

China's Role in the UN Peacekeeping Operations in Africa

Weijia Wu

Faculty of Public Administration, Department of International Affairs and International Relations,
Hubei University, Wuhan, 430061, China

202031101014015@stu.hubu.edu.cn

Abstract. Since China reclaimed its legitimate seat at the UN in 1971, China has always followed the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and actively participates in the activities of the UN and its specialized agencies which are favorable to global peace and progress. A number of global issues have involved China in a significant way, such as reducing the armed forces, protecting the environment, safeguarding human rights, resolving regional conflicts and so on. 2023 marks the 67th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Africa. China and Africa have throughout the years taken a unique road of collaboration on the path of development and revitalization, written a wonderful chapter of mutual help, and set a brilliant example for creating a new kind of international relations. However, as the most important form of cooperation between China and Africa in the security field, China's involvement in the UN peacekeeping missions in Africa may not undergo so smoothly as imagined. Therefore, this paper focuses on the role China exerts in the UN peacekeeping operations in Africa, reflects upon the obstacles China encounters in this course and puts forward suggestions accordingly for future participation.

Keywords: China, UN peacekeeping operation, Africa.

1. Introduction

The problem of peace and security has always been the primary research object in the field of international politics. After the Second World War, the United Nations was founded, serving as a world-scale international organization which aims to maintain world peace. However, the US-Soviet Cold War broke out in the second half of the twentieth century. During that period, regional conflicts occurred frequently, threatening regional peace and even world peace, thus the UN peacekeeping operations emerged as the times require. China formally participated in the operations in the 1990s and had contributed significantly. The year 2023 commemorates the 67th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and Africa, so it is of both theoretical and practical significance to study China's role in the UN peacekeeping operations in Africa.

1.1. Core Conception

Since the establishment of peacekeeping operations, many of the scholars at home and abroad have made their definitions on peacekeeping operations. Scholar Lian Liu describes the United Nations peacekeeping operations as non-mandatory operations undertaken by the United Nations, with the consent or invitation of the conflict party, and it was designed to aid in the preservation or restoration of regional peace and security [1].

The UN peacekeeping website states that UN peacekeeping operations are steps taken by the UN to help maintain and restore peace and security in conflict areas, where UN peacekeepers offer security and the political and peace-building support needed to aid nations in making the challenging, early transition from conflict to peace [2]. Thus, UN peacekeeping operations refer to a voluntary and non-coercive operation, in which the United Nations takes military action to create circumstances for a final settlement of a conflict by political or diplomatic channels, or monitor agreement implementation.

1.2. Research Objectives and Questions

By analyzing relevant reports in terms of financial assistance, material supplies and personnel support, the paper analyzes China's role in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa from the

perspective of global security governance. Unlike previous studies that mainly focus on historical process, characteristics, roles and challenges of China's participation in UN peacekeeping operations, this study specifically explores China's role-playing in African peacekeeping operations.

The study examines two main questions. First, what contributions did China make to local people, to the whole region and to the international system respectively in the course of taking part in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa? Second, what interior or exterior factors would affect China's role-playing in this process? And what approaches could prevent China being affected by these factors in order to play its role better in the future?

The findings and results of the study seek to stimulate future researchers to dig deep into this field and make contributions to international relations studies. The study contributes to the literature of global security governance. It also provides reference for China's international strategy and national security construction, enabling China to better undertake its responsibility as one of the permanent member states of UNSC. Lastly, it provides suggestions for China's role-playing in the African peacekeeping, so that China can effectively deal with a series of emergent problems in the future.

1.3. Methodologies

The paper draws upon a series of domestic and foreign pertinent literature, and takes China's participation in African peacekeeping operations as a case study. It examines the difficulties that China encounters in UN peacekeeping operations and provides some corresponding countermeasures for future activities. The study analyzes the role of China in the participation of African peacekeeping operations from three perspectives: individual, state, and international levels. It is beneficial for comprehensively evaluating the contributions China has made.

1.4. Paper Structure

The paper consists of six parts. The first part introduces the objectives, questions, structure, relevant academic conceptions and applied methodologies of the study. The second part is a literature review by classifying and analyzing the current research contents in both domestic and overseas research situation, exploring some innovative points that are not involved and supplying theoretic support for the study. The following three parts demonstrate the research findings and some further discussions about the research questions. The last part summarizes the main findings of the study, presents the limitations itself, and gives corresponding advice for the future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Domestic Research Situation

Domestic scholars have carried out large amounts of researches concerning China's involvement in UN peacekeeping missions up to now, most of which focused on discussing four directions, which cover the historical process, characteristics, roles and challenges of China's involvement in the UN peacekeeping missions [3]. However, research specifically focuses on the analysis of China's contribution to peacekeeping operations in a particular region is relatively rare. Moreover, there is a lack of comprehensive discussion regarding the factors that affect China's role in these operations.

From a historical perspective of China's involvement in UN peacekeeping missions, its attitude has evolved from passive and negative to active and positive. Scholar Bikang Meng has divided this historical process into three distinct periods: the initial period, the mature period, and the redevelopment period [4]. Furthermore, scholar Xingyu Feng has summarized three characteristics of China's involvement in African peacekeeping missions since 2015. These characteristics include a commitment to the principle of multilateralism, the principle of prioritizing political settlement, and support for the United Nations in strengthening its ties with regional organizations [5].

When examining the impact of China's involvement in UN peacekeeping missions, many scholars explore the contributions China has made from several aspects. Scholar Yaosheng Wang discusses the progress brought about by China from three aspects: China itself, the United Nations, and the host

country. Wang's analysis suggests that China's involvement in African peacekeeping missions can promote the resolution of conflicts within host countries and accelerate their economic recovery and reconstruction [6].

Researchers have also identified various challenges that China has faced during its participation in the UN peacekeeping operations. Scholar Ji Xu concludes that China faced of three challenges. First, China's participation started late and its voice was relatively weak; second, China's contribution to UN funding was not matched with the proportion of participants; third, the activity was limited to the UN peacekeeping system without deeper expansion [7].

2.2. Overseas Research Situation

Compared with the studies in China, the overseas research on UN peacekeeping operations started earlier and covered several subject areas such as social sciences, medicine and dentistry, arts and humanities, psychology and so on. Those researches mainly involve the implementation of UN peacekeeping operations, the impact of peacekeeping operations, the force being used in UN peacekeeping and so on. Although there are a few overseas researches having to do with China's participation in UN peacekeeping operations, foreign scholars' opinions about China's motives of participating in UN peacekeeping operations are of subjective color to certain extent owing to the distinction of ideology.

Scholar Blair Robert A., Di Salvatore Jessica and Smidt Hannah M. discuss about the factors that affect the implementation of UN peacekeeping operations. They discovered that mandate fragmentation is adversely connected with mandate execution, particularly for peacebuilding tasks, by combining fresh data sets on peacekeeping operation activities and mandates in Africa from 1998 to 2016. They used instrumental variables and two-way fixed effects models to analyze the data [8].

Scholar Cho uses information on commerce, security, and other governments' engagement to assess 18 instances of China's participation and nonparticipation from 2013 to 2017. They discovered that, although concerns about sovereignty continue to influence China's conduct, consideration of economic interests is a stronger predictor of China's behavior than worries about its reputation, the safety of its surroundings, or the nature of its missions [9].

3. Overview of China's Participation in African Peacekeeping Operations

In a world facing complex international situation, China has always been the advocator of upholding world peace and stability and the practitioner of multilateral governance. With the aim of eliminating the international conflicts, improving the global security governance and promoting the achievement of lasting world peace and development, President Xi previously put forward the Global Security Initiative for the first time in the opening ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2022 in April, advocating the spirit of unity to adjust to the ever-changing international order and the win-win thinking method to address the complex and intertwined security challenges [10]. In practice, China has been participating in the UN peacekeeping operations to promote regional peace and world peace for more than 30 years, which can be dated back to the sending of military observers to the United Nations in 1990. As a key area for China to participate in peacekeeping operations, Africa has received large amounts of both personnel and financial support from China.

On the one hand, the amount of China's personnel support for UN peacekeeping operations accounted for large percentage in troop and police contributions of various countries to some extent. Over the last 30 years, China's military has sent more than 50,000 officers and soldiers to more than 20 countries and regions to participate in UN peacekeeping operations, and 27 peacekeepers have sacrificed their precious lives in the operations [11]. According to the latest data from the UN peacekeeping website, currently, the Department of Peace Operations oversees 12 peacekeeping operations, and as of February 2023, China has become one of the top ten military contributors and police contributors in four African missions, including the United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan, the United Nations Mission for the referendum in Western Sahara and the United

Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei [12]. To be more specific, as of 31 May 2023, China has sent 1,031 troops, 17 staff officers and 3 experts on mission to the UNMISS, meanwhile, 410 troops and 9 staff officers have been assigned to the UNIFIL, with 397 troops and 9 staff officers being dispatched to the MINUSMA [13].

On the other hand, China's financial support for UN peacekeeping operations also occupied a large proportion of the UN peacekeeping operations' budget sources. According to the report published by the UN peacekeeping website, China's financial contribution to UN peacekeeping operations accounted for more than 15% of the donor countries' contribution during the period from 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2021 [14]. Each peacekeeping operation has its own budget and account, which covers operational expenditures such as transportation, logistics, and staff costs such as salary, in order to make better use of the financial assistance provided by donor nations. In more detail, the \$6.38 billion approved budget for UN peacekeeping operations covers 10 of the 12 missions, including the liquidation budget for the United Nations-African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), supports logistics for the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), and offers support, technology, and logistics to all peace operations through global service c. [15].

In addition, in an exclusive interview with Xinhua News Agency, UN Under-Secretary-General for peacekeeping affairs Lacroix expressed his deep appreciation for China's invaluable contributions to the UN peacekeeping cause. He specifically mentioned the Chinese peacekeeping helicopter detachment on peacekeeping missions at the UN Abyei Temporary Security Force. Lacroix noted that this Chinese detachment played an important and successful role in rescuing UN staff who were trapped during the escalating conflict. The Abyei region is one of the disputed areas between Sudan and South Sudan [16].

Frankly speaking, the above content can only reflect a comparatively narrow part of China's involvement in African peacekeeping missions. But there is no doubt that China's determination and volition of upholding regional and even world peace can be completely borne there and then by the data and objective compliment discourse mentioned above. Despite the short time of China's involvement in UN peacekeeping missions, China has been exerting all its efforts to make contributions to the world peace through peacekeeping activities all the time. By means of engaging in the global security governance agenda, China demonstrates its responsibility as a responsible major power in the world and shows the aspiration of creating more favorable conditions for the development of world peace in the future with the upliftment of its comprehensive national capabilities.

4. China's Roles in African Peacekeeping Operations

As one of the valuable research methods in the field of international relations, analytical hierarchy process was first systematically used by Kenneth Waltz in his book *Man, State, and Politics* in 1959. It demonstrates three ways to analyze the behaviors of sovereign states, which involve the individual aspect, the state aspect and the international system level. The paper also tries to use this approach to explore what impact China has in the process of taking part in African peacekeeping operations.

For the local people, China's participation of peacekeeping operations in Africa enables the local people to stay away from war and violence, rebuild their homes and make a living by receiving humanitarian supplies and technical support. Take the case of peacekeeping operations in South Sudan as an example. Initially, the peacekeepers reclaimed a small piece of wasteland in local area and planted vegetables to ensure their food supply. However, due to the food shortage in South Sudan, local needy children frequently stole them away. In light of this situation, Chinese peacekeepers decided to distribute vegetable seeds to the local people and taught them how to grow vegetables. They unexpectedly found that locals in South Sudan are keen to learn and acquire more farming knowledge. Hence, Chinese peacekeepers began to serve as planting technicians in local area, with large quantities of Chinese vegetables appeared on the land of South Sudan. It can be said that the

problem of food and clothing for the people of South Sudan was successfully solved with the help of Chinese peacekeepers.

For African countries, China's engagement of peacekeeping operations in Africa increases the confidence for policy-makers to fight against the rebels in the peacekeeping areas and to pursue peacebuilding as far as possible. Because those rebels want to receive the recognition of other countries' governments for its legitimacy in the legal sense. If they are not accepted by China, it means it is much less likely to be accepted by many other countries. It gives more opportunity for the policy-makers to come up with tactics to attack against those rebels. Furthermore, since the 21st century, the focus of peacekeeping operations has shifted to Africa. The previous failure of several UN peacekeeping operations in the African continent has led the United Nations and the policy-makers of peacekeeping areas to reflect and adjust its traditional peacekeeping thinking. One of the significant changes is that they began to pay attention to peacebuilding, rather than just peacekeeping. Because peacebuilding is the promotion of a sustainable peace, and peace maintenance is based on the guarantee of temporary peace.

For China, participating in African peacekeeping operations demonstrates the national image of China and increases the opportunity of cooperation with African countries in different domains in the future. Lots of African leaders so far have expressed their thanks to China in public for China's contribution to their countries in the peacekeeping field. For instance, when Liberian President Boris Johnson Sirleaf met with the head of the third Chinese peacekeeping police riot team in Liberia in 2015, he said, "The Chinese peacekeeping police riot squad has made important contributions to the peace and stability of Liberia. I sincerely thank you on behalf of the Liberian government and the public." President Xi first proposed the idea of a community with a shared future for mankind in 2012. He pointed out that promoting the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind is not aimed at using a new system to replace another system, nor is it to replace one civilization for another. Instead, it aims at coordinating different social systems, ideologies and historical culture by means of searching for the greatest common divisor of cooperation to create a better world. During the BRICS Summit in 2023, it was South Africa that hosted the 15th BRICS Summit and the BRICS Business Forum. South Africa invited 67 leaders of African countries to attend the BRICS-Africa Conference and the BRICS Plus Dialogue. Therefore, as the principal member of BRICS, China will unfold a series of collaboration with African countries in the future undoubtedly.

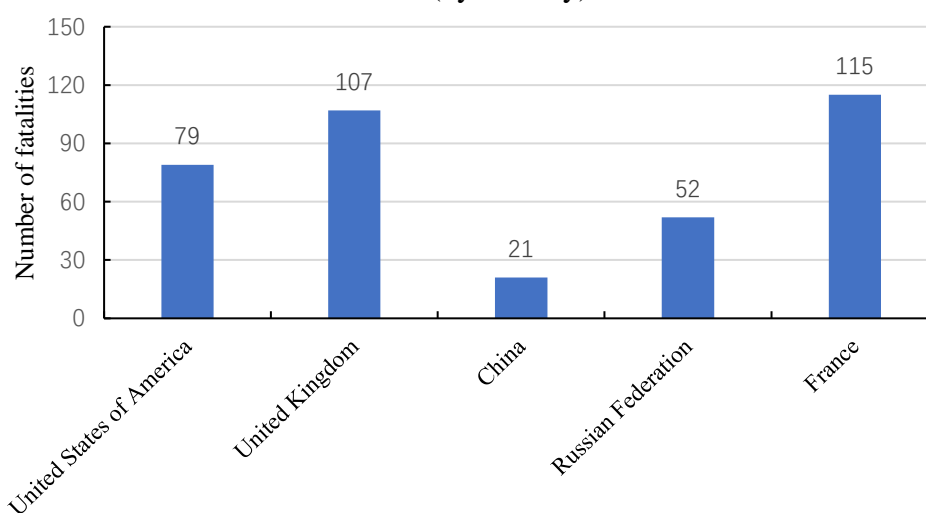
For the United Nations and the international community, China's involvement in African peacekeeping missions is conducive to upholding the status of the United Nations, exerting a positive role in promoting harmony and righteousness in the international community. Since the establishment of the United Nations in 1945, the United Nations has undertaken the responsibility to promote world peace and security. The UN collects its dues as its daily operating expenses, but due to the impact of COVID-19 in recent years, the global economy is in a serious downturn. And the UN financial situation is stretched, hindering the smooth operation of the United Nations. However, the huge default of the United States aggravated the financial distress of the United Nations. In contrast with the United States, China positively provided material and financial support for the United Nations, and dispatched thousands of peacekeepers to coordinate with the UN. It is beneficial for enhancing the mutual respect and trust between countries, between countries and international organizations, so as to achieve the harmonious development of all countries in the world.

5. Factors Affecting China's Role in African Peacekeeping Operations

By and large, China's engagement in the UN peacekeeping operations in Africa can be influenced by a variety of objective and subjective factors. The objective factors refer to the external elements that are intractable for China to cope with, such as the local ambient conditions of Africa, foreign scholars' negative opinions towards China etc. And the subjective factors refer to the internal flaws of China itself unfolded in the course of participating in African peacekeeping operations.

Firstly, Chinese peacekeepers who are dispatched to the African peacekeeping areas are likely to confront with life danger resulting from the hostile natural environment and ensuing various diseases. For instance, the Republic of Mali in West Africa is one of the most dangerous UN peacekeeping mission area, where the peacekeepers face with the trouble of sandstorm, high temperature heat, and infectious diseases spread by mosquitoes. To make matters worse, the local tension such as violent and terrorist attacks occur from time to time. Therefore, apart from the deteriorating social security environment, the potential unsafe factors continue to threaten the security of UNMU as well. According to the latest statistics given by the UN Peacekeeping Website, the overall amount of fatalities in the peacekeeping missions as of June 2023 has accumulated to 4314, 21 of which come from China [17]. As shown in Table 1, even as the permanent members of UNSC, even as the major power in the world, the amount of these five countries' fatalities in peacekeeping operations are also at a high level. Despite the foundation of a relatively systematic mechanism by UN to avoid the occurrence of dangers, the expansion of peacekeeping missions has led to the advent of more and more new dangers.

Table 1. Fatalities in Peacekeeping Operations of Five Permanent Members of UNSC as of June 2023 (by country)



Five permanent members of UNSC

Secondly, China is also up against the so-called “China threat theory” claimed by certain overseas scholars. In recent years, the advent of COVID-19 has directly stricken the global economy system, bringing about a profound influence on international trade, financial markets and global economic development. But China's economy has withstood the pressure. According to recent forecasts by the International Monetary Fund, China's GDP would expand by 5.2% this year, contributing one-third to global GDP growth, and the Chinese economy is still the main driving force of world economic growth [18]. However, the rise of China has triggered heated discussions among scholars at home and abroad. Some scholars consider the rise of China as a source of new ideas and approaches to world politics while others identify it as a potential source of tension in world politics. Specifically in the field of peacekeeping, certain scholars believe that China's behavior of participating in the African peacekeeping operations is mainly out of self-interest rather than selflessness. For example, China's participation in the Congo peacekeeping operations is considered to be an excuse for China to acquire the rich mineral resources in the Republic of the Congo. Therefore, although China just wants to seek a bigger role on security issues within the existing international system, it can be misunderstood to be a threat as a rising power.

Thirdly, apart from these two objective factors mentioned above, the internal problem China faces with in participating in African peacekeeping operations lies in the lack of updated and well-rounded legal support. In 2012, the Regulations on the Chinese People's Liberation Army's Participation in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (Trial) was released and implemented. In light of the actual conditions of UN peacekeeping missions, it defines the tasks for the Chinese military to participate

in UN peacekeeping operations, and defines the division of responsibilities of different branches. It regulates the management, rewards and punishments for the military's participation in UN peacekeeping operations. And detailed procedures of the dispatch and withdrawal of peacekeeping troops and military professionals are also included. However, the problem is that its efficacy only stays at the level of regulations instead of laws, which implies that China should constantly enrich, revise and update relevant laws on peacekeeping operations to guarantee for its better engagement in UN peacekeeping operations.

6. Conclusion

To sum up, the following conclusions can be drawn through analyzing the roles of China's participation in the UN peacekeeping operations in Africa, especially its contribution to local people, to African countries, to China itself and to the international community. Firstly, participating in peacekeeping operations in Africa enables the local people to stay away from war and violence and rebuild their homes by receiving humanitarian supplies. Secondly, it increases the confidence for policy-makers to fight against the rebels in the peacekeeping areas. Thirdly, the engagement of China helps demonstrate the national image of China and enhance China's influence around the world. Fourthly, China's participation in the UN peacekeeping operations in Africa is conducive to the world peace, exerting a positive role in promoting harmony and righteousness in the international community.

In addition, two dimensions of factors should be taken into consideration for China in the course of participating in the UN peacekeeping operations. On one hand, a lot of crises such as flames of war, diseases and natural disasters will threaten the safety of peacekeepers, and China's behavior of participating in the UN peacekeeping operations can be misunderstood as interest-based. On the other hand, China's domestic law deficiency also hinders the better engagement of peacekeeping activities for China.

Based on the above findings, this paper suggests that China should try to improve the precautions for the crisis that is likely to happen in the course of peacekeeping operations, and perfect the laws related to the peacekeeping field as far as possible. While assessing the real global situation and the future developing trend, China should adhere to its objective and realistic attitude and should also maintain the calm and confidence in the face of external risks and hidden crises.

However, on account of the limitation of my academic ability, there are still somewhat deficiencies in this paper. First, it is difficult to collect a lot of primary sources concerning UN peacekeeping operations and the selected literature is limited, so the analysis may be a little bit one-sided. Second, this paper involves less discussion on peacekeeping-related theories, so the theoretical support is not mature enough. Third, the logic of the paper may not be rigorous enough.

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