

How COVID-19 Pandemic Bolsters China's Influence toward Hegemonic Race in ASEAN

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Abstract

The Covid-19 outbreak that occurred at the end of 2019 added to a long series of global crises at a time when the trade war was still ongoing. The epidemic then quickly spread throughout the world. Southeast Asia is no exception. The presence of this epidemic in Southeast Asia adds to the intensity of the struggle for hegemony between the United States and China. Vaccine diplomacy from China, the United States, and ASEAN itself presents its own dynamics for the competition for hegemony in this region from the two countries. This paper uses a qualitative method approach, where the author presents a critical review of the current dynamics. While the theoretical basis, the author uses the theory of hegemony through non-traditional security approach instruments centered on the vaccine diplomacy competition conducted by two superpower countries. The results show how the dynamics of the superiority of China's vaccine diplomacy are important points and provide broad projections of a new chapter in the struggle for hegemony in Southeast Asia.

Keywords: ASEAN, China, COVID-19, Hegemony, U.S.A.

Abstrak

Wabah Covid-19 yang terjadi pada akhir tahun 2019 menambah rentetan panjang krisis global di saat perang dagang masih berlangsung. Wabah tersebut kemudian dengan cepat menyebar di seluruh dunia. Tidak terkecuali di Asia Tenggara. Hadirnya wabah ini di Asia Tenggara menambah intensitas perebutan hegemoni antara Amerika Serikat dan China. Diplomasi vaksin dari China, Amerika Serikat, dan ASEAN sendiri menghadirkan dinamika tersendiri bagi persaingan hegemoni di kawasan ini dari dua negara tersebut. Paper ini menggunakan pendekatan metode kualitatif, Dimana penulis akan memaparkan ulasan kritis terhadap dinamika yang terjadi saat ini. Sedangkan landasan teori, penulis menggunakan teori hegemoni melalui instrumen pendekatan non-traditional security yang berpusat pada kompetisi diplomasi vaksin yang dilakukan dua negara superpower. Hasil penelitian mengemukakan bagaimana dinamika keunggulan diplomasi vaksin China menjadi poin penting dan memberikan proyeksi luas akan babak baru dalam perebutan hegemoni di Asia Tenggara.

Kata Kunci: ASEAN, Cina, Covid-19, Hegemoni, Amerika Serikat.

INTRODUCTION

In the fourth quarter of 2019, a new virus called severe acute respiratory

syndrome coronavirus two or SARS-CoV-2 that attacks the human respiratory system has emerged. The virus is the host of the disease called

COVID-19 can cause mild, moderate, severe respiratory symptoms, with a relatively high fatality rate in humans and fauna, referring to the total death toll as of May 26, 2021, which amounted to 3.49 million people because the data is dynamic) worldwide.

In addition to the high fatality rate, the transmission ratio of the virus is also categorized as dangerous because of only four months after the first findings in Wuhan, China, on March 11, 2020, WHO declared this virus a global pandemic (Tempo, 2020). Finally, on December 23, 2020, the Chilean government announced that its military base in the Antarctic continent had positive cases of COVID-19. This case indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic has spread throughout the continents on Earth without exception (The Guardian, 2021).

In the context of ASEAN, the regionalism of the Southeast Asian countries is also one of the fastest areas that faced Covid-19. Since the second week of January 2020, ASEAN countries such as Thailand, Singapore, the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia announced the COVID-19 cases (Kompas, 2021).

If we look at the geopolitical point of view of Southeast Asia regionalism, COVID-19 adds one significant

dynamic to two existing challenges that existed before. These challenges are the problems due to the trade war and the prolonged dispute over the sovereignty of several ASEAN countries such as the Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei Darussalam, and Malaysia in the South China Sea. It is inseparable from the hegemonic competition between China and the United States and its allied members such as the European Union, Australia, and Japan.

For 54 years, ASEAN has become one of the oldest and most stable regional institutions besides the European Union. The founders of this association of developing countries and former colonies of colonialism aspired to create a peaceful, secure, stable, and prosperous Southeast Asian region based on the principle of free intervention and rejecting the use of force for its members (Southgate, 2019).

The region has so much potential, such as strategic location, the enormous potential of the trade market by its large population, and the richness of natural resources. That is why the area could be a strategic partner for the great powers, the United States and the Soviet Union (Secretariat, 2021). That is the background behind the establishment of ASEAN in 1967. In this modern era, the struggle for influence in the Southeast

Asian region continues, but the United States and China carry it out.

It is typical if a superpower country targets ASEAN as a strategic partner. For the estimation, the calculation of this region's trading potency is more than US\$ 5 trillion per year. The trade market size of ASEAN is empowered by the population of 10 Southeast Asian members, which amounts to more than 600 million people (Fravel, 2014). Let us look at the background of the period. The main menu of the hegemonic race between the United States and China is a globalization of the international economic regime that upholds the joint progress of cooperating state actors accompanied by economic progress that adheres to a system of capitalism and industrialism (Jemadu, 2008).

In chronological order, the rapid progress of China's industry and trade over the past four decades has turned the country into a superpower nation. Thus, its government is confident to initiate a very ambitious foreign policy which is also an effort to restart China's classical hegemony through the One Belt One Road (OBOR (Lowy Institute, 2017). B.R.I. was a colossal trading route across the world. From China as a starting line, through trans-continent routes. Modern B.R.I. will enchant

China's power in trading and foreign politics.

Along with the South China Sea dispute, the rhythm of globalization, especially in the major of trade, investment, and movement of people across global borders, had declined when President Donald Trump led the United States in 2017. A few months later, President Trump issued two detailed executive orders to increase import duties on products from China and conduct a review of trade policies towards countries with a trade surplus with the United States, including Indonesia. It is regarding the review of the fiscal facility - which was finally officially extended because after negotiating many times since 2018 regarding the extension of the G.S.P. facility (Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020). The two United States policies marked the climax of the escalation of the international trade war.

Lately, China's hegemony maneuver has become significantly massive since the fourth quarter of 2019. It began when a new virus attacks the human respiratory system called SARS-CoV-2. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak as a global pandemic (Tempo, 2020).

Although at the beginning suspected by the whole world as a COVID-19 mastermind subject, China has the capacity and capability to handle this virus. Vaccine, declared by WHO almost on every occasion, is the silver arrow to handle the spread of the virus. China has it. Every country needs a vaccine as soon as possible. No matter how much the efficacy, the vaccine is crucial to fulfilling as the number one priority. In the international relation context, this phenomenon makes vaccine value increase tremendously. COVID-19 vaccine had become one of the powerful instruments.

China and the United States are a few countries that can provide vaccines to the world in the short term. However, that short-term has a superb value regarding what COVID-19 caused to the world. From a peer-to-peer point of view, China could provide vaccines faster than the U.S. This comparative advantage can be exploited by a country such as the United States and China to gain the most significant possible advantage, especially in the political and economic fields such as trade.

This paper explains how China's diplomacy vaccine, when COVID-19 vaccine wanted by the world, can push their intention in ASEAN such as B.R.I. for the specific case, or on hegemonic

race in the general case with the United States. Vaccine distribution gaps were obtained from official data. In this paper, data from Statista is used as a time reference. Statista (2021) reported that China has already exported 250 million doses. The United States has just distributed 3 million doses in the same period.

That realization makes the author believe that China will become a winner in terms of vaccine diplomacy toward the United States. Everybody is against the time when facing a disease crisis. The risk we should take while waiting for vaccine availability will become bigger. COVID-19 pandemic is about people's health and people's lives in general.

The pandemic that led to tightening all of social activities suddenly had a massive side effect to almost all the aspects of life. Indonesia economy, for example, faced the impact with a growth contraction from 5.02 percent in 2019, to minus 2.07 percent in 2020 (Ministry of Finance, 2021). Globally, the massive impact on geo-economics due to the pandemic can be seen from the 2020 global economic growth statistics, which contracted 3.3 percent from positive growth of 2.3 percent in 2019.

As of May 10, 2021, U.S. News reported that only 11 countries had been completely untouched by the COVID-19 pandemic. The 11 countries are; the Cook Islands, Kiribati; Nauru; Nieu; Palau; the Pitcairn Islands, Tokelau; Tonga; Turkmenistan; Tuvalu; Micronesia (Kompas, 2021). Nevertheless, although there are pandemic survivors, those countries cannot survive either. Every country should be safe together in order to gain global recovery. That is the globalization order.

In this pandemic, everyone is racing against time. China has started exporting its vaccine at the end of 2020 until May 2021 to get through all ASEAN members. On the other hand, the United States took more than six months to deliver its vaccine to Southeast Asia. Six months gap, in this situation, is very crucial. The country that can provide the COVID-19 vaccine will get significant bargaining power. China can manage this chance to bolster its influence within ASEAN.

In the previous research subjecting hegemonic race in the Southeast Asian region, Arase (2010) mentioned that China greatly expands its cooperation in the non-traditional security sector to expand or even exceed the influence that the United States already had in the

Southeast Asian region. For example, in the economic and investment fields, China and ASEAN formed the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area (ACFTA) pact, fully enforced in 2010. Since 2001, China has also been noted to have cooperated in non-traditional security fields such as narcotics, maritime, health, and crime,. A competing multilateral donor to the World Bank, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), was established in 2016 (Lichtenstein, 2018).

This pandemic has awakened the importance of reviewing non-traditional world security and raising awareness of the impact of non-traditional security born due to the globalization era (Nihas, 2020).

In previous pandemic research such as H.I.V. and malaria, great power countries, especially the United States, handled the outbreak. As a country and agent of multilateralism, the U.S. took all the critical steps to health the world. The United States was also initiated a couple of innovative funding schemes that could invite funding sources from non-state actors such as philanthropy (Hotez, 2001).

According to Hofman (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic has become a new international diplomacy battlefield. The state of the pandemic has increased

to become a determinant of both countries in the global political arena. The United States attacked China as the ringleader of the COVID-19 pandemic by using the jargon as the Wuhan virus. This attack is undoubtedly intended to tarnish China's name globally. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Bamboo Curtain responded immediately by saying that this virus came from the United States, deliberately brought to Wuhan to end up in the country. Even geopolitical tensions were no less high when the folio pandemic occurred in 1950 between the United States and Russia during the cold war era.

Hofman underlined that every crisis phenomenon such as the COVID-19 pandemic has the opportunity to create a new shift in the balance of power. The geopolitical factor between the two major powers during the pandemic that hit in the modern era, such as starting with HIV-AIDS (2002), H5N1 (2009), SARS (2009), Ebola (2012), and COVID-19 (2020). This analysis is quite important to explain. After all, the superpowers significantly influence every international community, as Hofman obtained the results based on a historical approach. A global crisis like a pandemic will deal a more significant blow to non-

superpower countries. This pandemic is strongly predicted to increase global protectionism, hitting other security aspects such as the economy and other security aspects. Global health diplomacy has become one of the most critical aspects of China's foreign policy. China has been using health diplomacy as a soft power instrument in its foreign policy since 1949. President Deng Xiaoping (1978–1992), China has used comprehensive multichannel health diplomacy that includes both bilateral and multilateral medical and health cooperation. Under Xiaoping, Beijing has embarked on a new road to economic modernization and reoriented its foreign policy to heighten the diplomatic relations' with two essential characteristics' peace and development (Flavel & Medeiros 2003). Also, the Chinese foreign policy had stood for 'a low profile, do something and concentrating on establishing a favorable external climate for domestic economic growth (Chang, 1991).

China's stance changed since the severe acute respiratory syndrome—SARS (2003) outbreak, and its inability to handle the same had significantly dented its global image. Moreover, it had highlighted the significant shortcomings of China's healthcare system. In terms of the SARS pandemic

period, China has lost to more than US\$ 6.1 billion or gross domestic product (G.D.P.) contraction of about 0.5 percent in 2003. It had compelled the Chinese government to increase its budget on public health.

President Hu Jintao (2002–2012) had transformed China's health diplomacy with the tag line of 'Harmonious Society' (Goldizen, 2016). China has used the calls for 'peaceful development' and 'harmonious world' to project itself as a benevolent country in the post-SARS world. The same was substantiated by the argument of Goldizen (2016), who noted that China's improved preparedness had become evident, particularly in the context of effective control of the 2009 H1N1 epidemic and 2013 avian influenza outbreak (H7N9).

The paper assesses the character of China's vaccine diplomacy in the COVID-19 pandemic. It focuses on a critical point where China is predicted to be superior in the COVID-19 vaccine diplomacy race against the United States. The realization of vaccine supplies from China can be distributed to countries in need. China can distribute and even donate its vaccines, including in regions well within the spheres of influence of the United States. That gives China has a great

opportunity to increase its hegemonic influence (Segev & Lavi, 2021).

In the findings of Segev and Lavi, the new assessment is based on general data, namely the coverage of vaccine distribution in China and the United States. The author will continue the assessment to the Southeast ASIA regional scope. This research will attempt to describe how China and its rival – the United States- responded to managing the COVID-19 as a global pandemic to fulfill the gap of existing research about the health diplomacy of China and the United States Flavel, Medeiros, and Goldizen mentioned before.

Various dynamics, such as the maneuvers of the two countries in the vaccine diplomacy competition in Southeast Asia, will also be presented. The background of the time used as the background also starts from when the COVID-19 first outbreak until August 2021. In addition, the internal dynamics of state actors, such as China and the United States. Meanwhile, ASEAN country actors will be explained in general terms.

METHOD AND THEORY

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach. This method was chosen to

provide analytical exposure examining the causal relations between actions and the consequences. Various factors of current events, history, phenomena, and symptoms be explored and elaborated in such a way as to provide a clear picture of the purpose and proof of the topic of writing (Cresswell, 2014).

Meanwhile, the data collection technique in this article uses the literature study method. It includes a literature review with various aspects of the viewpoint ranging from culture and values to prevailing norms. The data will be summarized by sourced from books, documents, magazines, and other valid sources (Sugiyono, 2012). Methods and data collection based on security studies, hegemony, and regionalism. The research goal is to conclude based on the theory presented in the last chapter.

Theory

As Boediono (1981) mentioned, in any simple international trade activity where two countries transacting need each other without any difference in state power, the transaction cannot be considered equal to 100 percent. Only one country gets a more considerable advantage in every transaction, and a 50-50 advantage is almost impossible. This statement applies retroactively if bilateral transactions are carried out by

superpower countries that can provide vaccines that are silver arrows in dealing with the COVID-19 outbreak. The value of the vaccine is very high as a commodity.

Gramsci defines hegemony as "a condition in which the governed accepted authority without the need for the application of force. Hegemony is created from dominance and intellectual-moral leadership. This specific group must show leadership to form alliances and dominate others. China seeks to dominate and align with ASEAN regionalism in Southeast Asia. In the modern context, capitalism and globalization are used as the main institutional instruments, with the upper class as the leader against the lower class. There are several necessary prerequisites such as material capability, market structure, and willingness of the hegemon to become a leader (Cox, 1983).

The concept of hegemony also focused on the regional issue- ASEAN. Although the core definition of hegemony is dominant globally, applying this concept is also possible at the regional level. Because, before it can dominate completely, a hegemonic state needs to first ensure its hegemony at the regional level (Hurrell, 2006).

A hegemonic nation will have privilege as the global political leadership. According to Yan's, political leadership derives from an authority, capability, morality, and power. Understanding China's challenge to American hegemony of its cooptation abilities and the attractiveness of its governance model, rather than its coercive potential, the following segments focus on examining how this challenge manifested during the coronavirus pandemic using the sources of morality, capability, authority, and power. This paper examines how pandemic COVID-19 strengthens China's influence in ASEAN in terms of hegemonic race.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

China, the Victorious of Vaccine Diplomacy Against the United States

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an extraordinary effect in rapidly changing the world's awareness of a non-traditional security threat, namely health security. The massive impact caused by this virus can be seen from the 2020 global economic growth statistics, which contracted 3.3 percent from positive trend growth of 2.3 percent in 2019 (Kontan, 2021). Remmits and Sweijs (2020) described various security risks caused by the COVID-19

pandemic, such as the potential for political and socio-economic conditions, food security, business, investment, and military stability, which all directly affect society, such as poverty and even death.

It makes all countries strive to secure the supply of vaccines to at least resume socio-economic activities in the country. The sooner a country gets a vaccine, the faster efforts to recover from the impact of the pandemic. Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said that all countries in the world, without exception, were immediately trying to secure vaccine supply with the slogan "my country first." Furthermore, rivalry tensions are significantly reaching a climax, said Retno, occurring in big countries (Kompas, 2021).

All countries faced chaos in the first half of 2020 due to pandemics. When all countries, including China's arch-enemy, the United States, and the European Union, have implemented the "my country first" policy in terms of vaccines, China did the opposite way because China has a vaccine production capacity including a lot of raw materials supply. Indeed, every country put all the action to stabilize the domestic problem first with all costs. The vaccine is the only thing that can make the situation

better. The ones who got the vaccine faster will be the winner. Suisheng Zhao, who is also Director of the Center for China-US Cooperation from the University of Denver, United States (2021), said that China took this opportunity to win vaccine diplomacy against the United States, which somehow got the lucky chance instead of the pandemic:

"Many countries would prefer U.S. or EU-made Pfizer and Moderna vaccines over China's vaccines if given the choice, yet they cannot access them. These countries are desperate and have jumped at the opportunity to receive Chinese vaccines". "Vaccine diplomacy has helped China's influence and enabled it to capitalize on new opportunities. China has rolled vaccines out to participants of its Belt and Road Initiative and enhanced preferential access to jobs alongside investments in infrastructure and connectivity projects".

As silver arrow to eradicate the COVID-19 pandemic, the essential of the vaccine is very important for a country to rebounds all the problems. Just with the certainty of the availability of vaccines can boost nation confidence. Thus, a country can formulate a follow-up policy. Good sentiment thanks to vaccines also encourages the private sector to return to production. Moreover, the most important is, the vaccine can save people's lives.

Indonesia Composite Index on December 7, 2020, rose 2% when the first Sinovac shipment arrived in Indonesia one day before. COVID-19 vaccine, at least, can give some positive short term sentiment (Kontan, 2021). The author believes the same effect through all of ASEAN members.

China started its vaccine diplomacy in May 2020. President Xi Jinping said that Beijing would share the COVID-19 vaccine and prioritize helping developing countries. This statement was announced when Xi attended the 73rd session of the World Health Assembly (Xinhua, 2021). In October 2020, China joined the World Health Organization's (WHO) Covid-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) initiative to provide vaccine aid to developing countries.

These two China's statements give some confidence to non(yet)-producing vaccine there is a hope to manage the pandemic. China's vaccine diplomacy stated on its supply gives room to potential recipient countries to deal with Beijing to secure vaccines.

In the context of Southeast Asia, Indonesia became the first Southeast Asian country to receive three million doses of the Sinovac vaccine at the end of 2020. Cambodia (600 thousand doses), Laos (300 thousand doses),

Thailand (200 thousand doses), the Philippines (600 thousand doses), and Brunei Darussalam (unspecified) received vaccine shipments from China in February 2021 (Al Jazeera, 2021).

At the end of February, Malaysia received a shipment of 200,000 doses of vaccine from China (Xinhua, 2021). As for Singapore, in March 2021, it will bring in 200 thousand doses of vaccine (Straits Times, 2021). Myanmar became the last country to receive 500,000 doses of the vaccine from China in early May after being delayed from a scheduled date in February due to a military *coup d'etat* (CNBC Indonesia, 2021). After a long time of refusing China's vaccine, Vietnam finally began accepting Sinovac doses in June 2021 (Voanews, 2021). Besides vaccine donation, China also aggressively provides masks, personal protective equipment, and sending medical experts.

Despite the emergency, the Chinese vaccine is acceptable with ASEAN members, is relatively easy to store and transport at ordinary refrigeration temperatures, and is more straightforward and less expensive. As of the second week of May 2021, China has exported 252 million doses of its vaccine worldwide, with domestic absorption of approximately 345 million doses (People's Daily China, 2021).

When the world expects to sink into recession in the coming years, economic considerations will be significant for developing countries. They will lend an advantage to the Chinese vaccines. China's highly developed vaccine production capacity, combined with the logistical simplicity surrounding its vaccines, will increase the demand for these vaccines (Segev, 2021).

The Chinese state-owned enterprise Sinopharm obtained approval from the authorities in China on December 31, 2020, after its BBIBP-CorV vaccine demonstrated 79.34 percent effective in clinical trials. The vaccine is being examined by the WHO, whose support is essential for the regulatory agencies in various countries worldwide. A decision on the matter is expected in early March (Segev & Lavi, 2021). The vaccine developed by another Chinese company, Sinovac, got efficacy rates varying between 50 and 91 percent.

However, the Chinese companies have already undertaken to supply 400 million vaccine doses to other countries at the same source. Therefore, it appears that although Chinese policy is usually motivated by internal considerations, China is giving priority to external considerations over its internal

considerations. China portrays the supply of its vaccines as a humanitarian measure, under the motto, "No one should be left behind," while taking strong measures in the face of local outbreaks.

At the same time, China since 2016 has been increasingly providing loan relief for B.R.I. participating countries. More than US\$ 520 billion to 150 countries AIIB members have been distributed by the Chinese government. The loan guarantee is an instrument for ensuring that infrastructure supporting projects such as airports, ports, access roads in these countries continue to run. The main reason is that all of the B.R.I. participating countries, which are developing countries, faced financial crises handling domestic pandemics (Mouritz, 2020).

Therefore, the outbreak of the novel coronavirus pandemic paves the new roads for China's global health diplomacy, which is a rhetorical extension of its Belt and Road Initiative. Not only targeted developing countries, China also has been providing medical aid to many countries, including the United States, under its global health diplomacy to recast itself as a responsible global health leader (Gauttam, Singh, and Kaur, 2020).

Until this research is finished, there is no detailed open-source information about new B.R.I. project lending in ASEAN. However, AIIB President Jin Liqun did not deny that the agency still gives new B.R.I. project funds in 2020 with or without COVID-19 consideration, including ASEAN members. According to his statement, Liqun argued that AIIB makes sure not to lend to countries whose debt ratios are worrying. Because it could kill the country, AIIB is willing to finance developing countries every time. The institution will pay great attention to that issue. AIIB has its calculation of this loan, not a burden for them. The key to solving this epidemic is cooperation. That is why AIIB emphasizes one pillar consideration about debt transparency. Liqun also said B.R.I. is an international platform that allows anyone to join. The mandate of President XI is that anyone can join and benefit. Moreover, the essential point is that AIIB is not picky about the projects. It is entirely the decision of all member countries that apply (PIIE, 2021).

As previously mentioned, China can use vaccine diplomacy to increase its influence in terms of the non-traditional security aspects in Southeast Asia with a 76.3% ratio. According to Yusof Ishak Institute periodically survey named The

State of Southeast Asia 2021 edition highlights distribution vaccines as one primary consideration for China to boost trust from ASEAN countries (Seah, et al., 2021).

The United States Missed the Golden Change to Rebalance Chinese Maneuver

The United States' dynamics reflected opposite way from China. In the first half of 2020, the United States made a shocking policy. Washington considers the WHO not as transparent as China to manage the pandemic. This shocking maneuver continued as the United States withdrew from WHO membership as of July 8, 2020, and took effect on June 6, 2021 (Time, 2020).

The decision inflicts big worry from the global community because the U.S. contributed \$893 million—15% of the entire budget and more than twice as much as any other country during the WHO's latest funding cycle. The withdrawal from the WHO was rich with symbolism — another instance of America's go-it-alone strategy under Trump. However, it also had practical ramifications. The U.S. halted funding for the U.N. health agency — stripping it of cash from the country that has long been its biggest donor just as the agency was battling the health crisis that has

killed more than 2 million people worldwide. The U.S. had also pulled back staff from the organization.

With the withdrawal of the United States, the world is worried that the role of this international organization - one of the values that the United States has always held - will not be conducive to overcoming the pandemic. Especially in that period, there was no vaccine that available.

The implication was that the role of international organizations such as the World Health Organization at the beginning of the pandemic was considered by the global community not doing well. WHO was initially rejected by the Chinese government when sending its investigation task force team. That could justify the United States' accusation that China deliberately created this pandemic. However, after receiving strong criticism from the global community, China finally allowed a team of WHO experts to conduct independent research in Wuhan (Jakarta Post, 2021).

Six months after the withdrawal statement, after President Joe Biden's inauguration in January, the new administration wrote a letter to U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres saying the U.S. had reversed the planned pullout from the WHO that was

expected to take effect in July (APnews, 2021).

Regarding COVID-19 vaccine production, the United States pharmacy private company needed more time fulfilling all mandatory authorization. The value of sustainability and good governance relation between the regulatory and private sectors has been the United States' value since long ago. Oppositely, China has more authorization to cut the bureaucracy. That is, of course, the matter of ideology.

In fact, in the beginning, the United States vaccine export was very competitive alongside Chinese products. Singapore was the country in Southeast Asia that received the arrival of the Pfizer vaccine on December 21, 2020 (Channel News Asia, 2020). The next shipment was recorded in Malaysia in the third week of February with 312,390 doses (Malay Mail, 2021).

The United States faced two main problems with providing vaccines to other countries. First, the United States uses a different domestic approach to secure vaccines for domestic. Joe Biden boosted vaccine procurement by more than 300 million doses. Thus, that turned out, Pfizer should prioritize the majority of its products for the government. Biden has allowed Pfizer

to refocus its export vaccines worldwide since June 2021 (Bloomberg, 2021). However, in May, China announced that it had administered 546 million COVID-19 vaccine doses or 19.5% of its population. China has administered nearly twice as many doses as the U.S., which ranks second globally with 289 million COVID-19 vaccine shots injected into American peoples.

This delay makes the United States and China vaccine diplomacy have a very different result. The Chinese Vaccines have become a reasonable substitute for ASEAN countries. Pfizer vaccine was recorded in Malaysia in the third week of February with 312,390 doses (Malay Mail, 2021). Malaysia and Singapore are the only countries in ASEAN that got the Pfizer vaccine on the first batch. The other ASEAN member, such as Indonesia, received the American vaccine on August 19, 2021.

The second is, the American vaccine requires special and more expensive storage and transportation. However, the Chinese vaccine is relatively easy to store and transport at ordinary refrigeration temperatures, which is easy to afford and cheaper. Therefore, the Western companies' vaccines are suitable for developed countries that can afford the high

storage and transportation costs. In contrast, the Chinese companies have so far sent vaccines to developing countries in Central Asia, South America, and Africa, who are willing – or forced – to settle for a merely "adequate" vaccine. As the author mentioned before, everybody will not mind technology even though the Chinese vaccine efficacy rate is just 1%, still a massive advantage over nothing.

The United States' capability to produce the COVID-19 vaccine is so much better now. However, on the other hand, China's productivity is getting more advanced. In early August 2021, Biden said that the country had donated more than 100 million doses to 65 countries. China has reached what the United States did in April 2021. As a peer comparison, As of August 2021, China has donated more than 304,9 million doses to the Asia Pacific. While the United States got 23,8 million. This year, China aims to provide more than 2 billion doses (Globaltimes, 2021).

Washington also had an efficacy problem. The figures come about one month behind the White House's June goal of delivering 80 million doses overseas, part of a greater vaccine-donation drive in the coming months. In addition, U.S. producers are also increasing prices for their products

while the shots are becoming more urgently needed amid the rampaging Delta variant, putting more pressure and worries on developing countries seeking access to vaccines.

Pfizer has raised the price of its COVID-19 vaccine by more than one-quarter and Moderna by more than one-tenth in the latest E.U. supply contracts, as Europe battled supply disruptions and concerns over side effects from rival products, Financial Times reported on August 1. That is why the ASEAN member's confidence toward the United States about its non-securities role toward ASEAN ratio is just 7.4% of confidence rate (Seah, et al., 2021).

The Chinese vaccine has indeed had considerable doubt about its efficacy until now. Beijing, of course, realizes too. Based on that dynamic, China has improved its vaccine capability and capacity. Chinese vaccine makers Sinovac and Sinopharm have announced the opening of new manufacturing facilities in China and abroad, potentially easing some of the supply squeeze (Fortune, 2021).

Several ASEAN members such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand have become China's strategic partners to localize the Sinovac vaccine since early 2021. Since getting

regulatory approval in April, the locally fill-and-finish Sinovac jabs. According to the manager, they have completed some 14 million doses ahead of schedule as of July. Manufacturing Head of Pharmaniaga Life Sciences Mohd Saharuddin said the cooperation with Sinovac and its willingness to be engaging and open in technology transfer enables Pharmaniaga to successfully build its CoronaVac operation on the Chinese technology and expertise on human vaccines (CCTV, 2021).

The Race Still Long Way to Finish, but Will More Intense After Pandemic

It is so clear, in the geopolitical dynamics that occurred in Southeast Asia during the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of the United States was less visible in playing its role as a superpower. China takes more control and initiatives to help Southeast Asia cope with COVID-19. The United States does not mean a prominent role. Washington is very active in Southeast Asia in confronting China, which remains aggressive in the South China Sea when all countries struggle with the pandemic. The tensions in the South China Sea are quite high, as seen from the United States armed forces, who are

on full alert in the South China Sea in the Philippines.

In the first 100 days of Biden's presidency, a congress meeting held on April 29, 2021, President Joe Biden said competition with China was one of his cabinet's main programs for the next four years (Nikkei Asia, 2021). It is because that the South China Sea symbolizes China's hegemony in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, Biden also stated that the United States exports vaccines to those needed as soon as possible. Biden said that the competition is based on fair competition to avoid open conflict.

Chen Xiangmiao (Global Times, 2021) argues that the United States has turned the current edition of hegemonic competition the same as the previous cold war. It can be seen how the United States recalled allied countries to fight together. Allied countries have responded to this call. The United States is on full alert in the South China Sea, especially in the Philippines.

Allied countries from Asia, such as Japan and Australia, had already been prepared at the disputed zone. Britain also sent one of its flagship warships H.M.S. Queen Elizabeth (Asia Times, 2021). Previously, some other western allies, such as France and Germany, had also been in Southeast Asia to enforce

the 2016 UNCLOS decision in favor of the Philippines against China's territorial claims.

Because of its sophisticated vaccine diplomacy to provide vaccine belt road in Southeast Asia, China should get the price, the B.R.I., and the South China Sea. However, it does not just happen. The countries involved in the South China Sea disputes, such as the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, and Vietnam, still show resistance.

The Philippines, for example, even though it has received more than a million doses of vaccine from China, still shows resistance to Chinese military activities in its waters. Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte declared his objection to China's aggressive maneuver. In response, the Philippine and United States military agreed to hold a joint exercise in the Leizhou Peninsula area for two weeks (CNBC Indonesia, 2021).

Duterte said that his country owes a lot to China for getting a free COVID-19 vaccine, but he does not tolerate any violation of the sovereignty of its maritime territory (The Diplomat, 2021). As is known, the Philippines has won UNCLOS in 2016 over the Nine-Dash Line's claim as a traditional Chinese fishing waters area.

Brunei Darussalam has yet to show a firm stance between accepting or rejecting China's claims. On April 4, 2021, Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah attended The Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2021 in China. Although B.R.I. could boost the regional economy, the decision would be submitted to the BIMP-EAGA (The Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippine East ASEAN Growth Area) forum (Xinhua, 2021). Meanwhile, Vietnam has been firm from the start not to accept China's vaccine assistance because of the South China Sea dispute.

In early April, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Malaysian Foreign Minister Hishammuddin Hussein established communications to strengthen bilateral relations. One of five critical points that agreed on that meeting is that the two countries agreed to strengthen relations in the health sector related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the South China Sea dispute. The following is an excerpt from the official press release of the two countries regarding the South China Sea (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2021):

Fourth, we need to jointly maintain peace and stability of the South China Sea. As important coastal countries of the South China Sea, China and Malaysia agree on the reinforcement of marine dialogue and

cooperation and proper management of differences. We need to continue to strengthen our determination and overcome interruptions, fully implement the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, create enabling conditions amid the pandemic and promote offline consultations on the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea in a flexible manner. The two sides agree to formulate substantive and effective rules which are consistent with international law including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea at an early date, in order to better maintain peace and stability of the South China Sea.

China changes its strategies with the soft power approach strategy to persuade ASEAN members. In his opening speech of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2021 (People's Daily Online, 2021), President Xi Jinping stated that his country's stance would act softly to deal with the South China Sea dispute. Xi said the B.R.I. initiative, the head of a polemic in the South China Sea, would be open to all parties, not just one particular party. The party referred to in this case is China. Xi also said his country would not seek hegemony, expansion, or influence no matter how much it grows.

In China's case, with ASEAN in particular towards Brunei Darussalam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, and

Indonesia have one platform to resolve the South China Sea polemic through the code of conduct or C.O.C., which is planned to be finalized by the end of 2021. ASEAN, the last discussion of the C.O.C. occurred at the ASEAN Regional Forum at the Minister of Foreign Affairs level in August 2020 (The Diplomat, 2020). Nevertheless, at the ASEAN Leaders' Meeting held in Jakarta on April 24, 2021, the regionalism of Southeast Asia just focused on the problem of the current pandemic and human rights issues due to the military *coup d'état* in Myanmar (ASEAN Secretariat, 2021).

The South China Sea C.O.C. is believed to have great significance for the hegemonic race. However, the C.O.C. will not be completed this year because the pandemic makes meetings as necessary as the South China Sea discussion, which requires face-to-face meetings difficult (Straits Times, 2021).

China's aggressiveness in the South China Sea might be debatable, which led to a charioteer discussion. China tries hard to claim the South China Sea to symbolize hegemonic superiority in Southeast Asia. Even though being counter international rule in the South China Sea, this kind of selfishness, we may say, is a characteristic of a hegemonic nation. Because they can, or

at least believe so, to achieve that price. Furthermore, China must maintain its reputation for never losing in sovereignty disputes (Jemadu, 2017).

The assumption is that the state of hegemonic race post-pandemic era will have an atmosphere like a cold war. In terms of maneuvers of those countries, Mahbubani argued that the United States would act like the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, China will act like the United States (Mahbubani, 2020). It means that China will seek a flexible approach without imposing China's values to be applied to ASEAN as seen in the vaccine diplomacy competition. Meanwhile, the United States prioritizes military strength and united value, which later turns into specific multilateralism with its best allies such as the European Union, Japan, and Australia (Global Times, 2021).

Lately, Mahbubani prediction has started showing some results. The United States has initiated a specific security triangle partnership with the United Kingdom, and Australia called AUKUS on September 2021. The deal will see the U.S. and U.K. give Australia the technology to build nuclear-powered submarines for the first time. It is widely viewed to counter China's influence in the South China Sea (B.B.C., 2021). At the same time, China

has shown great flexibility. In September, Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao submitted China's application to join the free trade agreement, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). The CPTPP was signed by 11 countries, including Australia, Canada, Chile, Japan, and New Zealand, in 2018. This trade pact is a rival pact followed by China, namely Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. RCEP is a free trade agreement (F.T.A.) between the ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam) and its six F.T.A. partners Australia, China, South Korea, China, Japan and New Zealand (Reuters, 2021). The new dynamics coincided with China's hegemony and the South China Sea.

CONCLUSION

Indeed, China's victorious vaccine diplomacy in ASEAN against the United States cannot have any immediate impact. However, this move has resulted in an essential investment for China in the medium and long term. It is unclear when ASEAN and China agree on the South China Sea C.O.C.

draft. The new two trade pacts, RCEP and CPTPP, still need more time to be adjusted.

As Gramsci mentioned, China has proved its material capability and willingness of hegemony in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, China also meets all requirements as a hegemon country based on Yan's theory of authority, capability, morality, and power. In the COVID-19 context, China has proved its capability to manage pandemics not only for domestic but for the world faster than the other that shows in its vaccine diplomacy in terms of Yan authority, capability, and power discourse. China's labeling of its vaccine as a public good and its consistent participation in multilateral schemes was the image of China's morality.

The result of successfully vaccine diplomacy gave China some prestigious value-added about its power in general. As we know, the global issue that occurred before the COVID-19 pandemic was the trade war. It happened because the United States was in the form of improving its trade balance, which turned out to be a deficit of more than US\$ 106 billion in the 2017 fiscal year.

It prompted U.S. President Donald Trump to issue a policy of trade protectionism against import tariffs on

several products from China, such as iron and aluminum, to gain coffers. - other coffers for the country amounting to more than US\$ 50 billion (Pujayanti, 2019). These dynamics indicate that China's industry and trade have emerged as one of the most significant powers in the world. China succeeds in dealing with the capitalist system and globalization order of Gramsci.

If we look back on what happened in the COVID-19 pandemic, China has re-established itself as one of the leading actors in the international arena. China's government can provide aid to other countries. It includes vaccine donations and provides long-term vaccine loans bilaterally through AIIB multilateralism institutions. The meaning of superpower that leads to hegemony must be owned by a country that has the flexibility to show off at any time.

China's position in the trade war and COVID-19 pandemic could be recognized as surpassing the United States, conveying that China is a strong country. Moreover, the historical record of how the United States can become a Super Power country must go through a long process. Violating the sovereignty of a country with a unilateral claim is indeed an act that cannot be justified. ASEAN certainly needs to demand China to respect ASEAN's sovereignty

in the South China Sea. However, rejecting China is also not a wise move.

Due to globalization, the world is highly connected with very complex patterns. The COVID-19 pandemic also reminds us of how massive we must pay if the flow of globalization stops. In addition, the B.R.I. made by China also holds great potential for the expansion and intensification of trade access, which is very potential considering that there are 600 million middle-class markets in ASEAN and 600 million middle classes in mainland China.

The difference between the United States and the Soviet Union's two hegemonies and the China-United States are very different. In the current modern hegemony race, those two countries have a high and complex level of bilateral interdependence. It ranges from interdependence in trade, investment, social, and other complex variables. War is not a choice anymore. Thus, it is unsurprisingly that the competition between China and the United States will continue for the next three to five decades.

As a comparison, the duration of the last hegemonic race between the United States and the Soviet Union took 44 years of the cold war between 1947-1991. The winner can be seen if one country collapses or is accepted as the

sole hegemonic volunteer by the world community. China improving influence in Southeast Asia during the COVID-19 pandemic is interesting. However, it would be unwise to assume that China was already crossing the finish line. It is interesting to see the progress of the actors in dealing with current mitigating conditions and in dealing with crises that will continue to come in the future.

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