Book Review

Yuji Uesugi, Anna Deekeling, Sophie Shiori Umeyama, and Lawrence McDonald-Colbert (eds.)

Operationalisation of Hybrid Peacebuilding in Asia: From Theory to Practice

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Introduction

'Hybrid peace' has emerged as a dominant framework, in both scholarship and policy, for understanding outcomes of peacebuilding projects. Located within the 'local turn' in peace studies, hybrid peace is often invoked to investigate composite form of peace emerging out of interactions between international and local actors, which embodies both liberal and illiberal features (Mac Ginty and Sanghera, 2012; Richmond, 2015). As a framework, it has successfully challenged the determinism and hegemony of liberal peace interventions in conflict-affected states, and has brought the focus on the agency of local actors to co-opt, resist, dominate or assimilate liberal models (Belloni, 2012; Boege, 2016). This edited book by Uesugi, Deekeling, Umeyama, and McDonald-Colbert extends this inquiry and reappraises the concept by locating this phenomenon in the context of Asia. It attempts to answer a simple yet profound question that scholars and policymakers alike have grappled with: how can outsiders effectively facilitate a process

of hybridization that can tap into the resources and expertise of local actors without jeopardizing local ownership and 'locally grounded legitimacy'? The book provides multiple insights into the question and contributes to the discussion on hybridity in three domains: conceptually broadening and deepening the understanding of process of 'hybridization'; informing the praxis of peacebuilding; and contextual, where it provides fresh empirical insights and an inductive lens focused on peacebuilding in Asian. With nine chapters, and methodologically combining case studies with conceptual chapters, the book also engages with and builds on multiple other threads of scholarship in peace studies, including, inclusion of civil society, emerging powers in peacebuilding, power relations, religion in peacebuilding. Given the scope and layers of the book, it needs to be appraised as a key resource that helps us explore and unpack processes of hybridization in Asia.

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Enhancing the conceptual premise of 'hybridization'

'Hybridity' despite its conceptual scope has continued to be reinforce the binary of 'local' and 'international' when examining processes of hybridization. Even the type of peace outcomes that emerge are said to be depended on the positonality between the local and the international. For instance, Mac Ginty sees hybrid peace outcomes to be dependent on four variables: the compliance power of the liberal peace agents; the incentivizing powers of the liberal peace agents; the ability of local actors to resist, ignore or adapt; and finally the ability of local actors, structures and networks to present alternative forms of peace (Mac Ginty, 2011). An important conceptual contribution of the book is to redeem the scholarship of hybridity from this binary by advancing and critical appraising of the 'mid-space, a space in which the top, elite levels can interact with the bottom, grassroots or local level. Mid-space actors such as monks or civil society leaders are pitched as agents with the capacity to foster connections and dialogue between bottom/local or grassroots and often disengaged top/national and international actors. Their very positioning in the 'mid-space' gives them local legitimacy, but also access to external information which enables them to act both as gatekeepers or bridgebuilders, and thus, emerge as agents of hybrid peacebuilding. The chapters presenting case studies on Cambodia and the Philippines, as well as conceptual chapters in the book recount the influence these mid-space actors have in influencing knowledge formation and shaping normative commitments of their local communities.

The book, however, also outlines the conceptual inadequacies of the 'mid-space' framework. The chapter by Deekeling and Simangan notes that the specificities of the ambivalence in the position of 'mid-space' actors- either as bridgebuilders or gatekeepers, need to be teased out more explicitly to be meaningful. Explanations about under which conditions does a mid-space actor becomes either a bridge-builder or a spoiler are not completely clear and could be further delved on. Similarly, the framework of 'mid-space' holds that the 'legitimacy' mid-space actors hold can broker and bridge all sides- the national, local and the international. However, there are questions about whether inclusion of local actors and frameworks are autonomically likely to marginalize the normative preferences of the international or national actors and vice-versa. The chapter detailing the case of the Cambodian Sangha illustrates such zero-sum perspectives that can constrict the ability of mid-space actors. In Cambodia, Buddhist monks were successful in championing grassroots voices and views, but were not able to bridge their relationship with the authoritarian political elite.

Despite these conceptual inadequacies, the 'mid-space' framework does seek to remedy a core critique of 'hybrid peace' framework by making it more practically applicable for practitioners and policymakers. In advancing the framework of 'mid-space', the book recalibrates the 'scale' of actors responsible for processes of hybridization, by charting out a level that is between the national and local. It thus decenters the empirical and conceptual discussions on hybridity from its tendency to revolve around the binaries of bottom/local or grassroots and top/national and international actors. It also operationalizes the 'mid-space' as an arena which could be harnessed for more positive peace outcomes.

Relatedly, another conceptual highlight presented by the book is its harnessing of approaches of feminism, relationality, complexity, and identity to understand processes of 'hybridization' better. Brining these frameworks into conversation with 'hybridity' has not only enhanced the practical application of 'hybridity'

as a concept, but also reinforced the importance of 'mid-space'. For instance, 'complexity' highlights how the interactions between international peacebuilders and local stakeholders are an iterative process of mutual learning and adaptation. This has multiple inferences for processes of 'hybridization'. For instance, as De Coning's chapter outlines that adapting a 'complexity' based framework needs researchers not only to focus on actors, but rather on their connections and interactions, and how this changes the peacebuilding environment. These interactions between actors, often positioned differently in their power and leverage, not only help understand the processes of 'hybridization' but also how mid-space actors can be deployed within these equations.

Informing the praxis of peacebuilding

So pervasive is the use of 'hybridity' as a conceptual lens in peace studies that it has been used to explain for all aspects of peace process, in most conflict-contexts. From the hybrid governance in post-war Sri Lanka (Höglund and Orjuela, 2012); hybrid justice system in Cambodia (Simangan, 2018), and hybrid SSR, and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process in Rwanda (Wilén, 2012), examples are aplenty. Yet, despite the scholarly rigor, questions remain over how the framework can be harnessed for practical peacebuilding programming on the ground. If hybridity is about fluidity and absence of determinism, is there a scope for international actors to control the process to elicit certain liberal outcomes, and if no, is there even a point for international engagement in the process. To start, contrary to the scathing indictment of the role of international actors in conflict-affected contexts in peace studies, the book argues that there is both a role and responsibility of external actors in supporting peace processes. Or as De Coning and McDonald-Colbert, in the third chapter of the book put

it, 'local systems are often trapped in a path dependent conflict cycle that are resilient against change, and they may need external assistance to open-up other possibilities.'

The book, in the various chapters, outline practical pathways which allow such international actors can understand and facilitate processes of 'hybridization' in ways that embodies local legitimacy. First, the book highlights a visual mapping between different 'mid-space' actors who function between the local and international actors- can help make sense of the complexities on the ground. Understanding their relative power vis-à-vis' other local and national actors can also help international actors harness their skills and expertise. This finding chimes with the broader scholarship on the need to understand the 'political settlements' or the distribution of power in societies, understand power and interests of elites groups, and the bargains between them to situate how international interventions can de designed (Khan, 2010, 2018; Barma, 2012). The centrality of 'power' dynamics and notably, how elites can also shape international peace interventions to advance their interests has been frequently appraised in the scholarship (Parks and Cole, 2010).

Second, a pertinent policy insight that the book, notably, the fifth chapter by Sophie Shiori Umeyama and Will Brehm, builds on is the importance of identity of mid-space actors. The book outlines how these mid-space actors serve as guardians of beliefs, values, and group affiliations, and become arbiters of shared 'identity frames' to their constituencies. These identities, the book notes, can be harnessed for 'transformative relationship' building between the various cleavages in CAS. As aptly summated by case study of Cambodian monks, presented in the fifth chapter, where they were able to interweave indigenous religious practices with international

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discourses on peace, in effect, becoming important 'mid-space' actors in post-conflict Cambodia. However, the chapter also cautions of the limitations, while they can become bridge-builders, they might not entirely always succeed. In Cambodia, while monks used their authority and legitimacy to enable peace, they had to confront the country's repressive authoritarian regime which constrained their capacity. Further, this 'identity' can also be leveraged to become spoilers, as seen in the case of the monkhood in Myanmar. Transfer of knowledge, training them to enhance their skills to establish better rapport with national and local elites are some practical ways teased out in the fourth chapter by Anna Deekeling, Dahlia Simangan on how mid-space actors can be deployed for transformative relationship building.

Third, in leveraging the concept of complexity, the third chapter of the book cautions practitioners and policy makers that iterative and adaptive processes of peacebuilding, based on interplays between international peacebuilders and local stakeholders, means that any effective intervention must be innovative, amenable to change, and grounded on long-term engagement. Of course, ideas about long-term sustained peacebuilding engagement is neither new in policy circles nor scholarship, but what the book highlights that this long-term peacebuilding is also necessitated by time-intensive processes of relationship building with mid-space actors.

Lastly, the book, notably the sixth chapter by Ferth Manaysay and Jovanie Espesor reinforces the idea of inclusion, and how inclusion of marginalized actors in peace process. This focus on inclusion is not new-found. Pathways for inclusion, including, power-sharing mechanisms that act both as a short-term conflict management tool, which addresses demands for inclusion put forth by warring groups, and also as a long-term project of constitutional accommodation,

providing important guarantees through different political, territorial and military divisions of power has almost emerged as a sub-discipline in itself (Call, 2012; Bell, 2018). However, what is different is the book's inductive insights from the Philippines to highlight how civil society actors have enabled this process of greater inclusion of women and other marginalized groups. This focus on civil society confirms to newer insights on the role and inclusion of civil society actors in the peace settlement, and how this increases the durability of peace (Nilsson, 2012).

Contextual insights on 'Asian peacebuilding'

With the case studies of Cambodia and the Philippines and in looking at China and Japan as external peacebuilding actors, the chapters in this book emphasizes the peculiarities of regional states and their peacebuilding practices. The need to explore such specificities of Asia has been gaining ground considering two distinctions. First, the states in Asia have rarely collapsed in its entirety and thus have not needed statebuilding efforts. Rather the conflicts tended to be due to overreach of or abuse of power by the state (Keethaponcalan, 2020). Second, any external peacebuilding effort in Asia is likely to encounter regional and emergent powers, like China, Japan, or India which is likely to become an intervening variable in the intervention. The book fleshes these peculiarities by looking at Japan's peacebuilding engagement in Timor-Leste, Myanmar, and Mindanao, as well as China's role in Myanmar and Afghanistan/Pakistan. The chapter on China fleshes out the concept of 'developmental peace' - idea that conflicts are rooted in material deprivation, and that development, in the form of economic wellbeing, infrastructural investment, and trade opportunities, can address instability (He, 2019; Kuo, 2020) The book underscores both similarities

and differences between Japan and China's role- a pertinent finding given the nascent scholarship on practices of these states in the realm of peacebuilding. Points of convergence between the two pertain to adherence to Westphalian notions of sovereignty and non-interference as its logical corollary, and absence of hesitance of collaborating with illiberal mid-space actors like the military in Myanmar. Differences are related more in terms of the impact of the engagement on peace outcomes. The eights chapter of the book by Yuji Uesugi and Anna Deekeling highlights how Japan has exploited its potential as a 'hybrid peacebuilding facilitator', while the chapter by KwokChung Wong and Fujian Li question the transformative ability of China's 'developmental peace' on grounds that it lacks grassroots engagement to fully foster locally legitimate hybrid peace.

Despite its significant contributions, there are two aspects of the book, which I believe, could be further explored. First, the book focuses on interaction of Japanese and Chinese actors with mid-space actors in different Asian states in the last two chapters. However, in positing China and Japan as distinct, and regional peacebuilding actors, with competing norms and modalities of engagement, to that of liberal peacebuilders, the book could have taken the inquiry further to look at Japan and China themselves as 'mid-space' actors bridging the West and the conflict-affected states. As regional actors, these states are seen to bring in both leverage and resources in peace processes in Asia, and thus serve as bridgebuilders and gatekeepers. The second is the much-discussed idea if hybridity can be determined and worked on, or is it the culmination of an organic process of interactions between varied local, national, and international actors (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2016). The book despite discussing these debates in the first few chapters does not provide an explicit position and thorough engagement on this debate, despite many case studies

dealing with the same issue. This could have made a further theoretical contribution to the study of hybrid peace, but peace studies more broadly. While these remain, the book makes a significant contribution to understanding processes of hybridization of Asia and would be a relevant resource to all scholars of peace studies and practitioners.

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