



China's New Public Diplomacy: Vaccine Diplomacy in the Covid-19 Pandemic Era

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Abstract

This study analyzes the implementation of New Public Diplomacy using the covid-19 vaccine by the Chinese government. This study applies a qualitative descriptive method. The data source used in this research includes journals, books, reports, news articles, and other sources accredited by Sinta or ISSN and related to the research topic. Researchers obtain literature sources through the Harzing Publish or Perish application, and other data sources come from Google. Furthermore, the researchers use the concept of New Public Diplomacy proposed by Jan Melissen. The urgency of this study is China responded to the global public's intimidation regarding accusations of negligence as the cause of the Covid-19 pandemic by building and restoring its image, namely by supplying vaccines to several countries. The results of this study show that China is using the Belt Road Initiatives' commitment to the Health Silk Road program as their Nation-Branding and China are capable of being adaptive in carrying out New Public Diplomacy. However, China failed to ensure the public because the public had suspicions about China's hidden motives.

Keywords: Belt Road Initiatives, China, Covid-19, Nation-Branding, New Public Diplomacy, Propaganda

Introduction

The development of democratization and mass media in this modern era has made citizens become independent observers and active participants in international politics. These citizen participations become references for political actors to calculate their policy steps in increasing the influence of their power. Therefore, public opinion is one of the points that are taken into account in doing international political activities. In this case, both the government and non-government actors are trying to carry out public diplomacy. Public diplomacy is defined as efforts carried out by the state to shape the state's image better (Ma'mun, 2012).

The existence of the Covid-19 pandemic, which was discovered in 2019, has become a health crisis phenomenon that has become a public discussion. The Covid-19 virus is a new variant virus that mutates from an animal virus to a human, and this virus was first discovered in Wuhan, China (Beniac et al., 2020). This virus is a type of infectious virus that attacks the acute respiratory disease with the name Sars-CoV-2 virus (Sumarni, 2020). This virus can cause health problems in terms of the respiratory tract, and the level of danger is the same as the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) viruses (Indonesian Health Ministry, 2020).

Since the discovery of this virus in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, the Covid-19 virus has continued to spread out in global scope (Sumarni, 2020). Thus, on January 30,

2020, WHO (World Health Organization) declared this phenomenon an emergency disease outbreak in the PHEIC (Public Health Emergency of International Concern) (Sumarni, 2020). The spread of the Covid-19 virus is spread through the saliva or droplets of infected sufferers (World Health Organization, 2022). These droplets are then transmitted by entering other people's open mucosa (Sumarni, 2020). Because of its spread ways, it has made each country's government establish regulations regarding social restrictions that will minimize crowds (Sumarni, 2020). This disease does affect not only for health but also many other aspects, such as the economy, tourism, politics, environment, trade, and state relations in a multilateral-global dimension (Muhaimin et al., 2021). These changes occurred because there were restrictions that had to be made to break the chain of Covid-19 spreads.

Based on the initial discovery of the Covid-19 virus, this virus is often called as the coronavirus or the Wuhan virus (Muhaimin et al., 2021). In addition, the President of the United States, Donald Trump, also accused that this virus as a conspiracy resulting from leaks from a Chinese laboratory because the pandemic caused a significant setback in the United States economy (Muhaimin et al., 2021). The impact of these accusations on China can be seen from its economic, social, and political aspects. Furthermore, China is recognized as the second largest economy after America. But, at the end of 2019, China suffered a setback in its economic expansion of 6% (BBC News Indonesia, 2020). On January 23, 2020, the government imposed a lockdown policy in all cities to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 virus (Saragih et al., 2022). This policy certainly impacts the Chinese economy because it will hamper the export process. In addition, the decline in public consumption caused several companies collapse. Even, some of them who have loans to survive are still unsure if they will still stand in this pandemic (Saragih et al., 2022).

In the social aspect, ethnic Chinese are persecuted by the global public as a form of racism. Racism actions that occur against China can be seen as many restaurants in Vietnam write prohibitions to accept visitors from China in front of their buildings. In Japan, the hashtag #ChineseDon'tComeToJapan is widely mentioned on Twitter. In Canada, children who are ethnic Chinese experience bullying at school. In France, print media proclaim their works with cover photos of Chinese women emblazoned with the word 'Yellow Alert', which means a warning to be aware. Even in academic circles that have a high level, such as universities, they also commit racism against ethnic Chinese. The University of California states also suffers a phobia known as xenophobia, a natural reaction due to ongoing health cases. This controversy causes the Chinese ethnic community to fear socializing with other ethnicities (Azanella, 2020).

On the political aspect, China is experiencing a feud with the United States. The United States and China did not have good relations after the trade war. Donald Trump, the president of the United States, blames China for saying that this virus is a conspiracy created by China to harm the United States and other countries (Akhli & Samhudi, 2020). World political conditions heat up during the Covid-19 pandemic because of the feud between the United States and China. At that time, countries used the Covid-19 phenomenon as a political constellation to gain their interests. This stems from the emergence of the stigma that the Covid-19 pandemic is a pandemic caused by China's negligence. It makes China's image in international politics decline. Thus, the step taken by China to restore its image is to conduct more in-depth research on vaccines to prevent the risk of spreading the virus.

Statements stating that the Covid-19 virus was a virus engineered by China weakened China's image in the public eye. Thus, the step taken by China to restore its image is to conduct deeper research on vaccines to prevent the risk of spreading the virus. Scientists and health experts continue to try to find an effective vaccine against the Covid-19 virus. The Covid-19 vaccine that will be distributed must pass preclinical trials and five stages of rigorous trials to see its effectiveness in fighting the Covid-19 virus (Irawan et al., 2021). As of October 19, 2020, there are at least 154 types of vaccines that are entering the preclinical trial period, 44 types of vaccines are in the clinical trial period, and eight vaccines are in their third clinical trial (Task Force in Handling COVID-19, 2020). The Covid-19 vaccines produced by China and capable of passing through the third phase of clinical trials are CanSino, Sinopharm, Sinovac, and Sinopharm-Wuhan (Irawan et al., 2021).

The discovery of an effective vaccine to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic has risen to the idea of cooperation in health matters which is a combined form of the negotiation process, the impact of non-health negotiations, and triggering foreign policy in supporting the global health (Margono et al., 2021). In terms of health cooperation, China uses its vaccine production as a tool for public diplomacy to establish communication and restore its image in the international system. Evidence regarding China's efforts to expand health infrastructure is reinforced by the statements of China's state adviser and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Wang Yi, in a vaccine assistance agreement with Indonesia, where he stated that China was ready to cooperate by making Indonesia a country involved in vaccine production in the Southeast Asia Region (Margono et al., 2021). China continues to work on developing and supplying vaccines to the world simultaneously. President Xi Jinping has also stated to WHO that his Covid-19 vaccine is a 'global public good' (Irawan et al., 2021).

This research is interesting to be studied because China responded to the global public's intimidation regarding accusations of negligence as the cause of the Covid-19 pandemic by restoring its image, namely by supplying vaccines to several countries. The problem that China got did not necessarily dampen China's efforts to help the global public. So, the author needs to analyze this topic by answering the formulation of the problem in the form of how to implement China's New Public Diplomacy using vaccines in the Covid-19 era.

Conceptual Framework

The author analyzes this topic using the concept of Public Diplomacy. Diplomacy is a tool or practice used by a diplomat in representing his country or organization to negotiate (Setiawan, 2016). This diplomacy is generally said to be a method that is used by someone to obtain personal interests using non-military means. Etymologically, Diplomacy comes from the Greek word '*diploun*', which means 'to fold'. This is related to the past of the Roman Empire, where anyone who crossed national borders had to show a travel document which was called a '*diplomas*' (Setiawan, 2016). Public Diplomacy consists of old public diplomacy and new public diplomacy. The difference between these two terms lies in the involvement of non-state actors; the way actors communicate has changed to use the internet, which is also known as 'The Real-Time Global Technologies' that obscures national borders, and the old approach model in the form of top-down messaging has turned into a relationship building (Yani & Lusiana, 2018).

In this case, this article uses the concept of New Public Diplomacy by Jan Melissen. Jan Melissen, in his book entitled “The New Public Diplomacy Soft Power in International Relations”, defines New Public Diplomacy as an effort by actors to influence the foreign public's view of a country (Melissen, 2006). In his book, Melissen divides his explanation into three categories: first, he defines public diplomacy as a concept; second, evaluating and identifying the characteristics of public diplomacy practices; and the last one, distinguishing between public diplomacy in the term of propaganda, nation-branding, and relations between cultures (Melissen, 2006).

First, Defining public diplomacy as a concept, in contrast to Old Public Diplomacy, which only uses the state as the only actor, New Public Diplomacy can also be finalized by international organizations (Melissen, 2006). Melissen stated that New Public Diplomacy is intended for foreign publics. So, in its implementation, the strategy undertaken in carrying out the New Public Diplomacy must be distinguished between the domestic public and the foreign public (Melissen, 2006). New Public Diplomacy is described as a flow of information that has a one-way or maximum two-way communication pattern, which aims to convey the positive aspects of the country to the foreign public (Melissen, 2006).

Table 1. Defining New Public Diplomacy as a Concept

Defining New Public Diplomacy as a Concept		
1.	Actor	State or Non-State
2.	Objective	Distinguished between foreign public and domestic public
3.	Communication Patterns	Maximum 2 directions

Source: Melissen, 2006

Second, the procedure for evaluating and identifying the characteristics of public diplomacy practices is by finding targets that match the goals. In this case, diplomatic practices are sometimes accustomed to professional communication patterns. Thus, to adjust to the foreign public, diplomats can use the mass media to carry out their propaganda purposes (Melissen, 2006). Next, it has to ensure that the information conveyed can be received without any suspicion of national interest motives (Melissen, 2006).

Third, there are several terms embedded in New Public Diplomacy; they are a concept of Propaganda, Nation-Branding, and Cultural Relations. Before getting to know more about New Public Diplomacy in Propaganda, it is necessary to have an understanding of the propaganda itself. Propaganda has a pejorative connotation where propaganda is interpreted as a deliberate effort to influence public opinion with certain interests that are deliberately designed to serve the interests of propagandists or political elites either directly or indirectly. However, the meaning of propaganda in New Public Diplomacy is an informative campaign for foreign publics with a one-way message pattern using persuasion techniques (Melissen, 2006).

The concept of Nation-Branding is a concept that leads to marketing rather than diplomacy. Nation-Branding practices have superior or profit ambitions, while diplomat practices tend to prioritize diplomatic communication between actors. So, the goal of diplomacy is the recognition of opponents and the acceptance of limitations. Furthermore,

this New Public Diplomacy is long-term. New Public Diplomacy in the Nation-Branding concept can be interpreted as a concept that highlights the identity of a country that will communicate its aspirations, but this is limited by the social reality (Melissen, 2006).

Culture, compared to other concepts, has an affinity with diplomacy itself. Culture is shown to convey messages that will be conveyed, such as promoting human rights, spreading democratic values, the idea of Good Governance, and the role of the media in civil society. In this case, New Public Diplomacy in Cultural Relations aims to deliver the cultural exchanges that communicate thoughts, researches, journalism, and national debates of a country (Melissen, 2006).

In line with with Melissen's theory to distinguish the three concepts of new public diplomacy, the authors identify that the method used by China to restore its image is related to the concept of Nation-Branding.

Table 2. Diplomacy Tools in New Public Diplomacy Concept

New Public Diplomacy Concept			
	Propaganda	Nation-Branding	Cultural Relations
Diplomacy Tool	Specific campaigns or activities	The idea of national identity	Culture

Source : Melissen, 2006

Method

In order to analyze this topic, the writer used a descriptive qualitative research method. This study uses a data source in the form of Library Research. The data that the authors observe are secondary data which include theses, journals, books, reports, news articles, and other sources accredited by *Sinta* or ISSN and related to the research topic. Literature sources in the form of scientific works researchers obtain through the Harzing Publish or Perish application, and other data sources come from Google. The data that the authors found were then analyzed using Mendeley and Nvivo 12, namely by collecting and categorizing keywords related to the topic in one unit.

Finding and Discussion

New Public Diplomacy Vaccine Definition by China as a Nation-Branding Concept

New Public Diplomacy in the Nation-Branding concept aims to highlight the identity of the country, which is reflected in the idea of its aspirations to gain foreign public recognition. In this case, the idea that China has is the 'Health Silk Road'. China's strategy in public diplomacy is embodied in one of the strategies from the Belt Road Initiative (BRI) mission, namely the 'Health Silk Road' (Ilfie, 2020). The Health Silk Road serves to expand China's health manufacturing on the international stage, some of which are by providing vaccines and masks (Agape, 2021). Belt Road Initiative is a development program created by China since 2013 that aims to restore China's heyday during the Han dynasty (Agape, 2021). The Belt Road Initiative program is an extension of the previous program, One Belt One Road (Ngeow Chow-Bing, 2020). Initially, the Belt Road Initiative concept was based on a geographical location that connected Eurasia. However, this concept was later expanded to reach Africa, Latin America, countries in the Polar Regions, to the Pacific countries (Ngeow Chow-Bing, 2020). Apart from the area of authority, this concept is also quite flexible in its

policies. Belt Road Initiative's main basis is the infrastructure which contains five components, namely Policy Coordination, Facility Connectivity, Free Trade, and Financial Integration, to the exchange of people/services (Ngeow Chow-Bing, 2020). This Belt Road Initiative then remains non-binding because the components in it can change according to ongoing bilateral negotiations and discussions with extensive consultations (Ngeow Chow-Bing, 2020).

During Xi Jinping's leadership, Belt Road Initiative was representative as a commitment included by him in the Constitution of the Chinese Communist Party (Ngeow Chow-Bing, 2020). This indicates that Belt Road Initiative's commitment will be long-term. In its journey, Belt Road Initiative does not always find a smooth road. Belt Road Initiative often receive skepticism from the public with accusations of being a debt trap that will make other countries dependent on China.

The concept of the Health Silk Road, which is one of the Belt Road Initiatives' strategies, began in 2015. This strategy is one of the implementations of the people exchanges component. China has committed to supplying and investing in medical needs in the form of medicines, medical equipment, and, most importantly, vaccines (Ngeow Chow-Bing, 2020).

In this data presentation, it can be elaborated that China's actions in the Belt Road Initiative on the Health Silk Road program can be justified as a form of New Public Diplomacy in the Nation-Branding concept. In this case, the identity reflected by China is Belt Road Initiative with a program called the Health Silk Road. This program has its resemblance with the New Public Diplomacy in the Nation-Branding Concept because it has a long-term commitment, and there are limitations to a social reality that make the implementation of this commitment not entirely perfect.

Identification of Chinese Vaccine Distribution Practice Characteristics

China's vaccine development can be proven by its dominance in the global market. As of March 2021, vaccines originating from China have been able to dominate the world, reaching 141 million doses (Muhaimin et al., 2021). Based on Airfinity data, in April 2021, Chinese vaccine companies Sinovac and Sinopharm produced 250 million doses. The following is data on the number of vaccines owned by vaccine-producing countries based on Airfinity in March 2021.

Table 3. Quantum data of the largest countries' vaccine production and export

No.	Country	Vaccine Quantity	Export Quantity
1.	China	229 million doses	109 million doses
2.	India	125 million doses	55 million doses
3.	European Union	110 million doses	46 million doses
4.	United States	164 million doses	-
5.	United Kingdom	16 million doses	-

Source: Airfinity 2021

China is trying to continue to carry out its engagement program with ASEAN, namely the ASEAN Comprehensive Framework by signing bilateral cooperation with 9 out of 10 countries in ASEAN except for Vietnam for the supply of Sinovac and Sinopharm vaccine assistance (Agape, 2021). China distributes its Covid-19 vaccine by adjusting its distribution

according to the targeted countries. Some of them are China granting a license to Indonesia to produce the Covid-19 vaccine outside of China's territory (Muhaimin et al., 2021). In this regard, Indonesia is cooperating with China in procuring the Sinovac CoronaVac vaccine through an Indonesian state-owned pharmaceutical company, namely Bio Farma, while Western companies are still unable to grant licenses to other countries to produce vaccines outside their territory (Muhaimin et al., 2021). Another example is the United Arab Emirates (UAE) prefers the Sinopharm vaccine because Chinese companies are willing to conduct phase three trials in the UAE and allow the UAE to produce the vaccine and distribute it in its regional territory (Muhaimin et al., 2021).

China's ability to adapt proofs one of the Melissen's idea, it is the need for adjustments to diplomatic communication patterns with foreign publics. In this case, China is trying to adapt its vaccines to the policies of the target countries. However, in Melissen's second idea regarding ensuring that information is received without any suspicion of the motives of the political elite, China failed to implement it. This happens because of the social reality of China's Nation-Branding, Belt Road Initiative is considered a debt trap that will make other countries dependent on China (Ngeow Chow-Bing, 2020).

This speculation come to the surface regarding to Sri Lanka's debt to China being in constructing the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka (Maulidiyanti, 2021). However, subsequent research emerged, which found that the events in Sri Lanka were caused by the poor financial management of the Sri Lankan Government (Agape, 2021). In addition, China's executive, Ray Ren, denied criticism of views regarding China's intentional acquisition of the Hambantota Port, saying that this was done in the interests of all countries. Judging from its footprint, in 2017, there were only 175 ships anchored at Hambantota before China managed this port. Meanwhile, when China managed this port, at the end of 2018, there were 300 ships anchored. This could benefit other countries, such as Africa, the Middle East and the United States (CNBC Indonesia, 2019). Thus, public accusations that China framed Sri Lanka cannot be proven. Furthermore, the challenge that needs to be faced by China in carrying out New Public Diplomacy to restore its image from the foreign public is to ensure that information received by the public does not raise suspicion or other hidden motives.

Conclusion

Current perspectives of public opinion have become one of the references for diplomatic actors in making policies aimed at gaining international recognition. The concept that can explain how to get public attention is by conducting public diplomacy. China is a country that has a bad reputation, especially after the spread of the Covid-19 virus. China was t accused of being negligent and the cause of a pandemic that harmed the whole world. The, it makes China's image worse for world community. China then seeks to restore its image by carrying out public diplomacy using the covid-19 vaccine that is produced to stop the chain of the spread of the virus. In this case, The concept initiated by Jan Melissen can describe the implementation of China's New Public Diplomacy in using vaccines in the era of the covid-19 pandemic. The result of this research is that China is defined as using New Public Diplomacy with the concept of Nation-Branding. The Nation-Branding concept China reflects its BRI Commitment and the Health Silk Road program. In addition, China can adaptively apply the New Public Diplomacy concept strategy in carrying out diplomatic

relations with the objectives. However, the challenge that China needs help to solve in this regard is to reduce the suspicion of information conveyed to the foreign public. The foreign public has suspicions that this policy carried out by China has other motives because of the social reality of China's Nation-Branding, namely that BRI is considered a debt trap that will make other countries dependent on China. This stigma arose because China allegedly acquired the Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka, a trap made by China against Sri Lanka. However, this view cannot be fully justified because Sri Lanka needed to fulfill the initial investment agreement with China and the poor management of Hambantota Port when Sri Lanka still managed it.

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