

Vaccine Diplomacy as New Soft Power Effort of US in Dealing with China in Southeast Asia

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic and developed countries' response to the crisis reveal that the landscape of global health governance is changing into a political realm. As countries around the world struggle to secure vaccines to break the COVID-19 chain, superpowers are actively distributing vaccines internationally in an act known as "vaccine diplomacy". The US and China have shown political interests in vaccine diplomacy, which can be seen from the way the two countries respond to achieve vaccine diplomacy targets, especially in strategic countries or regions such as Southeast Asia. This article explains US vaccine diplomacy in Southeast Asia which is considered a form of containing US power against China's vaccine diplomacy which first distributed vaccines in Southeast Asian countries. The US conducts vaccine diplomacy to compete with Chinese vaccines in accordance with the relative advantages of US politics by bringing up various diplomatic actions, namely the discourse on booster vaccines. This research uses the literature review method and the concepts of vaccine diplomacy and counter-strategy diplomacy. The results showed that US vaccine diplomacy is driven by political interests. The agenda of the vaccine diplomacy visit contains a discussion of invitations to stem China's power in the Indo-Pacific and South China Sea.

Keywords: US; China; Vaccine Diplomacy; Soft Power

ABSTRAK

Pandemi COVID-19 dan respon negara maju terhadap krisis ini mengungkapkan lanskap tata kelola kesehatan global mengalami perubahan menjadi ranah politik. Ketika negara-negara diseluruh dunia berjuang untuk mengamankan vaksin untuk memutus rantai COVID-19, negara superpower secara aktif mendistribusikan vaksin secara internasional sebagai tindakan yang dikenal "diplomasi vaksin". US dan China sangat memperlihatkan kepentingan politik dalam diplomasi vaksin yang terlihat dari cara kedua negara menanggapi dalam mencapai target diplomasi vaksin terutama di negara atau kawasan-kawasan strategis seperti Asia tenggara. Artikel ini menjelaskan diplomasi vaksin US di Asia Tenggara yang dianggap merupakan bentuk containing power US terhadap diplomasi vaksin China yang terlebih dahulu menyalurkan vaksin di negara-negara Asia Tenggara. US melakukan diplomasi vaksin untuk menyaingi vaksin China sesuai dengan keunggulan relatif politik US dengan memunculkan tindakan diplomasi yang bervariasi yakni dengan wacana vaksin booster. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode literatur review dan konsep diplomasi vaksin dan diplomasi kontra strategi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa diplomasi vaksin US didorong oleh kepentingan politik. Dalam agenda pembahasan kunjungan diplomasi vaksin berisikan pembahasan ajakan untuk membendung kekuatan China di Indo-Pasifik dan Laut China Selatan.

Kata kunci: AS; Cina; Dilomasi Vaksin; Soft Power

Introduction

Diplomacy is a method that is often used by a country to influence the politics of other countries or other international actors in achieving their national interests. Diplomacy is also a way of conveying messages and interests of the State regarding the fields of politics, economy, trade, social and culture, defence and other interests in international relations, in order to achieve mutual understanding between two countries (bilateral) or several countries. multilateral) (Foreign Indonesia, 2019). This study will discuss the issue of US vaccine diplomacy as New Soft Power's effort to stem China's power in Southeast Asia considering the changing world political context is currently concentrated on the issue of the COVID-19 pandemic. America and China are vaccine-providing countries and use vaccines as a political tool to gain the interests of both countries. The US is using vaccines to gain close ties with Southeast Asian nations and stem China's power in the region. Therefore, vaccine diplomacy is the right condition to build a new nation's strength or soft power through vaccine propaganda that stems China's power in Southeast Asia.

Vaccines are used as a new form of power for big countries to expand their political interests in various countries or region¹. Vaccines have become a political goal between China and America in Southeast Asia. However, the two countries have significant differences in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, including in the provision of vaccines. China is taking advantage of a time when US and European Union countries have been slow to respond to vaccines and still face concerns about vaccine safety². China became the main pioneer in distributing COVID-19 vaccines in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) because the US in the Donald Trump administration left WHO so that when the world experienced a government vacuum, it was called global G-Zero. This causes the US to have no immediate response to vaccine provision³. During the COVID-19 pandemic, China succeeded in filling and stepping on the global leadership vacuum left by the US⁴.

However, a change occurred when the US began to fill the global political stage again as a hegemonic country by trying to take a position in the context of global politics, especially vaccine politics⁵. Therefore, it is not surprising that vaccine development and diplomacy is very similar to an arms race⁶. There is a narrative battle over a COVID-19 vaccine between the US and China in the politicization of global vaccines⁷. America's growing stockpile of vaccines has opened new avenues for US vaccine diplomacy in Southeast Asia⁸. Apart from these US efforts, China has already achieved its interests further through vaccines in Southeast Asian countries even though China basically refuses that the distribution of the vaccine is a form of China's responsibility to the COVID-19 outbreak which incidentally came from Wuhan China but vaccine diplomacy cannot be separated from political interests. There are some Chinese foreign policies and Chinese interests through the vaccine. First, the

¹ D. Ellwood, "USC Public Diplomacy," 27 May 2021. <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/vaccine-diplomacy-new-chapter-story-soft-power>

² M. Leigh, "Vaccine Diplomacy: soft power lessons from China and Russia. April 27, 2021. <https://www.bruegel.org/2021/04/vaccine-diplomacy-soft-power-lessons-from-china-and-russia/>

³ E. Brattberg. "Middle Power Diplomacy in an Age of US-China Tensions." *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 1, 2021: 219-238, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2021.1896136>.

⁴ E.R. Norman, "COVID-19: Data Reporting, Good Governance, and New Policy Priorities." *World Affairs*, Vol. 183, No. 10, 2021: 213, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.ugm.ac.id/10.1177/0043820020946582>

⁵ A. Anisin, "The Contradictions of COVID-19 and the Persistence of Western Hegemony." *South African Journal of Political Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 2, 2021: 331-346, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589346.2021.1913799>

⁶ T. Struye-de, Swielande, Tanguy Struye de. "The Biden Administration: An Opportunity to Affirm a Flexible and Adaptive American World Leadership." *World Affairs*, Vol. 184, No. 2, 2021: 2, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00438200211014643>

⁷ B.N. Jaworsky & R. Qiaoran. "The Politics of Blaming: the Narrative Battle between China and the US over COVID-19." *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2020: 295-315, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-020-09690-8>

⁸ Cambridge University Press. "United States Seeks Answers on COVID-19's Origin While Stepping Up "Vaccine Diplomacy"." *American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 115, No. 4, 2021: 732-739, <https://doi.org/10.1017/ajil.2021.52>

interests of China's strategy and strength as well as the case of the South China Sea which is linked to the diplomacy of the COVID-19 pandemic. The two Chinas have met the criteria of a superpower⁹. The superpower slogan emphasizes China's interests in pandemic diplomacy and vaccine diplomacy, namely to launch China's interests over the United States to become a superpower country replacing the United States. China's vaccine diplomacy as a new political stage to achieve national interests¹⁰. China's diplomatic politics is shrouded in the issue of humanitarian responsibility by taking the opportunity under the pandemic to fulfil its strategic goal of asserting its role and influence on the world by making China feel as if it is a country responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic¹¹. China's vaccine diplomacy aims to expand the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China has shipped millions of doses of the vaccine to countries in Asia, Africa and Europe¹². China uses global health diplomacy to build a good image for its geopolitical interests¹³. Political economy factors shape the way non-Western powers such as China, Russia and India carry out vaccine diplomacy¹⁴. In the context of disaster diplomacy, vaccine diplomacy is highlighted as a form of how countries will choose vaccine recipients in the framing of vaccine aid providers in buying political advantages in recipient countries¹⁵. As a strategic state in an effort to hedge among the increasing competition for political power.

The previous study was preoccupied with seeing how China's politics in vaccine diplomacy is where China is a country that has the potential to surpass the US with all the dynamics of political strategy development, whereas on the other hand, the US also has the same desire as China. The global health crisis strengthens the competitive dynamics between the US and China¹⁶. In his argument the health crisis reinforces the competitive dynamics between the US and China in influencing instability into the global order¹⁷. The geopolitical thinking of the two countries has tried to take advantage of the crisis to increase international profits. In Bahi's research, what is interesting is how vaccines are no longer a humanitarian effort in dealing with a world pandemic but have turned into a political tool for big countries for national interests, especially geopolitical interests. Thus, the author is interested, further discussing how the United States vaccine diplomacy sees the big trend of China being involved in providing vaccines, especially in Southeast Asian countries. The author's interest is based on the

⁹ Binh, Le Hai. "Superpower Responsibility, China, the South China Sea and the COVID-19 Pandemic." *International Journal of China Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2021: 47-64, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/superpower-responsibility-china-south-sea-covid/docview/2565686787/se-2?accountid=13771>

¹⁰ N.C. Tung. "US-China COVID-19 vaccine diplomacy competition in Vietnam: where vaccines go, influence may follow." *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 2022: 1-16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2022.2077302>

¹¹ A. Kobierecka, & M.M. Kobiereck. "'Coronavirus Diplomacy: Chinese medical assistance and its diplomatic implications.'" *International Politics*, Vol.58, no.6, 2021: 973-954, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-020-00273-1>

¹² P. Kurecic, & V. Haluga. "Health Diplomacy as A Soft Power Tool of the PR China During the Covid 19 Pandemic." *Economic and Social Development: Book of Proceedings*; Varazdin. Croatia, Varazdin: Varazdin Development and Entrepreneurship Agency, 2021: 237-243.

¹³ M. Leigh, "Vaccine Diplomacy: soft power lessons from China and Russia. April 27, 2021. <https://www.bruegel.org/2021/04/vaccine-diplomacy-soft-power-lessons-from-china-and-russia/>

¹⁴ M. Suzuki & Mao Yang. "Political economy of vaccine diplomacy: explaining varying strategies of China, India, and Russia's COVID-19 vaccine diplomacy." *Review of International Political Economy*, vol. 29, No.4, 2022: 1-21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2022.2074514>

¹⁵ A. Pfaff, "Disaster Diplomacy" and the US response to COVID-19, April 15, 2020. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/disaster-diplomacy-and-the-us-response-to-covid-19/?fbclid=IwAR1ZqtVwteo2_mxrzVMHD6c-gWoURbVMpXVuurleJT7P_bkO6LGRNMP8voo

¹⁶ L.H. Binh, "Superpower Responsibility, China, the South China Sea and the COVID-19 Pandemic." *International Journal of China Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2021: 47-64, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/superpower-responsibility-china-south-sea-covid/docview/2565686787/se-2?accountid=13771>

¹⁷ N.C. Tung, "Uneasy Embrace: Vietnam's Responses to the U.S. Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy Amid U.S.-China Rivalry." *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 35, no.4, 2021: 1-31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2021.1894223>

dynamics of global politics, which is always coloured by the political competition between China and the US. In connection with that, it is interesting for the author to see the political response and US interests in its vaccine diplomacy in Southeast Asia. As US politics is always associated with discourses of danger that other potential countries such as China are enemies¹⁸. Thus, China's vaccine diplomacy in Southeast Asia is seen as a political test for the US. The US is very open to calling China a country whose dominance must be damned. Therefore, the US is using the same vaccine diplomacy opportunity as China. The US uses vaccine diplomacy as diplomacy with the right political momentum when vaccines become a commodity that is still needed by all countries in the world, including Southeast Asian countries. China is interesting to see its political dynamics in the distribution of global vaccines. Vaccine political diplomacy between the US and Southeast Asia is an interesting phenomenon to be studied more deeply about what US interests play in the politics of vaccine diplomacy.

In this context, the US is seen partly aspiring to build political diplomacy to stem China's power in Southeast Asia. There are two contributions made by this article. First, it fills gaps in the existing literature by analysing perceptions of US interest in health diplomacy or vaccine diplomacy in Southeast Asia. Second, this article provides a more inclusive analysis by considering that health diplomacy can be politicized and become a new political instrument for developed countries. This article uses the concepts of diplomacy and Barston's national interest which will be explained in the framework of the analysis. The concept of diplomacy at least offers a way related to the state's strategy to achieve power, namely the quality of diplomacy. Diplomacy is one of the important instruments in the implementation of a country's national interest. Diplomacy as the main tool in achieving national interests related to the state. Through diplomacy, a country can build an image of itself. According to in *Modern Diplomacy* by Barston, vaccines are connoted as diplomatic space which varies greatly to obtain the national interest of a country¹⁹. Meanwhile, according Fidler D.P, dalam the *Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy* that utilization of health concepts in policy making to achieve non-medical goals such as social political and economic goals²⁰.

Literature Review

Studies on vaccine diplomacy have been widely discussed in various forms of research, either in the form of journals, books or some kind of scientific report. This is related to the progress of vaccine diplomacy in encouraging the termination of the global COVID-19 chain. An understanding of the concept of vaccine diplomacy is still an interesting topic to discuss in the study of international relations, where a comprehensive understanding of vaccine diplomacy can then lead to other goals, namely not only referring to the security interests of the global community, but it can be seen as a new political form of developed countries to achieve its national interest in developing countries. One of the many discussions contained in the literature review is how the concept of vaccine diplomacy is defined as a new form of soft power that has the capacity to achieve the goals of another concept, namely the national interest. This study will examine the US vaccine diplomacy as a form of new soft power in stemming China's power in Southeast Asia. This article uses several literature reviews that emphasize research related to diplomatic aspects of US and Chinese vaccines.

¹⁸ D. Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Political Identity*. "Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1998

¹⁹ Barston, Ronald Peter. *Modern Diplomacy*. New York: Pearson Education, 2013

²⁰ Fidler, D.P. "Health diplomacy. In: Cooper A, Heine J, Thakur R (eds) *The Oxford handbook of modern diplomacy*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, p 691–707, 2013

Nguyen Cong Tung, argued that the US and China's COVID-19 vaccine diplomacy in Vietnam was labelled as a proxy fight. Both the US and China use vaccine diplomacy to achieve strategic and foreign policy goals, especially in relation to Vietnam. The US vaccine donation consolidates Vietnam's strategic confidence in the US during difficult times. Furthermore, despite widespread distrust and suspicion about the quality of Chinese-made vaccines against the Vietnamese people. China's vaccine donation to Vietnam can still prevent it from growing into an anti-China coalition led by the US²¹. From this understanding, Nguyen Cong Tung would like to explain that vaccine diplomacy, both China and the US, have the same political goal, namely to fulfill foreign policy and national interests, especially in Vietnam. China's vaccine diplomacy has not been able to eliminate the anti-China perspective in Vietnam.

The development of China's vaccine diplomacy is very large in relation to its foreign policy goals and national interests. Le Hai Bihn argued that since 2012 China's foreign policy has focused on modifying the international order to suit China's growing power and to fulfill China's dream of changing national policies and becoming a superpower. Thus, China emerged as a key player in global affairs, especially against the COVID-19 pandemic to fulfill its foreign policy. Furthermore, China is still failing to fulfill its duties as a superpower. Le Hai Bihn wanted to explain that China's vaccine diplomacy is to fulfill its foreign policy as part of a strategy to increase China's strength. Peter Kureci and Vesna Haluga explain that vaccine diplomacy or health diplomacy is an important component of world powers' foreign policy with the aim of spreading geopolitical influence. Through health diplomacy or vaccine diplomacy China has used every opportunity to expand and strengthen its geopolitical influence. Vaccine diplomacy is used by China as a form of soft power with a long-term goal to determine China's geopolitical position in global politics in the future²². Peter Kureci and Vesna Haluga further explained that China's vaccine diplomacy is used as a new political tool to increase its political power in the world.

Ian Tsung-Yen Chen argued through vaccines China enjoys large-scale geopolitical affinity, receives more investment Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Through vaccines China brings countries closer to China's political orbit. China engages the vaccine trade as a political concession. During the global crisis due to COVID-19, the interaction between China and the diplomatic target country for its vaccine involved more political factors than other factors. The Chinese government is transforming vaccine diplomacy as a political bargaining power and taking advantage of the crisis to consolidate or expand its sphere of influence. However, in the diplomatic process, China's vaccine lost its momentum due to western vaccines, especially the US, which had already produced vaccines and were approved by the WHO. The US becomes stronger and unites more countries amidst the intense US-China power competition²³. Ian Tsung-Yen Chen wanted to explain that China is using vaccine diplomacy to expand its influence, but diplomacy has encountered obstacles because the US has intensified its efforts to block China's vaccine policy.

Furthermore, the literature presented above shows that vaccine diplomacy is a concept that can provide a political strategy that encourages the realization of national interests. The four studies above have an argument that vaccine diplomacy is a new political instrument for developed countries to

²¹ N.C, Tung, "Uneasy Embrace: Vietnam's Responses to the U.S. Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy Amid U.S.–China Rivalry." *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 35, no.4, 2021: 1-31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2021.1894223>

²² Petar, K, and V.Haluga. "Health Diplomacy as A Soft Power Tool of the PR China During the Covid 19 Pandemic." *Economic and Social Development: Book of Proceedings Varazdin*. Croatia: Varazdin Development and Entrepreneurship Agency, 2021: 237-243.

²³ I. Tsung-yen, Chen, "The Crisis of COVID-19 and the Political Economy of China's Vaccine Diplomacy." *Foreign Policy Analysis: Journal of Global Security Studies*, 2022: vol.18, no.3: 1-18, <https://doi.org/10.1093/fpa/orac014>

achieve their national interests. Thus, the authors are interested in applying the diplomatic concept of vaccines in the behavior of US vaccines in Southeast Asia. The Southeast Asian region is very important for US political diplomats to maintain their existence in the Indo-Pacific region.

Methodology

This research is qualitative research that uses literature study as the primary data collection method. This method highlights the interpretive nature of research and emphasizes words rather than quantitative data in the diplomatic analysis of US vaccines in Southeast Asia. This study analyses primary and secondary data collected from various online sources. Primary data includes state documents, speeches, and statements from US officials which are mostly sourced from government websites. Secondary data in the form of academic journals, books, online articles, and news sourced from the internet. In addition, this study also digs deeper into data from opinions and past interviews of US scholars on how to translate US politics towards China, which is considered a political rival and if connoted in foreign policy, China can be said to be the main enemy for US politics, especially in Indonesia-Pacific. To explain US vaccine diplomacy in Southeast Asia, this article uses the framework for analysing the concept of counter-strategies diplomacy by Barston's. This concept states that vaccine diplomacy is connoted as a highly varied diplomatic space to obtain the national interests of a country. The US's inability to conquer China uses hard diplomacy so that the US tends to use the same method as China to achieve the quality of diplomacy as a strategy of its national interest in the pandemic era.

a. Vaccine Diplomacy

The term vaccine diplomacy is part of a form of global health diplomacy that is generally used by countries to solve health problems that have a global impact. However, the connotation of vaccine diplomacy is also closely related to the national interests of a country. The utilization of health concepts in policy-making to achieve non-medical goals such as social political and economic goals²⁴. Therefore, health diplomacy or vaccine diplomacy can be seen as a form of “soft power” that can be used to improve bilateral and multilateral relations. Vaccine diplomacy is a form of global health diplomacy that refers to the use and administration of vaccines to achieve a country's global health and foreign policy goals²⁵. Vaccine diplomacy is a health diplomacy term that is not only used specifically for the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this term later became a trend during COVID-19 which was widely used by developed countries to achieve their foreign policy goals.

b. Counter-Strategies Diplomacy

Counter-strategies diplomacy is a form of political diplomacy that intends to build bilateral and multilateral support, build broader coalitions that can be used as a form of side political campaigns in the midst of ongoing political competition. Counter-strategies diplomacy is a form of diplomacy that can split alliance groups.²⁶ The escalation of counter-strategies diplomacy is considered effective because it does not only depend on a progressive response but on explicit threats through supply

²⁴ Fidler, D.P. “Health diplomacy. In: Cooper A, Heine J, & Thakur R (Eds) *The Oxford handbook of modern diplomacy*, “Oxford University Press, Oxford, p.691–707. 2013

²⁵ Remco J.L.van Dijk & Cathrine Yuk-pink.L. “The effect of Chinese vaccine diplomacy during COVID-19 in the Philippines and Vietnam: a multiple case study from a soft power perspective, “*Humanities & Social Science Communications*, vol.10, no.678. 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-02073-3>

²⁶ Barston, Ronald Peter. *Modern Diplomacy*. New York: Pearson Education, 2013

disruptions. In the economic context, it can be seen from the implicit threat of economic collapse through supply disruptions and strategic routes, while in the context of vaccine diplomacy it is considered effective because of the response of China and the US and also the US response in distributing vaccines in Southeast Asia.

Counter-strategies diplomacy can be used as a means of promoting ideas and framing debates. This approach promotes ideas through technical issues framed in the form of cooperation between countries and discussions on issues of geopolitical strategy and even cooperation and the financial sector. This can be seen in the way the US government brings the vision of vaccine diplomacy but in meetings with Southeast Asian countries it discusses economic cooperation and geopolitical issues and other traditional issues. Therefore, counter-strategies diplomacy is an existing form of diplomacy that bridges the discussion of traditional issues in contemporary issues.

Analysis

Since the 1980s, the power competition between China and the US has remained in the midst of a world experiencing large fluctuations due to the HIV/AIDS virus. Therefore, the COVID-19 pandemic is also used as a “soft power tool”. The COVID-19 crisis has made US-China relations even worse where there is a war of discourse and blaming each other over the spread of disease and struggling to rotate global opinion between the two countries. China uses COVID-19 as a political strategy to overtake the US as a global leader. China delivered a soft power and diplomatic message that vaccines are seen as the Chinese Communist Party's much larger ambition of “telling the story well” spread China's voice and strengthen narrative power internationally. China has taken the COVID-19 crisis as a golden opportunity to start its good propaganda²⁷ This then made the US decide to openly respond to China's power in Southeast Asia because one of the areas that China focuses on in vaccine diplomacy is Southeast Asia.

US vaccine politics in stemming China's power by making political speculations about the cause of China must be responsible for the global COVID-19 pandemic. The US and its allies have pushed for discourse about the origins of the virus while China has rejected an investigation into its initial handling of the outbreak. US vaccine politics in containing China's power by making political speculation about why China should be held responsible for the global COVID-19 pandemic. The US and its allies have encouraged discourse on the origins of the virus while China has rejected investigations into its initial handling of the outbreak. The US government views it as a form of Chinese political strategy because of China's political behavior at the beginning of COVID-19. The Chinese government launched a public diplomacy campaign in April 2020 declaring itself a global health leader²⁸. So that the US response is a natural form of political response as a political rival. The form of the Chinese government's statement that uses the term public diplomacy in responding to vaccine diplomacy. This refers to the “government order”²⁹. In addition to these investigations, the US is also developing vaccines to open new avenues for its vaccine diplomacy³⁰. Therefore, seeing the level of Chinese political behavior, the US decided to retaliate by creating a global discourse on

²⁷ B. Gill, “China’s Global Influence: Post-Covid1-9 Prospect for Soft Power,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol.43, no.2, 2022: 97-115, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2020.1771041>

²⁸ K. Lancaster & M. Rubin. Assessing the Early Response to Beijing’s Pandemic Diplomacy. *Council on Foreign Relations*, april 30, 2020. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/assessing-early-response-beijings-pandemic-diplomacy>

²⁹ Seow Ting Lee. Vaccine diplomacy: nation branding and China’s COVID-19 soft power play. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, vol.19, no.1, 2023:64-78, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-021-00224-4>

³⁰ Anon. "United States Seeks Answers on COVID-19's Origin While Stepping Up “Vaccine Diplomacy.” *American Journal of International Law*, Vol.115, no.4, 2021: 732-739, <https://doi.org/10.1017/ajil.2021.52>

China's vaccine variant which is not sufficient to protect the global community, especially from the COVID-19 virus attack. The discourse that was built was a booster vaccine to open up opportunities for US vaccines to enter on a large scale in Southeast Asia. In both China and the US, vaccines have emerged as diplomatic instruments that demonstrate influence through donations or loans for vaccine manufacturing and the signing of vaccine purchase agreements with countries that have limited access.

a. Vaccine Diplomacy as an Effort to Establish the US New Soft Power in Southeast Asia

The US uses vaccine diplomacy as an effort to establish new soft power in Southeast Asia. Vaccines have had a place in diplomacy since the Cold War era. Countries that can produce and distribute life-saving injections to others less fortunate see a return on their investment in soft power. Vaccine diplomacy is a new form of diplomacy in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic when viewed from the perspective of the concept of diplomacy, vaccine diplomacy is a new diplomatic method considering that diplomacy is not a constant phenomenon. Based on Fidler (2013), This is known as diplomatic space, where diplomatic space varies greatly to obtain a country's national interests in the form of political, social and economic interests. The US has entered the global stakes for the fair distribution of safe and effective vaccines. Vaccines are used as a form of the US new diplomatic space in the Southeast Asian Region. Vaccines are an instrument in obtaining the US geo-economic and geo-strategic national interests in the Southeast Asian region. The US Vice President, Kamala Harris conveyed the donation of one million doses of vaccine in addition to the previous US government sending 6 million doses of vaccine to the Vietnamese government as well as US\$ 23 million in aid for the COVID-19 pandemic³¹.

The US vaccine diplomacy in Southeast Asia is US new attempt to regain influence over countries in the Southeast Asian region. US has donated 1.5 million doses of the Pfizer vaccine in Thailand and 5 million doses of the vaccine³². Through vaccine diplomacy, US forms its politics to stem China's power in Asia and Southeast Asia in various ways. The US has now given many doses of vaccines in Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia, where the US product vaccines such as AstraZeneca, Pfizer, and Moderna were started. The US vaccine dose is considered the best compared to the Chinese vaccine dose; thus, the US recommends countries to carry out a booster vaccine for people who have received a dose of Sinovac vaccine³³. The US has a strong commitment in the Joe Biden administration to meet the worldwide vaccine needs. In line with that, the US has supplied 110 million doses of vaccine worldwide and 23 million doses of vaccine in Southeast Asia. It has also established a branch office of the US Centre for Disease Control and Control in Southeast Asia located in Vietnam, which aims to prepare ASEAN countries for facing pandemics in the future. In addition, it also provided financial assistance to ASEAN in the amount of 500 thousand dollars to be used by ASEAN to buy vaccines in an effort to control COVID-19.

b. Vaccine Diplomacy as a Form of US Containing Power Against China in Southeast Asia

The first US vaccines, Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech, using the mRNA technique have the highest efficacy. The results were seen in strong immune system responses compared to vaccines using

³¹ Npr. The U.S is Trying to Improve Relations with Asia using Western vaccine, August 19, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/08/19/1029437780/the-u-s-is-trying-to-improve-relations-with-southeast-asia-using-western-vaccine>

³² C.Global, "Analysis: U.S Vaccine Diplomacy in Full Swing in Southeast Asia. July 31, 2021. <https://www.caixinglobal.com/2021-07-31/us-vaccine-diplomacy-in-full-swing-in-southeast-asia-101749366.html>

³³ Times, "As Chinese Vaccine Stumble, U.S Finds News Opening in Asia., The New York, August 20, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/20/business/economy/china-vaccine-us-covid-diplomacy.html>

the older technology of inactivated mRNA-based inoculation. In addition to Moderna and Pfizer, Novavax and Johnson & Johnson can be used as a single vaccine. The US is the only global supplier besides China with its various vaccines. The vaccines owned by China, Sinovac and Sinopharm use old vaccine techniques and use technology that relies on the inactivated COVID-19 virus. The content of Sinovac and Sinopharm is known to be less satisfactory than mRNA³⁴.

Table 1. COVID-19 Vaccines³⁵

Vaccines	Type	Estimated Efficacy for Base Strains*	Comment	Anticipates 2021 Doses
Prizer	mRNA	95 percent	Neutralizes UK and South African variants	2 billion
BioNTech	mRNA	94 percent	Possible steep reduction in neutralization of South African variant	1 billion
Johnson & Johnson	Adenoviral Vected	66 percent	Single dose; higher efficacy against severe disease; effective against “multiple virus variants”	More than 1 billion “claimed” but late strat
Novavax	Protein	96 percent (interim trials only)	86 percent for UK and 60 percent for South African variants (interim)	2021 doses unclear; 2 billion in 2022
Oxford-AsraZeneca	Adenoviral Vected	62-90 percent (range from different dosing)	Reduced efficacy against South African variant	2.5 billion in multiple countries (prorated)
Gameleya	Adenoviral Vected	92 percent (possibly inreflective trial)	No results against variants	800 million
Sinovac	Inatived Virus	50-78 percent (incompatible trials across countries)	100 percent prevention of hospitalization; not yet approved for elderly	500 million
Sinopharm-Beijing Institute	Adenoviral Vected	79 percent (interim trials only)	Not yet approved elderly; no outside review on variants	750 million
CanSino Biologics	Adenoviral Vected	66 percent (interim trials only)	Single dose; not approved yet	At least 70 million
Bharat Biotech	Inatived Virus	60 percent (interim trials only)	No results against variants	700 million

Source: American Enterprise Institute, <https://www.aei.org/> (2021)

³⁴ Derek Scissors, Dan Blumenthal & Linda Zhang. “The US-China glonal vaccine competition,” *American Enterprises Institute*, February 18, 2021, <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/the-us-china-global-vaccine-competition/>

³⁵ Derek Scissors, Dan Blumenthal & Linda Zhang. “The US-China glonal vaccine competition,” *American Enterprises Institute*, February 18, 2021, <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/the-us-china-global-vaccine-competition/>

The US and China's vaccine political diplomacy competition is greatest in the Southeast Asian region, including Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam. This is due to the huge population of Southeast Asia and the high need for vaccines. One of the Southeast Asian countries that has become an area of competition for US and Chinese vaccine diplomacy is Vietnam. China and the US utilize vaccine diplomacy to achieve their foreign policy strategy goals. The US considers that vaccine donations will strengthen Vietnam's trust in the US during the COVID-19 period. While there is still great distrust and suspicion of the quality of Chinese vaccines by the Vietnamese people, China's vaccine diplomacy strategy can prevent Vietnam from falling further into the anti-Tiongkok coalition led by the US³⁶. Through counter-strategy diplomacy, the US can begin to organize political strategies in Southeast Asia to prevent the dominance of China's vaccine diplomacy which can be the US political strategy in several state visits in Southeast Asia to stem the power of China's vaccine.

US policy in response to COVID-19 goes beyond ensuring vaccines for its citizens and supporting international relief campaigns. US initiatives to ensure markets for vaccine production and distribution and global supply chains. The US is working with logistics companies to deliver vaccines to low-income and high-need countries at low prices and the shipping costs are borne by the US. The policy of pushing cheap vaccines to low-income countries and the COVID-19 emergency is a form of US counter-strategy diplomacy in stemming the power of China's vaccine diplomacy, which since the beginning of COVID-19 has started distributing vaccine assistance. One of the priority countries is Southeast Asian countries. The primary pivot of the US and China's strategic competition is the Indopacific, particularly Southeast Asia. Southeast Asia has become a competitive trend due to its strategic location in the geopolitical context.³⁷ China is the first country to send vaccines to Southeast Asia, contributing 7 million doses of vaccine in nine ASEAN countries in July 2021. Until December 2022, the Philippines became the second largest recipient of Chinese vaccines in Southeast Asia with a total of 60 million doses of vaccine³⁸. The vaccine consists of two forms of receipt, namely as aid reaching 5 million doses and 55 million doses purchased from China. Meanwhile, one of the Southeast Asian countries encouraged by China to produce vaccines through the policy of technology transfer to developing countries is Indonesia³⁹. This geopolitical context makes countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam partners in the US geopolitical strategy. This effort was emphasized through the political statement of the US vice president during a diplomatic trip to Southeast Asia.

Vaccine diplomacy is seen as a form of containing US power against China in Southeast Asia. This can be seen from the speeches of the US Vice President, Kamala Harris in Vietnam and in Singapore on August 25, 2021, which not only discussed vaccines and efforts to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic but also emphasized on security stability, peace, freedom of the sea area, free trade, promote human rights, commitment to the international order and awareness of common interests. The assistance is considered a form of US assistance to attract the attention of Southeast Asian countries not to make China a country that is involved in various political policies in the

³⁶ Nguyen, C.T. "US-China COVID-19 vaccine diplomacy competition in Vietnam: where vaccines go, influence may follow", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol 76, no.6, 2022:653-671, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2022.2077302>

³⁷ Derek, S, Dan, B & Linda, Z. "The US-China glonal vaccine competition", *American Enterprises Institute*, February 18, 2021, <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/the-us-china-global-vaccine-competition/>

³⁸ Remco J.L.van Dijk & Cathrine Yuk-pink.L. "The effect of Chineses vaccine diplomacy during COVID-19 in the Philippines and Vietnam: a multiple case study from a soft power perspective", *Humanities & Social Science Communications*, vol.10, no.678. 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-02073-3>

³⁹ Bridge. "China COVID-19 Vaccine Tracker, December 2022, <https://bridgebeijing.com/our-publications/our-publications-1/china-covid-19-vaccines-tracker/>

Southeast Asian region, such as South China and the Indo Pacific through the principles of the United Nations Convention Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The US prioritises building global cooperation and safeguarding US security⁴⁰.

In addition to geostrategic and geo-economic objectives regarding international trade routes, China is considered by the US to have controlled many sea trade routes by claiming the South China Sea area and approaching many Southeast Asian countries for a long time. China also left the UNCLOS agreement due to the conflict in the South China Sea, so the US continues to campaign that China does not unilaterally control international trade routes in the Indo-Pacific region, especially the South China Sea region. The US vaccine diplomacy in Southeast Asia, by providing vaccine assistance, financial assistance for the management and recovery of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and even the establishment of a branch office of the US Centre for Disease Control and Control in ASEAN, which is located in Vietnam, aims to stem China's power in the Southeast Asian region. Related to that matter, the authors consider that the US vaccine diplomacy is a form of response to the statement of the China foreign ministry that China does not link geo-strategy and geo-economic interests in vaccine diplomacy but is a form of China's responsibility as a known country to the world, as a source of the COVID-19 virus and also as a large country that is responsible for sharing vaccines with developing countries. On the other hand, in reality, China's diplomacy is closely related to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) program as China's geostrategic effort in increasing strength in the Southeast Asian region⁴¹.

China's foreign ministry has provided free vaccines to 69 countries including Southeast Asian countries and exported it commercially to 28 other countries. Furthermore, even though China has no relationship with the economic interests of 28 countries, but the commercial interests of 28 countries are sufficient to illustrate that the vaccine commercial is also a form of achieving China's economic interests in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic, while free vaccines to 69 countries are a form of China's geopolitics in approaching other countries. Developing countries such as Indonesia benefit from other sectors not only from vaccines directly, but also from other investment sectors in various natural resources of Indonesia and other Southeast Asian countries and even other regional countries.

In addition, the China government's statement does not use vaccine diplomacy to gain political advantage considering the fact that President Xi Jinping's statement is not in line with China's political behaviour which sent 3 million doses of vaccine to Vietnam on the same day the US Vice President, Kamala Harris arrived in Vietnam. It is China's political behaviour through vaccine diplomacy in order to launch China's BRI policy. The US responded strongly to China's efforts by observing US behaviour in the Southeast Asian region. It showed the US's attitude which is aggressively carrying out and supplying vaccines to Southeast Asian countries. This attitude clearly shows that through diplomacy the US vaccine has geo-economic and geo-strategic interests in stemming China's influence in the Southeast Asian region. Observing the context, the US economic interests are that America wants more trade routes without Indo-Pacific barriers and geopolitical interests, namely wanting US global power to remain a global power and maintaining US security in the Southeast Asia and Indo Pacific regions.

Vaccine diplomacy is the main line of the formation of new US soft power in Southeast Asia. US vaccine cooperation to compete with China in supplying the world's vaccines is very strong. US

⁴⁰ Tempo, "Wapres AS Kamala Harris Kunjungi Singapura dan Vietnam, tangkal pengaruh Cina . July 31, 2021. <https://dunia.tempo.co/read/1489255/wapres-as-kamala-harris-kunjungi-singapura-dan-vietnam-tangkal-pengaruh-cina>

⁴¹ Y. Huang, "Vaccine Diplomacy is paying off for China. March 11, 2021. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-03-11/vaccine-diplomacy-paying-china>

vaccines are not only produced by US vaccine companies but also expanded to reach vaccines to the US and some allied countries, namely India, Japan and Australia. In Asia, the US is collaborating to make and distribute vaccines by delivering 1 billion doses of vaccines to Asian countries by 2022⁴². The US vaccine diplomacy is more aimed at Asian countries because its political rival to China and China is an Asian country that has the same power as the US both in the military and economic fields so that the US makes China a rival both politically, military and economically. Thus, the US geo-strategic and geo-economic interests in Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific region are very important as an effort to balance US power against China. Therefore, the vaccine is a new instrument or the US new soft power in instilling political interests in Southeast Asia for the purpose of containing China's power and balance of power in Southeast Asia and the Asia Pacific.

The US wants great power in the grip of politics. It does not want China's dominance in Southeast Asia and the Indo Pacific because it is a world trade route and the main trade route for the US from various countries. In his State of the Union address in 2021, Joe Biden vowed that "America is back" by setting out a plan to right the course of the US role in the world. One of the pillars of US foreign policy is restoring trust and predictability in regional relations and the importance of allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific, engaging ASEAN and returning the US to the forefront of the COVID-19 response. To strengthen partnerships in the Asia Pacific, the US announced the Quad vaccine partnership to strengthen and assist Indo-Pacific countries in meeting their health security requirements. The Quad vaccine drives key health initiatives and provides a way to compete with China in the face of Beijing's vaccine diplomacy. The most important Indo-pacific region is Southeast Asia as it is a strategic region in America's long-term policy towards China and the Indo-pacific⁴³. Thus, vaccine diplomacy in Southeast Asia is one of their ways in balancing power against China by attracting the attention of Southeast Asian countries. Southeast Asia is a major target for China's vaccine diplomacy because of China's propaganda with vaccine diplomacy in Southeast Asia for geopolitical purposes. Collectively, Southeast Asian countries have ordered 203 million doses of China's vaccine. The following is the number of Chinese vaccines that have entered Southeast Asian countries from 2020 to June 2021.

Table 2. Doses of China Vaccine in Southeast Asia

Countries	Number of doses donated by China	Number of doses purchased from China	Number of doses sent by China
Brunei	52.000 (sinofarm)	-	-
Cambodia	2.2 million (sinofarm)	14.5 million (sinova) 4 million (sinofarm)	5.5 million (sinofarm) 1 million (sinofarm)

⁴² S. Malau, and J. Simanjuntak, "AS, India, Australia, Jepang Sepakat kirim satu miliar vaksin ke seluruh Asia pada akhir 2022." *March* 15, 2021. <https://www.tribunnews.com/internasional/2021/03/15/as-india-australia-jepang-sepakat-kirim-satu-miliar-vaksin-ke-seluruh-asia-pada-akhir-2022>

⁴³ Ashley, T; Susannah, P; Tom, C & Toby, W. "Correcting the course" How the Biden administration should compete for influence in the Indo-Pasifik, *United States Stues Center*, August 2021, <https://www.ussc.edu.au/correcting-the-course-how-the-biden-administration-should-compete-for-influence-in-the-indo-pacific>

Indonesia		125 million (sinovac)	94.5 million
Laos	1.9 million (sinofarm)	-	-
Malaysia	-	12 million (sinovac) 3.5 million (CanSino)	3.7 million (sinovac)
Myanmar	500.000 (sinofarm)	-	-
Singapura	-	200.000 (sinovac)	200.000
Thailand	1 million (sinovac)	18.6 million (sinovac)	5.5 million
Filipina	1 million (sinovac)	25 million (sinovac)	8 million
Timor Leste	100.000 (sinovac)	-	-
Vietnam	500.000 (sinofarm)	-	-

Source: www.iseas.edu.sg (2021)

Table 3. Portfolio of Comparison of China and US Vaccine Doses in Southeast Asia (as of June 20, 2021)

Countries	China’s Vaccine Dose Quantity	US’ Vaccine Dose Quantity
Brunei	52.000	Moderna: 200.000, Pfizer: 300.000,
Cambodia	20.7 million	-
Indonesia	125 million	Pfizer: 100 million
Laos	1.9 million	Pfizer: 100.620
Malaysia	15,5 million	Pfizer: 44,8 million
Myanmar	500.000	-
Singapura	200.000	Moderna: undefined Pfizer: undefined
Thailand	1,9 million	Pfizer: 20 million
Filipina	26 million	Moderna: 20 million, Pfizer: 42,5 million
Timor Leste	100.000	Moderna: 5 million, Pfizer : 124.800
Vietnam	500.000	Moderna: 5 million, Pfizer: 31 million

Source: www.iseas.edu.sg (2021)

The vaccines provided by China to Southeast Asian countries are closely related to China's geopolitical and geoeconomic strategies in Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific region. The Philippines as a Southeast Asian country that used to be pro-China has realised that China's aggressiveness in conducting vaccine diplomacy in Southeast Asia has also increased its aggressive behaviour in the South China Sea, causing Vietnam and the Philippines to reject Chinese-made vaccines. The above statement opens up opportunities for the US to conduct vaccine diplomacy in Vietnam in August 2021 and provide grant support to Vietnam and ASEAN to build a pandemic disease control centre in Southeast Asia. On the other hand, the fact is that in June 2021, China still contributed 120 million doses of vaccine in Southeast Asia with an estimated 4.8 times more than COVAX's contribution in

Southeast Asia. Cambodia has reached 23% of the vaccinated population and is almost entirely using Chinese vaccines. The US and China continue to race to launch vaccine assistance in Southeast Asia. There are 30 key countries prioritized for US vaccine distribution, including Vietnam as a US geopolitical ally in Southeast Asia, the Philippines as a US ally, and Indonesia⁴⁴.

China's vaccine diplomacy is closely related to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) which aims to launch the economy and to support China's dominance in the world⁴⁵. China is taking advantage of Trump's leadership by filling several power vacuums by proposing China's vision for world order, gaining an increasing number of leadership positions in international organizations and launching China-led interests⁴⁶. Vaccine diplomacy has provided new avenues for increasing influence in the international political constellation. China has successfully distributed vaccines to 113 countries, 39 countries in Asia Pacific, 18 Latin US countries and 46 countries in Africa have received vaccines from China. In the Asia Pacific region, especially in the Southeast Asia region, Indonesia is the top supplier of vaccines with 205 million doses of vaccine, Brazil 95 million, Iran 61 million, Pakistan 61 million, Philippines 45 million, Cambodia 34 million, Bangladesh 34 million, Turkey 31 million, Argentina 28 million and Thailand 27 million. The top selling countries are Indonesia which reached 211 million doses of vaccine, Brazil 100 million, Turkey 100 million, Pakistan 88 million, Bangladesh 75 million, Mexico 67 million, Chile 61 million, Iran 60 million, Peru 48 million and the Philippines 48 million. There are no Indonesian donations, Laos has 5 thousand doses of vaccine, Myanmar 5 thousand, Bangladesh 4 thousand, Afghanistan 3 thousand, Iran 3 thousand and Pakistan 3 thousand⁴⁷.

China's vaccine remains a component of vaccines, which remains one of the vaccines that play an important role in the global war against vaccines. China's vaccine remains a vaccine that has very easy access for countries in the world⁴⁸. China's vaccine diplomacy as a form of China's soft power is China's effective form of responding and producing COVID-19 vaccine. China is taking advantage of a time when US and European Union countries have been slow to respond to vaccines and are still faced with concerns about vaccine safety⁴⁹. Furthermore, China increasingly has great prospects in supplying a number of vaccines in developing countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia as a form of diplomacy soft power⁵⁰. The COVID-19 pandemic has given rise to a variety of popular new terms. One of them is vaccine diplomacy as a new soft power. The prospect of global health is a new area of competition among developed countries. Big countries tend to allow a way to attract the attention of developing countries, namely vaccine diplomacy. The response of developed countries to the COVID-19 vaccine seems likely to be uncooperative and divisive. Each vaccine-producing country tends to blame each other and try to propagate propaganda. This can be seen from the political

⁴⁴ The Jakarta Post. China vaccine doses to ASEAN top million, 4.8 times UN program. June 21, 2021, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/seasia/2021/06/21/china-vaccine-doses-to-asean-top-120-million-48-times-un-program.html>

⁴⁵ K. Lyli, and N. Kommenda. *What is China's belt and road initiative*. July 30, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/ng-interactive/2018/jul/30/what-china-belt-road-initiative-silk-road-explainer>

⁴⁶ S. Zhao, "Rhetoric and Reality of China's Global Leadership in the Context of COVID-19: Implications for the US-led World Order and Liberal Globalization." *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol.30, no.128, 2020: 233-248, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2020.1790900>

⁴⁷ Bridge, "China COVID-19 Vaccine tracker, China's Vaccine Around the world, 2021. https://bridgebeijing.com/our-publications/our-publications-1/china-COVID-19-vaccines-tracker/#China8217s_Vaccines_Around_the_World

⁴⁸ Chang, Peter T.C. "China's Vaccine Diplomacy in Malaysia: Problems and Prospects." *ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute Analyze Current Events*, Vol 1, No 121, 2021: 1-8, <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/2021-121-chinas-vaccine-diplomacy-in-malaysia-problems-and-prospects-by-peter-t-c-chang/>

⁴⁹ M. Leigh, "Vaccine Diplomacy: soft power lessons from China and Russia, Bruegel.org. 27 April 2021. <https://www.bruegel.org/2021/04/vaccine-diplomacy-soft-power-lessons-from-china-and-russia/>

⁵⁰ A. McGowan, "China's vaccine diplomacy fills void in developing world left by US vaccine nationalism, January 12, 2021. <https://www.pri.org/stories/2021-01-12/china-s-vaccine-diplomacy-fills-void-developing-world-left-us-vaccine-nationalism>

behaviour of the US and China which continues to reap controversy. Each of these countries is trying to obtain its political interests where there are many other political contexts that are on the agenda of vaccine diplomacy⁵¹.

Vaccine diplomacy is a tool to achieve geopolitical interest⁵². Vaccine diplomacy is an important component of foreign policy to spread its geopolitical influence around the world. In other words, China's vaccine diplomacy is seen as soft power policy⁵³. US growing stockpile of vaccines has paved the way for vaccine diplomacy⁵⁴. The COVID-19 pandemic is the biggest threat to global public health this century⁵⁵. The COVID-19 pandemic has taken on a geopolitical dimension. The health crisis reinforces the competitive dynamics between the US and China in influencing the global supply of public goods and instability into the global order. Geopolitical thinking both countries have tried to take advantage of the crisis to increase international profits. Cooperation to reduce the health and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is just a way for the US and China to exploit the situation to collect political, economic and military advantages⁵⁶.

The hegemonic stability of China and US emphasizes the importance of a dominant power willing to take the lead in providing global public goods⁵⁷. The occurrence of free competition between US and China, due to the absence of enforcement authorities at the global level and self-interested countries, acts as free drivers who get the benefits of a public good without sharing the cost of provision. The existence of a hegemon to supply public goods in this case vaccines and other goods at the global level has maintained international stability because other countries that benefit will freely choose to strengthen, not to challenge, the international system. A crisis occurs when the hegemon stops supplying the necessary public goods and no other power can fill the vacuum⁵⁸.

The challenge for the US during the COVID-19 crisis is still enjoying excellence and refusing to assume responsibilities while other countries, one of which is China, are increasing their strength to play a bigger role even though their capabilities are quite limited. China claims leadership in the globalisation of political economy so that it is very closely related to how China responds to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the global economy. Thus, not a few, China supplies vaccine and other aid to 133 countries covering the Asia Pacific region, Africa and Latin America⁵⁹. The China government has promised countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America preferential access to a

⁵¹ M. Jennings, "How some countries are using covid to enhance soft power, Vaccine diplomacy has involved efforts to undermine trust in the intentions and efficacy of rival powers, February 23, 2021. <https://asiatimes.com/2021/02/how-some-countries-are-using-covid-to-enhance-soft-power/>

⁵² Sanmarti, M. "The Danger of Vaccine Nationalism." *New Zealand International Review*, Vol 46 No 2, 2021: 2-4.

⁵³ Kurecic, Petar, and Vesna Haluga. "Health Diplomacy as A Soft Power Tool of the PR China During the Covid 19 Pandemic." *Economic and Social Development: Book of Proceedings: Croatia, Varazdin Development and Entrepreneurship Agency*, 2021: 237-243, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2539944896?accountid=13771>

⁵⁴ World Health Organization. "United States Seeks Answers on COVID-19's While Stepping Up "Vaccine Diplomacy." *The American Journal of International Law, Cambridge University Press: Washington,*, 2021: 732-739, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/ajil.2021.52>

⁵⁵ D. Choi, & S. Janke. "Vaccine Diplomacy"? - China's Global Vaccine Efforts and Controversies. July 21, 2021. <https://www.ualberta.ca/china-institute/news/the-latest/2021/july/vaccine-diplomacy.html>

⁵⁶ Le H. Binh, "Superpower Responsibility, China, the South China Sea and the COVID-19 Pandemic." *International Journal of China Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2021: 47-64, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/superpower-responsibility-china-south-sea-covid/docview/2565686787/se-2?accountid=13771>

⁵⁷ Bussy, J. What International relations tells us about COVID-19. 26 April 2020. www.e-ir.info/2020/04/26/what-international-relations-tells-us-aboutCOVID-19/

⁵⁸ Freeman, Carla P. "Reading Kindleberger in Beijing: Xi Jinping's China as a provider of global public goods." *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol 23 No 2, 2021: 297-318, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1369148120941401>

⁵⁹ Bridge, "China COVID-19 Vaccine tracker, China's Vaccine Around the world, 2021. https://bridgebeijing.com/our-publications/our-publications-1/china-COVID-19-vaccines-tracker/#China8217s_Vaccines_Around_the_World

COVID-19 vaccine for using inoculation as a way to strengthen ties with countries the US has neglected. According to a statement by China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China's vaccine diplomacy is possible to fill the void left by the US leadership. The US withdrawal from global leadership since the Trump administration has created an opportunity for China fill that global gap⁶⁰.

The US has paved the way for China to distribute vaccines to Southeast Asia through bilateral vaccines⁶¹. Vaccine diplomacy is one part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by being the first country providing vaccines to developing countries make an impression on the world⁶². When China government is trying to procure vaccines for other countries, especially developing countries, the US is still busy saving its people without paying attention to vaccines for the global community for its citizens⁶³. The spread of COVID-19 and vaccine diplomacy exacerbated political friction between the US and China due to global rival vaccine dominance⁶⁴. The politics of the US and China have experienced quite high friction in vaccine diplomacy since the leadership of Donald Trump continued to press and assert against China to be responsible for the spread of COVID-19 by threatening to raise a new trade line for China⁶⁵.

The cause of China being the main pioneer in distributing the COVID-19 vaccine in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) was assigned by the US to the Donald Trump government, leaving the WHO so that at that time the world experienced a government vacuum called global G-Zero. This causes the US to not have a fast pace in responding to vaccine provision⁶⁶. China uses vaccines to expand its power⁶⁷. During the COVID-19 pandemic, China managed to fill and step in the global leadership vacuum left by the US since Donald Trump administration⁶⁸. The COVID-19 vaccine is the newest commodity in international diplomacy⁶⁹. The COVID-19 vaccine demonstrates the simultaneous process of globalisation of health with political and economic disparities, showing structural barriers to global collaboration in dealing with the threat of COVID-19. The geopolitical importance of vaccines must be understood in the context of the increasingly intense the US-China relationship which is exacerbating the complexity and uncertainty of the world's future⁷⁰. The contestation of vaccine diplomacy between China and the US is getting higher because the US

⁶⁰ Financieras, CE Noticias. Chinas Doses of Vaccine Diplomacy. 2021. www.proquest.com

⁶¹ Shepherd, Christian, Stephanie Findlay, and Stephanie Palma. China Aims to Steal March on US With Vaccine Diplomacy: Inoculations. October 21, 2021. <https://www.proquest.com/trade-journals/china-s-COVID-19-vaccine-diplomacy-steals-march/docview/2468001047/se-2?accountid=13771>

⁶² A.S.Chassany. "The West should pay attention to Russia and China's Vaccine Diplomacy. 2021. www.proquest.com

⁶³ Isabelle, Lee. Incoming New York Gov. Kathy Hochul said she's not ruling out a statewide vaccine mandate. 15 August 2021.

<https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/incoming-new-york-gov-kathy-hochul-said-she-not/docview/2561267466/se-2?accountid=13771>

⁶⁴ Al-Rodhan, N. Meta-Geopolitics of pandemic: the case of COVID-19. 8 May 2020. www.globalpolicyjournal.com/blog/08/05/2020/meta-geopolitics-pandemics-caseCOVID-19

⁶⁵ Mason, Jeff, Matt Spetalnick, and Humeyra Pamuk. Trump threatens new tariffs on China in retaliation for coronavirus. May 1, 2020. www.reuters.com/article/us-healthcoronavirus-usa-china-idUSKBN22C3DS

⁶⁶ E. Brattberg. "Middle Power Diplomacy in an Age of US-China Tensions." *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol 44 No 1, 2021: 219-238, <https://10.1080/0163660X.2021.1896136>

⁶⁷ J. Rogin, "The United Nations States Can't Ignore China's Vaccine Diplomacy in Latin America. 4 April 2021. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/the-united-states-cant-ignore-chinas-vaccine-diplomacy-in-latin-america/2021/04>

⁶⁸ E.R. Norman, "COVID-19: Data Reporting, Good Governance, and New Policy Priorities." *World Affairs*, Vol. 183, No. 10, 2021: 213, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.ugm.ac.id/10.1177/0043820020946582>

⁶⁹ Chatterjee, Niladri, Zaad Mahmood, and Eleonor Marcussen. "Politics of Vaccine Nationalism in India: Global and Domestic Implications." *Forum For Development Studies*, 2021, Vol 48 No 2, 2021: 357-369, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08039410.2021.1918238>

⁷⁰ Y.R. Zhou, "Vaccine Routledge: Nationalism: Contested Relationship Between COVID-19 and Globalization." *Globalization*, Vol 19, No 3, 2021: 450-465, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2021.1963202>

started to fill the global political stage again as a world hegemonic country which in the previous government was out of global responsibility, so this triggered the rise of China. On the other sides, at the beginning of the Joe Biden administration, the US tried again to take a position in the global political context, especially in vaccine politics. Therefore, it has made the relationship between China and the US, which had been slowed down and continued to progress again because, concerning to that matter, China had just risen by causing higher competition⁷¹.

Laboratory tests showed that patients with the Omicron variant of COVID-19 who were given the Sinovac vaccine produced by China experienced a greater decrease in antibody levels compared to the first and second primary vaccines using the Pfizer vaccine⁷². The US booster vaccine is increasingly available with the emergence of a new variant of Omicron. Pfizer has played a fairly effective role in proving that the vaccines produced have a high enough resistance than Sinovac. The company Pfizer has shown experimental results that treatment reduces the number of hospitalizations and reduces mortality by up to 89%⁷³. By 2022, Pfizer expects sales to reach \$22 billion by 2022 and currently Pfizer is in active discussions with 100 countries about Paxlovid and has the capacity to provide 120 million doses. However, politics continues to emerge in the vaccine competition where vaccines pledged by the US have not yet been used by China and has done the same with the US by not approving a COVID-19 vaccine developed outside of China. China has vaccinated 87.1% of its population with domestically produced vaccines⁷⁴.

Political dynamics between China and the US continue to exist in an effort to increase each other's existence in the COVID-19 era that has gripped the world. A number of countries, including Southeast Asian countries, carry out booster vaccines against their citizens. The competition between the two countries is very visible from the policies and statements of the leaders of the two countries in dealing with global political games in a pandemic situation. At the beginning of the pandemic, the US which was late in producing vaccines, did not want to use the China vaccine, and even doubted the existence of the virus, causing the US to experience the highest spike in cases in the world in 2020. Through the Joe Biden era, the US's development in managing domestic vaccine problems and for the global community has increased. One of the actions taken by the US is to strengthen the immune system of the global population. In connection with that, it is recommended to have a booster vaccine, especially those using the Sinovac vaccine from China. Research continues to emerge by showing the results of the Pfizer vaccine testing laboratory. One of which is better at maintaining the immune system from the attack of the COVID-19 variant. The booster vaccine program has been carried out by a number of countries, including Southeast Asian countries, but not by China. The COVID-19 vaccine developed by Pfizer through Germany's BioNTech SE, the US vaccine maker, stated that sales in 2021 will decline by 13%, but in 2022, they expect to see an increase of the implementation of vaccines boosters in many countries with the estimation of \$98 billion to \$102 billion. A number of investors are investing in Pfizer companies with agreements to drive future growth⁷⁵.

⁷¹ Anisin, Alexei. "The Contradictions of COVID-19 and the Persistence of Western Hegemony." *South African Journal of Political Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 2, 2021:331-346, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589346.2021.1913799>

⁷² Aljazeera. China gives conditional approval for Pfizer COVID pill Paxlovid. 12 February 2022. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/12/china-gives-conditional-approval-for-pfizer-covid-pill-paxlovid>

⁷³ The Guardian, "China conditionally approves Pfizer's Covid treatment pill Paxlovid, February 12, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/12/china-conditionally-approves-pfizer-covid-treatment-pill-paxlovid>

⁷⁴ Reuters, "China approves use of Pfizer's COVID drug Paxlovid, February 15, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/china-gives-conditional-approval-pfizers-covid-drug-paxlovid-2022-02-12/>

⁷⁵ Aljazeera, "Pfizer's COVID sales to top \$50bn this year, investors want more. 9 February 2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2022/2/9/pfizers-covid-sales-to-top-50bn-this-year-investors-want-more>

US vaccine diplomacy as new soft power in stemming China's power in Southeast Asia and Indo-Pacific. According to Barston (2013), vaccine diplomacy is a diplomatic new space, because vaccine diplomacy is a new way to pursue its interests in Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific. Vaccine diplomacy is very important to use because the presence of COVID-19 is an important situation for a big country like the US to ensure its political security in Southeast Asia does not experience a significant shift due to China's vaccine dominance. The US as we know tends to use hard power strategies such as military threats or defensive strategies with security and military-based cooperation and a tendency to rigid diplomatic strategies. US foreign policy relies heavily on discourses of danger to shape identity and safeguard power boundaries and tends to foresee potential external adversaries such as China. With the discourse of the dangers of China's vaccine diplomacy in Southeast Asia, it is countered in the same way to maintain its identity and still legitimize its power as a superpower, especially in the Indo-Pacific.

Vaccine diplomacy has become an attractive new way for US foreign policy to reach interests and stem China's power in strategic areas and if the area is dominated by China, it can hamper various US interests in the Indo-Pacific. The Indo-Pacific route must be secured by the US by first securing the countries in that part of the region not being controlled by China. Therefore, vaccine diplomacy is the right choice to lure China's power. It is realized by the US that using the term hard power with military power is not influential enough to stem China's power nor is it situational to use this strategy. Soft power has contributed to the US strategy to influence the perceptions of Southeast Asian countries with the aim of forming an image and spreading strategic perceptions which consequently contributes to political, economic and security interests. US soft power shows that the US as a country that tries to show itself as a country that cares about the interests of developing countries by advocating for Southeast Asian countries that China is dangerous even though both have the same position of interests.

Conclusion

China is a country that is the main rival of the US in the dimensions of security, politics, economics and even in the field of global health. The politicisation of vaccine diplomacy is a major consideration in the development of US political strategy in dealing with Chinese power, including in Southeast Asia. According to the US, China's power in Southeast Asia is so great that it threatens US political existence in the Indo-Pacific. Therefore, due to the fact that Southeast Asian countries need the security of vaccine sources in the face of the health crisis due to COVID-19, the US will take advantage of the situation to distribute vaccine assistance to reduce China's vaccine dominance in Southeast Asia. In other words, vaccines are a new US political instrument in building political alliances and stemming China's political power in Southeast Asia. Thus, US vaccine diplomacy in Southeast Asia is a new US soft power effort aimed at attracting the attention of Southeast Asian countries and stemming China's power in Southeast Asia and the Indo Pacific. Vaccine diplomacy is a form of US geopolitics in the face of Chinese power in Southeast Asia and the Indo Pacific. Analysing the US vaccine phenomenon in Southeast Asia is in accordance with Fidler's (2013) opinion that vaccine diplomacy is closely related to the national interests of a country, both the US and China. Therefore, this is the main reason for the US to use vaccine diplomacy as a form of soft power in dealing with Chinese power in Southeast Asia. On the other hand, quoting from Barston (2013), it is a form of US vaccine diplomacy that is connoted as counter-strategy diplomacy to prevent the

domination of other countries and even to break up other countries' political alliances. Therefore, the main reason for the US to use vaccine diplomacy as a form of soft power in dealing with China's power in Southeast Asia.

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