Gauging Chinese Public Support for China’s Role in Peacekeeping

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Abstract

In recent years, Beijing has significantly increased its support for UN peacekeeping operations (UKPKOs). Currently, China is the largest troop-contributing country among the permanent members of the Security Council and the second-largest financial contributor to the UN peacekeeping budget. How does the Chinese public view its country’s involvement in peacekeeping operations? We investigate the question using a public opinion survey experiment conducted in China. Our main findings are as follows. First, respondents generally showed a high level of support for China’s participation in peacekeeping operations, and their support was highest if China served a leadership role. Second, China’s particular interest in a host country did not affect the level of support for China’s involvement; however, respondents perceived broad benefits to China’s international reputation from such activities. Third, there was a similar level of support for China’s participation in peacekeeping whether the mission was authorized by the United Nations or the African Union, but neither was seen as a substitute for host-state consent. Finally, respondents generally preferred that China make personnel (military and police) contributions in addition to financial contributions. These findings provide important insights into both the domestic motivations for and the constraints on Beijing’s future policy towards peacekeeping.

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1. Introduction

Since the end of World War II, interstate conflict has steadily decreased and civil war has become the dominant form of conflict. During this time, the annual battle deaths per million has dropped substantially, but the scope of humanitarian crises has not shown the same positive trend. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, an unprecedented 68.5 million people had been forcibly displaced by 2017—the size of Thailand’s population, which ranks 20th in the world. Among the displaced, nearly 25.4 million were refugees who fled their countries to escape conflict. Furthermore, these numbers increased five years in a row.\(^1\) The nature of civil wars has significantly contributed to these trends. Research has found that on average, civil wars last nearly four times as long as interstate wars;\(^2\) they also display a high degree of recidivism, with more than 50% of countries that have suffered one civil war experiencing a recurrence.\(^3\) Breaking the vicious cycle of conflict recurrence has become a major policy challenge for the global community.

Third-party peacekeeping operations, especially UN-authorizes peacekeeping operations (UNPKOs), have been found to significantly reduce the risk of conflict recurrence and lead to longer peace.\(^4\) Such results have increased the demand for peacekeeping missions in more places and for more complex tasks, from protecting civilians, to facilitating political processes to end violence, to supporting the establishment of new institutions that can help build lasting peace. Indeed, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of missions and the number of troops in each mission

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since 2000, and today, 14 UNPKOs are ongoing with more than 100,000 personnel serving in the missions.⁵

Yet the gap between what is needed and what UN peacekeeping can deliver continues to grow. While UN military and police peacekeeping forces have tripled since 2000, there has been a drop in financial contributions from rich countries who are permanent members of the UN Security Council. More importantly, these high-capability countries have not been contributing very many troops.⁶ The resulting trend is that rich countries contribute money and poorer countries contribute troops. This divide does not bode well for the legitimacy and effectiveness of UNPKOs.

China is an outlier against this backdrop, as its financial and troop contributions have steadily increased in recent years. Currently, China is the largest troop-contributing country among the permanent members of the Security Council and the second-largest financial contributor to the UN peacekeeping budget. In addition, China completed the registration of 8,000 standby forces at the United Nations in 2017 and pledged $1 billion over the next decade for the establishment of a China–UN peace and development fund.⁷ By bridging the gap between the decision makers at the Security Council and the troop-contributing countries that carry out UNPKOs on the ground, China is poised to become one of the key players shaping the contours of UN missions in the next decade and beyond.⁸

China’s increased commitment to UN peacekeeping has raised some important questions. Existing studies have focused on the Chinese government’s motivations for stepping up its peacekeeping efforts, and how the change can be reconciled with China’s long-standing foreign policy principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, but virtually no attention has been paid to the Chinese public’s attitudes about its country’s deeper involvement in UNPKOs. Peacekeeping

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can be costly for the public in terms of both sacrifices made by Chinese peacekeepers and the financial resources required for missions. Understanding Chinese public opinion on peacekeeping can thus provide important insights into both the motivations for and the constraints on the government’s future policy.

Studying Chinese public opinion raises the question of whether the public’s views matter to Beijing’s foreign policy. Recent scholarship has provided evidence that they do. Detailed studies of events since 2000 have offered convincing confirmation of the link between public opinion and China’s foreign policies, particularly regarding the United States and Japan. In addition, with the explosive increase in the number of Internet news outlets and the use of social media and networking tools, the Chinese public has become increasingly vocal about domestic and foreign policy issues in the public sphere. This in turn has placed constraints on government policy, and there have been many notable examples of government policy change at the local and central levels in response to strong public opposition expressed on the Internet and protests coordinated by calls to action on the Internet. Currently, China has 802 million online users, and the most popular messaging app, WeChat, had 1.08 billion monthly users in 2018. That the Internet population tends to be young further augments the speed with which public opinion may form and escalate in response to a news story. China’s increasing participation in peacekeeping missions will inevitably result in more frequent reports on the activities of Chinese peacekeepers and their sacrifices. Such reports will draw public attention, thus presenting the Chinese government with both motivations for and constraints on its decisions to send peacekeepers to far-flung places.

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Using a survey experiment conducted in China, this study investigates Chinese public attitudes about UN peacekeeping operations in general and China’s participation in particular. The survey experiment seeks to answer three main questions. First, how does the public react to different motivations for China’s participation in peacekeeping? We identify three motivations beyond humanitarianism for Beijing’s interest in UN peacekeeping: China’s economic, strategic, and security interests in a host country. Intuitively, these three factors capture the main sources of self-interest that may motivate a country to participate in peacekeeping, but we also gauge the respondents’ attitudes about the reputational aspects of China’s peacekeeping in an auxiliary question. Second, does public support for peacekeeping change depending on the type of participation? We identify three types of Chinese participation, based on China’s practice thus far: financial contribution only, personnel and financial contributions, and playing a leadership role in addition to financial and personnel contributions. Third, does it make a difference whether the UN or a regional organization such as the African Union (AU) authorizes a mission? While China has only participated in UN-authored peacekeeping, authorization by a regional organization has been argued to add legitimacy in the eyes of regional actors, especially if host-state consent is not available for various reasons. It is thus informative to understand the Chinese public’s views on the prospect.

Our main findings are as follows. First, respondents generally showed a high level of support for China’s participation in UNPKOs, but their support was highest if China served a leadership role. Second, China’s particular interest in a host country did not affect the level of support for China’s involvement; however, respondents perceived broad benefits to China’s international reputation from such activities. Third, there was a similar level of support for China’s participation in peacekeeping whether the mission was authorized by the United Nations or the African Union, but neither was seen as a substitute for host-state consent. Finally, respondents generally preferred that China make personnel (military and police) contributions in addition to financial contributions. Our study provides the first direct evidence of the policy preferences of the

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Chinese public on peacekeeping operations. Moreover, it addresses an important gap in the peacekeeping literature. Existing studies focus almost exclusively on the effect of peacekeeping on the host countries, overlooking the domestic incentives and challenges facing the contributing countries. Our research thus sheds light on the supply side of peacekeeping, which crucially depends on domestic politics.

2. China and Peacekeeping: Interests, Types, and IO Authorization

Since the 1990s, China has steadily increased its support for UN peacekeeping missions in both personnel and financial contributions (Figure 1 and Figure 2). In 1990, when it first began to participate in UNPKOs, China sent five military observers to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization in the Middle East. In contrast, China is today the largest troop-contributing country among the five permanent members of the Security Council, with more than 2,500 peacekeepers in the field. In addition, China is the second-largest financial contributor to UN peacekeeping, though the amount is still considerably lower than the United States’ contribution. As of 2018, China provided 10.3% of the peacekeeping budget (about $686 million), more than three times its contribution to the regular UN budget ($213 million). These numbers have been on an upward trajectory for more than a decade.
Fig. 1. UN Peacekeeping Troop Contributions by the P5, 1990–2015.
Source: The International Peace Institute Peacekeeping Database.

Fig. 2. UN Peacekeeping Financial Contributions by the P5 (Nominal USD), 1994–2015.
Source: The International Peace Institute Peacekeeping Database.
The international community stands to gain in a number of ways from China’s deeper engagement in UN peacekeeping. In addition to contributing directly to humanitarian goals, such activities can also motivate China to embrace international norms and bring more transparency to its military operations. But what are the factors that have motivated China to step up its peacekeeping efforts? A significant literature has developed to address the question, and a few factors have been identified to explain China’s behavior. First, its growing contribution to peacekeeping may enhance China’s reputation as a responsible great power at a time when such contributions are badly needed and when there are calls for Beijing to take up more global responsibilities. The move may also help reduce other countries’ anxiety about China’s rapid rise. Second, China’s significant overseas economic and resource interests, particularly in Africa, mean that China has a direct or indirect interest in preserving peace and security in other parts of the world, particularly in Asia and Africa. Finally, UN peacekeeping may serve broad strategic interests, such as furthering diplomatic influence in developing regions, strengthening military-to-military ties, etc. These arguments are intuitive, but the empirical evidence does not provide clear support for all of them. Moreover, to our knowledge, no study has examined how appealing these arguments are to the Chinese public.

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18 Songying Fang, Xiaojun Li, and Fanglu Sun, ‘China’s Evolving Motivations and Goals in UN Peacekeeping Participation.’
public. Our experimental design in this study allows us to examine whether these presumed drivers of the government’s policy actually influence the Chinese public’s attitudes about China’s engagement in PKOs.

In addition to stepping up its financial contributions, China in recent years has also shown a willingness to send a wider variety of personnel to UN missions. China has been known to provide enabling units to UN peacekeepers who are responsible for logistic, engineering, and medical support. Such units are highly valued as they are essential to the effectiveness of a mission and are in short supply. Since 2015, China has also deployed combat troops to Mali and South Sudan to keep peace and protect civilians in civil war environments. These soldiers experienced tense situations where they were attacked by local armed militants, and three Chinese peacekeepers were killed. Given the significant increase in its financial and personnel contributions, Beijing is seeking a leadership role in UN peacekeeping, arguing that its input in decision making should be commensurate with its contributions.

However, China will face new uncertainty in its quest to be more deeply involved in UNPKOs. In particular, such a step may require a departure from its long-standing foreign policy principle of not interfering in the internal affairs of other states. The principle has served China’s interest well by providing a defence against Western criticisms of its domestic policies and helping China gain trust among developing countries that feel equally vulnerable to similar criticisms. On the other hand, it is unclear what the payoffs are for China if it departs from the policy. Therefore, even as it provides more robust support for peacekeeping, China will likely continue to rely on UN authorization and consent of the host government to provide legitimacy for such actions.

Nevertheless, challenging circumstances may arise when host-state consent is not forthcoming while a country is experiencing a humanitarian crisis that demands action.

from the international community. China should prepare for such contingencies if it aims to project the image of a responsible great power. A practical question worth exploring is whether authorization by a regional organization, such as the AU, can substitute for host-state consent. For instance, the AU has the authority to sanction an intervention in a member state’s domestic affairs during a grave humanitarian crisis, which in the eyes of regional actors may legitimize an international intervention without the consent of the host government.\footnote{See ‘Constitutive Act of the African Union,’ article 4(h), http://www.achpr.org/instruments/au-constitutive-act/.} Therefore, AU support may give Beijing the flexibility to intervene under such circumstances. How would Chinese people react to such a change in their government’s policy stance? The non-interference policy has been reiterated numerous times by the government during the past 60 years and thus is extremely well known to the public.

Protecting national interests is one of the most important foundations of the Chinese government’s legitimacy in the eyes of the Chinese people.\footnote{Hongxin Yang and Dingxin Zhao, ‘Performance Legitimacy, State Autonomy and China’s Economic Miracle,’ \textit{Journal of Contemporary China}, Vol. 24, No. 91, 2015, pp. 492–507; Yunhan Zhu, ‘Performance Legitimacy and China’s Political Adaptation Strategy,’ \textit{Journal of China Political Science}, Vol. 16, No. 2, 2011, pp. 123–140.} The task has been made more challenging in the last decade with the rise of new communication technologies and social media, by greatly reducing information asymmetry between the government and the public, and by providing tools for quick and visible public opinion formation. Thus, understanding how the Chinese public perceives different aspects of China’s engagement in peacekeeping operations will provide important insights into the evolution of Beijing’s policy in this area in the future.

Based on the above discussion, we test three sets of hypotheses. In the first set, we test the effects of China’s self-interest in the host country on respondents’ support for China’s peacekeeping activities in the country. We identified three such interests: economic, strategic, and security. That China’s (or any country’s) peacekeeping efforts may be motivated by economic and strategic interests in a host country is easily understood and has been discussed earlier. We also think that security concerns can motivate China to participate in future peacekeeping, though few existing studies have
considered such a possibility. In particular, terrorism poses a grave threat to the international community at large, and Beijing may very well be cognizant of the logic that intervening in conflicts in fragile or failed states that have become breeding grounds for terrorism can help protect Chinese interests overseas and enhance domestic security by keeping bad actors away from its borders. We expect that the presence of any of these three national interests will increase Chinese public support for China’s participation in a peacekeeping mission. Because the logic is similar for all three interests, we state one hypothesis to capture the effect of each on public support:

**H1 (Interests):** Chinese public support for China’s participation in a peacekeeping mission to relieve a humanitarian crisis will be higher if China has economic/strategic/security interests in the host country than if it has no such interests in the host country.

Next, we examine the effect of endorsement by the UN or a regional organization on Chinese public support for China’s participation in peacekeeping. Traditionally, Beijing has recognized the UN as the only legitimate international organization to authorize peacekeeping missions. But this need not always be the case. Half of the conflicts in the world have occurred in Africa, and the AU’s Peace and Security Council (PSC) has authorized twelve peace support operations (PSOs), with mission strength reaching as high as 9,600. Moreover, China has partnered with the AU on a growing number of issues, including peace and security. It is not inconceivable, then, given the AU’s authority to sanction an intervention in a member state’s domestic affairs, China may seek AU endorsement to legitimize peacekeeping operations under some circumstances,

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23 In its 1984 UNPKO policy, China stated that a peacekeeping mission must be authorized by the UN. This position has been reiterated many times in its official statements and was also laid out in China’s 2000 Defense White Paper.
especially when host-country consent is not available. Nevertheless, currently China still regards the UN as the most authoritative organization in global security affairs. Therefore, we test the following hypothesis:

\[ H2 \text{ (Authorization)}: \text{UN authorization leads to a higher level of Chinese public support for China’s participation in a peacekeeping mission than AU authorization.} \]

Finally, we test a set of hypotheses regarding public support for different types of contributions that China makes to a peacekeeping mission. It is possible that different types of contributions may be perceived to affect public welfare differently, and therefore public support for China’s participation may vary depending on the contribution type. For example, financial contributions may be perceived as reducing Chinese citizens’ economic welfare, while personnel contributions may be perceived as dangerous to Chinese soldiers. As for China playing a leadership role in peacekeeping missions (in addition to financial and military contributions), the public may perceive higher economic and security costs on the one hand, and increased global influence for China on the other hand. Because it brings more benefits to China in terms of international influence compared with the other two types, we hypothesize that the leadership treatment will attract the most support from respondents.

\[ H3.1 \text{ (Participation Type)}: \text{Given the three types of contributions, the Chinese public is more likely to support China playing a leadership role in a peacekeeping mission.} \]

The other two experimental conditions may also interact with participation types, drawing higher support for certain combinations of China’s interests, international organization (IO) authorization, and types of peacekeeping contributions. It is neither possible nor interesting to compare all possible combinations, but we have two fairly straightforward conjectures. First, the existence of security interests, operationalized in

\[25] This can happen either because the country experiencing a humanitarian crisis is in anarchy with no functioning government, such as in Somali, or because the consent is not forthcoming from the government that is causing the crisis, such as in South Sudan.
our survey design as a terrorist threat in the host country, may lead the public to support more robust participation from China in the form of playing a leadership role in military actions. Second, because of the greater prestige that the UN enjoys compared with a regional organization, the public support for playing a leadership role is higher when the UN authorizes a mission than when the AU does. Thus, we have the following additional hypotheses about the types of participation:

**H3.2 (Security Interests × Participation Type):** Compared with the existence of other interests in the host country, the existence of a terrorist threat increases the level of support for playing a leadership role in a peacekeeping mission.

**H3.3 (UN Authorization × Participation Type):** Compared with a mission authorized by the AU, a mission led by the UN increases the level of support for China playing a leadership role in a peacekeeping mission.

### 3. Experimental Design

To test the hypotheses, we designed a survey experiment to examine the effects of three factors on the Chinese public’s support for China’s participation in peacekeeping: China’s specific interest in the host country (economic, strategic, and security), the type of contribution that China makes (some combination of financial, personnel, and leadership), and the IO that authorises a peacekeeping mission (the UN or the AU). Furthermore, we gauge the respondents’ attitudes about acquiring host-state consent as a prerequisite for China’s participation in a UN peacekeeping mission, and their perceptions about reputational benefits that China may derive from such activities.

Because civil war has become the most common form of armed conflict, and UNPKOs are often deployed in response to humanitarian crises resulting from such conflicts, we provided respondents with a hypothetical humanitarian crisis situation in a civil war context. Moreover, because just over a half of China’s peacekeeping missions
have been in Africa,\textsuperscript{26} we placed the hypothetical country in that region. We randomly varied three dimensions of the scenario (see Table 1) that describe (1) China’s commonly identified self-interests (economic, strategic, and security) in the country in addition to the humanitarian baseline; (2) the IO that endorsed a peacekeeping mission (UN or AU); and (3) China’s participation type (financial support only; both financial and military (and police) support; financial and military support, as well as playing a leadership role in military actions).\textsuperscript{27} With this design, each respondent read the following hypothetical scenario:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>China’s Interests in the Host Country</th>
<th>IO Authorization</th>
<th>Participation Types</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian Crisis</td>
<td>UN Authorization</td>
<td>Financial Contribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian Crisis + Economic Interest</td>
<td>AU Authorization</td>
<td>Personnel Contribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian Crisis + Strategic Interest</td>
<td></td>
<td>Military Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian Crisis + Security Interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Treatments of Each Experimental Condition (4×2×3 Design).
Note: Security threat was operationalised as a terrorist threat.

\textit{A country in Africa is experiencing a large-scale civil war. [None/China has important economic ties with the country/China has a strategic partnership with the country/The country is quickly becoming a breeding ground for terrorism.] The war has resulted in a humanitarian crisis, with thousands of civilian deaths, and even more have become refugees. [The UN/African Union] has passed a resolution to create a peacekeeping mission in the country to re-establish and maintain stability, and is calling on countries around the world to provide economic and military assistance to the mission. The Chinese government has decided to provide [financial support only/both financial assistance and military (and police) support/financial as well as military and police support, and to play a leadership role in military actions].}

\textsuperscript{26} Out of the 29 UNPKOs in which China has participated since 1990, roughly 52% have been in Africa. This is not out of step with 47% of UN missions being in the region in the same period.

\textsuperscript{27} Since China started contributing to UNPKOs in the early 1990s, personnel and financial contributions have almost always gone hand in hand. Furthermore, China has not played a leadership role in a mission without also making financial and military contributions. Therefore, we only considered these realistic types of participation in our survey design.
After presenting the background information, we asked each respondent three questions. The first question straightforwardly gauged a respondent’s attitude about China’s involvement in peacekeeping activities, given the hypothetical scenario that was presented:

*Question 1: To what extent do you support or oppose the decision by the Chinese government?*

Respondents were given a choice of positions on a five-point scale: “strongly support,” “somewhat support,” “neutral,” “somewhat oppose,” and “strongly oppose.” The next question sought to understand respondents’ attitudes on the condition of host-state consent, which the Chinese government has insisted on in the past but that can be difficult to obtain in all circumstances.

*Question 2: To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “When China participates in a UNPKO, China should also acquire the permission of the host country.”*

In the final question, we presented to respondents three statements that the Chinese government often uses to justify foreign policies. For each statement, respondents were given the choice of their positions on a five-point scale: “strongly agree,” “somewhat agree,” “somewhat disagree,” “strongly disagree,” and “not sure.” The purpose of this question was to gauge whether respondents perceived broad and indirect benefits to China from its participation in peacekeeping that were not captured by our interest treatments. In particular, it is often argued that China cares a great deal about its reputation as a responsible great power, and we were interested in to what extent respondents made the link between the argument and China’s peacekeeping activities.

*Question 3: To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements?*

• *China’s participation in peacekeeping will be conducive to China’s relationship with the host country;*
China’s participation in peacekeeping will be conducive to improving China’s image internationally;

China’s participation in peacekeeping will demonstrate China being a responsible major power.

In the remainder of the survey, we focused on individuals’ characteristics. In particular, we developed measures that captured respondents’ degree of nationalism, their perceptions of China’s global status, their assessment of China’s economic prospect in the next five years, and their interest in current affairs.28 We also asked typical socio-economic and demographic questions, including age, ethnicity, gender, region, education, income, and self-perceived social status, and whether or not the respondent was employed in the state sector, was a member of the Chinese Communist Party, and had rural household registration.

4. Data and Findings

The survey experiment was administered by Qualtrics in China in May 2017. A total of 10,000 solicitations were sent to the subject pool, yielding a random sample of 2,122 Chinese adults.29 In terms of the self-reported demographic characteristics, 73.0% of the respondents were aged between 20 and 40; 96.7% were of the Han nationality; 59.3% were male; 75.8% identified as urban residents (city hukou). About 27.8% of the respondents had an annual income less than 30,000 yuan (around $5,000) and 20.9% over 120,000 yuan (around $20,000). In addition, 40.3% of the respondents worked in the state sector and 20.9% of the respondents were Communist party members. Finally, 92.3% of the respondents answered that they were very or fairly interested in China’s current affairs.30

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28 For details, see the survey questionnaire in online Appendix E.
29 The pilot survey was implemented on April 20, 2017. We designed the survey questionnaire in Qualtrics, and the company gave the survey link to the respondents, who were redirected back to the company’s server at the end of the survey to claim their points.
30 Overall, the population that our sample represents is younger, better informed, and politically more active than the average Chinese person. Mean comparisons of these variables confirm that overall, the covariates are balanced across the treatment and control groups of the three experimental conditions: China’s interests in the host country, IO authorization, and PKO type. See online Appendix A for
After reading a short introduction to the survey, each respondent was given the hypothetical scenario and the subsequent questions, as described in the Experimental Design section. A quick look at the respondents’ attitudes about PKOs reveals that the public is highly supportive of China’s participation in peacekeeping in general; 90.7% of the respondents supported China’s participation in the peacekeeping mission regardless of the specific interest for China in the host country, the IO that authorized the mission, and the type of contribution that China was said to make. More specifically, on average, roughly 60.0% of the respondents strongly supported China’s participation, and around 30.9% somewhat supported it. This finding is in line with the findings from some developed countries, such as the US and Canada, but the level of support is even higher in the Chinese respondents.\footnote{For instance, a survey in 2012 showed that a large majority (78%) of Americans believe the US should participate in PKOs; see Chicago Council on Global Affairs, \textit{Global Views 2004: American Public Opinion and Foreign Policy}, 2004, p.53. A Nano research survey in 2016 found that nearly 80% of Canadians think that participating in UN peacekeeping missions is a good thing; see CTV news, ‘Majority Supports Peacekeeping Missions in Active Fighting Areas: Nanos Survey,’ October 13, 2016, \url{https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/majority-supports-peacekeeping-missions-in-active-fighting-areas-nanos-survey-1.3114666}.} Below we discuss the results in more detail.

4.1 Interests in the Host Country

Figure 3 presents the results for the first hypothesis, which specifies the relationship between respondents’ attitudes about China’s participation in a peacekeeping mission and China’s interests in the host country. The vertical axis lists the three treatments of China’s interest in the host country, which we randomly assigned to respondents, along with the humanitarian baseline, and the horizontal axis is the level of support. The mid-point of each line represents the point estimate of the percentage of respondents who answered “strongly support” or “somewhat support” to the first question corresponding to each category on the vertical axis. The length of each line represents the 95% confidence
interval of the estimate, and the $p$-values are based on four-sample two-tailed Kruskal-Wallis tests.\footnote{The Kruskal-Wallis test is a non-parametric method for testing whether samples originate from the same distribution. It extends the pairwise Mann-Whitney U test to compare two or more independent samples of equal or different sample sizes.}

As we noted earlier, the Chinese public showed a high level of support for China’s participation in PKOs. Even the baseline case of only humanitarian interest received 90.3\% support. Surprisingly, and contrary to our first hypothesis, none of the self-interests that China may have in the host country increased support compared with the baseline; there are no statistically significant differences in the level of support across the four categories.\footnote{Of the $p$-values yielded in the Kruskal-Wallis tests comparing the respondents’ support for China making a financial contribution, making a personnel contribution, and playing a military leadership role, none of them achieves statistical significance.} The finding is interesting in and of itself, even though it does not support our hypothesis. It challenges conventional wisdom about the factors that may increase public support for a foreign policy. It also suggests that Chinese policy makers may have

![Fig. 3. China’s Interests in the Host Country and Average Level of Chinese Public Support for PKO.](image-url)

*Note:* The $p$-value in a four-sample Kruskal-Wallis test is .827, which implies that the levels of support of the respondents in the four subgroups are not statistically significant.
a lot of policy space when it comes to providing peacekeeping, and indeed, Beijing’s increased peacekeeping efforts in recent years seem to support this takeaway.

### 4.2 IO Authorization

![Graph showing IO Authorization and Average Level of Chinese Public Support for PKO.](image)

**Note:** The p-values are derived from t-tests comparing respondents with different treatments on IO authorization in terms of their support for specific types of PKO specified on the vertical axis.

For our second hypothesis, the results presented in Figure 4 show that whether a mission was endorsed by the UN or the AU did not make a difference in respondents’ support for China’s participation in peacekeeping. In other words, the finding suggests that the Chinese public does not perceive the AU as a less authoritative organization than the UN when it comes to authorizing a peacekeeping mission on the African continent. This does not support H2, but given our earlier discussion about the AU having the authority to sanction peacekeeping missions that are intrusive, the result is more instructive than otherwise. In recent years, China has significantly increased its support for the AU’s peacekeeping efforts. For instance, the AU received $1.3 million before 2010, and $1.2 million more in 2015 and 2016 from the Chinese government for capacity
building in the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). The Chinese public’s perception of the AU’s role in PKOs may have been influenced by reports of this intensified cooperation between China and the AU. But we cannot rule out two other possible explanations for the result: it could be that the Chinese public generally holds a positive view about significant international organizations, or the public may not be informed enough to differentiate between the two organizations, particularly regarding their roles in resolving conflicts and maintaining peace. Nevertheless, this is a significant finding that suggests regional organizations may have a more important role to play in public opinion in China when it comes to mobilizing support for peacekeeping missions.

4.3 Types of Participation

Figure 5 and Figure 6 present results corresponding to our third group of hypotheses. The vertical axis in Figure 5 lists the three types of participation that China may offer for peacekeeping. Consistent with H3.1, we find that the level of support is highest, at 94.0%, for the most robust form of participation—playing a leadership role—while the levels of support for financial and personnel contributions are 88.5% and 91.8%, respectively. Next, recall that H3.2 and H3.3 compare the level of support for China playing a leadership role with the support for the other two types, but they do so in the context of China’s security interest and UN authorization. Therefore, Figure 6 presents the distribution of the respondents’ support for some of the treatment combinations. The vertical axis in the figure lists the four motivations for peacekeeping and the two types IO authorization. Two of the six treatment combinations concern our last group of hypotheses, but additional interesting patterns emerge as well from the figure. Consistent with H.3.2 and H3.3, for both security interest and UN authorization there is a statistically significant higher level of support for China playing a leadership role than for financial contributions only. In fact, the pattern holds for the other four treatment

35 These differences are statistically significant at the .0001 level in a Kruskal-Wallis test.
36 We conducted three-sample Kruskal-Wallis tests for these two hypotheses.
combinations as well, with strategic interest being the exception. This exception might be attributable to the fact that the meaning of strategic partnership is rather vague, though the term is often used in the official language of the Chinese government.

Fig. 5. Chinese Public Support for Three Types of PKO.

Note: The p-value statistics shown above are derived from t-tests comparing respondents receiving the treatment specified on the y-axis with the respondents in the baseline group (i.e., who received the "financial contribution" treatment). In addition, the p-value in a three-sample Kruskal-Wallis test is .0001, which implies that the levels of support of the respondents in these three subgroups are statistically significant.

However, there is no difference between the levels of support for playing a leadership role and for making (financial and) personnel contributions. Thus, it seems that the dividing line for the respondents’ attitudes is whether or not China sent peacekeepers in addition to contributing financially, rather than whether or not China played a leadership role in peacekeeping. Overall, China leading PKO missions is the type of participation the respondents favored most.
Fig. 6. Chinese Public Support for Different Types of PKO in Different Scenarios.

*Note*: The *p*-values are derived from three-sample Kruskal-Wallis tests comparing respondents with different treatments on participation types in the scenarios specified on the vertical axis.

5. The Effects of Host-State Consent and Benefits to China

Since the beginning of China’s participation in UNPKOs in the early 1990s, Beijing has insisted on the so-called Hammarskjöld principles of peacekeeping: consent of the host country, non-use of force except in self-defence, and neutrality. In its 1984 UNPKO policy, China clearly stated that a PKO mission must not be deployed without an invitation from the target state. The position was reiterated in China’s 2000 White Paper on National Defence. However, recent years have seen a perceptible shift in China’s domestic debate on peacekeeping from a focus on state sovereignty to China’s responsibility as a rising major power. A statement in China’s 2005 policy paper on UN

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reforms leaves some room for approving resolutions based on UN Chapter VII in “exceptional” situations.39

Has this shift had a trickle-down effect on the Chinese public? No. The second main question in our survey asked respondents to express their degree of support for the statement that a host-state’s consent was necessary for China’s participation in UNPKOs. As many as 88.5% agreed with the statement, but support was even higher among older respondents: 90.1% of respondents age 50 or older answered “Yes,” compared with 84.7% of the younger respondents. Moreover, we found that 89.2% of the respondents who received the AU treatment said that host-state consent was required, while 87.8% of the respondents who received the UN treatment said the same; the difference is not statistically significant. These results suggest that respondents thought host-state consent was extremely important and could not be replaced by the endorsement of a regional organization.

The third main question in our survey asked respondents to share their views about the broad benefits to China of its peacekeeping activities. Recall that China’s interests in a host country did not increase respondents’ level of support for China’s peacekeeping activities compared with the baseline scenario of simply witnessing a humanitarian crisis. Presumably respondents were largely motivated by humanitarian concerns in their support. But could they perceive some indirect benefits to China? All three options presented to the respondents received very high levels of support: 91.3% of the respondents agreed that participating in PKOs would improve China’s bilateral relationship with the host country, 91.9% thought that it would improve China’s global image, and nearly 89.8% agreed with the statement that it would demonstrate China was a responsible major power.

We used the information from the two additional questions to construct independent variables that capture respondents’ attitudes regarding host-state consent and their perceptions of the overall benefits to China to help us explain a respondent’s support for peacekeeping. Furthermore, we developed measures that captured respondents’ degree of

nationalism, their perceptions of China’s global status, their perceptions of China’s economic prospects in the next five years, and their interest in current affairs. We then conducted a multivariate logistic analysis, using whether each respondent supported China’s participation in peacekeeping as the dependent variable, and three sets of independent variables: (1) the factors (interests, IO authorization, types of participation) and necessary interaction terms between them that correspond to hypotheses H3.2 and H3.3; (2) variables that capture respondents’ attitudes and perceptions discussed above; and (3) respondents’ socio-demographic variables.

Figure 7 presents the estimated coefficients of the independent variables and their 95% confidence intervals. The effects of the treatment variables are consistent with what we found in the bivariate analysis. Therefore, in what follows, we focus on the effects of the other two sets of independent variables.

Interestingly, we find that those who thought that host-state consent was a prerequisite for peacekeeping were 7.9% more likely to support China’s participation in PKOs. We conjecture that some underlying variable explains both. For instance, perhaps

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40 See these measurements and descriptive statistics in online Appendix A, Table 1.
more nationalistic respondents were more likely to support the idea that other countries’ sovereignty should be respected, just as they would like China’s sovereignty to be respected. Such respondents might also be more likely to support China joining peacekeeping missions because they take great pride in China being seen as a responsible power. Not surprising, we find that those who thought China received broad benefits by participating in peacekeeping were more likely to support China contributing to peacekeeping. Additionally, consistent with our intuition, respondents who were more nationalistic, more optimistic about China’s economic growth in the next five years, or more interested in current affairs, were more likely to support China’s participation in PKOs. However, a respondent’s perception of China’s global status—a global superpower or not—did not affect that person’s support for China’s participation in peacekeeping.

Some interesting patterns also emerged from other demographic characteristic variables. First, there were significant generational differences among the respondents: as shown in Figure 8, there is a negative relationship between the level of support for peacekeeping and age. More specifically, every ten-year increase in age reduces the level of support by about 1.1%. Second, respondents from Eastern and Central China showed a slightly higher level of support for China’s peacekeeping efforts than those from Western China. Interestingly, CCP membership had no effect on the dependent variable. Overall, the variables that capture respondents’ perceptions were better predictors of the respondents’ support for China’s participation in PKOs than the socio-demographic variables.
Fig. 8. Generational Differences in the Predicted Level of Public Support for China’s Participation in PKOs.

Note: Other variables’ values are set at their mean. The bars represent the 95% confidence interval for the predicted level of support. The 95% confidence intervals are calculated using the delta method.

In the above analysis, we used pooled data regardless of the treatments that different groups of respondents received. To detect nuanced patterns that may escape such an aggregated analysis, we conducted a separate analysis for each type of participation.41 Again, we do not find that IO authorization or China’s self-interest in a host country had any effect on the level of support that a particular type of participation received. Variables that capture respondents’ beliefs and perceptions, such as host-state consent, benefits to China, and nationalism, all positively correlated with the level of support, similar to what we observed in the pooled analysis. Moreover, the generational difference over the support for China’s participation in PKOs held for all types of participation as well. However, we do find an interesting twist to the earlier finding that being optimistic about China’s economic growth in the next five years increased respondents’ support for China’s participation in PKOs. When disaggregated, the effect appeared only for the participation type “financial assistance only.” Additionally, the regional difference that

41 See online Appendix D for details.
we found earlier also held only for the participation type “financial assistance only.” That is, respondents from Eastern and Central China, which are more developed than Western China, tended to be more supportive of China making financial contributions to peacekeeping. These nuanced findings make intuitive sense.

**Conclusion**

The world has witnessed an increasing number of states disintegrating into civil wars and anarchy in recent years. The international community has urged China to step up its effort to provide much-needed support for peacekeeping, in terms of both financial and personnel contributions. China has responded, and currently it is the largest troop-contributing country among the permanent members of the Security Council, and the second-largest financial contributor to the UN peacekeeping budget. While this development is impressive, the real test of the commitment will likely come in the future when the Chinese public begins to feel the costs associated with the increasing contributions.

So far, scant attention has been paid to the Chinese public’s preferences regarding peacekeeping. Much of the analysis inside and outside China about its expanding participation in UN peacekeeping has focused on Beijing’s decisions—especially its motivations for contributing more, and whether it will change its stance on non-interference. We believe there is a real need to understand the Chinese public’s opinions on these matters. Beijing’s foreign policy decisions are not without constraints. The proliferation of online news sources and communication technologies has made it extremely challenging for any government, including Beijing, to shield its public from receiving information on sensitive foreign policy issues. In the meantime, the Chinese public has become more eager to express their opinions, facilitated by increasing living standards as well as ever more convenient and faster social media applications, such as Weibo and WeChat. Therefore, understanding where the Chinese public stands on
China’s role in providing peace for the wider world provides important insights into the policy options available to Beijing in response to such issues.

Our survey design allows us to gauge Chinese public support for peacekeeping in the context of a wide range of factors, including motivations to participate, types of participation, IO authorization, and perceptions of the benefits to China. Moreover, we are able to tease out to what extent sensitive issues, such as host-state consent, associated with China’s long-held principle of non-interference in others’ domestic affairs, may influence public attitudes about China’s peacekeeping efforts.

Many both intuitive and surprising findings emerged from the study. The main findings are as follows. First, in all scenarios, respondents showed high levels of support for China’s engagement in peacekeeping activities. Second, contrary to conventional wisdom, China’s various self-interests in the host country did not increase the already high level of support based only on humanitarianism; however, respondents perceived indirect benefits to China’s international reputation from such activities, which might have contributed to their strong support for China’s participation in peacekeeping. Third, whether the UN or the AU authorized a PKO did not make a difference to the level of support for China’s engagement in the mission; at the same time, we found no evidence that AU authorization was seen as a substitute for the condition of host-state consent. Finally, respondents generally preferred that China make personnel (military and police) contributions in addition to financial contributions.

While our sample is not representative of the general population, it is representative of China’s large online population. The attributes of our respondents are consistent with the characteristics of Chinese netizens found in the annual Report on the Development of Internet Network in China recently released by the China Internet Network Information Center (CINIC). The samples drawn in others’ online surveys or survey experiments conducted in China also found attributes similar to our sample. One could argue that

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the online population is the more politically attentive segment of Chinese society and is the likely source of domestic pressure on Beijing’s foreign policy. Beijing may very well be keen to anticipate the online public reactions when rolling out significant foreign policy initiatives. Therefore, research on Chinese public opinion such as ours helps explain and predict Chinese foreign policy.

So what are the main policy implications of our study? First, the results suggest that Beijing has a lot of policy space when it comes to providing peacekeeping because the Chinese public does not seem to attach immediate self-interest to their support for such missions. Second, the fact that the public tends to support peacekeeping more if China takes a leadership should give Beijing a strong incentive to seek such a role in the UN. Third, the public is likely to view favorably Beijing’s deepening cooperation with the AU on peacekeeping. Finally, host-state consent may continue to pose domestic constraint on Beijing’s peacekeeping decisions in the future.
