

China's Vaccine Diplomacy during Covid-19 Pandemic: When it Worked and When it Did Not Work?

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ABSTRACT

This article mainly analyzes China's policy of vaccine distribution to different countries during COVID-19 since 2020 (China's vaccine diplomacy). It analysed comparative cases in four countries: Serbia, the United Arab Emirates, Brazil and India. Through the study of these comparative cases, this paper answers an important question: under what conditions is China's vaccine diplomacy more effective and successful, and under what circumstances is it not effective/successful. Finally, the main research results and policy recommendations are summarized.

Keywords: public health diplomacy, vaccine diplomacy, Chinese foreign policy, belt and road initiative

1. INTRODUCTION

Global public health diplomacy refers to “the process of decision-making in which states, intergovernmental organizations and non-state actors respond to public health challenges or use public health concepts or mechanisms in policy formulation and negotiation strategies to achieve other political, economic or social goals.[1] Global public health diplomacy has three primary functions: first, it is an element of soft power and image building; second, it can be used as a tool to implement foreign policy; lastly, it can also influence a country's foreign relations. Vaccine diplomacy is an offshoot of global public health diplomacy. It depends on the use or delivery of vaccines, which can also be thought of as a combination of health and science diplomacy.

During the recent outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, China has provided Chinese vaccines to a wide range of countries. However, the responses from the recipient countries and broader international community have been quite different.[2] The Chinese government holds that vaccines are a powerful weapon against the virus. They should serve the whole world and benefit all mankind. The Chinese government has stated that that covid-19 vaccines should become public goods. China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasized that China is committed to making Covid-19 vaccines as global public goods after they are developed, and to

improve their accessibility and affordability in developing countries. It also emphasized that China opposes “vaccine nationalism” and that China does not accept the creation of an “immunization gap” and reject any attempt to politicize global vaccine cooperation.[3]

Several countries in the world have developed their own Covid-19 vaccines independently or collaboratively since 2020. The US has developed two types of m-RNA vaccines by Pfizer and Moderna and a traditional vaccine by Johnson . Russia has developed its Sputnik vaccine. China has developed Covid-19 vaccines by Sinovac. The UK has developed the Oxford-AstraZeneca. At least 73 vaccines to protect humans against the deadly covid-19 virus have been in development globally.[4] From supply capacity perspective, despite the initial global vaccine shortage at the early days of the vaccines debuts due to production constraints caused by pandemic-induced supply chain disruptions, vaccine productions have increased very quickly in several countries around the global. Apart from countries that first developed Covid-19 vaccines, these vaccines have been produced in several countries around the world, including Belgium, Austria, Germany, Nether land, and India. However, inequality in global covid-19 vaccine distribution is a major problem in the world that constraints the global fight against the pandemic. There is a severe vaccine gap and immunization gap between developed countries and developing countries. More specifically, rich and

developed countries have reserved and nearly bought out all the vaccine supplies when the vaccines were still under development, leaving poor and developing countries have very limited access to the vaccines. About 85 percent of vaccines produced in western countries have been ordered by developed countries, while developing countries simply do not have access to the vaccines.^[5] Moreover, the transportation and storage of Covid-19 vaccines requires expensive and specialized equipment, such as cryogenic refrigeration. For developing countries, Covid-19 vaccines are not only logistically expensive, but countries that are under western sanctions such as Iran have been left out of the global Covid-19 supply chains.^[6] Overall, the production and investment of Covid-19 vaccines is insufficient to meet global demand. How to close this global vaccine gap is a critical task facing the international community and calls for immediate solutions.

China has made efforts attempting to increase covid-19 vaccine supplies to developing countries in the world. While promoting vaccination at home, China has taken concrete actions to fulfill its commitment to making Chinese Covid-19 vaccines as a global public good. Since China launched its vaccines, it has been providing more than 700 million doses. Chinese Covid-19 vaccines to about 80 countries and 3 international organizations.^[7] For example, countries like Serbia, UAE, Belarus, Pakistan have all received Chinese vaccines in multiple batches. Many countries that have received Chinese vaccines have expressed appreciation for China's assistance in the fight against Covid-19 by supplying vaccines, sending medical experts and transferring technology.^[8] However, China's contribution to bridge the vaccine gap between developed countries and developing countries has not been sufficient to meet the demand in poor countries globally. Despite China's efforts, the supply of Chinese vaccines is still far below the global demand and cannot address the supply shortages in many developing countries. In particular, low-income countries, which account for more than half of global population, have received only 1.6 billion doses, far less than the need of their populations.^[9]

This article analyzes China's vaccine diplomacy during the Covid-19 pandemic since 2020. It analyzes four comparative cases: Serbia, United Arab Emirates, Brazil, and India. Through these comparative cases study, this article answers an important question: under what conditions China's vaccine diplomacy is more effective/successful and when it is not. The rest of the paper is organized as follows: the second section reviews the relevant literature on vaccine diplomacy. The third section analyzes the four cases in details. This paper concludes with a summary of the main findings and policy recommendations.

2. CASE STUDIES

Case 1: China's Vaccine Diplomacy in Serbia

China established diplomatic relations with the former Yugoslavia when it was founded in 1955. In 2009, China established its first strategic partnership with Serbia after the breakup of Yugoslavia. In 2016, the bilateral relationship was upgraded to a comprehensive strategic partnership. [10] In the same year, Chinese President Xi Jinping paid a state visit to Serbia at the invitation of the Serbian president, marking a new chapter in decades of traditional friendly relations between the two countries and a milestone in the development of bilateral relations.^[11]

The two countries have maintained frequent high-level political exchanges. In 2011, then Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi visited Serbia and discussed the space and opportunities for bilateral cooperation.^[1] In 2014, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang visited Serbia, the first visit by a Chinese premier in 28 years.^[12] In 2016, the first Chinese head of state paid a state visit to Serbia and established a comprehensive strategic partnership.^[13] In March 2017, then Serbian President Nikolic paid a state visit to China. In 2019, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic came to China to attend the second BRI Forum. Apart from Chinese President Xi's state visit to Serbia in 2016, other senior Chinese government officials have also visited Serbia on several occasions. For example, Premier Li Keqiang communicated and cooperated with the Serbian government on many occasions (Premier Li Keqiang attended the China-CEEC Economic and Trade Forum and China-CEEC Leaders' Meeting in Serbia in 2013.^[14] In the same year, met with Serbian President Nikolic at the Great Hall of the People) and made an official state visit in 2014. In May 2019, State Councilor and Minister of Public Security Zhao Kezhi visited Serbia. These high-level political exchanges not only reflect the steely friendship between the two countries, but also strengthens cooperation in different fields to achieve win-win and rapid development.^[15]

China-Serbia economic and trade cooperation has achieved significant progress over the past five years. China was Serbia's third largest trading partner in 2020. China is Serbia's second largest source of imports. The trade volume and export between China and Serbia rank the first among China's trade with the seventeen Central and Eastern European Countries. The total trade volume between China and Serbia reached \$2.12 billion in 2020, up by 52.3% year on year.^[16] Over the past 7 years, China and Serbia have cooperated in infrastructure projects, such as power plants, roads,

railways, hydro power plants. More specifically, in 2019, China and Serbia signed a rail vehicle cooperation plan, providing conditions for Chinese high-speed locomotives to enter Serbia.[16] Despite the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, Chinese forces continued to carry out infrastructure construction in Serbia. [18]The opening of The Zemun-Borca Bridge, The first Chinese Bridge to be built in Europe, will end nearly 70 years of the city having only one Bridge.[17]The left line of the Budapest-Belgrade railway opened to traffic. The successful completion of the E763 expressway linking Serbia and Montenegro have a great importance to Serbia as a major transport artery for neighboring countries.

Serbia has been a stronger supporter and active participant in China's BRI. Serbia's President Vucic acknowledged the potential positive global impact of BRI. In an interview with Chinese media on August 6, he said the BRI is an initiative to promote stability in the world, connecting different countries, cultures and people at a spiritual and material level. "We have believed from the very beginning that the Belt and Road Initiative is aimed at promoting peace and its content is promoting peace [19]Serbia's Minister of Innovation and Technological Development, Nenad Popovic, also recognized the potential benefit regarding job creation and development opportunities that BRI projects can bring to Serbia. He said that the BRI provides us with a very important platform of equal opportunities for all countries, and Serbia will spare no effort to participate in the BRI and ensure that the vision of the BRI is realized.[20]Scholars in Serbia also believe that the BRI is not a simple initiative, but a comprehensive cooperation in trade, investment, infrastructure, and policy dialogue.[21]Under China's BRI, China-Senegal railway, cross-sea bridge, China-Senegal industrial zone, Chinese banks, Chinese enterprises, etc. Chinese investment will drive Serbia's export and GDP growth.

Besides political and economic progress, bilateral cultural exchanges between the China and Serbia have also achieved significant progress. This enhances people-to-people bond between the two countries. For example, Serbs can learn about Chinese culture and Chinese can learn about Serbian culture in places such as the Confucius Institute at the University of Novi Sad. As the BRI has gained popularity among people in Serbia, more and more Serbian people are interested in Chinese culture, and the Chinese language has become a popular foreign language to study among the local people. Also,Chinese is now a credit course at the University of Novi Sad.[22]

China has supported Serbia in its fight against the epidemic and helped Serbia overcome the most difficult period. At the height of the epidemic, China exported the first 1 million doses of vaccine to Serbia.[23] More specifically, Chinese experts have been sent to Serbia to

help fight the epidemic. including experts in the prevention and treatment of infectious diseases, respiratory and critical diseases, infection and psychology.[24]Apart from the official assistance to Serbia, Chinese citizens have also been very enthusiastic in supporting Serbia. According to incomplete statistics, the Serbian Embassy in China has received a large number of medical supplies donated by the Chinese people and enterprises. For example, enterprises in Zhejiang province jointly donated 112 boxes of supplies. Chinese companies have sent mask machines and a team of 14 people to Serbia. Chinese medical and health enterprises donated 50 ventilators to Serbia, and the Shanghai Women's Basketball Team donated 300,000 masks.[25]

Senior members in Serbian government have received Chinese vaccines, indicating strong political support for China's vaccine diplomacy. For example, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic and Health Minister Lonchar were the earliest to receive the Chinese Covid-19 vaccine.[26]Serbia purchased at least 500,000 doses of Chinese vaccine.[27]About 1.95 million Serbian people have received at least one dose of Chinese vaccine. China's timely vaccine support has played an important role in relieving the epidemic situation in Serbia. German Chancellor Angela Merkel acknowledged in an interview with German television that with the "Chinese vaccine," Serbia is getting vaccinated faster than other European countries.[28]

Overall, China's vaccine diplomacy to Serbia has achieved positive outcome. The Serbian government and people have shown their gratitude to the Chinese people. Serbian President Vucic thanked the "Chinese brothers" for their help and expressed heartfelt thanks to the Chinese government and people through social networks. Serbian people have posted messages on social media, such as "thanks to the Chinese people", "China is Serbia's best friend" and "China is Serbia's hard brother".[29]Serbia has also been firmly stood by China when many countries in the world were blaming China's ineffective response to control the spread of the "Chinese virus" pandemic. The positive outcome of China's vaccine diplomacy to Serbia was not only because of China's vaccine assistance to Serbia during the Covid-19 pandemic but more importantly a continuation of the good bilateral diplomatic relationship between the two countries. Before the pandemic, Serbia was already the first European country to grant Visa-free access to China, and its people's favorable opinion of China ranked second in the world after Pakistan. Moreover, China's vaccine assistance to Serbia also came at a time when Serbia was having almost no access to global vaccine supplies. Even major countries in the EU, such as Germany and France blocked the export of domestic medical supplies to protect their own countries first. The Serbian President repeatedly said that "European solidarity does not exist,

it is a fairy tale on paper."^[30]Against this background, China's timely vaccine assistance to Serbia was much highly appreciated and well received by the Serbian government and people. The successful cooperation between China and Serbia proves that only calm, fair and open exchanges between countries can jointly fight virus.

Case 2: China's Vaccine Diplomacy in United Arab Emirates

Since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1984, bilateral friendly cooperative relations have been developing smoothly.^[31]The two countries have maintained frequent high-level political exchanges. In January 2012, then-Premier Wen Jiabao paid his first visit to the UAE, marking the establishment of China-UAE strategic partnership.^[31]In March 2012, Crown Prince Mohammed of ABU Dhabi of the UAE and Speaker of the UAE. ^[32]Federal National Assembly Maul Visited China and announced two major projects with a total investment of \$3.4 billion during his visit to China. ^[33]Especially with the development of the BRI, bilateral relations have developed rapidly in an all-round way. In January 2015, Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited UAE. In the same year, the UAE signed the BRI Agreement with China. In July 2018, Chinese President Xi Jinping paid a three-day state visit to the UAE.^[34]During this period, bilateral economic, political, cultural and people-to-people relations have been further strengthened and a comprehensive strategic partnership has been formed.Frequent high-level exchanges have brought about close cooperation between the two countries in various fields and bilateral relations will usher in another important milestone.^[35]

Over the past 35 years, engagement between the UAE and China has flourished in almost every field, with bilateral trade growing most significantly. China has become the second largest trading partner of the UAE, with bilateral trade volume reaching \$60 billion in 2017.^[36]The UAE is also an important hub for China's trade with the Middle East, Africa, Europe and other regions. In addition, the UAE has provided a platform for Chinese enterprises to enter emerging markets, with more than 4,000 Chinese enterprises now operating in the UAE. ^[37]For example, DSO Dubai Silicon Valley Oasis free Zone is a gathering of Chinese high-tech enterprises.Dubai Network City (Didi, Aliyun, Huawei, etc). ^[38]The gathering place of health and medical industry(Siemens, Tongrentang, etc.)Infrastructure construction is also proceeding smoothly. In 2020, China National Chemical Engineering Group Co., Ltd. signed a general contract with Dubai Magg Group, covering housing construction, infrastructure, petrochemical, chemical and other fields. ² China

Yangtze Group successfully won the second phase of the UAE railway project, with a total order value of nearly 350 million US dollars, which is the largest single overseas order for China's railway so far.^[39]

The UAE is a natural partner for China's BRI. The cooperation between China and the UAE in energy, finance, production capacity and new technology has yielded many fruitful results. For example, China has provided technology assistance to help develop UAE's domestic solar and nuclear energy sectors. In 2017, China helped the UAE built the world's largest independent solar power station with an installed capacity called the Sweihan Photovoltaic Project.^[40]China National Materials Energy Conservation Corporation signed a cement waste heat power generation project with the UAE to use waste heat from cement production lines to generate electricity and promote the development of local environmental protection and waste utilization. More importantly, in addition to the construction of clean energy projects, in 2015 China and the UAE established a joint investment fund to invest in clean energy projects in both countries and promote financial cooperation.^[41]In July 2018, the China-UAE Joint Statement stated that the two sides will jointly support the construction of China-UAE Production capacity cooperation demonstration parks and build BRI demonstration projects.

China and the UAE have also made significance progress in energy and infrastructure cooperation. In 2017, the UAE awarded 12 percent of the onshore oil exploration rights in ABU Dhabi to Chinese enterprises, marking a historic breakthrough in China-UAE oil field cooperation. In March 2018, a Chinese company won the right to explore 10 percent of each of two offshore oil blocks in ABU Dhabi. ^[42] The cooperation between the two countries means that the two sides have realized comprehensive oil exploration and development and import and export cooperation in the energy field, which is of great significance to the strategic security of China's energy security. Besides energy, China and UAE have also cooperated in major infrastructure projects. The Khalifa Port is an important example. Strategically located along the BRI, the Khalifa Port is one of the fastest growing container ports in the world.^[43] It is jointly constructed and operated by a Chinese enterprise and ABU Dhabi Port Authority. When put into full operation, the new infrastructure will greatly increase the capacity of Khalifa Port.^[44] These collaborations are mutually beneficial for both China and the UAE.

The BRI has brought China-UAE relations into a "golden period" and ushered in new opportunities for bilateral cooperation. In 2018, China and UAE established a comprehensive strategic partnership and joined the BRI. UAE minister of Economy Mansouri said: China-UAE cooperation on renewable energy;

China-Arab investment cooperation in energy, chemical industry, infrastructure, culture and tourism has been expanding. The BRI has helped the UAE gain access to the Chinese market.” [45] In an interview with the UAE ambassador to China, another government official, Ali Al-Zahri, said that in the post-oil era, the local economic structure needs to be transformed and upgraded to develop a diversified economy. The BRI is highly compatible with the UAE's post-oil initiative. Uneven and unstable regional development has always been the biggest problem affecting the prosperity and development of the world economy. He firmly believes that the BRI will bring more stability to the world and more opportunities for exchanges among people of all countries.[46]

UAE scholars also see complementarities and mutual benefits that the BRI can bring to China and UAE. For example, Yusuf, a scholar from King Saud University, argued that both China's BRI and UAE development strategies are comprehensive development plans aimed at maintaining social stability and achieving economic development. China's investment, one is to introduce advanced technology, the other is to reduce unemployment by training workers in skills. The synergy between UAE development plans and China's BRI is an important opportunity.[47] Middle East Economic Watch consultant Hadhury highly values the BRI, calling it a public good that China provides to the international community to boost its economy.

The positive bilateral relations between China and the UAE set the stage for positive vaccine cooperation during the Covid-19 pandemic. In early September 2020, the UAE began clinical trials of the Chinese Covid-19 vaccine.[48] In October 9, the UAE has given emergency approval for the use of The Chinese Covid-19 vaccine to protect frontline health-care workers as tests have proved safe and effective. Research in the UAE said the group's vaccine was 86 percent effective. Since then, the UAE has extended the Chinese-developed Covid-19 vaccine to all adults in the country, including 1 million local residents and more than 8 million foreign residents.[49] Once the Chinese vaccine became available, the head of state and senior government officials of the UAE took the lead in taking Chinese vaccines, giving a vote of confidence to Chinese vaccines. On September 19, UAE Health Minister Abdurrahman Oweis received a Covid-19 vaccine developed by China in the field, proving that the vaccine is safe and effective.[50] On December 9, UAE Prime Minister Al Maktoum shared on social media that he is receiving a Covid-19 vaccine developed by a Chinese company.[50]

China and the UAE have also teamed up to produce Covid-19 vaccines in an effort to make vaccines a public good. On March 28 this year, the "cloud launch" ceremony was held in Beijing, Hebei and Abu Dhabi.

With the launch of the project, the UAE now has its first Covid-19 vaccine, called "Vaccine of Life". China partnered with the UAE to produce up to 200 million doses of its state-backed Sinopharm vaccine to distribute to its population and across the region. The vaccine cooperation and partnership provides China with strategic positioning ,and the UAE with a speedy vaccination rollout—half of the UAE 's populations has already been vaccinated, mostly with Chinese vaccinations. More recently, the UAE has allowed the use of Chinese Covid-19 vaccine to vaccinate its children aged between 3 and 17.

The fruitful cooperation between China and the UAE during the Covid pandemic has been built upon an overall positive bilateral relationship between the two countries. China has long recognized the unique geometric strategic location of the UAE. The UAE has become an important international trade, financial and transportation hub in the Asia-Pacific region. Its strategic position can help China expand market access in the region and promote RMB internationalization. China also recognizes that the UAE also an important fulcrum along the BRI. Since the outbreak of Covid-19, China-UAE cooperation has not stalled but expanded into new areas. China and the UAE have conducted efficient cooperation in joint prevention and control, information sharing, vaccine research and development, as well as medicine and health care cooperation.

Case 3: China's Vaccine Diplomacy in Brazil

China and Brazil established diplomatic relations in 1974. Subsequently, in 1993, the two countries strengthened their strategic partnership. In recent years, relations between the two countries were upgraded to a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2012. Political mutual trust and exchanges between the two countries have been continuously enhanced since the establishment of diplomatic ties. Both countries are full of vitality and enjoy broad development prospects in all areas.

The two countries have frequent high-level political exchanges. In July 2014, Jinping Xi attended the BRICS Summit and paid a state visit to Brazil. He also held events marking the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and Brazil and had extensive exchanges with Brazilian leaders and people from all walks of life to focus on common development, promote practical cooperation and promote the development of China-Brazil comprehensive strategic partnership. In May 2015, Premier Li Keqiang paid an official visit to Brazil. In August 2016, Chinese Vice Premier Liu Yandong attended the opening ceremony of the Brazil Olympic Games. In September 2016, then Brazilian President attended the G20 Summit in China.]

Bilateral economic relationship between China and Brazil has also been developing very rapidly. China is Brazil's largest trading partner, export destination and source of imports, and Brazil is China's largest trading partner in Latin America. Strong Chinese demand for agricultural products has also pushed Brazil's agricultural products exports to a record high. Chinese outbound investment in Brazil has become a new highlight in China-Brazil economic relations. By the end of 2013, China had invested more than \$20 billion in Brazil and set up nearly 100 companies there.

Brazil has also demonstrated support to China's BRI. In May, 2019, Brazilian Vice President Evo Moran spoke highly of the important role of the BRI during his visit to China. He expressed Brazil's hope to align its investment and development plans with the BRI. In a similar fashion, Brazilian ambassador Marcos also argued that the BRI is a good illustration of China's rise on the main stage of the world economy. He believes that China's infrastructure construction is good for trade and investment and will be of great help to the development of the world. Although Brazil has not yet signed the BRI cooperation agreement with China, the country has shown support to China's BRI. For example, Brazil awarded China an infrastructural order of RMB 8 billion. Brazilian scholars have also pointed out several benefits of the BRI. For example, Brazilian scholars argued that the BRI will promote the further development of China's relations with other countries. At the same time, the development of BRI will bring more development opportunities to other countries and will boost world economic recovery in the long run.

China has supported Brazil in its fight against the Covid-19 epidemic. Chinese medical experts held video conferences with their Brazilian counterparts to share China's experience. For example, in July 2020, experts from the Brazilian Ministry of Health exchanged information with experts in Wuhan via a remote video conference. Through this video conference, Chinese experts shared their experience in Covid-19 prevention and treatment with Brazilian medical experts. Chinese experts also explained the efficacy of drugs and targeted therapies. In addition to sharing experience, China also provided vaccines to Brazil and offered Brazil the option of taking Chinese vaccines.

However, Brazilian president has repeatedly rejected the Chinese vaccine. This rejection delayed the optimal vaccination time in Brazil and worsened the pandemic situation. The Brazilian president's rejection of the Chinese vaccine was not a "quality issue" but a political gimmick. The governor of Sao Paulo state, who is considered the incumbent's main rival in the 2022 presidential election, has been pushing for the purchase of Chinese vaccines. The Brazilian government's rejection of the Chinese vaccine is therefore highly political. Bolsonaro's rejection of the Chinese vaccine

was in some ways influenced by the US warning of reducing its dependence on Chinese imports for its own security. At personal level, Bolsonaro has long admired US way of life. During his visit to Washington, he also saluted the American flag, and this was criticized by Brazil's former president.

Bolsonaro's irrational behavior was resented by Brazilian public health officials and the Brazilian people. Individual decisions should not override the interests of society, that any vaccine approved for health should be included in the national immune system and that "no one's political decisions should go beyond scientific ideas" regardless of the country.

China's vaccine diplomacy and vaccine assistance towards Brazil has not achieved positive outcome at the same scale as in the cases of Serbia and the UAE. This is largely because of the irrational politicians' politicization of the pandemic and the vaccine at the expense of the interests of the Brazilian people. The lesson from the Brazilian case is that politicians' individual political preferences play an important role in a nation's crisis management and response. Despite the overall good relationship between China and Brazil prior to Bolsonaro's administration, Bolsonaro's leaning to the US political choice has been a deciding factor that China's vaccine diplomacy has not been well received in Brazil.

Case 4: China's Vaccine Diplomacy in India

Unresolved territorial disputes have been a thorny issue since China and India established diplomatic relations in 1950. Since 1959 Tibetan rebellion, there have been more than 5 times small or big scale conflicts between the two countries. After the two sides resumed exchanging ambassadors in 1976, bilateral relations gradually improved. In the early 21st century, Indian Prime Minister Paid an official visit to China and the two sides signed the Declaration on China-India Relations and Comprehensive Cooperation. In April 2005, Premier Wen Jiabao visited India and the two sides signed the Joint Statement, announcing the establishment of strategic cooperative partnership for peace and prosperity. Until a conflict once again shattered the tranquility along the border. In June 2020, fierce clashes broke out along the contested border between China and India, resulting in casualties on both sides. The conflict was temporarily put to rest following the meeting between military commanders on both sides.

As the two largest developing countries and emerging economies, China and India are still in different stages of development, and there are big differences in both industrial level and resource endowment. Therefore, the trade between the two countries is highly complementary and there is a large space for trade. In 2018, bilateral trade reached a new

milestone, exceeding at \$90 billion. India has been running a widening trade deficit with China. China is the biggest source of India's deficit. By the end of 2017, China had invested \$4.77 billion in India. But after 2019, Chinese investment in India declined. The finance ministry said: China's direct investment into India fell to \$163.77 million in the 2019-20 fiscal year, declining for the third consecutive year.

Indian scholars have recognized the mutual benefits that BRI can bring for China and India. Professor Dieberg at Nehru University argued that the BRI has created countless jobs and development opportunities, benefiting people in countries and regions along the routes. More importantly, the digital revolution is taking place in India since Chinese mobile brands have captured half of the mobile phone market in India, which is driving the development of the Internet era in India.

The Chinese government has always welcomed India's participation in BRI, but the Indian government has consistently rejected to be a participant. Despite the huge potential benefits of BRI, India has long held a negative attitude towards it in order to curb China's influence and development. In an attempt to curb China's rising influence in Southeast Asia, India blocked the development of China-India-Bangladesh-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CPEC). Moreover, Indian right-wing Politicians and scholars have repeatedly criticized China's "debt-trap diplomacy" in Sri Lanka and Maldives.

The Modi government intends to leverage India's large vaccine production capacity to conduct vaccine diplomacy, as India is the world's largest vaccines producer. Since the Covid-19 outbreak, India has been using its vaccines as a "diplomatic tool" to strengthen its position in its strategic rivalry with China and counter China's influence in South Asia. At the beginning of 2021, the Modi government considered providing 12 million to 20 million doses of vaccine to its neighbors within one month, including Nepal. China also pledged to provide vaccines to Nepal to help ease the outbreak. India has already provided at least 15.6 million doses of locally produced vaccine to 17 countries through donations or commercial contracts. India has also sought support from the US and Europe, and India has exported vaccines to these countries. India's vaccine diplomacy rivalry with China may not be sustainable due to its own supply constraints. More specifically, India's own national vaccine inventory and vaccine supply are limited. So almost all of the Indian national vaccination operations failed to meet government targets.

Despite rising China-India rivalry, the Chinese Foreign Ministry reached out to India for humanitarian reasons. China opened its export of ventilators, masks and medical supplies to India, and offered to provide

medical assistance to India. However, the Indian government made a political decision not to import Chinese vaccines despite that it allowed states to import their own foreign vaccines. Some states have even ordered outright bans on the use of Chinese vaccines in vaccine tenders, saying they will not import vaccines from countries bordering India on land. India's refusal of China's medical assistance has resulted in severe consequences for Indian people. India's Covid-19 death toll hiked, resulting in the breakdown of cremation system. The consequence of India's politicization of China's medical assistance has severely hurt India's efforts against the Covid-19 pandemic.

The primary reason that India refused to join the BRI and refused to accept Chinese medical aid and vaccines has been rising competition and structural distrust between the two countries due to historical conflicts and legacy issues. This influence determines India's suspicion and distrust of China, vigilance and conceit, and sees China as its main competitor. To this day, many Indians, especially in the military and civil service, are still haunted by the 1962 war and are hostile and wary of China. With a host of thorny contradictions between the two countries, this has further fueled India's hostility and distrust towards China. Moreover, China and India also have unresolved territorial disputes that have led to militarized conflicts, further exacerbating the structural distrust between these two countries. In 2020, border conflicts and militarized confrontations occurred frequently in the China-India border area, and the two countries have been on high alert against each other. This has been a major hurdle for the development of Sino-Indian economic cooperation.

3. CONCLUSION

This article has analyzed four cases in which China's vaccine diplomacy has received different reactions from the recipient countries. Countries like Serbia and UAE genuinely appreciated China's vaccine support and demonstrated strong political willingness to support not just Chinese vaccine but also support China politically during the pandemic. Nevertheless, Brazil and India not only publicly expressed strong suspicion against Chinese vaccine, but also showed hostility against China's vaccine diplomacy. The primary reason why China's vaccine diplomacy generated different results was pre-existing bilateral economic and political relations. When there is pre-existing close economic cooperation and high degree of political trust, vaccine diplomacy tends to be effective. However, when the pre-existing relationship is characterized by deep structural distrust or politicized by a hostile national leader, vaccine diplomacy would unlikely be successful.

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