

Why Are Chinese Peacekeepers So Disciplined? Towards a Research Agenda

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1. The General Challenge of Peacekeeper Discipline

Recent years have seen an increased awareness of the problem of criminal conduct committed by participants in United Nations ('UN') peacekeeping operations ('PKOs'). Cases of sexual exploitation and abuse have attracted most attention. Such inappropriate and even criminal conduct causes damage to the reputation of the UN, and adds misery to the vulnerable. This undermines the original aims of PKOs.

More than 50 years ago, we had the first reported sex crimes committed by UN peacekeepers. At the time, they appeared to be a few scattered incidents.¹ More recently, in 2004, about 150 UN peacekeepers in the Congo were accused of using food and money to persuade and trick local women and children into having sex with them.² One year later, more than 20 peacekeepers in Liberia were accused of the same crime. Peacekeepers in Cote d'Ivoire, Sudan, and other countries have also been found to have committed sexual violations against those they were charged to protect. In 2007, 127 UN peacekeeping personnel were alleged to have committed acts of sexual exploitation and abuse; in 2010, the number was 85; in 2013, 66.³ A 2007 report⁴ observed that, during the two preceding years, the UN had investigated 319 peacekeepers in East Timor, the Middle East, Kosovo and Haiti for the commission of sexual violations. In the end, 18 civilian personnel, 17 international policemen, and 144 military personnel were repatriated.

Although such cases of sexual abuse by peacekeepers have been a substantial problem for PKOs, it is noteworthy that Chinese troops have never been found responsible for

such violations. In fact, up until the point of writing, every Chinese officer and soldier participating in PKOs has been awarded UN Peace Medals.⁵ This has been favourably noted by both domestic and international media. It was reported in 2010 that the Chinese peacekeeping police had created a standard of "no casualty, no violation, no repatriation".⁶ *Legal Daily* wrote that the UN Assistant Secretary-General Titov praised Chinese peacekeeping police's "no discipline violation".⁷ Journalist Andrew Higgins stated: "Chinese personnel have a reputation for tight discipline and have not been tarnished by the sex and corruption scandals that have afflicted peacekeepers from some other nations".⁸

Such domestic and international recognition suggests that the discipline of Chinese peacekeepers is highly valued. In what follows, this author tentatively examines some factors which may explain this discipline, especially with respect to sexual conduct, and suggests that further research should be conducted on these factors.

2. UN Guidelines and Chinese Regulations to Ensure Peacekeeper Discipline

The UN has issued guidelines to prevent sexual violations by peacekeepers.⁹ A three-pronged strategy is taken to address such sexual exploitation and abuse: the prevention of misconduct, the enforcement of UN standards of conduct, and the implementation of remedial action. Preventive measures include: (1) pre-deployment training for peacekeepers; (2) use of poster campaigns, newsletters, brochures, web sites, and radio broadcasts to raise awareness

¹ *China Daily*, 26 December 2009 (<http://www.legal-tools.org/doc/1470c3/>).

² *Xinhua Net*, 4 March 2005 (<http://www.legal-tools.org/doc/a3ef54/>).

³ The UN Conduct and Discipline Unit Website (<http://www.legal-tools.org/doc/d2b74f/>).

⁴ See 'More Than 100 UN Peacekeepers Were Expelled Because of Sexual Scandals', *China Daily*, 1 July 2007 (<http://www.legal-tools.org/doc/b5d286/>).

⁵ 2013年中国国防白皮书 (*China's Defence White Paper*), April 2013.

⁶ *Legal Evening Daily*, 20 January 2010 (<http://www.legal-tools.org/doc/13b8ce/>).

⁷ *Legal Daily*, 30 June 2014 (<http://www.legal-tools.org/doc/654cbc/>).

⁸ *The Washington Post*, 1 December 2009 (<http://www.legal-tools.org/doc/49bbfb/>).

⁹ For relevant provisions, see <http://www.legal-tools.org/doc/082b6b/>.

among peacekeepers; and (3) regulation of peacekeepers, such as restricting their movements by use of curfews, requiring them to wear uniforms outside barracks, designating certain off-limits areas, and increasing patrols around high risk areas.

When an allegation of misconduct has been received, the UN will carry out an administrative investigation, then repatriate the individuals concerned, and ban them from future peacekeeping operations. The undertaking of disciplinary sanctions and any other judicial action against the individuals involved remains the responsibility of the national jurisdiction of the individual concerned. The sending State must report back to the UN on the outcome of misconduct investigations and actions taken.

In addition, each country is required to develop its own ‘Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Victim Assistance Mechanism’, adapted to the national context, which aims to assist complainants and victims. It should also provide medical, legal, psycho-social and immediate material care as well as facilitate the pursuit of paternity and child support claims. Assistance and support are to be offered based on the individual needs that arise directly from sexual exploitation or abuse.

Whether the UN’s strategy succeeds depends to a large extent on the soldiers’ level of self-discipline. Yet, as it is the sending States that have direct jurisdiction over peacekeepers, all the UN can do is to repatriate peacekeepers who have committed offences and prevent them from participating in future PKOs. Though the UN claims to have ‘zero-tolerance’ for sexual exploitation and abuse committed by peacekeepers, its weak sanctioning power undermines its policy and goal.

Besides the above-mentioned standard-setting efforts of the UN, China has adopted a number of regulations on military discipline that are applicable to Chinese peacekeepers. In 2012, President HU Jintao signed an order to publish the Regulations of PLA Participating in PKO.¹⁰ These regulations address peacekeeper responsibilities, dispatching and retracement, education and training, management and guarantee, and rewards and punishment. Moreover, Chapter 10 of China’s National Defence Law requires soldiers in service to defend their motherland’s honour, obey all laws and military statutes, execute orders and show good discipline.¹¹ It also requires soldiers to protect and, interestingly, to love people.¹² Furthermore, Article 6 of the PLA Discipline Regulations stresses that the general requirements for military service are that a candidate is politically qualified, militarily competent, with excellent work habits and strict discipline. The philosophy

underlying these Chinese regulations is that rewards for proper conduct are a priority, but that punishments will also be pursued in a complementary fashion, so as to maintain PLA discipline. For example, Article 74 of the Regulations provides that the Peace Mission Commemorative Medallion should normally be awarded to peacekeepers, but Article 99 establishes that military personnel who molest, humiliate or have sex with women will be punished, providing numerous forms of sanctioning.

Considering the fact that a number of States have put in place such regulations, the existence of the latter is obviously not the only reason why Chinese peacekeepers have observed strict discipline when they are on UN missions. Let us consider other factors that may shed light on the question posed by this brief.

3. Influence of Chinese Traditional Ideas

China’s military history promotes high standards of conduct among its soldiers. A significant number of philosophers and military strategists in ancient China regarded ‘benevolence’ as an important element to win wars. For example, SIMA Rangju stated that “benevolence is the first”, and that attacking a country was permitted for the purpose of caring for the people and in order to stop a war.¹³ The book *Zuo Zhuan* suggested ‘Seven Kinds of Military Morals’¹⁴, namely, the banning of atrocities, the quelling of wars, the protecting of lords, the reassuring of people, the achieving of success, the uniting of the public, and the accumulating of wealth. HSÜN Tzu stated that military power was used to ban atrocities and remove the evil rather than just fight for material possessions.¹⁵

According to these classical Chinese sources the ultimate goal of a war is to serve the well-being of citizens. This kind of war is referred to as ‘a war for justice’ and the military as ‘an army of justice’. To launch such a war successfully and to qualify as such an army, soldiers are required to possess certain qualities. They are required not to bully the weak, not to be greedy for self-interest, not to be licentious in the face of beauty, to die for their country, and to be loyal.¹⁶ Today’s UN PKOs could likewise be seen as ‘wars for justice’ and the troops are like ‘armies of justice’. The purpose of the PKOs is to assist people in turbulent countries with the aim of resolving unrest and by that facilitating peace. Based on this and Chinese military tradition, the Chinese peacekeepers are to view the protection and assistance of the local people as their responsibility, and it would be humiliation to treat the latter as spoils of war, especially women and children.

¹³ LIU Zhongping, *Sima Methods, Translation and Annotation*, Commercial Press, 2009, p. 1.

¹⁴ LI Mengsheng, *Zuo Zhuan, Translation and Annotation*, Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 1998, p. 475.

¹⁵ ZHANG Jue, *Xun Zi, Translation and Annotation*, Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 1995, p. 155.

¹⁶ These qualities are mentioned by ZHUGE Liang, a military thinker in ancient China.

¹⁰ Signed on 22 March 2012, the order was in the process of trial implementation at the time of writing. “PLA” denotes the People’s Liberation Army, the armed forces of China.

¹¹ See Articles 56 and 57, Chapter 10, 中华人民共和国国防法 (China’s National Defence Law), 14 March 1997.

¹² *Ibid.*, Article 58.

Besides the normative role played by the concept of ‘benevolence’ in Chinese military history, it would also seem relevant to consider China’s traditional attitude towards sexual conduct. The key concept is ‘propriety’, a core idea that permeates Confucian texts. *The Analects of Confucius* contains a widely known phrase: “look not at what is contrary to propriety; listen not to what is contrary to propriety; speak not what is contrary to propriety; make no movement which is contrary to propriety”.¹⁷ This requires people’s behaviour to accord with propriety. Although Confucius did not use the concept of propriety to limit sexual desire, China’s conservative notions of sex have commonly led to misunderstandings of the propriety prescription. Mencius’ statement that “it is improper for men and women to touch each other’s hand in passing objects”¹⁸ is well-known. The book *Li Ji*¹⁹ records many norms on personal conduct, for example the norm that men and women should not sit in the wrong place, and a man should not talk with his sister-in-law face-to-face. Over time, the ancient society of China formed a system of feudal ethics to restrain people’s behaviour. Until the Song Dynasty (A.D. 960-1279), Neo-Confucianism urged people to “keep the natural law and eliminate the human desire”.²⁰ At that time, such references to human desire mainly meant sexual desire. People observing such feudal ethical codes were praised by society, especially women who were seen as virtuous, although the conservative expectations of sexual conduct applied to both genders.

Besides Confucianism, Taoism has also developed its own views on desire. LAO Tzu believed sexual desire was an instinct, but that people should not give in to desires in order to keep in good health. Sexual abstinence became a basic principle of Taoism for health preservation.

It would lack historicity to deny that such doctrines have had profound effects on Chinese ways of thinking, and, to some extent, the behaviour of many Chinese to this day. The majority of people in China still rarely talk about sex openly, and hold promiscuity in contempt. They think sex should take place within marriage only. Sexual promiscuity is regarded as a disturbance of social morality; a person indulging in such behaviour could be accused of threatening public morals and he or she would thus lose

public respect.

It is a reasonable hypothesis – to be verified by appropriate research – that these traditional normative influences tend to have a conservative effect on many Chinese, including Chinese peacekeepers. When internalised, such norms on personal conduct can obviously strengthen a sense of self-discipline, which has served as one contributing factor that explains why Chinese peacekeepers have not been involved in sexual scandals. It would go against common sense to exclude this factor from the analysis that should be undertaken.

4. Efforts to Instil Loyalty to Authority and a Will to Serve the People

Soon after the PLA’s establishment, the Chinese Communist Party decided that it should exercise full control over the PLA.²¹ To this end, the PLA adopted several methods of political training, including education comprising military training (60%) and ideological and political education (40%). During the war against Japan, the Party published different magazines and newspapers such as ‘The Red Star’, a military and political magazine. Another method resorted to was criticism and self-criticism, which required everyone to undertake self-reflection as well as criticism of the mistakes of others. Furthermore, in the Talks at Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art in 1942, MAO Zedong made reference to the idea to “serve the people”, adding “wholeheartedly” in 1944.²² The expression “base on people, serve people and maintain close ties with people”²³ gradually became one of the main principles of the PLA.

By using such methods, the Party has sought to strengthen its ideological leadership over PLA soldiers, instilling in them a sense of loyalty to authority. This may increase their awareness of the need to follow the rules imposed by superiors, including the injunction to protect and serve local people. It is difficult to exclude such training as another factor behind the self-discipline of Chinese peacekeepers. But again, this factor could not be considered as more than a part of the explanation, and it should be subjected to appropriate research.

5. Selection Process and Motivation

Since the 1990s, China has participated more actively in PKOs. It was stated that the first benefit of China’s PKO participation is the enhancement of her soft power and the

¹⁷ Translated and annotated by ZHANG Yanyin, *The Analects of Confucius*, Zhonghua Book Company, 2007, p. 171.

¹⁸ YANG Bojun, *Mencius, Translation and Annotation*, Commercial Press, 2007, p. 177.

¹⁹ It was compiled by DAI Sheng in the Western Han Dynasty (206 B.C. – A.D. 24), introducing various kinds of manners in ancient China before Qin and Han Dynasties (221 B.C. – A.D. 220).

²⁰ ZHU Xi, “Study(7)”, in LI Jingde (ed.), *Zhuzi’s Language Category*, Zhonghua Book Company, 1986, p. 375. This concept was gradually formed over several centuries in ancient China. The book *Li Ji* already expressed a similar idea. The philosopher ZHOU Dunyi of Northern Song Dynasty (A.D. 960–1127) founded Neo-Confucianism. His student CHEN Yi brought up the concept, which was developed and promoted by ZHU Xi in the Southern Dynasty (A.D. 1127–1279), and then it became widely known.

²¹ Already in the 1920s, this principle found its expression in the sentence “the party directs the gun”, see GU Zhiming, *中国人民解放军道德建设史 (The PLA’s Moral Construction History)*, Beijing: PLA Press, 2013, pp. 154–155.

²² MAO Zedong, ‘On the Coalition Government’, report to the 7th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, 25 April 1945.

²³ It was reflected in *中国共产党章程 (CCP Constitution)* and some other CCP files, for instance, *关于党内政治生活的若干准则 (Several Guidelines on the Political Life of the CCP)*.

improvement of her national image.²⁴ It was observed that “PKOs are an important stage to expand national interests and show an image of responsible power”.²⁵ Since Chinese participation in PKOs is widely regarded as a name-card for China on the world stage, China follows a strict process of selecting and training her peacekeepers.

A report by a Peking University research group²⁶ sets out the selection process for Chinese police seeking to serve in UN PKOs. Police in every Provincial and Municipal Public Security Bureau may apply in response to vacancy announcements. Generally, the qualification requirements include political correctness, professional and English language capabilities, age limit of above 25, and at least five years of work experience. Qualified applicants attend a written examination on the necessary basic skills, which includes assessing one’s competence in foreign language (English), driving, and weapon usage. Besides assessing an applicant based on such quantifiable items, the Chinese Peacekeeping Police Training Center (‘CPPTC’) interviews each candidate, to check factors such as their appearance, working experience, and family background. The CPPTC Director, Mr. GAO Xinman, described the selection process as “selecting the excellent from the good”.²⁷

His article entitled ‘Pay Attention to PKO’s Requirements and Deepen the Reform of Training’²⁸ suggests that candidates’ political thoughts be examined with background checks because “peacekeepers act as a civilization and friendship ambassador”. He mentions that the training of peacekeepers includes ideological and political education.²⁹ The ‘PLA Ideological and Political Education Outline’³⁰ points out that the main task of this education is to foster the soldiers’ core values to “be loyal to the CCP,

love the people they are sent to help, serve the country, be devoted to their missions, and to advocate honour”, as well as to train new soldiers to have high moral qualities and discipline. However unusual some of this language may sound to readers from other countries, it is hard to believe that such training does not have some impact on the morale and discipline of Chinese peacekeepers.

6. Conclusion

According to the above-mentioned report prepared by a research group at Peking University, when Chinese soldiers were asked why they wish to participate in PKOs, the three top answers were that it is “an excellent personal experience”, it “moulds a good image for China in the eyes of the world”, and “helps the needy in other countries”. This shows that the peacekeepers see themselves as volunteers and that they aspire to perform well. The report acknowledged that it was hard for the inquiry to “completely reflect the peacekeepers’ real thoughts, but the research group can deduce that chasing money and reputation is not the main motivation. Most Chinese peacekeepers connect participating in PKOs with serving the country and achieving self-worth”.

This aspirational trinity of Chinese peacekeepers – seeking excellent personal experience, serving China, and helping the needy – may be a reasonable indication of three main factors behind the discipline of Chinese peacekeepers. If they violate applicable UN and Chinese regulations by committing sexual or other violations, they would defeat such personal aspirations and contradict their socialisation in traditional Chinese standards of personal conduct, as well as their PLA training to respect chains of authority and the nature of peacekeeping participation. Foreign observers who seek to draw lessons from the performance of Chinese peacekeepers would do well to take this variety of factors into account. The present author submits that this is a fertile area for more systematic research and analysis.

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PURL: <http://www.legal-tools.org/doc/337391/>.

²⁴ *China Report*, 10 February 2010 (<http://www.legal-tools.org/doc/4d6bbd/>).

²⁵ *People’s Daily*, 30 June 2013 (<http://www.legal-tools.org/doc/f93988/>).

²⁶ Peking University’s “Chinese Peacekeeping Police Training System” research group, 崛起背景下的中国维和警察培训—调研河北廊坊中国维和警察培训中心的报告 (*Report on Researching Chinese Peacekeeping Police Training Centre in Langfang, Hebei*), 2011.

²⁷ *China Report*, 9 February 2010 (<http://www.legal-tools.org/doc/754641/>).

²⁸ *Legal Daily*, 19 April 2010 (<http://www.legal-tools.org/doc/b637f1/>).

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Ratified by the Central Military Committee and published by the General Political Department in January 2007 (on file with the author).