A Fractured Global Health Governance:
China Steps Up in Global Health Leadership?

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Abstract

This paper discusses the increasing role of China and its rivalry with the United States in global health governance. COVID-19 has presented new challenges in the domain of global health, marked by the debate between unilateral and multilateral approaches to dealing with the pandemic. US declining role poses a threat to the spirit of multilateralism and the prospects for global health governance. When global health governance is on the brink of collapse, China upholds a multilateral approach to lead collective action to defeat the virus. This research utilizes qualitative research method and literature study to collect research data sourced from secondary data sources. Using the concept of rising powers in the realm of global health governance, the results of this study show that the pandemic has offered China a strategic opportunity to fill a leadership vacuum. It has also improved its global position by providing the world with much-needed information and medical supplies. The active contribution of China to global health governance may enhance its global image and legitimacy, build relationships and friendships, emphasize the Peaceful Rise narrative, and support the Health Silk Road project.

Keywords: Pandemic, Governance, Leadership, WHO, COVID-19, China.

Abstrak

Tulisan ini membahas mengenai meningkatnya peran Tiongkok dan rivalitasnya dengan Amerika Serikat dalam tata kelola kesehatan global. COVID-19 telah memberikan tantangan baru dalam domain tata kelola kesehatan global, yang ditandai dengan perdebatan antara pendekatan unilateral dan multilateral dalam menghadapi pandemi. Penurunan peran AS memberikan ancaman bagi semangat multilateralisme dan prospek tata kelola kesehatan global. Pada saat tata kelola kesehatan global di ambang kehancuran, Cina hadir dengan pendekatan multilateral-nya untuk memimpin aksi kolektif mengalahkan pandemi. Penelitian ini memanfaatkan metode analisis kualitatif dan studi literatur untuk mengumpulkan data penelitian yang bersumber dari sumber data sekunder. Dengan menggunakan konsepsi rising powers di ranah tata kelola kesehatan global, hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pandemi COVID-19 telah menawarkan Cina kesempatan strategis untuk mengisi kekosongan kepemimpinan dan meningkatkan posisi globalnya dengan menyediakan informasi maupun persediaan medis yang sangat dibutuhkan dunia. Partisipasi aktif Cina dalam tata kelola kesehatan global dapat meningkatkan citra dan legitimasi global, membangun relasi dan menciptakan persahabatan, menekankan narasi kebangkitan damai, hingga menyokong proyek Health Silk Road.

Kata kunci: Pandemi, Tata-kelola, Kepemimpinan, WHO, COVID-19, Cina.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has brought changes in global health and disease patterns that affect the basis for decision-making regarding global health prospects. The COVID-19 pandemic has been felt like the most significant global health crisis in

modern times. The effect of the current global pandemic has been regarded as a potential moment for changes in the dynamics of international politics. Since its emergence in Wuhan – China, COVID-19 has significantly influenced the world order and dynamics in international relations, posing severe challenges to global socio-economic growth, hindering the flow of globalization, and increasing competition between great powers. No one could imagine how COVID-19 will develop in the future; however, many researchers believe that COVID-19 has a long-term impact on politics, especially as it relates to global power transitions and global health governance.

The global crisis may be an opportunity for global cooperation. However, in reality, the crisis has pushed the world into chaos and division. The COVID-19 is a severe transnational issue, and the war against it depends on global health governance. To date, there has been no substantive breakthrough or sustainable progress of global health governance (Jiemian, 2020). In addition, global health governance has been on the brink of collapse due to the emergence of a heated debate between the multilateral and unilateral order. So, it can be seen that global threats are increasing, global governance deficits are increasing, and there is a pessimism in constructing collective mechanisms. In fact, as a world health agency, the World Health Organization (WHO) has fallen into the international political contestation and cannot play its full role. Moreover, even some of the most prominent international institutions, such as the United Nations (UN) and Group of Twenty (G20), have exposed their weaknesses as the leading

global governance actor. Jiemian (2020) mentions that several crises caused by COVID-19 are another manifestation of global governance's severe failure.

The two great powers, China and the United States (US), collaborated well on prior crisis management, enhancing their mutual trust and contributing significantly to world peace and stability. However, there was a sharp decline in China-US relations because they were both facings during the trade war. The international community hopes the COVID-19 should have been used as an opportunity for China and the US to work together. Still, this crisis has resulted in confrontation, distrust, and discord between the two sides, directly threatening economic globalization and hindering efforts to manage global health.

Even though the US is the sole hegemon to its high capability and power in the domestic-international political sphere, ironically, the US is also one of the countries most affected by COVID-19. Through this, it can be seen that the lack of a US strategy to combat COVID-19 nationally has demonstrated incapability to prioritize its international role during crisis periods and calls into question the legitimacy of the current global democratic model as a whole (Hamovitz, 2021). The US appears to be more focused on home affairs, which has resulted in its decline in leadership on global health governance. In fact, in President Donald Trump's administration, the US consistently only cared about its national interests, neglected its international commitments, and chose to leave its position as the leader in some of the international institutions (Jiemian, 2020). US reluctant approach to dealing with the current global health

crisis is a sign of its intention to withdraw from global affairs. Similarly, the prospect of global health governance is in peril, primarily due to declining US commitments.

So far, the US has relied on its ideology to strengthen global domination through its worldwide influence; unfortunately, these efforts failed. The slogan *'Make America Great Again'* doesn't just reflect that the US is no longer great. However, it also reflects the self-centricity shown through its efforts to abdicate responsibility for global health and withdraw from global governance (Gostin et al., 2020). During President Trump's administration, the US has launched numerous attacks on the WHO leadership and is seeking to withdraw from the WHO completely. Without US support, global efforts to deal with the pandemic will certainly face limitations. Cutting funding to WHO and avoiding collective action during a pandemic will hinder the globally effective and efficient response. By that, the current health crisis has also has revealed the status of the world's health governance and sparked a geopolitical debate about the world's power transition (Gauttam, Priya, Bawa Singh, 2020). The US-China rivalry has become an interesting area of research for international relations academics.

Although this rivalry has been going on for a long time, the global crisis has increased tensions between the two countries. Previous studies attempt to describe the rivalry between the US-China amid the COVID-19 pandemic, such as Dunford and Qi (2020) study entitled "Global Reset: COVID-19, Systemic Rivalry and the Global Order." In his research, Dunford & Qi (2020) discusses; (1) the relative significance of meritocratic and liberal governance systems in dealing with global health and financial crisis; (2) determines the significances that lead to the transition of the unipolar to multipolar global order; and (3) recognizes the importance of global cooperation during a pandemic. The COVID-19 will rev trends toward a 'global reset,' a transformation in the center of economic gravity to Asia, and developments toward a multipolar world order (Dunford & Qi, 2020).

The US-China rivalry during the pandemic is also framed by Riham Bahi (2021) in his writing entitled "The Geopolitics of COVID-19: US-China Rivalry and the Imminent Kindleberger Trap," which discusses the collapse of global cooperation amid the COVID-19 crisis. This paper also emphasizes that the US has left its role in leading international collective efforts amid the COVID-19 pandemic as a traditional leader. During the crisis, the absence of leadership at the global level has led to the breakdown of the international order (Bahi, 2021).

In addition, Joseph Nye (2020) also provides an overview of the post-COVID-19 world order, primarily influenced by China's rise. First, (Nye, 2020) focuses on the declining position of the US as the leader of the international community, which at the same time indicates the end of the global liberal order. Second, China will increasingly engage in a global collective approach and establish new global rules and norms (Nye, 2020). Third, Nye (2020) describes a world order dominated by China, in which China will be able to close the economic gap between itself and the US.

In general, according to Morton (2017), it can be understood that leadership

is crucial, mostly during international crises, strategic vulnerabilities, or even the conditions of instability. However, the specific political leadership structure needed to consolidate cooperative movements during the shift is still not sufficiently comprehended. When power competition intensifies, especially between the US and China, this has sparked concerns about the prospects for international cooperation, which will gradually decline.

Through the explanation above, the vacuum of power is very likely to emerge as a consequence of increasing various global health challenges amidst COVID-19. The author of this paper acknowledges that several articles have pointed to the increasing role of China in global health governance (Genevaz, 2021; Qi, 2021; Zha, 2021). However, those articles do not elaborate further on the correlation between China's increasing role in global health governance and its rising power interests. Therefore, this paper aims to examine China's role in global health governance amid the COVID-19 pandemic and to see how far it relates to China's interests in its rising situation. Moreover, the inadequacy of literature raises the urgency to examine more regarding the strategic interests behind the rising power agenda in the domain of global health governance.

METHOD AND THEORY
Method

This study uses secondary data sources from journals, books, articles in books, white papers, and publications carried out by credible institutions and think-tanks and other references that correlate with the topic under study. In answering the problem formulation and achieving the objectives of this study, the researcher used qualitative analysis techniques that emphasized the author's interpretation of the data sources that had been obtained. The author also takes advantage of the conceptual framework that has been formulated with the aim of translating the data obtained to prove the hypothesis that has been made.

Theory

The end of the Cold War period between the US and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) have marked a transitional era of global governance. Twenty years later, there is still a lack of consensus on the allocation and enforcement of power in this multipolar world (Tank, 2012). However, various new powers have emerged seeking a global political role in their increasing economic influence (Tank, 2012). Countries that have significant rapid economic development, political influence in the world order, cultural influence, and military power are classified as rising powers or new powers (Tank, 2012).

Rising powers will change power dynamics in the international system by pursuing voice, exerting significant influence in international organizations or institutions, and creating political ties through regionalism. When rising powers evolve to be a reliable actor in certain international institutions, rising powers will insist on reforms in the global governance structure, therewithal contesting the current order (Lisk & Šehović, 2020). Given this, the discussions regarding rising powers and global governance have become predominant themes in international relations.

This paper focuses on global governance with the domain of health; health is indeed a 'global' phenomenon that affects the well-being of the whole world, especially amid the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there are very few in-depth narratives and research on global health governance amid the current urgency. Viewing global health as related to global governance, Kickbusch (2006) describes *global health* as those health matters that exceed nationwide borders and call for efforts on the global forces and flows that determine people's health. At the national and international levels, the government seeks to involve a broad scope of actors. Many countries identify global health as one of the primary goals of foreign policy (Gagnon & Labonté, 2013). In addition, international organizations, international institutions, private businesses, to philanthropists have viewed the prospect of global health as a top priority.

With regard to global governance, Lee et al., (2002) explained that global health governance directs to a framework of international norms, rules, and principles that determine and construct how the global community makes and implements collective decisions (global health policies) to react to global health issues and challenges.

Fidler (2010) describes global health governance as using formal-informal institutions, regulations, and processes by states and non-state actors to deal with global health challenges that demand cooperative effort to manage them effectively. Linking rising power to global health governance, Cooper et al., (2007) explained that the growing influence of rising powers on the global health

architecture could result in global governance that looks very different from before.

The diplomatic approach to health and global health governance allows rising powers to take a maximum position in exploiting and presenting innovations in global governance (Kickbusch & Szabo, 2014). Lisk & Šehović (2020) explain that soft power diplomacy carried out by rising powers in global health can include providing access to essential medicines, vaccines, economic and financial assistance, to human security. This case defines that the global health landscape emphasizes diplomacy, cooperation, and partnership (Husain & Bloom, 2020).

As agents of change in the world order, the rising powers use soft-power diplomacy and innovations in international development cooperation to influence global health governance. Rising powers seek to increase their influence and existence in multilateral global institutions that aim to gain legitimacy and achieve national interests from their active involvement in the international environment (Lisk & Šehović, 2020). It is essential to see and assess the role of rising powers in contemporary global health architecture, especially in anticipating and explaining emerging health challenges and how rising powers benefit from their role in this domain.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

The Increasing Role of China in Global Health Governance

China's attitude towards global health governance institutions began to shift since the 1990s (Youde, 2018). This change also occurred because the government began to develop a sense of

accountability, a desire to promote a responsible global society, a new commitment to the international system, and recognition of the importance of human security and non-traditional security. Youde (2018) also cites Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) as one impetus for China's further involvement in global health governance. At the beginning of the pandemic outbreak, the government of China was forced to shut down Hubei province and quarantined critical areas in the region, including the city of Wuhan (Smith & Fallon, 2020). Not only in Wuhan and Hubei, but large parts of China were also quarantined, and restrictions were tightened to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Even though COVID-19 might sound like a nightmare for China, some argue that the rapid transformation of COVID-19 from an epidemic into a global pandemic is, in fact, a possible 'game changer' for China. Even though initially heavily criticized during the initial handling of the virus, China managed to contain the spread of the virus in less than two months, looks pretty remarkable compared to European countries and the US. In fact, after successfully dealing with COVID-19, China has taken steps to revive its economy and increase its productivity (McMorrow, 2020).

Although China's model for fighting COVID-19 is neither easy nor realistic for some states to follow, China is yet the primary source of information, considering that China has been the first country to deal with the outbreak. China has also been vigorously sharing experiences in their success in handling COVID-19, especially in ensuring the appropriateness of medical facilities and quarantine management, with officials and experts

worldwide via online conferences (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2020). China has effectively shifted the discourse from 'struggling China' ("Come on China" [*Zhongguo zhiyuan*]) to a discourse of 'Chinese support' ("China supports" [*Zhongguo zhiyuan*]) (Smith & Fallon, 2020).

First, China's significant influence in global health governance is reflected in China's enthusiasm to actively contribute to the WHO, several international institutions and organizations, which from the very beginning, China has reported on all epidemic developments and control measures (Jiemian, 2020). When China began to create domestic stability, China began to provide aid and assistance in various forms to other countries, WHO, and even other related UN bodies.

From the very start of the outbreak, China shows the world that China has embraced global solidarity and collaboration in responding to the pandemic, with the principles of truthfulness, openness, and vigorous participation. Chinese government recognizes the value of participation in global health governance. It has taken steps to demonstrate that China is ready to embrace some of the values, norms, and expectations in the international community's global health governance architecture.

Even at the international conference like the G20 summit, President Xi Jinping declared that China would be more than prepared to fight the pandemic. President Xi also sent a response note to WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, that:

"…humanity is a community with a shared future…China will continue to work with WHO and other countries and contribute to upholding global public health security" (President Xi in Jiemian, 2020).

With this statement, China has also invested a lot of medical aid and financial support into anti-epidemic associations worldwide. Rudolf (2021) stated that the Chinese leadership wants to be interpreted as a "responsible great power" in both a multilateral and bilateral approach to dealing with the pandemic. In fact, on May 18, 2020, Xi Jinping, in his speech, announced to WHO that China would provide affordable vaccines to the world as a "global public good" (Rudolf, 2021). China has also joined the COVAX vaccine platform, initiated by the United Nations (UN), intending to ensure a fair distribution of vaccines globally.

In addition, China has also criticized the withdrawal of US funds, noting that such action would weaken WHO's capacities (Gauttam, Priya, Bawa Singh, 2020). Following the US withdrawal from WHO, WHO will survive a short-term US funding freeze, as other donors will help compensate for financial gaps during the pandemic. After Trump first announced a freeze on US funds in mid-April 2020, China provided an additional $30 million for the global pandemic response, nearly the same amount the US initially contributed to the effort (Shih, 2020). Since then, China has also pledged $2 billion over two years to fight the pandemic with WHO (Rudolf, 2021). If the US fails to donate voluntary funds to WHO, the US will have a relatively more minor influence on the policy-making process at the agency. If the US does not pay or break its relationship with the WHO, the US will lose its voting rights. Thus, Trump's plan to leave the WHO has enabled China to develop its power and influence within the institution. Table 1. shows the help that China has delivered to the international community:

Table 1. China's Official Assistant to Global Anti-Pandemic Efforts

Material Supplying	• Assisted WHO in purchasing personal protective equipment and establishing reserve centres of supplies in China; • Contributed in WHO's "Access to COVID-19 Tool Accelerator" Initiatives, aiming to speed up the production, distribution and development of new tools; Shipped protective materials to 200 countries; • About 70.6 billion masks and 340 million protective suits; • About 96,700 ventilators and 115 million pairs of goggles; • About 40.29 million infrared thermometers and 225 million tests kits.
Cash Support	• Donated $2 billion to the international community within 2 years; • Two batches of support totalling $50 million to the WHO; • Helped WHO's COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund to raise funds in China;
Capacity Building	• Sent 29 medical expert teams to 27 countries; • Medical units stationed in 56 countries helped the national fight, delivering health information and counselling to local people and overseas Chinese; • Organizing over 400 online and offline training sessions.

Source: (Song, 2021).

Before COVID-19, observers had seen increased cooperation between WHO and China, from the Health Silk Road (HSR) initiative to its full backing for WHO's

mission to achieve universal health by 2030. This refers to the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Health Sector Cooperation under the HSR initiative signed by China and WHO in January 2017 (Rudolf, 2021). In fact, in August 2017, various officials from many countries, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations signed the Beijing Communiqué on Health Cooperation in Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and HSR, which summarized the fundamental elements of China's BRI health policy.

The administration of President Xi also frequently highlighted the significance of constructing a society with a shared future for humankind. President Xi's various speeches at international forums also emphasized China's leadership to be in a prominent position in regards to global affairs, supported by rhetorical innovations, like forming a "global community of common destiny" (Husain & Bloom, 2020). China reflects its spirit of multilateralism and global health governance through strengthening bilateral and regional partnerships, especially with 17 Eastern European Countries (CEECs), ASEAN and China-Japan-South Korea, Russia, and European countries.

Given the global pandemic and the power vacuum in global health governance, China has provided a significant opportunity to increase further its role and influence in the global health domain.

Second, China is also expanding its bilateral health cooperation amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, China focuses on distributing medical equipment and providing information, strategies, and mechanisms to combat coronavirus in more

than 150 countries while enabling its strategic achievements (Kurtzer & Gonzales, 2020). These extensive bilateral relations are shown by China's assistance in sending its expert medical team to several countries in Europe, Africa, and Asia. The Chinese medical team will focus on communicating interactively with local medical teams, providing information related to controlling COVID-19, and sharing experiences in treating patients.

China claims that the action is humanitarian and distinguishes it from a development program. Initially, many criticized China's efforts in public diplomacy for its liability in involving non-state actors and only focusing on state-led top-down initiatives (Walker, 2018). However, currently, there is active participation from non-Chinese actors such as Xiaomi, Huawei, and others (Smith & Fallon, 2020). Even Jack Ma has personally provided medical supplies and facilities to foreign governments facing crises, including the US.

Third, Amounts on China's spending on aid during the COVID-19 pandemic are challenging to know with certainty due to donor methodology and the opacity around Chinese aid. Nevertheless, experts confirm that China provided more humanitarian assistance in 2020 than in previous years (CGD, 2020). From the beginning of the pandemic until July 2021, China has provided some essential medical equipment, such as ventilators, COVID-19 test kits, and protective suits – to more than 150 countries as well as 13 international organizations (Qi, 2021).

In addition, China is also the largest exporter of vaccines, both through commercial partnerships and donations (UWD, 2021). China's active contribution

to vaccine distribution emphasizes that China will strive to make vaccines affordable and accessible to developing countries that are battling COVID-19. As I mentioned earlier, this commitment was reflected in President Xi's speech, in which Xi emphasized that a Chinese-made COVID-19 vaccine would become a "global public good." The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that China had provided around 1.2 billion vaccine doses to more than 100 countries and international organizations (Song, 2021). As of August 2021, the rapid development of a Covid-19 vaccine has made China the largest vaccine exporting country in the world - China has exported more than 770 million vaccine doses to more than 60 countries (Qi, 2021).

The rate of global vaccine production has been increasing gradually, driven by the increase in vaccine manufacturing and development carried out by major countries. In this case, China's leadership in overcoming COVID-19 can also be seen through the number of vaccines that have been successfully used domestically and vaccine exports. According to Our World in Data, until October 2021 - China has led the use of domestic vaccines and exports of vaccines globally (Song, 2021). Graph 1. shows the comparison of the use of vaccines domestically and exports of vaccines by some of the most prominent vaccine-producing countries in the world.

Graph 1. The Comparison of States COVID-19 Vaccines Used Domestically and Exported (in million doses)
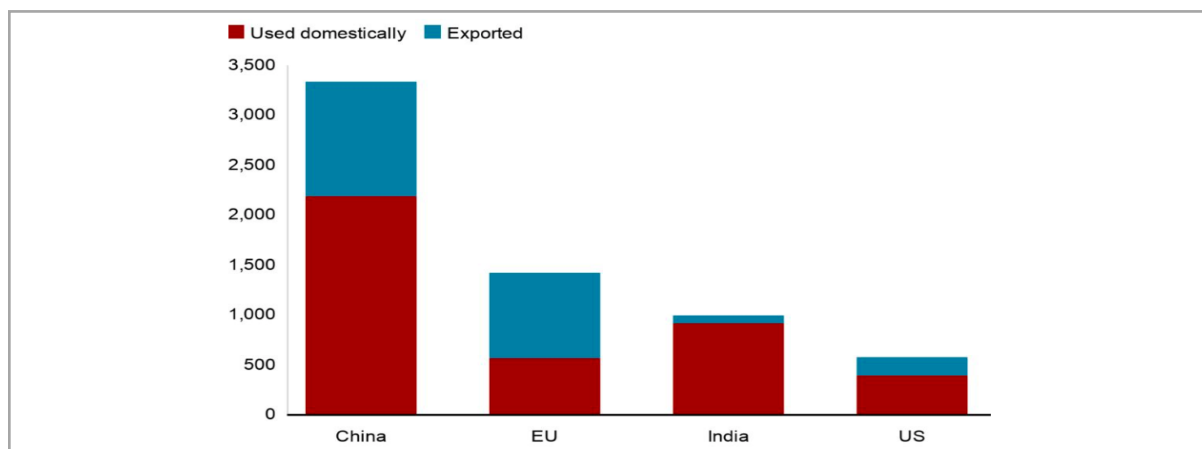
Source: (Song, 2021).

Thus, China's participation in handling COVID-19 at the national, bilateral, and multilateral levels has shown China's increasing role and dominance in global health governance. From the explanation above, China's desire to take a significant role in global health governance has been reflected in various speeches and statements from President Xi and several of China's political elites, its commitment to various international institutions and organizations, to intensifying bilateral cooperative relations with developing countries. In addition, China's efforts to send medical teams, financial assistance, donations, medical aid, information sharing, and vaccine distribution have demonstrated China's global-scale leadership efforts in combating COVID-19.

Strategic Salience of Global Health Leadership for Rising China

Along with the development of 'the golden era,' there are also various challenges in the health domain, where the global health arena is no longer only concentrating on medical, professional, and technological issues and solutions. Instead, global health has acquired political and commercial relevance; hence, global health governance is often subject to commercial and political interests. In line with this, facing the chaotic international situation amid the pandemic, China's commitment to diplomacy and global health governance cannot be separated from China's interests, especially in the rising situation. In this study, the authors conclude some of the strategic salience of intensifying China's role in the global health domain.

Firstly, China's active participation in global health governance, especially WHO, is not only focused on China's interests to spread ideology and influence norms and rules within the institution. However, there are other strategic issues that China must control, especially the importance of maintaining the national unity of mainland China, in this case, Taiwan. After Tsai Ing-wen was elected President of Taiwan in 2016, under its influence, China forced an end to Taiwan's participation as an observer in the annual World Health Assembly (WHA) (Genevaz, 2021). Taiwan's excellent health system places it as an important actor in the global health network. Even in 2020, more than 20 countries have lobbied Taiwan to participate in WHO, but China still managed to thwart it (Genevaz, 2021).

This issue correlates with Taiwan's diplomatic recognition and Taiwan's capability in the handling of pandemics,

showing that democratic regimes can effectively use high-tech monitoring tools without violating the rights of citizens. Allowing that narrative to be heard would go against the Chinese government's absolute priority to build on its authoritarian regime's superiority in quelling the pandemic. So, China needs to take part and build good relations with WHO. This is even supported by WHO's Director-General, who upholds the "One China Policy" policy and implies that WHO approves the exclusion of Taiwan from the organization.

Secondly, China's generosity in the global health domain has reflected China's interest in creating friendships and connections with state and non-state actors during the pandemic. Despite the enthusiasm, ambition, and investment, China's international order development has not produced many tangible results to date. One of the obstacles is China's incapability to foster 'meaningful' friendships with other countries, specifically the great powers (Smith & Fallon, 2020).

Roshchin (2006) states that friendship has become an essential essence for constructing the international order. China has long recognized that friendship is essential for establishing order and has sought to strengthen friendship with many countries worldwide (Strüver, 2014). One example is the notion of "all-weather friend," which China uses to express its association with other countries, where there is mutual trust and strong political support for China. Therefore, China's active contribution and its role in global health in times of crisis have become a strategic opportunity for China to

strengthen and create new friendships with aid recipient countries.

China has centered its aid on mutual friendship and interconnectivity. The phrase "shared future of mankind" has become a phrase that is repeatedly issued in Chinese press conferences, which also positions China's humanitarian power (CGNT, 2020.). In addition, China has shown state-identity in its approach with other countries through references to traditional phrases, like:

> *"You throw a peach to me, and I give you a white jade of friendship"* (Geng, 2020).

This shows that China's active contribution and assistance in dealing with the pandemic are reciprocal aspects of its friendship. As the situation in Europe has deteriorated, China has created similar "friendly" offer to Germany, France, Spain, and other European countries (Lau, n.d.). The rhetorical response to Africa has also been similar, with President Xi stating that:

> *"China and Africa are good friends, partners and brothers. We have long been supporting and helping each other"* (President Xi in Geng, 2020).

While assisting Serbia, President Xi also noted:

> *"China and Serbia are comprehensive strategic partners… the hard-as-iron friendship of the two countries, and of the two peoples, shall last forever"* (President Xi in (Lau, n.d.).

The friendship aspect is an essential part of China's interests because this will have a long-term impact, leading to increased cooperation between China and aid recipient countries and building state loyalty. China intends to offer assistance is mainly to position itself as a great power that has come to help the world, especially in its rising situation.

Thirdly, it aligns with the strategic importance of China's Peaceful Rise narrative. Along with the rise of China as increasing power, came the perception of 'China threat,' which has been commonly debated since the 1990s (Wang, 2015). China understands that without effectively addressing the "China threat," the international community will not accept China's rise well.

Chinese political elites who have travelled to Seoul, Tokyo, Washington, and other countries see how the perceived "China threat" can harm China's vision and decrease the effectiveness of its diplomacy. To allay these concerns and suspicions, China's political elite created the idea of Peaceful Rise, which means that China's rise will be peaceful and beneficial to the Chinese and the whole international community (Wang, 2015). Thus, China's active contribution in global health governance also reflects its efforts to reduce the perception that China's rise is a threat to international stability.

Under the leadership of administration of Xi, there has been a paradigm transformation in China's foreign policy, which at first seemed to be a low-profile approach to a grand strategy pursuing a hegemonic role (Lanteigne, 2009). In Xi's presidency, global health diplomacy has appeared as an essential feature in China's foreign policy. Gagnon & Labonté (2013) state that global health diplomacy in international relations theory is the relationship between global health governance and foreign policy. Thus,

countries' active participation in global health has become an important tool to help a state to create its 'ideal image' via health assistance programs.

China's massive contribution to global health governance has provided legitimacy. It has also become a soft power tool that recreates an essential role in strengthening its power and influence over other countries. Therefore, these political activities aim to improve global health prospects and maintain and strengthen relations with other countries. In addition, China has demonstrated its principles, competence, and power in global health governance and can therefore acquire greater legitimacy for itself and its governance model.

Like what we have observed amid the global health crisis, China has been keen to abide by the norms of international partnership and indicate the kind of moral behaviour necessary for the rise of a country. Thus, by assisting, China can maintain its Peaceful Rise narrative, showing an ideal image to the international community so that China's rise does not become counter-productive.

Fourthly, a key element of China's multilateral approach in handling the pandemic is also related to its intention to promote the development of HSR and as a means to encourage BRI more broadly. By June 2020, 25 countries had signed a joint communique that explicitly promoted the HSR concept and called for information sharing and increased connectivity to facilitate pandemic response assistance (CSIS, 2020). In March 2020, China positioned itself as a primary provider of personal protective equipment (PPE), which many European countries ordered, given the scarcity of these items.

The only European country that has signed a memorandum on the BRI, Italy is also the first European country to be affected by COVID-19. Xi Jinping immediately proposed an HSR partnership by sending doctors and medical equipment under Chinese supervision (Genevaz, 2021). As with other BRI initiatives, the HSR label includes initiatives led by Chinese public and private actors.

China's role also gives it diplomatic assets, through which China has successfully transferred pharmaceutical technology to Indonesia, Morocco, and Brazil, given the country's massive vaccine production. International cooperation in the health sector has become an essential component of China's BRI to build a "global community of common destiny." The pandemic has demonstrated China's diplomatic power in developing the BRI and its far-reaching and strategic way of working. China has successfully linked measures against the pandemic in aid recipient countries with prospects for post-pandemic cooperation within the BRI framework. This clearly shows that China's intensification of global health governance has provided an opportunity for China to improve its foreign policy.

A Challenge to US Hegemony?

When the epidemic started in China, China took advantage of the global spread of COVID-19 as its foreign policy opportunity. While the US is declining in global affairs, the developments brought by China has been able to extend its influence in international organizations and institutions, especially at the WHO.

With the isolationist measures taken by the US, China's health diplomacy has constructed geopolitical space at the global

governance level Jiemian (2020) believes that the US has lost its status as the only global hegemon until now. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many US allies were no longer following the orders of the US leadership, as was the case at the G7 Foreign Ministers Meeting, which abandoned the 'blame game' and stigmatization carried out by Washington on China (Jiemian, 2020). Fundamentally, the current alliance system cannot cope with many of the emerging challenges, and the political consensus of allies is undergoing substantial fluctuations.

The former Trump's irresponsible rhetoric is not the only aspect undermining US global legitimacy and authority during the pandemic. However, the US has also undermined the international community's trust by the Trump administration's refusal to comply with or heed the suggestion of international health bodies or even health specialists. The US approach shows a disregard for the value of global alliances, which further weakens its international leadership. Even Welch Larson (in Hamovitz, 2021) admits that the former Trump regime viewed alliances as a burden to the national interests.

That approach, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, has put the US in a precarious position globally. Suppose the US leaves the WHO due to concerns about the significant influence of China in the WHO – in that case, the freezing of funding and US apathy will create a power vacuum, and China or other countries can quickly fill the vacuum. In addition, scientific partnerships on a global scale also have implications, in which the US could lose influence over global health initiatives, including distributing drugs and vaccines.

Despite growing criticism of both hard and soft power, China has won the hearts and minds of many countries, gaining international trust by asserting policies aligned with expert suggestions and emphasizing its urge to work collectively (Gauttam, Priya, Bawa Singh, 2020). The consistency between China's Peaceful Rise narrative and actions in global health governance is morally necessary, but it is also crucial to increasing China's international legitimacy and authority.

Although China's activities in global health governance are disguised in the form of altruism, it has also been used to expand geopolitical and geo-economic influence. China's view of the importance of global health governance leadership was also broadly reflected at the 2017 CCP Congress. President Xi Jinping publicly stated that this is a "new era" of "great power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics and approaches." This new era is "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation," China seeks to improve its participation in leading the global governance reforms. In general, this is an attempt to change the international order to favour autocracy over democracy.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, given the failure of the US response in fighting the crisis, the Chinese system looks more attractive to many countries and the global community (Bresnick & Haenle, 2020). However, there is still less transparent evidence that authoritarian systems are more reasonable and better at dealing with pandemics than the western democratic systems. Moreover, China will utilize its strategic opportunities and relative success to improve its authoritarian model of governance and

every aspect of its system, from state-directed economic policies to digital surveillance. If the US cannot improve its situation and position, then US democracy and the post-World War II global governance system it has constructed will risk losing their credibility and relevance (Bresnick & Haenle, 2020).

Apart from the increasing trust of the international community in China, China has also made sure to present its governance model as a possible model to rely on during the global crisis. China views that the main reason for the failure of Western democracies to control the spread of COVID-19 domestically is due to their inefficient governance model (Hamovitz, 2021). The authoritarian system that prevails in China is crucial in enabling China to take the necessary actions to fight the virus while preserving the country's economy.

The ways of liberal democracy, especially the US, have been proof that these countries are not equipped to handle such crises (Huang, 2020). China is currently contributing to reforming approaches in the global health domain and positioning itself as a 'development partner' instead of a donor – a substantial difference in global health governance. The essence, modalities, and commitments that apply to the south-south partnership differ with the contours of the north-south partnership. With the mentality of great power rivalry and zero-sum games, the US has constantly belittled and stigmatized Beijing's contribution, citing its suspicion over China's increasing power from its active participation in global governance. By calling for the narrative that China is fighting for international leadership and expanding geopolitical influence, the US is

merely missing out on a chance to fight the pandemic collectively. Through the leadership and legitimacy that China has gained, it can be seen that China has built a foundation as a hegemon and has demonstrated capabilities, authority, and morality that are important for a rising country.

CONCLUSION

The modern era has seen the rise of dynamic ecosystems in the global health landscape, which has added to the complexity of global health governance. Each faction elicited a different response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the US adopting an isolationist posture and China sustaining a multilateral posture. This then poses challenges for coordinated global health governance and causes political conflict to threaten international cooperation.

Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic has created a strategic opportunity for China to gain leadership through the intensification of its role in promoting global health governance. The Trump administration's decision to withdraw from various international treaties and institutions in times of crisis has demonstrated the decline of the US as a leader in global health governance and created a vacuum of power. With the absence of US leadership, it seems more comfortable for Beijing to position itself as a great power and a global leader in the post-pandemic world order.

Given this crisis, the world's countries welcome China's medical assistance and support, making it easier for China to reflect on its national interests, especially in the rising situation. In handling the global pandemic, Chinese

medical assistance was mobilized by various actors, ranging from the central government and local governments, private companies and state companies, foundations and individual donors.

China has used its health diplomacy to expand its geopolitical and geo-economic reach, to build solidarity through humanitarian movements. This has helped China gain international legitimacy and projected the country's image as a world leader that puts forward the spirit of multilateralism and friendship in African, Asian, and European countries. This aligns with the China Peaceful Rise narrative, to projects such as HSR and OBOR.

Therefore, China's growing contribution to global health governance has symbolized China's national interests. Moreover, the intensification of China's role in global health governance, both multilateral and bilateral approaches, has strengthened China's relations with donor-recipient countries and international organizations. The active participation of China in global health governance provides a positive picture of the state's material powers and strengthens the idea of its leadership capabilities in the international sphere.

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