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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 (UNPKOs). Of the five permanent members of the Security Council, China is currently the largest troop-contributing country and the second-largest financial contributor to the UN peacekeeping budget. What is the view of the Chinese public on its country's involvement in peacekeeping operations? We investigate the question using a public opinion survey experiment conducted in China. Our main findings are, first, that respondents showed a high level of support generally for China's participation in peacekeeping operations but highest of all when China performed a leadership role. Secondly, China's particular interest in a host country did not affect the degree of public support for China's involvement; however, respondents did perceive broad benefits to China's international reputation from such activities. Thirdly, although there was a similar level of support for China's participation in peacekeeping whether the mission was authorised by the United Nations or by the African Union, neither was seen as a substitute for host state consent. Finally, respondents generally preferred China to make personnel (military and police) contributions in addition to financial contributions. These findings provide important insights into the domestic motivations for Beijing's future peacekeeping policy and attendant constraints in this regard.

Introduction

Since the end of World War II, interstate conflict has steadily declined and civil war has become the dominant form of conflict. During this time, the number of annual battle deaths per million has substantially fallen, but the scope of humanitarian crises has not shown a similarly positive trend. According to the United Nations (UN) Refugee Agency, by 2017 an unprecedented 68.5 million people—the size of Thailand's population, which ranks 20th in the world—had been

forcibly displaced. Among them, 25.4 million had fled their countries to escape conflict, and their numbers had increased for five consecutive years.¹ Some features of civil war contribute significantly to these trends. Research shows that the duration of civil wars is generally four times that of interstate wars,² and that they display a high degree of recidivism; more than 50% of countries that have fought a civil war experience a recurrence.³ Breaking this vicious cycle of conflict recurrence, therefore, has become a major policy challenge for the global community.

Third-party, especially UN-authorized peacekeeping operations (UNPKOs), have considerably reduced the risk of conflict recurrence and led to longer peace,⁴ spurring a greater demand for peacekeeping missions to more places to perform 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. Since 2000, there has indeed been a dramatic increase in such missions and in the numbers of their troops. Today, 14 UNPKOs, encompassing more than 100 000 personnel, are in progress.⁵

Yet the gap between what is needed and what UN peacekeeping can deliver continues to widen. UN military and police peacekeeping forces have tripled since 2000, but financial contributions from rich countries who are permanent members of the UN Security Council have fallen. More importantly, these high-capability countries have contributed relatively few troops.⁶ The resultant trend is one where rich countries contribute funds and poorer countries send troops. This divide does not bode well for the legitimacy and effectiveness of UNPKOs.

China is an outlier against this backdrop, as both its financial and troop contributions have steadily increased in recent years. Among the permanent members of the Security Council, China is currently the largest contributor of troops and second-largest financial contributor to the UN peacekeeping budget. In 2017,

1 Source: <http://www.unhcr.org>.

2 Patrick T. Brandt, David Mason, Mehmet Gurses, Nicolai Petrovsky, and Dagmar Radin, 'When and How the Fighting Stops: Explaining the Duration and Outcome of Civil Wars', *Defence and Peace Economics*, Vol. 19, No. 6 (2008), pp. 415–34.

3 J. Michael Quinn, T. David Mason, and Mehmet Gurses, 'Sustaining the Peace: Determinants of Civil War Recurrence', *International Interactions*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (2007), pp. 167–93.

4 Virginia Page Fortna, 'Does Peacekeeping Keep Peace? International Intervention and the Duration of Peace after Civil War', *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (2004), pp. 269–92; Madhav Joshi and T. David Mason, 'Civil War Settlements, Size of Governing Coalition, and Durability of Peace in Post-Civil War States', *International Interactions*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (2001), pp. 388–413; Quinn et al., 'Sustaining the Peace: Determinants of Civil War Recurrence'; Barbara F. Walter, 'Designing Transitions from Civil War: Demobilization, Democratization, and Commitments to Peace', *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (1999), pp. 127–55.

5 Data as of 31 January, 2019, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/data>.

6 IPI Peacekeeping Database, <http://www.providingforpeacekeeping.org/peacekeeping-data-graphs/>.

China moreover completed its registration of 8 000 peacekeeping standby forces, and pledged \$1 billion over the next decade towards establishing a China–UN peace and development fund.⁷ In bridging the gap between the Security Council's decision makers and the troop-contributing countries that carry out UNPKOs on the ground, China is poised to become a key player in shaping the contours of UN missions over the next decade and beyond.⁸

China's growing 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 this change can be reconciled with China's long-standing foreign policy principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. However, scant attention has been paid to the Chinese public's attitudes to the country's deeper involvement in UNPKOs. Peacekeeping can be costly to the public as regards the sacrifices made by Chinese peacekeepers and the financial resources needed for these missions. Understanding Chinese public opinion on peacekeeping, therefore, can provide important insight into both the motivations for the government's future policy and attendant restraints in this regard.

Studying Chinese public opinion raises the question of whether or not the views of the public matter to Beijing's foreign policy. Recent scholarship provides evidence that they do. Detailed studies of events since 2000 confirm the link between public opinion and China's foreign policies, particularly with regard to the United States and Japan.⁹ The explosive increase in Internet news outlets and the use of social media and networking tools has empowered the Chinese public to be far more vocal in the public sphere on domestic and foreign policy issues, and thus to place constraints on government policy. There are indeed notable examples of government policy change at both the local and central levels as a result of strong public opposition and protests coordinated on the Internet that calls for action.¹⁰ Currently, China has 802 million online users, and WeChat, the country's

- 7 Michael Martina and David Brunnstrom, 'China's Xi Says to Commit 8,000 Troops for U.N. Peacekeeping Force', *World News*, 28 September, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-un-assembly-china-idUSKCN0RS1Z120150929>.
- 8 Marc Lanteigne, 'The Role of UN Peacekeeping in China's Expanding Strategic Interests', *Special Report*, The United States Institute of Peace, September 2018, https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2018-09/sr_430_lanteigne_final.pdf.
- 9 James Reilly, 'Remember History, Not Hatred: Collective Remembrance of China's War of Resistance to Japan', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (2011), pp. 463–90; Jessica Weiss, *Powerful Patriots: Nationalist Protest in China's Foreign Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
- 10 Zhu Huaxin, 'Wangmin chengwei yalijituan shi guojiajinbu de xiangzheng' ('Netizens Becoming Pressure Groups Stands for China's Progress'), *Zhongguo qingnianbao (China Youth Daily)*, 30 December, 2009, http://zqb.cyol.com/content/2009-12/30/content_3007321.htm; Shen Xuhui, 'Zhongguo wangluo minzuzhuyi de xingqi ji dui wajiao de yingxiang' ('The Rise of Online Nationalism in China and Its Effect on Foreign Policy'), *Lingdao (Leaders)*, No. 31 (2010), <http://www.aisixiang.com/data/31751.html>; Qi Jianhua, *Yingxiang zhongguo*

most popular messaging app, had 1.08 billion monthly users in 2018.¹¹ That the Internet population tends to be young accelerates the speed at which public opinion forms and escalates in response to a news story. China's growing participation in peacekeeping missions is bound to engender more frequent reports on Chinese peacekeepers' activities and the sacrifices they make, which will draw public attention and thus present the Chinese government with both the motivation to send peacekeepers to far-flung places and constraints on such decisions as well.

Using a survey experiment conducted in China, this study investigates Chinese public attitudes to UN peacekeeping operations in general and China's participation in particular. The experiment sets out to answer three main questions. First, how does the public react to the different motivations for China's participation in peacekeeping? We identify three motivations beyond humanitarianism for Beijing's interest in UN peacekeeping, namely, 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's participation in peacekeeping, but we also gauge through an auxiliary question the respondents' attitudes to the reputational aspects of China's peacekeeping.

Secondly, does public support for peacekeeping change depending on the type of participation? Based on China's practice thus far, we identify three types of Chinese participation, namely, solely financial contributions, both personnel and financial contributions, and playing a leadership role in addition to financial and personnel contributions.

Thirdly, does it make any difference whether a mission is authorised by the UN or by a regional organisation such as the African Union (AU)? Although China has so far only participated in UN-authorised peacekeeping, it has been argued that, in the eyes of regional actors, authorisation by a regional organisation adds legitimacy, especially if host state consent is not available for various reasons.¹² 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 peacekeeping operations (PKOs), but their support was highest if China served a leadership role. Secondly, 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. Thirdly, there was a similar level of support for China's participation in peacekeeping whether the mission was

wajiao juece de wuda yinsu (Five Influential Factors on China's Foreign Policy Making) (Beijing: Zhongyang bianyiju, 2015), Chapter 5.

11 *Di sishier ci zhongguo hulianwangluo fazhan zhuangkuang tongji baogao (The 42nd Report on the Development of Internet Network in China in 2018)* (Beijing: Zhongguo hulian wangluo xinxi zhognxin, 2018), http://www.cac.gov.cn/2018-08/20/c_1123296882.htm; Tencent, '2018 Weixin shuju baogao' ('Report of WeChat Users in 2018'), 9 January, 2019, <https://cn.technode.com/post/2019-01-09/wechat-gkk/>.

12 Fang Songying, Li Xiaojun, and Sun Fanglu, 'China's Evolving Motivations and Goals in UN Peacekeeping Participation', *International Journal*, Vol. 73, No. 3 (2018), pp. 464–73.

authorised by the UN or by the AU, but neither was seen as a substitute for host state consent. Finally, respondents generally displayed a preference for China to make personnel (military and police) contributions in addition to financial contributions. Our study provides the first direct evidence of the Chinese public's policy preferences with regard to peacekeeping operations. It moreover 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 that the contributing countries face. Our research thus sheds light on the supply side of peacekeeping whose dependence on domestic politics is crucial.

China and Peacekeeping: Interests, Types, and International Organisation Authorisation

Since the 1990s, China has steadily increased its support for UN peacekeeping missions through both personnel and financial contributions (Figures 1 and 2). In 1990, the year the country first began participating in UNPKOs, China sent five military observers to the UN Truce Supervision Organisation in the Middle East. Today, however, with more than 2500 peacekeepers in the field, China is the largest troop-contributing country among the five permanent members of the Security Council, and also the second-largest financial contributor to UN peacekeeping, albeit to a considerably lower degree than the United States. 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 figures have been on an upward trajectory for more than a decade.

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 may also motivate China's embrace of international norms and add transparency to its military operations.¹³ What, though, are the factors that have motivated China's stepping up of its peacekeeping efforts? Addressing this question has generated a significant literature that has identified several factors explaining China's behaviour.¹⁴ First, China's growing

13 Bates Gill and James Reilly, 'Sovereignty, Intervention and Peacekeeping: The View from Beijing', *Survival*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (2000), pp. 41–59; Bates Gill and Huang Chin-Hao, 'China's Expanding Peacekeeping Role: Its Significance and the Policy Implications', *SIPRI Policy Brief*, February 2009, <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/files/misc/SIPRIPB0902.pdf>.

14 Fang et al., 'China's Evolving Motivations and Goals in UN Peacekeeping Participation'; Courtney Fung, 'What Explains China's Deployment to UN Peacekeeping Operations?', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (2016), pp. 409–41; He Yin, 'China's Changing Policy on UN Peacekeeping Operations', Institute for Security and Development Policy, July 2007, http://isdpeu/content/uploads/publications/2007_he_chinas-changing-policy.pdf; Gill and Reilly, 'Sovereignty, Intervention and Peacekeeping: The View from Beijing'; Gill and Huang, 'China's Expanding Peacekeeping Role: Its Significance and the Policy Implications'; International Crisis Group, 'China's Growing Role in UN Peacekeeping', *Asia*

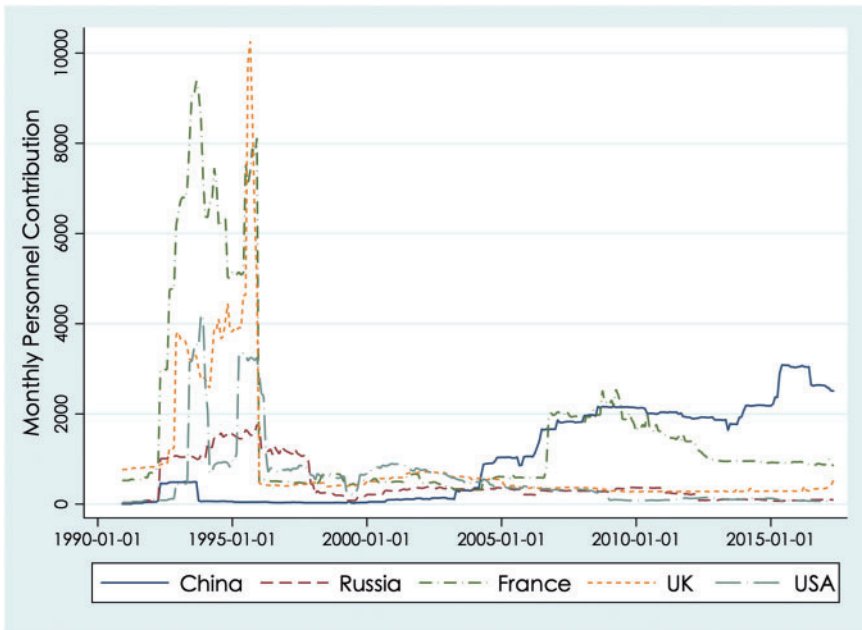


Fig. 1. UN Peacekeeping Troop Contributions by the P5, 1990–2015¹⁵.

contributions to peacekeeping at a time when such contributions are sorely needed, and when there are calls for Beijing to shoulder more global responsibility, may enhance its reputation as a responsible great power. The move may also help to alleviate other countries' anxiety about China's rapid rise.¹⁶ Secondly, China's significant overseas economic and resource interests highlight the country's direct or indirect interest in preserving peace and security in other parts of the world, particularly Asia and Africa.¹⁷ Finally, UN peacekeeping may serve broad strategic interests, such as furthering diplomatic influence in developing regions, and strengthening military-to-military ties.¹⁸ Such arguments are

Report 166, 17 April, 2009, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/north-east-asia/china/china-growing-role-un-peacekeeping>; Ryan Pickrell, 'China: Projecting Power Through Peacekeeping,' *The Diplomat*, 15 October, 2015, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/10/china-projecting-power-through-peacekeeping/>.

15 The International Peace Institute Peacekeeping Database (1990–2015), <http://www.providingforpeacekeeping.org/contributions/>.

16 Fang et al., 'China's Evolving Motivations and Goals in UN Peacekeeping Participation'.

17 Jonas Parello-Plesner and Mathieu Duchâtel, *China's Strong Arm Protecting Citizens and Assets Abroad* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Pickrell, 'China: Projecting Power Through Peacekeeping'; Ian Taylor, 'The Future of China's Overseas Peacekeeping Operations', *China Brief*, Vol. 8, No. 6 (2008), pp. 8–12, <https://jamestown.org/program/the-future-of-chinas-overseas-peacekeeping-operations/>.

18 Lanteigne, 'The Role of UN Peacekeeping in China's Expanding Strategic Interests'.

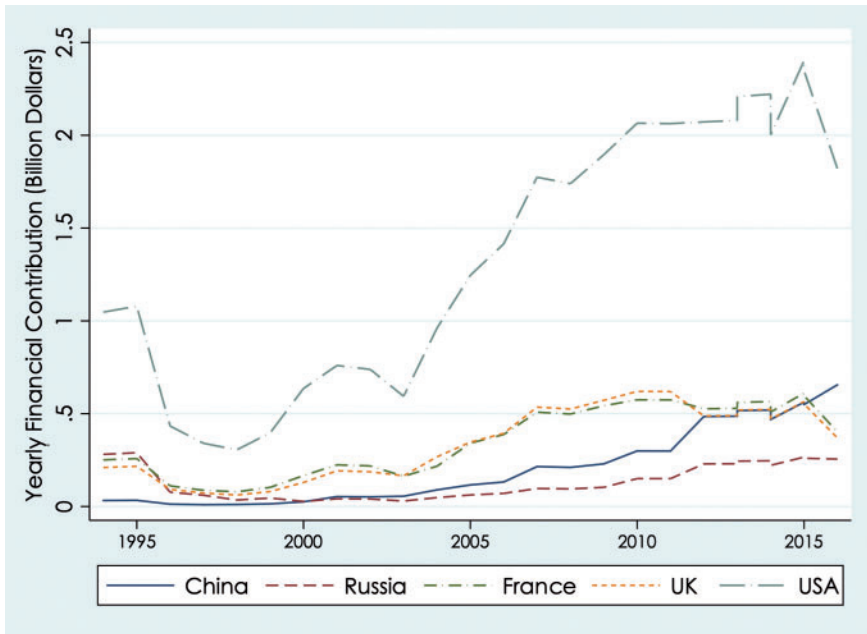


Fig. 2. UN Peacekeeping Financial Contributions by the P5 (Nominal USD), 1994–2015¹⁹.

intuitive, but some lack the clear support of empirical evidence.²⁰ Moreover, to our knowledge, no study has examined how appealing these arguments are to the Chinese public. Our experimental design in this study allows us to examine whether or not these presumed drivers of the government's policy actually influence the Chinese public's attitudes to China's engagement in PKOs.

In addition to stepping up its financial contributions, in recent years China has also shown a willingness to send a wider range of personnel on UN missions. China has largely been providing UN peacekeepers with enabling units responsible for logistic, engineering, and medical support—all of which are highly valued as essential to a mission's effectiveness, but in short supply. Since 2015, China has also deployed combat troops to keep the peace and protect civilians in the civil war environments of Mali and South Sudan. These soldiers experienced tense situations wherein attacks from armed militants took the lives of three Chinese peacekeepers.²¹ Given the significant increase both in China's financial and personnel contributions, therefore, Beijing seeks a leadership role in UN

19 The International Peace Institute Peacekeeping Database (1990–2015).

20 Fang et al., 'China's Evolving Motivations and Goals in UN Peacekeeping Participation'.

21 Kristin Huang, 'Chinese Peacekeepers in Tense Stand-off with Armed Militants in South Sudan', *South China Morning Post*, 6 January, 2015, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2127140/chinese-peacekeepers-tense-stand-armed-militants-south>.

peacekeeping on the grounds that its decision-making input should be commensurate with its contributions.²²

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

Nevertheless, challenging circumstances may arise if host state consent is not forthcoming at a time when a country is embroiled in 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 authorisation by a regional organisation, such as the AU, can be a substitute for host state consent. For instance, the AU has the authority to sanction intervention in a Member State's domestic affairs amid a grave humanitarian crisis, something which, in the eyes of regional actors, may legitimise an international intervention without the host government's consent.²³ Therefore, AU support may give Beijing the flexibility to intervene under such circumstances. Bearing in mind that the non-interference policy is extremely well known to the public, the government having reiterated it many times over the past 60 years, how would Chinese people react to such a change in their government's policy stance?

Protecting national interests is a mainstay of the Chinese government's legitimacy in the eyes of the Chinese people.²⁴ The task has been made more challenging in the last decade, however, with the rise of new communication technologies and social media, all of which greatly reduce the information asymmetry between the government and the public, and provide tools that enable rapid and visible formation of public opinion. 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 future policy in this regard.

22 Fang et al., 'China's Evolving Motivations and Goals in UN Peacekeeping Participation'; Logan Pauley, 'China Takes the Lead in UN Peacekeeping', *The Diplomat*, 17 April, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/04/china-takes-the-lead-in-un-peacekeeping/>.

23 See 'Constitutive Act of the African Union', Article 4(h), <http://www.achpr.org/instruments/au-constitutive-act/>.

24 Yang Hongxin and Zhao Dingxin, 'Performance Legitimacy, State Autonomy and China's Economic Miracle', *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 24, No. 91 (2015), pp. 492–507; Zhu Yunhan, 'Performance Legitimacy and China's Political Adaptation Strategy', *Journal of China Political Science*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (2011), pp. 123–40.

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 there. We identified three such interests: economic, strategic, and security. That China's (or any country's) peacekeeping efforts may be motivated by its economic and strategic interests in a host country is easily understandable, and has been discussed earlier. We also think that security concerns may motivate China's participation 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 well be cognisant of the logic whereby intervening in conflicts in fragile or failed states that have become breeding grounds for terrorism may help to protect Chinese interests overseas and also to enhance domestic security by keeping bad actors away from its borders. We expect that the presence of any one of these three national interests will increase Chinese public support for China's participation in a peacekeeping mission. Because the logic for all three interests is similar, we state one hypothesis to capture the effect of each one 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 Does Not.

Next, we examine the effect of UN endorsement, or that of a regional organisation, on Chinese public support for China's participation in peacekeeping. Traditionally, Beijing has recognised the UN as the only legitimate international organisation (IO) to authorise peacekeeping missions.²⁵ But this need not be the case in the future. Half of the world's conflicts have occurred in Africa, and the AU's Peace and Security Council (PSC) has authorised 12 peace support operations (PSOs) with mission strengths as high as 9600.²⁶ Moreover, China has partnered with the AU on a growing number of issues, including peace and security. It is not inconceivable, therefore, given the AU's authority to sanction an

25 In its 1984 UNPKO policy, China stated that a peacekeeping mission must be authorised by the UN. This position has been reiterated many times in its official statements and was also laid out in China's 2000 Defence White Paper.

26 The 12 missions are: African Union Mission in Burundi (AMIB)—2003–2004; African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS)—2004–2007; African Union Military Observer Mission in the Comoros (MIOC)—2004; African Union Mission for Support to the Elections in Comoros (AMISEC)—2006; African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)—2007 to present; African Union Electoral and Security Assistance Mission to the Comoros (MAES)—2007–2008; African Union/United Nations Hybrid Mission (UNAMID)—2008 to present; Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army (RCI-LRA)—2011–2017; African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA)—2013; African-led Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA)—2013–2014; Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to end the Boko Haram insurgency—2015 to present; and Regional Protection Force in South Sudan—2017 to present. See more information on the PSOs at <https://au.int/en/organs/psc>.

intervention in a Member State's domestic affairs, that China may under certain circumstances seek AU endorsement to legitimise peacekeeping operations, especially when host country consent is not available.²⁷ Nevertheless, China still currently regards the UN as the most authoritative organisation in global security affairs. Therefore, we test the following hypothesis:

H2 (Authorisation): UN Authorisation Leads to a Higher Level of Chinese Public Support for China's Participation in a Peacekeeping Mission than Does AU Authorisation.

Finally, we test a set of hypotheses regarding public support for the different types of contributions that China makes to a peacekeeping mission. Different types of contributions may possibly be perceived as differently affecting public welfare. Public support for China's participation, therefore, may vary depending on the contribution type. For example, financial contributions may be perceived as detrimental to Chinese citizens' economic welfare, while personnel contributions may be perceived as endangering the lives of Chinese soldiers. As to China playing a leadership role in peacekeeping missions (in addition to financial and military contributions), the public may perceive this as incurring higher economic and security costs on the one hand, yet gaining greater global influence for China on the other. Therefore, compared with the other two types, we hypothesise that the leadership scenario will attract the most support from respondents.

H3.1 (Participation Types): Given the Three Types of Contributions, the Chinese Public is More Likely to Support China's Playing a Leadership Role in a Peacekeeping Mission.

The other two contextual variables may also interact with participation types through drawing higher support for certain combinations of China's interests, IO authorisation, 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, operationalised in our survey design as a terrorist threat in the host country, may lead the public to support more robust participation from China by playing a leadership role in military actions. Secondly, because of the greater prestige the UN enjoys compared to a regional organisation, public support for playing a leadership role is higher when the UN authorises a mission than when the AU does. Thus, we have the following two additional hypotheses on 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 Authorisation × Participation Type): Compared with a mission authorised by the AU, a mission led by the UN increases the level of support for China playing a leadership role in a peacekeeping mission.

27 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.

Table 1. Contextual Variables in the Factorial Design (4 × 2 × 3 Design)

China's Interests in the Host Country	IO Authorisation	Participation Types
Humanitarian Crisis	UN Authorisation	Financial Contribution
Humanitarian Crisis + Economic Interest	AU Authorisation	Personnel Contribution
Humanitarian Crisis + Strategic Interest		Military Leadership
Humanitarian Crisis + Security Interest		

Note: Security threat was operationalised as a terrorist threat.

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. They are: China's specific interest in the host country (economic, strategic, and security); the type of contribution that China makes (a certain 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 to acquiring host state consent as a prerequisite for China's participation in a UN peacekeeping mission, and their perceptions of the 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, as just over a half of China's peacekeeping missions have been in Africa,²⁸ we placed the hypothetical country in that region. We randomly varied the contents of three contextual features of the scenario (Table 1) that describe (i) China's self-interest (economic, strategic, and security) in the country in addition to the humanitarian baseline; (ii) the IO that endorsed a peacekeeping mission (UN or AU); and (iii) China's participation type: financial support only; both financial and military (and police) support; and financial and military support, as well as playing a leadership role in military actions.²⁹ Through this design, each respondent read the following hypothetical scenario:

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/AU] has passed a

- 28 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.
- 29 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.

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].

After presenting the background information, we asked each respondent three questions. The first question straightforwardly gauged a respondent's attitude to 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 to the condition of host state consent, which the Chinese government has insisted upon 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 host country's permission.'

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 variable. 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 the extent to which respondents made the link between that 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 as 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 prospects in the next five years, and their interest in current affairs.³⁰ We also asked typical socio-economic and demographic questions, including age,

30 For details, see the survey questionnaire in [Online Appendix E](#).

ethnicity, gender, region, education, income, and self-perceived social status; also whether the respondent was employed in the state sector, was a member of the Chinese Communist Party, or had a rural household registration.

Data and Findings

Qualtrics administered the survey experiment in China in May 2017. A total of 10 000 solicitations were sent to the subject pool, yielding a random sample of 2122 Chinese adults.³¹ As regards the self-reported demographic characteristics, 73.0% of the respondents were aged between 20 and 40 years; 96.7% were of the Han nationality; 59.3% were male; and 75.8% identified as urban residents (city *hukou*). About 27.8% of the respondents had an annual income of less than 30 000 yuan (around \$5000) and 20.9% of over 120 000 yuan (around \$20 000). In addition, 40.3% of the respondents worked in the state sector and 20.9% were Communist party members. Finally, 92.3% of the respondents answered that they were very or fairly interested in China's current affairs.³²

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 to 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 China's specific interest in the host country, the IO that authorised the mission, or the type of contribution 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 those of developed countries such as the US and Canada, although the level of support is even higher among the Chinese respondents.³³ Below we discuss the results in more detail.

- 31 The pilot survey was implemented on 20 April, 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.
- 32 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 experimental conditions: China's interests in the host country, IO authorisation, and PKO type. See [Online Appendix A](#) for descriptive statistics of the sample, [Online Appendix B](#) for distribution of the treatment combinations among the respondents, and [Online Appendix C](#) for randomisation checks.
- 33 For instance, a survey in 2012 showed that a large majority (78%) of Americans believe the United States should participate in PKOs; see Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 'Global Views 2004: American Public Opinion and Foreign Policy', 2004, p. 53, <https://www.thechicagoCouncil.org/publication/global-views-2004-american-public-opinion-and-foreign-policy>. A Nano research survey in 2016 found that nearly 80% of Canadians think that participating in UN peacekeeping missions is a good thing; see 'Majority Supports Peacekeeping Missions in Active Fighting Areas: Nanos Survey', 13 October, 2016, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/majority-supports-peacekeeping-missions-in-active-fighting-areas-nanos-survey-1.3114666>.

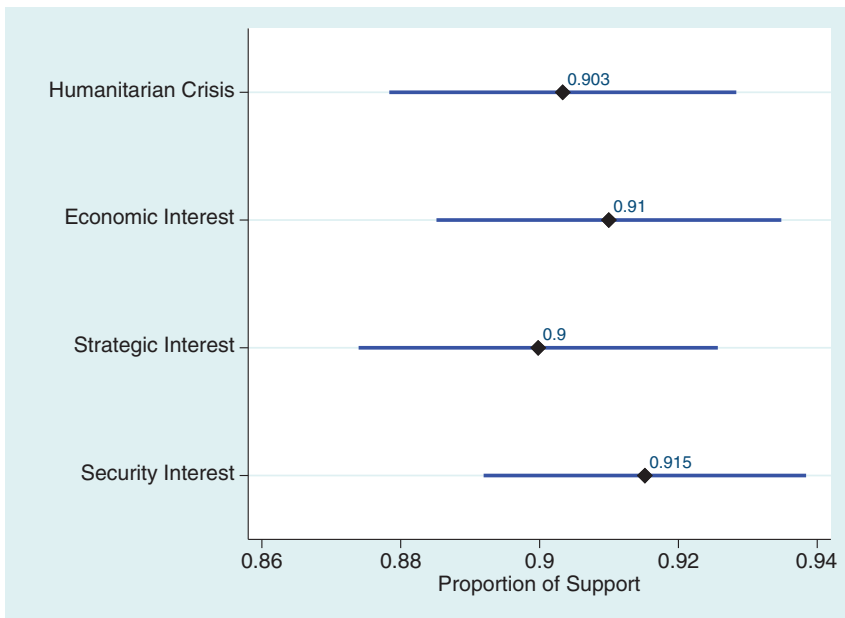


Fig. 3. China's Interests in the Host Country and Average Level of Chinese Public Support for PKO.

Note: The p -value in a four-sample Kruskal–Wallis test is 0.827, which implies that the levels of support of the respondents in the four subgroups are not statistically significant.

Interests in the Host Country

Figure 3 presents the results for the first hypothesis, which specifies the relationship between respondents' attitudes to China's participation in a peacekeeping mission and China's interest in the host country. The vertical axis lists the three values 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.³⁴

As we noted earlier, the Chinese public showed a high level of support for China's participation in PKOs. Even the baseline case of solely 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 as compared with that of the baseline; there are no statistically significant

34 In all other figures, the horizontal lines also represent 95% confidence intervals. The Kruskal–Wallis test is a non-parametric method for testing whether samples originate in the same distribution. It extends the pairwise Mann–Whitney U test to compare two or more independent samples of equal or different sample sizes.

differences in the level of support across the four categories. The finding is interesting in and of itself, even though it does not support our hypothesis. It challenges the conventional wisdom about factors that may increase public support for a foreign policy. It also suggests that Chinese policy makers may have a great deal of policy space when it comes to providing peacekeeping, and indeed, Beijing's increased peacekeeping efforts in recent years seem to support this takeaway.

IO Authorisation

For our second hypothesis, the results presented in [Figure 4](#) show that whether a mission was endorsed by the UN or the AU made no difference to 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 organisation than the UN when it comes to authorising 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 from the Chinese government \$1.3 million before 2010 and \$1.2 million in 2015 and 2016 for capacity building in the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).³⁵ 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 on significant IOs, or that the public may not be informed enough to differentiate between the two organisations, particularly regarding their roles in resolving conflicts and maintaining peace. Nevertheless, this is a significant finding that suggests regional organisations may have a more important role to play in public opinion in China when it comes to mobilising support for peacekeeping missions.

Types of Participation

[Figures 5](#) and [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 contribution only and personnel contributions are 88.5% and 91.8%, respectively.³⁶ Next, recall that H3.2 and H3.3 compare the level of support for China's playing a leadership role with

35 Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 'The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Johannesburg Action Plan (2016–2018)', https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1323159.shtml.

36 In pairwise comparison, there is a statistically significant difference between the levels of support for leadership role and financial contribution only (94.0% vs. 88.5%), and between the levels of support for personnel contribution and financial contribution only (91.8% vs.

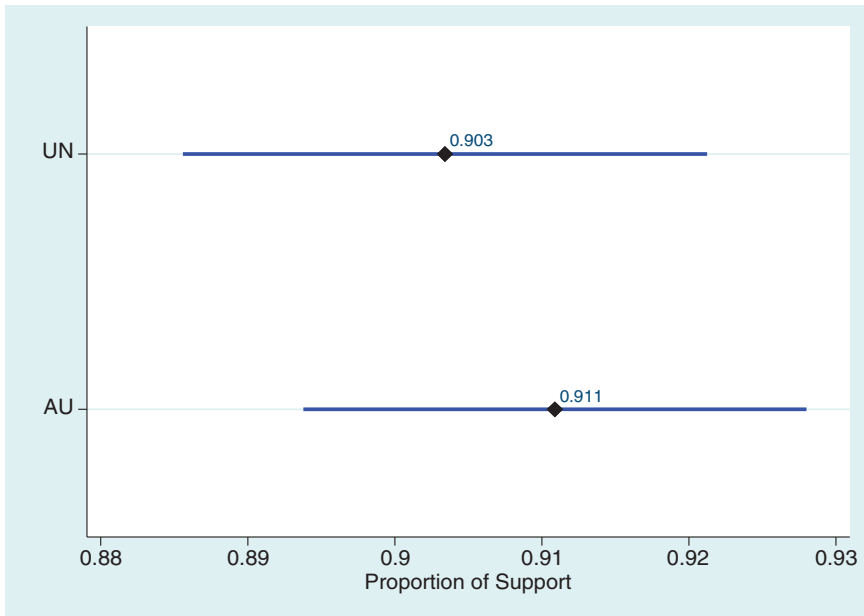


Fig. 4. IO Authorisation and Average Level of Chinese Public Support for PKO.

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.

that for the other two types, but they do so in the context of China's security interest and UN authorisation. 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 authorisation. 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 authorisation there is a statistically significant higher level of support for China's playing a leadership role than for financial contributions only. In fact, the pattern holds for the other four treatment combinations as well, the exception being strategic interest. 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.

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 China sent peacekeepers in addition to contributing financially, rather than whether China

88.5%). But the difference between the levels of support for leadership role and personnel contribution is not statistically significant.

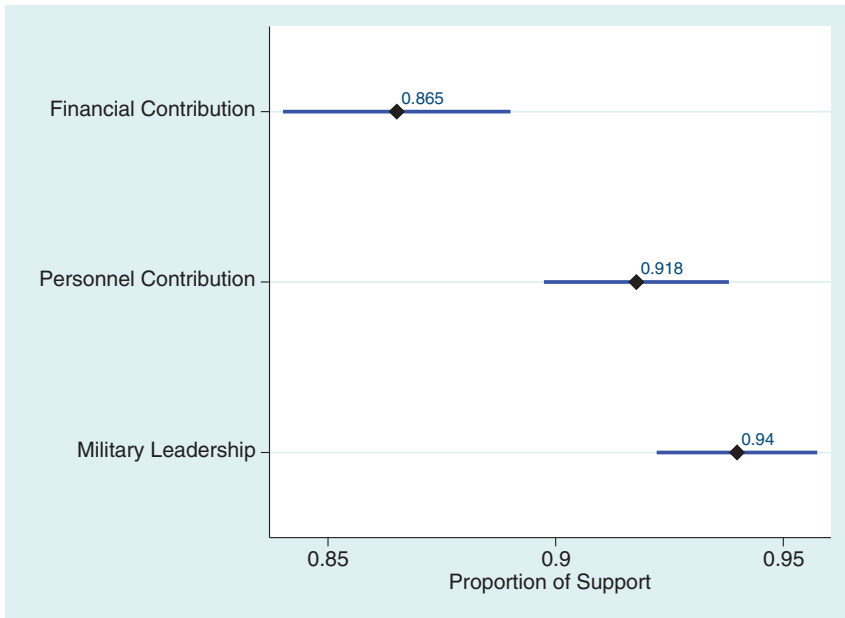


Fig. 5. Chinese Public Support for Three Types of PKO.

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 0.0001, which implies that the levels of support of the respondents in these three subgroups are statistically significant.

played a leadership role in peacekeeping. Overall, China’s leading PKO missions is the type of participation the respondents favoured most.

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.³⁷ 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.³⁸ However, recent years have seen a discernible shift in China’s domestic debate on peacekeeping from a focus on state sovereignty to China’s responsibility as a rising major

37 United Nations Security Council 6075th meeting, published on 23 January, 2009.

38 *China’s 2000 White Paper on National Defence* (Beijing: Ministry of Defence, 2000), http://www.mod.gov.cn/regulatory/2011-01/07/content_4617805_5.htm.

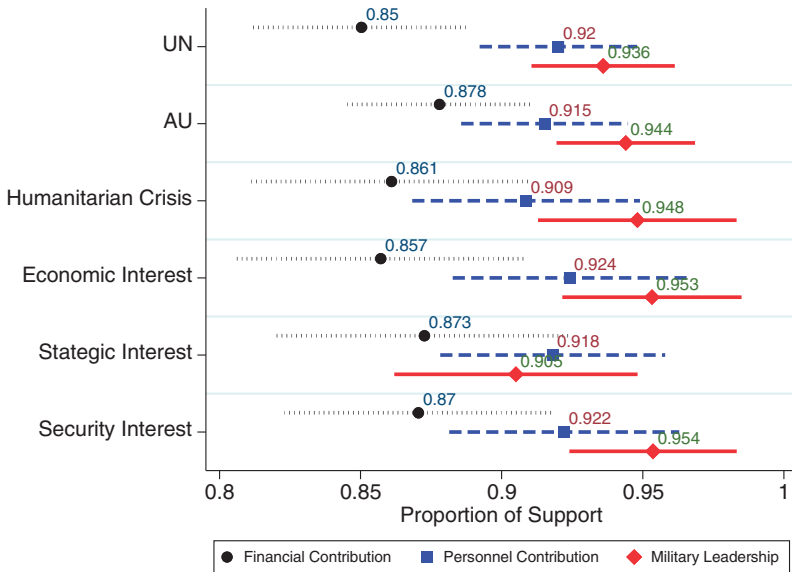


Fig. 6. Chinese Public Support for Different Types of PKO in Different Scenarios.
Note: The *p*-values are derived from three-sample Kruskal–Wallis tests comparing respondents with different treatments on participation types in the scenarios specified on the vertical axis.

power. A statement in China’s 2005 policy paper on UN reforms leaves 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 read the scenario of AU authorisation said that host state consent was required, while 87.8% of the respondents who read the scenario of UN authorisation 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 organisation.

The third main question in our survey asked respondents to share their views on 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 as compared with the baseline scenario of simply witnessing a humanitarian crisis. Presumably, respondents’ support was largely motivated by humanitarian concerns. But could they perceive some indirect

39 He, ‘China’s Changing Policy on UN Peacekeeping Operations’.

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 that 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 and of China's economic prospects in the next five years, and their interest in current affairs.⁴⁰ 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: (i) the contextual variables (interests, IO authorisation, types of participation) and necessary interaction terms between them that correspond to hypotheses H3.2 and H3.3; (ii) variables that capture respondents' attitudes and perceptions discussed above; and (iii) respondents' socio-demographic variables.

Figure 7 presents the estimated coefficients of the independent variables and their confidence intervals. The effects of the contextual 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 the more nationalistic respondents were more likely to support the idea that other countries' sovereignty should be respected in the same way as they would like China's to be. Such respondents might also be more likely to support China's joining peacekeeping missions because they take great pride in China being seen as a responsible power. Not surprisingly, we find that those who thought China received broad benefits from participating in peacekeeping were more likely to support China's 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 statistically 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

40 See these measurements and descriptive statistics in [Online Appendix A, Table 1](#).

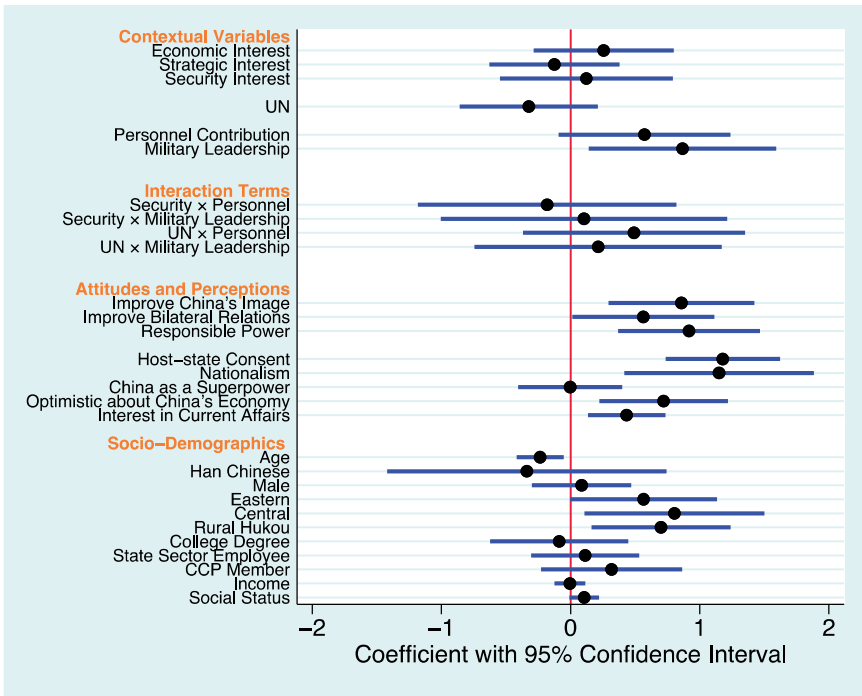


Fig. 7. Logistic Analysis of Support for China's Participation in Peacekeeping.

10-year increase in age reduces the level of support by about 1.1%. Secondly, respondents from Eastern and Central China showed a slightly higher level of support for China's peacekeeping efforts than those from Western China. Interestingly, the Chinese Communist Party (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.

In the above analysis, we used pooled data regardless of the treatment combinations 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 find that neither IO authorisation nor 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 whereby

41 See [Online Appendix D](#) for details.

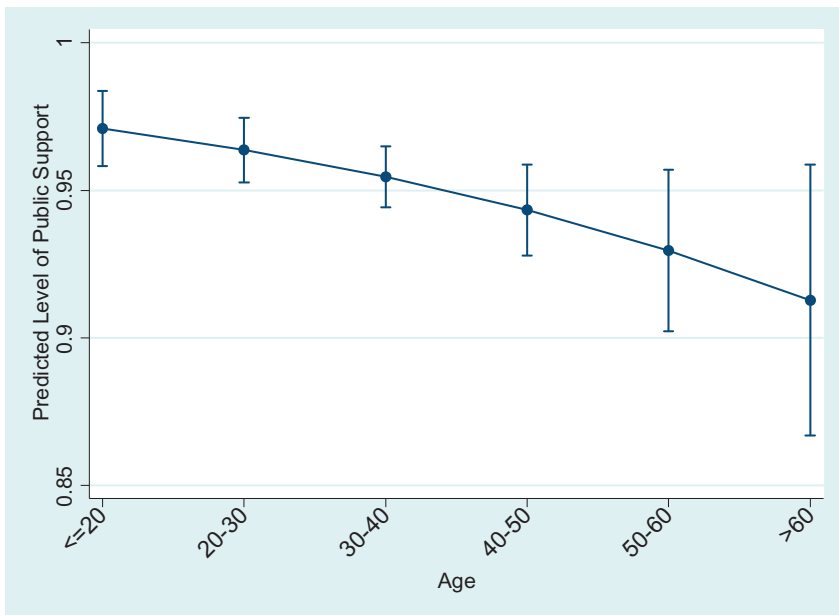


Fig. 8. Generational Differences in the Predicted Level of Public Support for China’s Participation in PKOs.

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.

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 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 growing numbers of states disintegrating into civil wars and anarchy in recent years. The international community has urged China to step up its efforts to provide much-needed support for peacekeeping through both financial and personnel contributions. China has responded; it is currently the largest troop-contributing country among the permanent members of the Security Council, and the second-largest financial contributor to the UN peacekeeping budget. This development is impressive, but the real test of China’s commitment will probably come in the future, when the Chinese public begins to feel the costs associated with these increasing contributions.

So far, scant attention has been paid to the Chinese public's preferences regarding peacekeeping. Much of the analysis within and outside of 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 shielding the public from information on sensitive foreign policy issues extremely challenging for any government, including Beijing. Meanwhile, the Chinese public has become more eager to express their opinions, facilitated by rising living standards as well as ever more convenient and rapid 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 authorisation, and perceptions of the benefits to China. Moreover, we are able to tease out to what extent sensitive issues, such as host state consent, which is 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. Secondly, contrary to the conventional wisdom, China's various self-interests in the host country did not increase the already high level of support based solely on humanitarianism; however, respondents perceived indirect benefits to China's international reputation from such activities that might have contributed to their strong support for China's participation in peacekeeping. Thirdly, whether the UN or the AU authorised a PKO made no difference to the level of support for China's engagement in the mission; at the same time, we found no evidence that AU authorisation was perceived as a substitute for the condition of host state consent. Finally, respondents generally preferred China to make personnel (military and police) contributions in addition to financial contributions.

Although 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).⁴² The samples drawn in others' online surveys or survey experiments conducted in China also found

42 'The 42nd Report on the Development of Internet Network in China in 2018', 20 August, 2018, http://cac.gov.cn/wxb_pdf/CNNIC42.pdf.

attributes similar to those in our sample.⁴³ One could argue that 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.⁴⁴ Beijing may well be keen to anticipate the online public's 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 great deal 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. Secondly, the fact that the public tends to give even greater support to peacekeeping if China takes a leadership role should give Beijing strong incentive to seek such a role in the UN. Thirdly, the public is likely to view favourably Beijing's deepening cooperation with the AU on peacekeeping. Finally, host state consent may continue to pose domestic constraints on Beijing's peacekeeping decisions in the future.

Supplementary Data

[Supplementary Data](#) are available at *CJIP* online.

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- 43 See Fang Songying and Li Xiaojun, 'Historical Ownership and Territorial Disputes', *Journal of Politics*, forthcoming; Li Xiaojun, Shi Weiyi, and Zhu Boliang, 'The Face of Internet Recruitment: Evaluating the Labour Markets of Online Crowdsourcing Platforms in China', *Research and Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2018), pp. 1–8.
- 44 Zhu, 'Netizens Becoming Pressure Groups Stands for China's Progress'; Shen, 'The Rise of Online Nationalism in China and Its Effect on Foreign Policy'; Qi, *Five Influential Factors on China's Foreign Policy-making*.