalism, which is built on the foundation of accommodating linguistic diversity, was considered a relevant model for the Nepali context. In 2008, when Nepal was attempting to transition from a centralized state to a federal one, a delegation of 17 senior government officers left for a two-week visit to India to learn about federalism. The delegation held discussions with parliament and state legislatures, the Supreme Court and High Court, and also met with India's Election Commission, its Finance Planning Commissions, and the Inter-State Council (Himalayan News Service 2008). Similarly, after the country had transitioned to a federal system in 2015, and whilst the Nepali government struggled to reassign 41,000 civil service staff in the newly formed provinces and local levels, the Minister for Federal Affairs and General Administration traveled to Delhi with his team to study India's experience (Neupane 2018). The Indian Institute of Public Administration, a pre-eminent institute engaged in training civil servants, has also hosted numerous civil servants and political leaders from Nepal and the wider region over the years. Furthermore, marginalized groups in Nepal championing identity-based federalism, such as the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities, have also sought to articulate their demands borrowing from India's experience of using affirmative action or quotas for underprivileged groups (Hachhethu 2014).

In Myanmar, both India and China have indirectly served as sources of inspiration for federal institutional design for different factions. Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAO), such as the United Wa State Army (UWSA), have advocated for an autonomous state, resembling China's domestic model, where provinces enjoy immense economic decentralization whilst political decision-making on social issues remains centralized.[5] Indeed, as a think tank representative remarked, "China's administrative model is built with a strong state at the center and autonomous provinces, focused on economic development. The UWSA want to see this model of economic autonomy leaving out fundamental political questions to the Center. While other EAOs want a model of federalism, which resembles that of other countries with ethnic diversity, including India."[6] Moreover, the Kachin people in Myanmar, as Kin-minorities, have looked to China's use of the minority Jinghpo language, in Dehong Dai and Jinpo Autonomous Prefecture, as a model for the promotion of minority culture (Han 2016).

Other EAOs in Myanmar have expressed an interest in learning from the Indian model, where linguistic diversity and quota-based accommodations for different minority groups are the basis of federalism. Indeed, some Western peacebuilding organizations organized study visits for representatives of EAO who signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), to India to study its federal design.[7]Contradictorily, the military is also drawn into the Indian model of federalism, with a strong Center, and residual powers vested not in states but the center. [8]

Unintended Modes of Influence

Myanmar has also witnessed unintended consequences from China's infrastructure investment, pitched as "developmental peace" by China. China's largest infrastructure project, the China Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC)—which is part of its Belt and Road Initiative—has unintentionally influenced the debate on federalism in the peace process. Chinese investment projects tend to undercut the inclusion agenda, as national projects are agreed bilaterally with the central government, despite being predominantly located in ethnic regions, with most companies linked to the Tatmadaw (The Irrawaddy 2020). Conflict-affected areas, such as the Kachin and Shan states, continue to host extensive Chinese investments, including those embedded within the China Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) (Lwin 2019). However, EAOs have been dissatisfied as operational aspects are negotiated with the central government, often bypassing the EAOs' established decision-making systems, and their demands (Donowitz 2018; South et al. 2018). Such a tendency towards "centralisation" contravenes the federalism debate, which has focused on the greater rights of ethnic communities to make decisions on their resources and land.

3 Interviews with civil society leaders, NGO representatives who organized these workshops, 2017–2018, Yangon
4 Three interviews in Kathmandu, October 2018
5 Interview with think-tank representative, November 15, 2018, Yangon
6 Interview, November 15, 2018, Yangon
7 Interview with NGO representative, November 12, 2018, Yangon
8 Interview with international mediator, March 21, 2024, Bangkok

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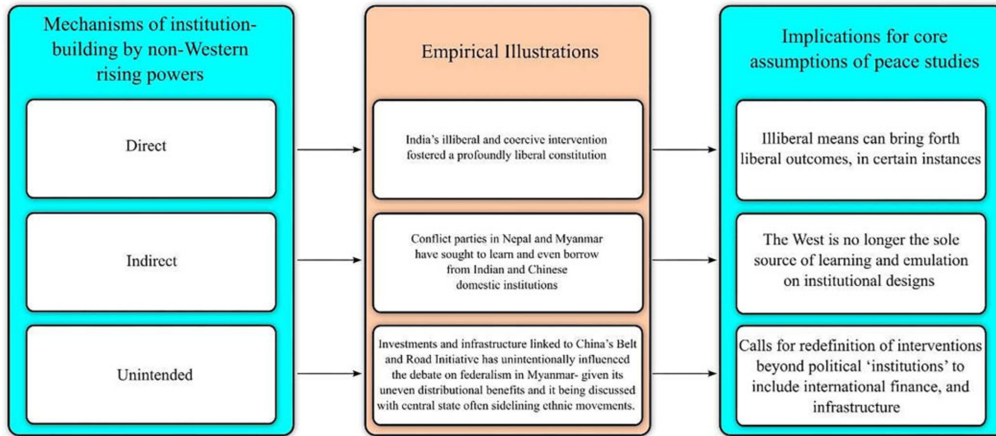

Figure 2. Implication of non-Western forms of institution-building for Peace Studies

As these investments intersect with the political economy of conflict, the interests of the national government appear aligned with those of the majority Bamar population, potentially leading to disproportionate disadvantages for ethnic communities and EAOs (Transnational Institute 2019; Swaine et al. 2021). Such patterns of investment have also led to local frustration about the peace process and the absence of peace dividends on the ground. Historically, investments like these have been conducted in partnership with companies that have military links or militias in the borderlands and ethnic armed groups. While they have benefited all sorts of elite groups, they have left the local population poor, often dispossessed of their land, and having to combat the effects of environmentally unsustainable investments (Woods and Kramer 2012; Hammond et al. 2019). Fears of an impasse have also led civil society to demand that all large-scale development projects in ethnic states and border regions should be suspended, until the political dialogue has advanced, and a sustainable peace is negotiated (Pyidaungsu Institute 2017).

The Belt and Road Initiative has also increased militarization in ethnic areas, leading to a decrease in trust regarding the peace process, which has impacted the potential for political dialogue on important issues like federalism. Armed troops and private security organizations, which often include former militias, are tasked with the protection of areas with investments. Such actions have inhibited trust, with many EAOs and ethnic nationalities concluding that the military is using the peace process to consolidate its hold on areas with abundant natural resources, and expanding its control (Woods 2011). For instance, the Kachin independence Organisation, one of the largest ethnic armed armies, asserts that the most significant offensive by the Tatmadaw in 2018 occurred in areas where CMEC initiatives were being undertaken (Bu 2018). The armed group further stressed that the primary motive for this is to secure areas hosting Chinese investments (Bu 2018).

Assessing the Impact of Statebuilding Beyond Western Interventions: and Implication for Peace Studies

The empirical examples presented above also implicate three key canons in peace studies, as highlighted in figure 2: on the *role of coercion for statebuilding*, the *normative basis and applicability* of "liberal peace," and the *focus on political and administrative "institutions"* as pathways for successful peacebuilding.

Role of Coercion for Statebuilding

A large body of critical peace scholarship agrees that statebuilding fails because of the way it is implemented, through relying on *coercive or "illiberal" means* (Pugh 2012; Turner 2012). Such "illiberal" means or pathways is seen to be inconsistent with the liberal ends it justifies, and the practice of "illiberal means towards liberal ends" has made statebuilding ethically bankrupt and subject to double standards (Jahn 2007). Such illiberal means have been problematized empirically in varied ways, including the violation of the sovereignty of CAS, stabilization projects relying on illiberal and authoritarian actors, the use of coercive diplomacy as backed by military peacekeeping forces, the absence of consent

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from host states, and even outright military intervention (Lidén 2021; Rosas Duarte and Souza 2024). The cases of Afghanistan and Iraq, where coercive means and normative doctrines of "humanitarian intervention" were mobilized, highlight how the "liberal" prefix has been a facade for illiberal modes of peacebuilding (Kühn 2012). Critical peace scholars highlight the causal process of how illiberal means impacts pereceptions of liberal peacebuilding among the local population, leading to resistance and cooption of international interventions, all of which leads to their failure to elicit liberal outcomes (Mac Ginty 2011; Paffenholz 2015).

The example of India's coercive diplomacy, which, despite its illiberal and coercive dimension, led to a more inclusive constitutional settlement and contributed to transforming the Madheshis from one of the most marginalized groups in Nepal to a credible political swing force, implicates the scholarly consensus on the role of coercion in two ways. First, it highlights how scholarly consensus on the linkages between coercion and local legitimacy overlooks domestic heterogeneity and contetation within some CAS. With different domestic groups competing for power and institutional guarantees (Pospisil and Rocha Menocal 2017), coercion by international actors might be viewed as legitimate by some groups and not others. In most CAS, a small cotorie of elites not only dominate and control all state apparatus, in the process excluding and marginalizing varied social groups, but also co-opt the economic assistance, legitimacy, and recognition, invested by the international community (Barma 2017). Here, to change a potentially exclusive political settlement into an inclusive one, international partners might need to use their leverage, and coercive capacities, to create space for minority groups. Coercion, thus, under certain circumstances might be an integral component of creating inclusive political institutions in post-conflict states. In fact, in Nepal, the most salient critique from marginalized groups was the retreat of the liberal peacebuilding community from promoting inclusion, cowing down to pressures from elites (Drucza 2017).

Second, the example illustrates how coercion can be used as a practical tool in eliciting liberal values of inclusion, especially when comparable statebuilding projects have failed to achieve similar outcomes through traditional methods such as technical assistance to establish inclusive institutions and strengthening the participation of marginalized groups in peace processes. Indeed, a broad body of work acknowledges that despite the intentions of international statebuilding projects, they fail to foster inclusive institutions, largely because elites in CAS co-opt liberal peacebuilders (and the institutions they support) by formally adopting inclusive rhetoric but rarely putting it into practise (Barnett and Zürcher 2008; De Waal 2009; Barma 2017). The example substantiates the argument that a, "certain amount of coercion is required for an operation to be seen as effective and legitimate" (Gippert 2017, 323).

Applicability of Liberal Peace in Non-Western Context

Multiple bodies of scholarship in peace studies have appraised the relevance of the "liberal peace" thesis, founded on European experiences, in non-Western contexts (Lewis 2017). The Eurocentrism of peacebuilding along with Western dominance in its expertise and funding, has meant that over time, "Western liberal experience" has consistently been the benchmark in CAS. Despite persistent critique that such externally-conceived models of state institutions are not always appropriate, potentially lacking local legitimacy and ownership (Mac Ginty 2011; Kühn 2012; Hajir et al. 2022), in practice statebuilding projects have continued the "tendency of looking to Western developed societies for templates of a desired end-state," and of transplanting these images in CAS despite the radical differences in context (Egnell and Haldén 2013, 236). In practice, from Italian experts drafting a new criminal procedure code in Afghanistan that closely follows the Italian code and a raft of international Western constitution-writing experts advising on post-conflict institutions in Iraq to the UN advocating for the "normativization" of peace agreements to embed ideas of inclusion, human rights; all are reminiscent of how "liberal peace" has posited the "West" as the source of learning and solutions for the problems of CAS (Suhrke and Borchgrevink 2009; Bell 2017; Alkadiri 2020).

Despite such appraisals, the scholarship on peacebuilding has yet to sufficiently look outside the "West" to explore other sources of norms and institutions that CAS looks to emulate. These examples of CAS learning and borrowing from the domestic experiences of non-Western states underpin the need for a reappraisal of the peacebuilding scholarship. The extant scholarship, while highlighting the challenges of adopting Western institutions and benchmarks for CAS and how the epistemic community of peacebuilders shares lessons across countries and different peace processes, has often failed to consider non-Western sources of institutional design and models (Darby 2008). At the same time, this literature also highlights the agency of CAS to source and borrow examples that they deem fit to their contexts, rather than the "perfect liberal" model advocated for

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by liberal peacebuilding projects. Institutional borrowing is increasing even outside the domain of peacebuilding, with far-reaching consequences for the "localisation" of liberal and illiberal values in CAS. For instance, Nepali officials and politicians are also orienting themselves towards Chinese governance methods through training programes and scholarships, including the use of CCTV surveillance and new laws granting overarching powers to Nepali intelligence units, undermining the spirit of Nepal's peace process focused on individual rights and freedom (Mulmi 2021).

These examples also highlight that China and India not only offer different models to CAS in certain institutional domains but also, due to their long history of dealing with minority accommodation and marginalization, exhibit domestic models that can range from "liberal and inclusive" to "illiberal and exclusive." Thus, while the examples of Tibet and Xinjiang, and Kashmir may lead international observers to label China as an "authoritarian bogeyman" and India as "the imperfect democracy," both countries incorporate some liberal and inclusive institutional traits from which lessons can be learned. Hence, there is a pressing need for a more systematic framework that not only examines how China and India present alternative normative and institutional models but also delves into how CAS may either adapt, reject, or rearticulate these models. As China and India continue to ascend on the global stage, the "power of their example" is likely to gain further traction in CAS in the Global South.[9]

Limitations of Focusing On Formal State Institutions

Confirming to state building experiences of Western states, extant scholarship sees intervention largely through the lens of military deployment or institutional engineering, measured or assessed in terms of financing, capacity building, and supporting formal political institutions (Barma et al. 2017). On the latter, despite critical assessments about the limitations of political institution-building as a pathway for peacebuilding in CAS, state-building projects have continued to fixate on supporting and building of formal political institutions (De Waal 2009; Barma 2017). Formal institutions such as constitutions, elections, anti-corruption policies, and rule of law have been routinely appraised by scholars to not work in many CAS, where informal institutions, such as patronage and clientelism, rather than the "design of formal state institutions" determine the outcome of the peace processes (Putzel 2012). Rather than yielding sustainable peace, unintended negative effects such as the impact of neoliberal economic reform on economic and social equality, the negative effect of early elections on peace outcomes, and elite capture of institutions, which aids in perpetuating exclusion (Sisk 2013). While initial scholarly response to such limitations of institutions was to propose proper sequencing of institutions through frameworks like "Institutionalization Before Liberalization" (Paris 2004), others have called for a decentering away from the focus on formal political and administrative institutions and for a rethink on *what defines or constitutes "institution-building"* (Bachmann and Schouten 2018).

The empirical illustrations in the section above signal a greater urgency in redefining the ambit of institution-building, as non-Western emerging states are increasing their engagement in CAS. Scholars highlight how countries like China and Saudi Arabia are shaping institutions in CAS through physical infrastructure building (Kuo 2020) and private capital investment (Ziadah 2019). Bräutigam illustrates how China's focus on infrastructure projects, largely decided and negotiated with political elites across Africa, distinguishes it from those of Western donors, whose engagement prioritizes addressing governance deficits of CAS (Bräutigam 2011). The "unintended" or accidental ways in which non-Western rising powers influence intervention in post-conflict institutions challenge the very way interventions are defined in peacebuilding scholarship.

The example of the BRI illustrates how financing "infrastructure" projects can be seen as a new mode of "intervention," one that has the potential to impact institutional discussions on federalism. It does so by creating winners and losers (Mark et al. 2020) and shaping the very dynamics of the peace processes. Given the pivotal role of infrastructure to the development and peacebuilding efforts of non-Western states such as China, Japan, Turkey, and Russia, the empirical evidence presented here suggests a need to reconsider its impact on liberal peacebuilding projects, as well as the politics of CAS more broadly. Moreover, the fact that the effects of "infrastructure" and large-scale projects on political transitions go largely unnoticed can be attributed to the decline in the capacity of Western external actors (Pupavac 2001). This has resulted in Western-supported peacebuilding projects moving away from grand planning and large-scale projects, instead acting as "facilitators" that place responsibility for the implementation and effectiveness of the project on local partners and the recipient state (Haldrup and Rosén 2013).

Such insight indicates the need to rethink our understanding and the "confines" of peace processes. When infrastructure development and private financing signif-

9 Interview with Indian diplomat, October 2018, New Delhi.

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icantly impact the core political agendas of peace processes, it raises the question of whether liberal peacebuilders can limit their involvement solely to peace agreements and the institutions they establish.

Conclusion

This article has shed light on how and in what ways non-Western states, in particular India and China, have influenced and shaped post-conflict institutions in CAS. It has sought to categorize varied mechanisms and strategies through which non-Western states are shaping these institutions and has discussed how these mechanisms call for a rethink of the scholarly canons of "liberal peace." In doing so, this article has made two key contributions to peace studies and International Relations more broadly. Firstly, the article has outlined the key mechanisms through which non-Western states engage in "institution-building": cataloguing direct, indirect, and unintended pathways. In this regard, it has bridged the gap between the scholarship on non-Western, or alternative, forms of statebuilding and the literature on transnational diffusions of norms. Doing so addresses a critical gap in peace studies, which has overlooked the "borrowing and lending" of institutional models in peace processes, in particular when involving non-Western states. Secondly, it has highlighted how scholarly assumptions, informing the current debates on peacebuilding, need revisiting in light of increased non-Western engagement in CAS, particularly on institutional modalities which, are often core to peace processes. More specifically, it calls for a reappraisal of three scholarly canons in peace studies: the role of coercion as a pathway for peace, the "West" as the source of influence, and the scope of what constitutes institution-building. In doing so, the article illuminates the need for extant scholarship to reconsider what means are being used, by which actors, to influence "post-war institutions," to ensure that non-Western engagement is accounted for. By examining non-Western approaches, in the context of a changing world order, where multiple visions and alternative perspectives on conflict management are competing with "liberal peace" frameworks, this article is one answer to the call to scholars for "deconstructing and creatively reimaging intervention and statebuilding discourses, processes, practices and tools" (Bargués et al. 2023)

It is possible to propose generalizable inferences from the examples of how India and China have approached CAS in their regional periphery. As Indian and Chinese security interests, from energy to trade, extend beyond their regional neighborhood, it is likely that both countries engage in similar practices outside the region. However, it is not the purpose of this article to generalise patterns, but rather to initiate a conversation on new and non-Western forms of institution-building, that go beyond the statebuilding template supported by Western states and multilateral institutions, are emerging on the ground.

Beyond the scholarly tropes, this article also speaks to two practical policies on institution-building. Firstly, given recognition of the difficulty of building "inclusive" institutions in CAS, the article highlights that, while coercive practices might not be palatable to a "do no harm" approach that underpins peacebuilding projects on the ground, some amount of coercion and leverage might be essential to persuade elites to agree to inclusive post-conflict institutions. This article points to how the engagement of non-Western countries, often branded as illiberal, authoritarian, or simply non-liberal, in CAS may not only lead to liberal outcomes but may also offer lessons to liberal peacebuilders. Similarly, the article also highlights the need to look beyond the remit of peace processes, identify broader economic factors, and understand how cross-border finance can impact post-conflict institutions. The neglect of the wider economic aspects in peacebuilding projects has been duly noted in the peacebuilding scholarship. This article, however, calls specifically for a closer exploration at patterns of international and cross-border trade and investment.

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