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## From Infrastructural Diplomacy to Vaccine Diplomacy: China Embarking on Strengthening the Soft Power in ASEAN

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### Abstract

One of China's biggest interests is the Southeast Asia region as part of China's main focus in becoming the regional power of Asia. The ASEAN has become the most crucial part of China's geopolitics game as Malaysia and Indonesia control most of its important sea lanes for trade. On the other hand, ASEAN states such as Myanmar, Vietnam, and Thailand, which share borders with China, have become vital for their national security and economic land route. Thus, China wants to increase the dependence and reliance of ASEAN states in competition with Japan, the EU, and the US. During the starting pandemic of Covid-19, China approaches ASEAN states mostly through Infrastructural diplomacy to increase its soft power and economic dependency in ASEAN, as most ASEAN states are developing countries that require infrastructure building. As the results, China took matters on its own by adapting to vaccine diplomacy that left no significant competitors such as US or Japan. Thus, this paper intends to study China's adaptation of diplomacy strategy and its effects on ASEAN-China relations. The methodologies adopted in obtaining data for the paper are purely empirical and secondary. Therefore, this paper recommends a further study on China's diplomacy strategy in ASEAN states, with an emphasis on state corporations through economic diplomacy employs the full range of a state's economic tools to advance its national interests. Thus, this paper concluded that China vaccine diplomacy has successfully installed dependency and trust of ASEAN states through the vaccination supply and consequently increased its influence leaving other major

power shut despite not fully obtain fully trust by other ASEAN states due to several demographic issues.

**Keywords:** Infrastructural Diplomacy, Vaccine Diplomacy, China, ASEAN

### Introduction

"Victory comes from finding opportunities in problems." – Sun Tzu.

The greatest strategist, Sun Tzu, laid down the importance of finding opportunities to win the war with precise calculations on moves and tactics. The quote is best to understand China's foreign policy and strategy in ASEAN states. In the Mekong economies of mainland Southeast Asia, China's biggest rival is Japan, which has long financed and built infrastructure across the region until Xi Jing Ping proposed the Belt Road Initiative (BRI). Xi declared that China would play a "proactive" role in Asia by China has prioritized "neighbourhood diplomacy", and Xi Jinping has declared his intention to "make more friends" and forge a "community of shared destiny" in Asia (Miller, 2017). As its neighbours become ever more economically dependent on it, China believes its geopolitical leverage will strengthen. Thus, how does "proactive" foreign policy work? In the first place, it requires oiling the wheels of trade and investment. China's rise in Asia is founded on a simple fact: its vast economy, measuring US\$10.9 trillion in 2015, is larger than the other economies of East and Southeast Asia combined, and in Southeast Asia, for example, both the EU and Japan contribute more. This phenomenon is a failing that the "Belt and Road Initiative", also known as "One Belt, One Road" or the "New Silk Road", is designed to rectify. It will use multilateral organizations such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and ASEAN Plus One, in which the United States plays little or no role, to advance its regional agenda. The reality is that China is already challenging the post-World War II order established in Asia under Washington's watch.

However, the hit of Covid-19 pushes China's proactive foreign policy into vaccine diplomacy. The new outbreak of Covid-19 has made China one of the world's vaccines providers despite the United States and Russia. More countries announced they would purchase China's COVID-19 vaccines or start mass inoculations using them, as senior officials of various countries stressed the safety of the Chinese vaccines despite some Western media questioning their efficacy and safety. According to the Global Times calculation, at least 17 countries have purchased COVID-19 vaccines developed by Chinese developers, including Sinovac, Sinopharm, and Cansino. In Indonesia, the worst-hit country in Southeast Asia, the authorities welcomed the arrival of 8 million high-dose COVID19 vaccines from China on May 25. According to Xinhua News Agency, China had received 83.9 million doses of COVID19 vaccine from China Industrial and Sinopharm and Anglo-Saxon company AstraZeneca, including bulk and ready-to-use vaccines (Han & Sarmiento, 2021). The Chinese Embassy in Thailand stated on its Facebook page that as of May 20, China had delivered 6 million doses of COVID19 vaccine in Thailand, including 500,000 doses donated on May 17.

China has provided 120 million doses of coronavirus vaccine to ASEAN member states, which is about 4.8 times the number provided to the region through the Global Vaccine Exchange Program by the United States and European countries (Kyodo, 2021). China declared that it would "do everything possible to provide vaccines to ASEAN countries and strengthen cooperation with other countries in vaccine research and development, production, procurement, vaccination, and monitoring. Also proposed: Implement the China-ASEAN "Public Health Cooperation Initiative" and the "ASEAN Regional Medical Supplies for Public Health Emergencies (Krishnan, 2021).

This research focuses on the diplomacy strategy of China in ASEAN states by emphasizing state corporations. The framework of economic diplomacy uses the full spectrum of economic tools of a state to achieve its national interests. It can cover all major international economic activities of a country, including but not limited to political decisions intended to affect exports, imports, investments, loans, aid, free trade agreements and more. Furthermore, economic diplomacy is a central aspect of China's foreign policy, especially during the remarkable boom in China's economy. Economic diplomacy, primarily through trade and carrots, accumulates or attracts soft power. This phenomenon is part of a broader strategy called the "new concept of security" formulated by Chinese think tanks in the 1990s. The West called it the period of the "peaceful rise of China." In ASEAN states' position, investment and foreign aid from China seem to be a great help, and in fact, ASEAN is one of the biggest trade members with China. It is best understood in the concept of investment-driven economic growth that offers public and private investment, which has been believed to be the driving engine of economic growth, increasing long-term savings and investment. Academics like Tan & Phang, Warner, Wehringer, and Yu admit that economic growth caused by the advancement of the domestic industry encouraged the export of goods to be the country's main concern from the 1980s to 1990s (Probo, 2020). In addition, investment patterns are based on market expansion for seeking new investors in both the private and public domains. Thus, this paper will look at China's proactive diplomacy strategy in ASEAN in achieving its national interest with the hit of Covid-19. Also, it will give a clear understanding of why China celebrates ASEAN in the way of vaccine diplomacy to sustain its regional power.

### **China Foreign Policy Strategy: Infrastructural Diplomacy to Vaccine Diplomacy**

China has a big plan for Asia by being a strong regional Asian power. The key is that China must rise again. Its leaders say revival, "rejuvenation", or "rejuvenation" to restore what has been lost. China used to be the largest civilization and the largest country globally. It must be like that again. Without China's "hundred-year national humiliation", China would not be able to understand the resonance of President Xi Jinping's "Chinese dream". The Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation". Under his leadership, the search for the "China Dream" has become the guiding ideology. The first is the inner vision - China is not strong at home. After all, China may not be great - but it is also closely related to China's position in the world. After years of preparations, China is determined to replace its status as a power in the modern world. Thus, ASEAN is one of China's biggest interests as the region controls the maritime sea roads that China has been demanding. It marked a fundamental change in China's foreign policy. Deng Xiaoping, the top leader of China between 1978 and 1992, suggested that China should keep a low profile in foreign affairs by formulating specific policies to transform its economic influence into regional leadership.

Concerns about the potential for great power rivalries in Asia have grown in recent years. The Sino- Japan infrastructure investment rivalry is most likely to occur in the geo-economics sphere, as regional powers attempt to enhance their regional and global influence by leveraging their expanding economic might. China and Japan are two countries that come to mind in this scenario. To build on its growing confidence as a rising power, China has endeavoured to export its infrastructure products and related technologies throughout Asia. At the same time, Japan is determined to maintain its dominant regional position in infrastructure development in Asia, especially in Southeast Asia. The most visible sign of this has been the high-speed railway (HSR) competition. In September 2015, Japan lost a US\$5 billion contract to China to build Indonesia's first HSR connecting Jakarta and Bandung (Zhoa,

2018). The same year, Japan leveraged its burgeoning relationship with India to secure a US\$15 billion deal to construct an HSR between Mumbai and Ahmedabad. Japan is also due to begin the construction of an HSR line connecting Bangkok with Chiang Mai. At the same time, Chinese companies have started work on another railway line from Nong Khai on the Lao border to Map Ta Phu on the eastern seaboard of the Gulf of Thailand (Zhoa, 2018). Indeed, big powers' rivalry has brought about a shift in Southeast Asian countries since 2010. While some mainland ASEAN countries like Laos and Cambodia view the Sino–Japanese competition as beneficial to their countries regarding economic capacity-building. Some maritime ASEAN countries like the Philippines and Indonesia are more concerned about major-power dynamics, especially Sino–US relations.

The vaccines can also be used as a "foreign policy tool to build soft power and project international influence," according to Yanzhong Huang, a senior fellow for global health at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington (Culber & Gan, 2020). Thus, after the Covid-19 hit, China has taken one step up in diplomacy rivalry in ASEAN as it embarks on a new way of policy, Vaccine diplomacy, or 'Health Silk Road'. China can use this global campaign to rehabilitate its image, which was tarnished by its initial mishandling of the coronavirus outbreak; rather than being blamed for the virus's primary spread, it can be praised for helping to bring the pandemic to a stop. Through bilateral and multilateral channels, China actively sought out government officials and civil society people in Southeast Asia, including hosting the Special ASEANChina Foreign Ministers' Meeting on COVID-19 on February 20. The main message China was trying to get through was threefold. First, China was capable of curtailing the spread of the virus, and the negative effects of the epidemic on China's socio-economic development would be temporary and limited. Second, China closely communicated with the World Health Organization (WHO) and ASEAN regarding the epidemic to ensure information transparency. Third, China called for international collaboration and solidarity in fighting the epidemic (Wen, 2020). In Indonesia, the diligent country of Southeast Asia, on May 25, the authorities welcomed the arrival of 8 million Bulk Dosages from China. According to the Xinhua news agency, Sinovac and Sinopharm won 83.9 million doses of Vaccine Covid19 in bulk and prepared form. Indonesia also has the cooperation of the traditional knowledge of China, an epidemiological quarantine of the State University in Indonesia, the University of Australia. It has the cooperation of traditional Chinese knowledge. China pronounced 17 6 million doses of the vaccine Covid19 containing 500,000 doses, the China from Thailand Embassy said on the Facebook page. According to the data published by the Thai Government, approximately 3.6 million Thai received a vaccine. Most of them received Sinovac Coronavac (Han, 2021).

So Far, the second batch of China's Sinovac Covid-19 vaccine is expected to arrive in Malaysia this month, according to Ouyang Yujing, China's Ambassador to Malaysia. A total of 2.5 million doses of Sinovac vaccinations, it would be delivered in the second shipment (Bernama, 2021). While Indonesia has spent US\$45 million purchasing vaccines from China for a mass vaccination program (Akhlas, 2021). Thailand received 200,000 doses on the first shipment among 2 million doses ordered from the Chinese biopharmaceutical firm (Huaxia, 2021). Shipment of another 500,000 doses of the Covid-19 vaccine arrived in Laos on June 14, provided by the Chinese Government (Star, 2020). China Donates 500,000 COVID-19 Vaccines to Myanmar Junta (Irrawady, 2021), and Cambodia has acquired more than 8 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines from China and the World Health Organization's COVAX Facility (Xinhua, 2021). It can be summed up that many ASEAN countries rely on China to get the vaccine which indirectly brings up China's image in ASEAN. This action will resist and slow down the Sino-



Japan competition over infrastructural diplomacy as China gets the upper hand in matters. Even the US had not had so much to say and react over the matter as their healthcare is dying. China even consoles by donating 500,000 doses of Sinovac Covid-19 Vaccine to the Malaysian Government. Malaysia, after Chinese aircraft were "flying in tactical formation" at up to 27,000 ft (8.2km) and came within 60 nautical miles (110km) of Sarawak, a Malaysian state on the island of Borneo by which later Malaysia said it was to summon China's ambassador for an explanation (Al-Jazeera, 2021). The shifts of diplomacy strategy from infrastructural, which was all about 'Silk Road', turned into 'Health Silk Road', really renewing China's soft power, especially in ASEAN.

### **Why is ASEAN Important to China?**

Since the early 1990s, most of the debate about China's growth has focused on two issues: how quickly are China's economic and military capabilities growing and how should the world, particularly the United States, respond to this new great power (for example, contain or engage)? Understanding the significance of China's expanding capabilities and the advisability of different responses necessitates an understanding of how Beijing officials aim. They realize their country's goals given the circumstances and the limitations imposed by their resources and the international environment as they must operate in a specific setting (Goldstein, 2001). Today, China's grand strategy involves land and sea control, where ASEAN states are involved. China is traditionally known as 'land power' projected by the BRI investment projects, and now China is embarking on 'maritime power'. While China's maritime economic activity and naval expansion have persisted throughout its history, most emphasis has always been on China as a land power. China has long had a mainland-oriented military strategy, which has been operationalized under President Xi's leadership. This phenomenon is most threats to its national security have always been in the land domain. China's predominantly land-based topographical features created China's strategic culture as a land power. It changed during the leadership of President Xi. It was especially after 2015 that China accelerated its naval modernization (O'Rourke, 2021).

The first is the maritime strategy. Mahan's basic view of what he called "naval strategy" was that total command of the seas was always the best means to a great power's grand strategic ends and that this could only be achieved by sweeping the enemy fleet from the seas. Corbett argued instead that great powers could each have their distinctive grand strategies and that each grand strategy demanded its own distinctive 'maritime strategy' (Latham, 2020). The ASEAN region holds most of the part that China has been trying to claim, called the 'First Island Chain'. The offshore archipelago runs over Eurasia's whole eastern seaboard as a transregional. It is the first island chain. While Western sources dispute the exact geographic span of the island chain, most agree that the Japanese home islands, the Ryukyus, Taiwan, and the Philippines, are the main focus (Yoshihara, 2012). The first island chain is a geographical construct unique to Beijing's vision, which appropriately situates China's mainland at the heart of maritime Asia.

Figure 1. The First and Second Island Chains



Source: Annual Report to Congress: Military Power of the People's Republic of China, 2009  
([http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/China\\_Military\\_Power\\_Report\\_2009.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/China_Military_Power_Report_2009.pdf))

Indeed, China facing the sea must face the string of islands that runs approximately parallel to the country's lengthy coastline. Only because a more distant island grouping centred on Guam—dubbed the second island chain—forms an additional concentric island ring around China does Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines constitute the "first" island chain (see Figure 1). In short, China's unique perspective imbues the concept of the island chain with actual geographical significance and coherence. Thus, most ASEAN states are involved in the claim, and China has always been careful in diplomacy to secure its interest.

Moreover, on the other side of Southeast Asia, China is always in the 'Malacca dilemma'. Namely, China can be greatly and adversely affected by blockages of key Asia-Pacific maritime trade routes, especially the Malacca Straits in Southeast Asia, a lifeline for much Chinese international trade (Lanteigne, 2008). The term "Malacca Dilemma" (Maliujia Kunju) at the end of a Chinese Communist Party (CCP) economic work conference in November 2003, when he publicly commented on the increasingly complex problem of energy security in light of China's growing reliance on oil imports, particularly from the Middle East. "Some powers have always encroached on and tried to restrict navigation across the strait," Hu said. The comment alluded to the importance of the Malacca Straits to Chinese and East Asian trade, and Hu stressed the importance of China remaining vigilant against foreign attempts to exploit this vulnerability for strategic gain. Hu was concerned about non-state actors such as terrorists attacking the Strait and the likelihood that others, such as the US, would try to exert greater control over the waterway, putting China at risk of economic disruptions.

Figure 2: Malacca Straits



**Source:** The Malacca Dilemma: A hindrance to Chinese Ambitions in the 21st Century, Berkeley Political Review retrieved from <https://bpr.berkeley.edu/2019/08/26/the-malacca-dilemma-a-hindrance-to-chinese-ambitions-in-the-21st-century/>

The Malacca Straits are the most fundamental of the sea lanes of communication, which connect the heavily-trafficked Indian and Pacific Oceans and Southeast Asia with East Asia, thus making them crucial to Chinese trade. The Straits measure about 1100 kilometres in length and a width ranging from 400km in their northwest region to a narrowing of approximately 15 kilometres in the southeast, and the Phillips Channel outlet of the Straits near Singapore tapers to only 2.8km. Most of China's imports derive from the Middle East and Angola. Currently, eighty per cent of China's oil has to pass through the Strait of Malacca, a narrow stretch of water between the Indonesian island of Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula. With Singapore, a major US ally that frequently participates in US naval drills, located at the mouth of the strait's eastern opening, the Strait of Malacca becomes a natural strategic chokepoint. Thus, to secure its maritime strategy, China always secures the ASEAN state's cooperation by ensuring its proactive diplomacy adopts any international environment. Moreover, the name was coined in 2013 by China's President Xi Jinping, who was inspired by the concept of the Silk Road, which was established during the Han Dynasty 2,000 years ago – an ancient network of trade routes that connected China to the Mediterranean via Eurasia for centuries. The BRI has also been referred to as 'One Belt, One Road'. The BRI consists of a Silk Road Economic Belt – a land route connecting China to Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, Russia, and Europe – and a 21st century Maritime Silk Road, a sea route connecting China's coastal regions to the southeast and south Asia, the South Pacific, the Middle East, and Eastern Africa to Europe. There has been concern over the project being a form of neo-imperialism. Some Western governments have accused the Belt and Road Initiative of being neocolonial due to what they allege is China's practice of debt-trap diplomacy to fund the initiative's infrastructure projects. However, the critics are always shown as China wants to expand its trade or land power through a chain of investments in nearly 70 countries and international organizations. Thus, ASEAN has been part of the plan.



The Chinese government has made a variety of initiatives to minimize China's dependency on the Malacca Strait. The Kazakhstan-China Pipeline connects the country to the oil-rich Caspian region. The Myanmar-Yunnan Pipeline transports oil and gas from the Bay of Bengal to China's Kunming region bypassing the Malacca Strait. Building a canal through the Kra Isthmus in southern Thailand would provide an alternate shipping route and be the most effective approach to avoiding the Malacca Strait entirely. In a perfect world, China would keep sovereignty of the area in exchange for completing the canal, similar to how the United States' Panama Canal Zone worked before full control. The USA gave back to Panama in 1999.

On the other hand, Thailand would be hesitant to accept such a deal. Because the country is not as economically or politically weak as Panama was in the nineteenth century, it would be far less eager to offer China the right to utilize and control strategically significant land. The canal would be vulnerable to hostile organizations if China failed to secure control of the area.

**Figure 3: Silk Road Economics and Maritime Initiative**



**Source:** China's master plan to dominate global trade | one belt one road

<https://medium.com/@trendingtopicshub/chinas-master-plan-to-dominate-global-trade-one-belt-one-road-fc8fbb07c099>

Improved infrastructure is required for ASEAN to drive economic growth through increased trade, investment, competitiveness, and connectivity within the region and the rest of the world. According to the ASEAN Development Bank (ADB), the total infrastructure investment needs in ASEAN from 2016 to 2030 will range between US\$2.8 trillion (baseline estimate) and US\$3.1 trillion (climate-adjusted estimate) (Jusoh, 2018). These infrastructure requirements are critical to supporting ASEAN trade, which has increased from US\$4 trillion in 2010 to US\$5 trillion in 2017. Total merchandise trade is expected to increase as ASEAN grows from the world's sixth-largest economy to the world's fourth-largest economy by 2050, with an annual GDP growth rate of 5.25 per cent expected between 2016 and 2020 (Outlook, 2017). China's investments in BRI projects provide an opportunity for ASEAN and its Member States to address the issue of inadequate infrastructure, which is a major impediment to both short-term and long-term ASEAN economic growth. BRI projects, in conjunction with internationally-sourced financing, including from China, help to increase much-needed investment in ASEAN infrastructure projects. BRI projects will also help ASEAN and its member

countries attract investment in productive sectors such as manufacturing, energy, and services. On the other hand, BRI projects may contribute to the trade imbalance between ASEAN and China. ASEAN-China trade in goods and services will continue to be lopsided in China's favour.

**Table 1: BRI Projects in ASEAN 2013–2018**

No	Project Name	Type	Start (expect)	Completion (expected)	Country	Value in Local Currency	Value in US\$ As at 5.8.2018
1	Bangkok–Nakhon Ratchasima (Ph. 1)	Railway	2017	2021	Thailand	THB 179bn	539mn
2	Vientiane–Boten	Railway	2015	2021	Lao PDR		5.8bn
3	Cirebon–Kroya	Railway	2017	2019	Indonesia		105mn
4	NR 55	Road	2015	NA	Cambodia		133mn
5	East Coast Rail Link	Railway	2017	2024	Malaysia	MYR 55bn	13.47bn
6	Gemas Johor Bharu Double Tracking	Railway	2016	2020	Malaysia	MYR 8.9bn	2.18bn
7	Melaka Gateway	Port	2014	2019	Malaysia	MYR 8bn	1.96bn
8	Muara Terminal	Port, refinery JV			Brunei		3.4bn
9	National Highway No. 5	Road	2013	2016	Cambodia		160mn
10	Phnom Penh–Sihanoukville Expressway	Road	2017	2020	Cambodia		1.9bn
11	Preah Vihear–Kao I Dang Railway	Railway	2013	2017	Cambodia		9.6bn
12	KA Purukcahu–Bangkuang Railway, Central Kalimantan (PPP)	Railway	2018	2023	Indonesia	IDR 77tr	5.3bn
13	National Road 214	Road		Completed	Cambodia		117mn
14	Sumsel 5 Power Plant	Power		Completed	Indonesia		318mn
15	Jakarta–Bandung	Railway	2016	2019	Indonesia		5.5bn
16	Morowali Industrial Park	Industrial Steel and Power			Indonesia		1.6bn
17	Nam Ou Hydro	Power			Lao PDR		2.8bn
18	Phongxaly–Yunnan	Road			Lao PDR		910mn

Table 1 above shows at least 18 BRI related projects in six ASEAN Member States: Brunei (1), Cambodia (5), Indonesia (5), Lao PDR (3), Malaysia (3), and Thailand (1).

**Source:** The author tabulates the Table based on the data from the Center for Strategic and International Studies and Nikkei, *Is China's Belt and Road Working? A progress report from eight countries on Beijing's infrastructure push clouded by project delays and mounting debt*, 28 March 2018.

### Does Vaccine Diplomacy Help to Save China A Face in The Region?

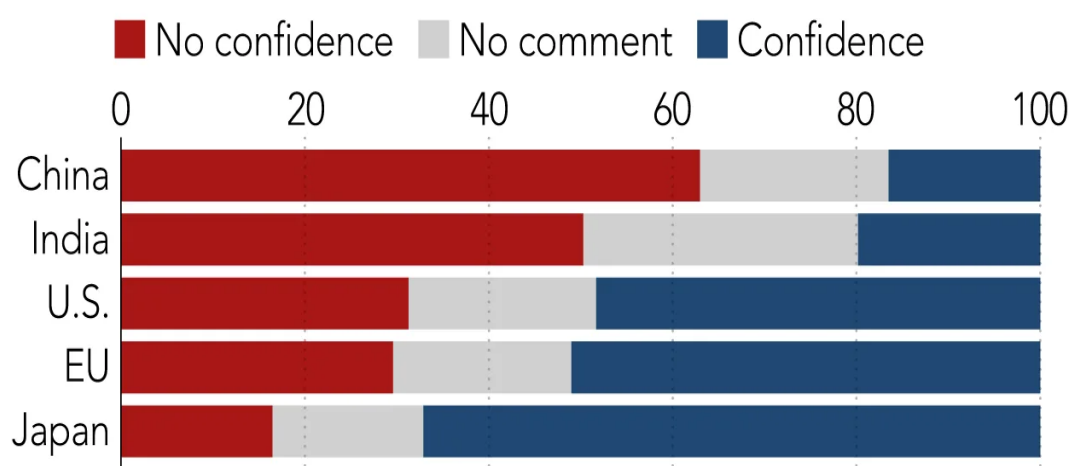
The real question is whether China's Vaccine Strategy helps raise China's image or soft power among ASEAN members? Before answering the question, one issue is understanding China's generous behaviour towards ASEAN countries. According to a survey conducted by the ASEAN

Research Center of the ISEASYusof Ishak Institute in Singapore, China's attempt to win people's hearts through "vaccine diplomacy" during the coronavirus pandemic failed. From November 18th to January 10th, a survey of 1,032 people, including academics, government officials, and business people from 10 countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations showed that 44.2% of the respondents said that China provided more to the region during this period. Assistance. Pandemic., Ahead of Japan's 18.2%, the European Union's 10.3%, and the United States 9.6%. But despite these efforts, 61.5% of respondents said that if they were forced to choose the United States in the current competition between China and the United States, they would choose the United States instead of China (Tani,2021). Support for the United States has increased by 7.9 percentage points from last year's survey due to the prospects of the new Biden administration; support for Washington in the region may increase, the report said (Tani,2021).

**Table 2: Trust Perception Towards Major Powers**

## Trust perception towards major powers

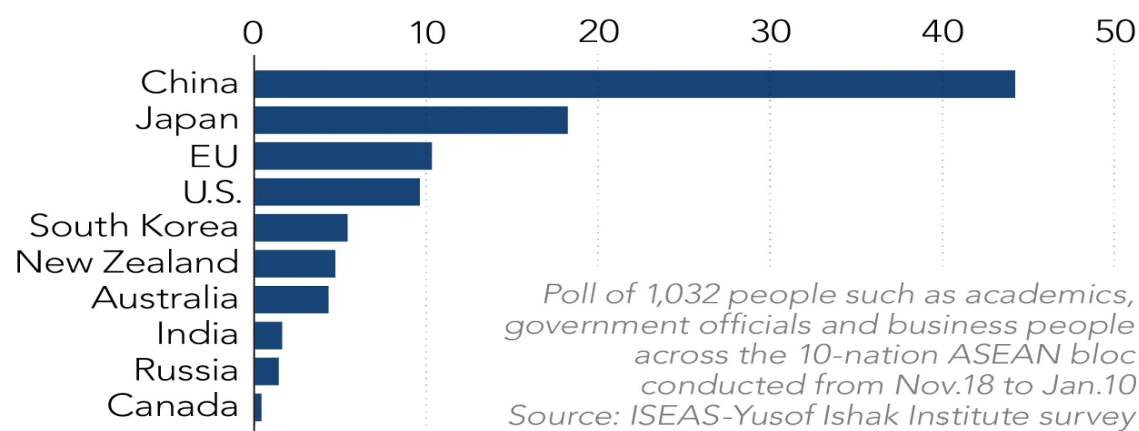
(Percentage of respondents)



Poll of 1,032 people such as academics, government officials and business people across the 10-nation ASEAN bloc conducted from Nov.18 to Jan.10

Source: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute

**Source:** ISEAS- Yusof Ishak Institute, retrieve from <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Coronavirus/China-s-vaccine-diplomacy-fails-to-win-ASEAN-support-survey>

**Table 3: ASEAN Dialogue Partners That Provided the Most Covid-19 Help****ASEAN dialogue partners that provided the most COVID-19 help** *(Percentage of respondents)*

**Source:** ISEAS- Yusof Ishak Institute, retrieve from <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Coronavirus/China-s-vaccine-diplomacy-fails-to-win-ASEAN-support-survey>

About 76.3% of the respondents said that China is the most influential economic power in the region, and more than 80% of the respondents in Laos, Thailand, Singapore, Myanmar, and Cambodia listed China as a country and group such as the United States, the European Union, and Japan. However, 72.3% of respondents who viewed China as the most influential country expressed "worries about China's growing regional economic influence" (Tani, 2021). Similarly, 49.1% of people think that China is the most influential political and strategic force in the region, and more than 30.4% think that the United States is. But among those who chose Beijing, 88.6% said they were worried about the impact. 46.3% of people think that China is a "revisionist power and intends to use Southeast Asia as its sphere of influence", which is higher than 38.2% last year, while 31.5% think that China is "gradually assuming the leading role of the United States", compared to 34.7% in 2020 (Tani, 2021).

China's confidence among global powers is also very low: 63% of people said they "have no confidence" or "have no confidence" that Beijing will "do the right thing" for the international community, a significant increase from 51, 5% in 2019. The percentage of people who have "confidence" or "a lot of confidence" in China's intentions has fallen from 19.6% two years ago to 16.5% (Tani, 2021). Japan is the most trusted country in the region, and 67.1% of respondents said they want Japan to act for the world's benefit. Compared to the previous year, the United States and the European Union have significantly increased their views on their credibility, with 48.3% and 51% of respondents, respectively, saying they expect their actions to be in the global interest (Tani, 2021). The region's confidence deficit in China is increasing. China is the only major country whose negative rating has risen, from 60.4% in 2020 to 63.0% in 2021. China's main economic and political influence in the region creates more astonishment than sentiment, "the report said." Most are concerned that such economic power, along with China's military might, could be used to threaten their country. Interests and sovereignty.

China's rise has also raised concerns about how Beijing will use its growing economic and military power. In terms of military affairs, China is the leading force in the Asian region and one of the world's emerging powers. China's rapid economic growth has made it increasingly



dependent on marine resources that pass through the main throats of Southeast Asian waters. China's GDP has increased fourfold since 1978. In a sense, China has become the sixth-largest economy in the world. In 1935, the Chinese government published a map called "Map of the Chinese Islands in the South China Sea". This map has 11 horizontal lines. In 1949, the Chinese government abandoned its claim to the Beibu Gulf, and now the notorious Ninidas Line was established. For the next seventy years, China's legal claim to this land has been questioned by many groups, but no matter what other parties think, this area has been and will always be under China's jurisdiction (Idsp, 2016). China's claim is not that all of the space within the nine-dash line is a controllable territory but that the islands in it, the Paracel Islands, the Nansha Islands, the Zhongsha Islands, and the Silver Islands, belong to them. If China gets its legal land, it will have exclusive economic control over the rest of the region within the Ninth Line. China is the first country to discover, name, explore and develop island resources in the South China Sea. It is also the first country to continue to exercise sovereignty over it. For more than 2,000 years, the South China Sea has been under Chinese control, and important trade routes must belong to them. Thus, active China activity in the region has pushed some ASEAN countries into distress concerning security.

Security over the South China Sea entails some territorial parts of ASEAN has always been an issue where China historically did many security breaches along the sea. In September 2020, an Indonesian patrol boat engaged a Chinese Coast Guard ship for nearly three days in the waters near the southern tip of the disputed claim to the South China Sea, where Indonesia is claiming economic rights. Indonesia's exclusive economic zone is located in Indonesia's so-called North Natuna Waters. "We asked them to move out as it was Indonesia's EEZ. But they insisted that it is China's nine-dash-line territory. Our officers at the vessel argued with them until they moved out," Kurnia said. He said he reported the incident to Indonesian government ministers (The Economics Times, 2020). Indonesia has no territorial claims in the South China Sea, but part of Indonesia's exclusive economic zone, including natural gas fields, is within China's "Nine Lines". Chinese ships often enter the Natuna North Sea area in Indonesia, triggering tensions between the two countries. Chinese ships also regularly patrol near James Shoal east of the island of Borneo and the Natuna Islands. The southernmost territorial claim in China and Malaysia claims to belong to it. On May 31, the Royal Malaysian Air Force stated that after 16 Chinese military jets approached the Malaysian coast of Sarawak on the island of Borneo, the fighter jets had been rushed off. The aircraft, including a large Xian Y20 military transport aircraft, did not enter Malaysian airspace (Brook, 2021). But China is very close, entering what Kuala Lumpur calls the Malaysian Sea Zone (MMZ), where it monitors the activities of the aircraft.

In some cases, foreign aircraft are required to identify themselves. Suppose a foreign aircraft enters its air defence identification zone (Brook, 2021). Malaysia's foreign minister Hishammuddin Hussein said the incursion was "suspicious activity" and a "breach of Malaysian airspace and sovereignty". The Chinese ambassador was summoned for a dressing down.

A few weeks after the security breach, China donated 500,000 doses of Sinovac's CoronaVac vaccines to Malaysia, which may be a charm to keep Malaysia and other ASEAN countries calm. Also, it is meant to help China get the upper hand as Japan will donate one million coronavirus vaccine shots each to Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand, Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi told reporters in Tokyo (Bernama, 2021). As Beijing seeks to expand its influence in the region through a combination of vaccine charm offensive and display of force, China has stepped up its march into Southeast Asian airspace, which has

aroused the anger of Malaysia in recent violations. Nine out of 10 ASEAN countries (except Vietnam) are expected to use Chinese vaccines. China pledged to provide vaccines to Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar in the form of donations. The Philippines received the donation, and then Manila purchased the vaccine, while Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand immediately purchased the Chinese vaccine. Nevertheless, ASEAN countries, especially Malaysia and Indonesia, show no sign of tolerating any security breach and have become bolder. The vaccine diplomacy can be seen as one way for China to slow the pressure over certain security and territorial breach to cover up its military works around the island.

### Conclusions

Nevertheless, China's vaccine is crucial toward ASEAN recovery despite whatever behind-the-door agenda. With this threshold, vaccine cooperation with China comes in handy, especially given that supplies from Western nations and global pharmaceutical giants are not easy. China has donated vaccines to over 80 developing countries in urgent need and has exported vaccines to more than 40 countries, offering 300 million doses to the world. This year marks the 30th anniversary of establishing dialogue relations between China and ASEAN. It is of special significance to seek breakthroughs in relations between the two countries based on past achievements. The spokesman said that the face-to-face talks held under the current severe situation showed that countries attach great importance to and place high hopes on Sino-Asian relations under the new situation. Bi Shihong, a professor at the China Peripheral Diplomacy Research Center and the School of International Relations of Yunnan University, said that now is the time to discuss passport vaccination between China and ASEAN countries, although it will take time. He noted that countries in the bloc had seen relatively low vaccination rates. A vaccine passport can only be launched when both sides agree and have vaccination rates up to "scientific standards." Wang Wenbin refuted these allegations at a regular press conference on Wednesday. The Chinese Air Force conducted routine training in the southern part of the Nansha Islands in the South China Sea. Wang Yi said that the training is not directed at any country. The Chinese Air Force strictly complies with international law and will not enter the airspace of other countries. Experts turned a deaf ear to the risk of an incident so small that it would disrupt relations between China and Malaysia or the EU countries. "On the issue of the South China Sea, Malaysia and most of the ASEAN countries have maintained open negotiation channels with China ... Of course, officials from these countries will discuss how to establish better risk control mechanisms," Chen said.

Furthermore, many ASEAN countries plead for more vaccines to reach herd immunity. Take the example of Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi calling on China to take more measures to increase vaccine supplies as the region scrambles to strengthen its defences against the increasing number of active COVID19 cases. Ms Retno made the plea at a meeting of China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in Chongqing, southwest China. Mass vaccination centres were opened in Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur this week, and as the number of daily COVID19 cases begins to increase, Indonesia hopes to vaccinate 1 million times a day (Connors, 2021).

Whatever the reason, China does help in the recovery and prevention of Covid-19 cases. It is not the best solution to reject China's help at all costs. However, the state should be careful and strategically plan diplomacy with China. Liberalists will see this as a big chance in taking advantage of the spillover of the fight between west major power and China in vaccine diplomacy. Plus, with China, significant economic and security advantages over ASEAN can be a stepping stone for ASEAN countries to get help and plan for economic recovery.

Regarding the new covid-19 spread, China stated that it would do everything possible to provide vaccines to ASEAN countries. It would strengthen cooperation with other countries in vaccine research and development, production, procurement, vaccination, and supervision. It would also recommend implementing the China-ASEAN Public Health Cooperation Initiative and the ASEAN Regional Reserve of Medical Supplies for Public Health Emergencies.

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