

THE DIRECTIONS OF CHINESE DIPLOMACY IN THE PANDEMIC CONTEXT

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Abstract China's diplomacy has been marked by drastic changes since 2020, following the emergence of the virus known as SARS-CoV-2. The rapid spread of this virus both within China and beyond its borders, and subsequently globally, has led to a situation of crisis that has never been seen before in China, a situation that the Chinese leadership has had to mobilize and act upon, both internally, as most provinces in China have been affected, and externally, where the situation has taken on a greater scale than in the country that first reported the first coronavirus case. China is stepping in and assuming its role as a major power, taking swift action and implementing a series of drastic measures aimed at isolating the virus and combating the pandemic. China's global involvement, particularly in the countries most affected by the coronavirus crisis, has been viewed diplomatically not only with gratitude, as in the case of Italy, but also with suspicion and criticism of its political involvement in the humanitarian aid process. The present article proposes an analysis of both the Western and Chinese perspectives on China's handling of the SARS-CoV-2 crisis and at the same time traces the direction of diplomatic relations between China and the major world powers, i.e. political alliances once the pandemic is over.

Keywords China, USA, EU, pandemic, Covid-19, diplomacy, soft-power.

Introduction

The first case of coronavirus appears in China, in the Hubei province, in the city of Wuhan, by the end of 2019. This virus, which generates the disease later called Covid-19, is symptomatically similar to the influenza virus, but is much more contagious, with a much wider spread and leading to death in countless cases, especially in people with other associated chronic diseases. At the time of writing, a total of 6,099,380 cases have been associated with influenza according to statistics provided by the World Health Organization.

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Taken by surprise and having evolved unexpectedly quickly, China initially faced a health crisis which it managed to overcome with help from its partner countries. Once the health crisis is eased and brought under control by drastic measures taken by the Chinese government, including closing cities, isolating the population, quarantining regions with a high number of cases, China gets involved in helping the most affected areas of the world. The virus knows no borders, no political barriers, it does not affect strategically and it does not only affect global health, but the effects of this pandemic are felt at the diplomatic, political, economic and psychological level, in terms of the mental comfort of the population worldwide.

The first area where the effects of the pandemic have been felt has been in international relations, as the overactive involvement of some countries or the lack of involvement of others has led to discontent, accusatory statements and a consequent cooling of relations between countries where there have been inconsistencies in health policy.

China's Diplomacy - The Presumption of Building a Community with a Common Destiny

Until 2019, China's foreign policy was based on promoting the country beyond its borders in order to strengthen its so-called soft power. In other words, China aims for external development through soft power by making use of its millennial history, culture and civilization, its attraction to exotic cultural elements which are foreign to Western audiences, presenting itself as a great power of the world, but at the same time as a militant of peaceful development, Confucian-type morality and presenting an alternative model of governance, based on ethics and prosperity. In order to improve its image outside its sphere of influence in Asia, China engages globally in various projects aimed at generating soft power and conquering through its benevolent politics.

Although plans to develop and deepen diplomatic relations through culture with the rest of the world were rigorously structured and explored by the Chinese government, with the outbreak of the coronavirus crisis, China is forced to reconfigure its diplomatic agenda and refocus its attention on what was, at the time, only an internal threat. Despite the best efforts of the Chinese government and the Chinese people equally, in the hope that the virus would remain local and not spread beyond the country's borders, it has been rampant and has spread across the globe.

In the face of this huge threat, China is turning its attention exclusively to fighting the virus and is making countless diplomatic and business efforts with the aim of preserving public health worldwide.

The Principles of China's Diplomatic Reorganization

Diplomacy is a product of the various stages of development that the world goes through and that echo in the evolution of society. Once it faces internal or external shocks, changes in government or transformations that change the perception of leaders, diplomacy may undergo

changes.¹ In this case too, where the shock was both internal and external, Chinese diplomacy reassessed its policy and charted a firm course in the fight to defeat the virus and contributed to global anti-epidemic cooperation. China's involvement was crucial once the virus spread and the pandemic began, as Chinese specialists had the opportunity to study the virus, find ways to treat infected people and provide support to specialists in other countries affected by the corona virus.

According to Yu Hongjun, vice-president of the Chinese People's Peace Association, China's proposed health diplomacy follows several principles that outline how China has acted in this context: promoting the building of a community with a common future for mankind, a point supported by Chinese President Xi Jinping himself, who has played a very important role in China's global affirmation and has personally been involved in countering the virus, followed by contributing to global anti-pandemic cooperation, with China believing that only through the cooperation of the international community and the unity of countries with increased influence can a fair fight be waged, supporting communication policy and people-to-people exchanges, especially between specialists from different countries, and last but not least, continuing and advancing the Belt and Road Initiative project - also called the new Long Silk Road, which should also give greater importance to the health sector.²

By offering aid and material support to the whole world affected by the corona virus, China is bringing the Belt and Road Initiative back into the discussion, stressing the need for a project that envisages a global connection, through which exchanges can take place with greater ease, thus proposing its own model of globalization, a model that evokes China's past and history, recalling the old Silk Road and assuming, at the same time, the role of a great responsible power, ready at any time to adapt to all global challenges.³

The Internal Crisis and the Global Crisis

With the appearance of the virus in China, a series of restrictions intended to be practical and effective are applied in the city where the first outbreak occurs, Wuhan, and then, at the request of President Xi Jinping, the entire province of Hubei joins the fight. Thus, on 23 January 2020, Wuhan city is closed and Hubei province, of which it is a part, is required to have strict records and detailed control of people entering and leaving the city. With these measures, the Chinese government manages to control the epidemic for a short period of time. Around 40

¹ Zhang Qingmin, "Xinguan feiyan yiqing da liuxing chongsu zhongguo waijiao yicheng," *Guoji zhengzhi yanjiu* (3/2020): 85, <https://www.jis.pku.edu.cn/docs/2020-08/20200817131151146784.pdf> (accessed on 03.05.2022).

² Yu Hongjun, "China Should Pursue Four Principles as Coronavirus Hits the World. How Covid-19 is Changing the World Order," *China Institute of International Studies* (2020): 2-5, <https://www.ciis.org.cn/english/PUBLICATIONS/202009/W020200914505488550839.pdf>. (accessed on 03.05.2022).

³Rudolph Moritz "China's Health Diplomacy during Covid-19," *SWF Comments* (9/2021): 5, doi:10.18449/2021C09.

000 volunteer medical workers from all over China voluntarily join the epidemic fight and leave for Hubei province.

As the number of cases grows out of control, despite the measures taken by the government, the problem that China has been facing becomes known worldwide and as a result, the whole world mobilizes and offers support to China. Thus, within only three months, China receives aid in the form of medical supplies, products absolutely necessary to fight the epidemic, from 77 countries, 12 international organizations, 84 local governments and public institutions around the world.⁴

Surprisingly, China was also supported by countries from which it was not expected to receive aid, was in constant contact with WHO specialists and foreign countries.

The stabilization of the situation in China has unfortunately not meant the elimination of the virus, but because contemporary society is subject to globalization, the movement of people and trade has also meant the circulation of the virus, which has mutated outside China's borders and made countless victims on all continents, especially in Europe, despite warnings from Chinese specialists.

The highly contagious nature of the virus has led to the announcement of a pandemic and thus to a global shortage of the materials needed to treat cases of illness, not to mention a possible containment of the virus, which has become more and more aggressive as it has moved through different parts of the world.

In this situation, China is forced to intervene and assume the responsibility of a great power. China is sending anti-epidemic aid to around 127 countries and 4 international organizations. In addition to this material aid, China has also provided specialized aid, such as countless video conferences between Chinese experts and representatives of the affected countries and has sent Chinese medical specialists around the world. The Chinese government also worked on a set of documents for treating the disease and another for preventing it, which it made available to the world, with the documents and treatment protocols translated into all the languages whose countries requested it.

China is therefore complying with the mentions of health outlined in the Belt and Road Initiative document, developing its global aid program in the context of the Health Silk Road, with health being a part of this initiative to relaunch the Silk Road.

Leading Chinese voices follow President Xi Jinping's call for cooperation and communication and argue that the contemporary era is one of global threats, issues translated into international vulnerability. In other words, Chinese experts, including Qin Yaqing, a university professor at Shanghai Business University, China, put forward their views, echoing the President's idea and his call that the pandemic can only be overcome through cooperation and solidarity from all members of the international community.⁵

⁴ Zhang, 87.

⁵ Qin, Yaqing, "Cooperation: An Iron Law of the Development of a Community with Shared Future," *China Institute of International Studies* (2020): 9, <http://ciisjournal.com/Admin/UploadFile/Issue/e13twqiq.pdf>. (accessed on 03.05.2022).

Regional and Global Cooperation

Of particular importance for China are the future directions in terms of adapting and innovating international mechanisms, changing international priorities, as new threats to common development require firm action and increased attention to the possible problems that may result.

According to Chinese analysts, the new strategic arrangements should include, among other things, greater attention to non-traditional security, an increase in the importance of the status of public health at the international level, a focus on the most pressing issues of the century: terrorism, cyber security, epidemics or climate change.⁶

Diplomatic actions played a particularly important role during the pandemic. The complex approach, both internally and externally, was a great achievement for China, which had not faced such a situation in its past and had no experience of managing an epidemic.

However, the involvement of President Xi Jinping himself, who has provided political support at the highest level of Chinese diplomacy, sending messages to the whole world, discussing and meeting with more than 50 heads of state, including the head of the World Health Organization, Premier Li Keqiang, who likewise spoke to a significant number of foreign leaders and representatives of international organizations, or Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who has been a strong voice for China with a frequent presence in the media, liaising with and supporting foreign ministers from over 60 countries.⁷

These links between China's representatives and their counterparts in the rest of the world were not only aimed at combating the pandemic, but at the same time, the approach was a multilateral one, in which other aspects, secondary areas that were affected by the pandemic outbreak were also considered, thus trying to find solutions, both in the short term, based on the restrictions imposed by most countries, and in the long term, with the aim of alleviating the effects that the pandemic could have generated, economically and socially. Chinese officials are committed to finding solutions to avoid the destabilization of the global economy and finance while reducing the impact on world trade. Among the measures taken by the Chinese government was the initiative to repay the debts of African, underdeveloped and developing countries that were affected by the crisis, or at least pay their debts to China in instalments.⁸

China has also maintained close relations with international organizations such as the World Health Organization, engaged regionally through ASEAN, which it has asked to help strengthen cooperation on control and prevention, and at the urging of Xi Jinping at ASEAN

⁶ Yang Jiemian, "The Covid-19 Pandemic and Its Impact on Contemporary International Relations," *China Institute of International Studies* (2020): 22-24, <https://www.ciis.org.cn/english/PUBLICATIONS/202009/W020200914505488550839.pdf>. (accessed on 03.05.2022).

⁷ Zhang, 90-91.

⁸ Moritz, 5.

meetings to strengthen public guidance and public diplomacy so as to convey relevant, open and transparent information on the evolution of the virus in member countries in the region. The cooperation with ASEAN was due to the fact that the first countries to which the virus migrated were China's surrounding countries and these are also countries for which China is an important trading partner. Implicitly, any action taken by China would have an immediate effect on them as well.

At the G20 conference in March 2020, the Chinese leader is calling for a united front against a common threat and to protect the global economy from factors that could lead to economic hardship in the context of the pandemic. At the same summit, China is proposing itself as a key player in this community, where it should take a leading role and work together with the rest of the world to face all contemporary threats.⁹

Stages of Chinese Diplomacy in the Pandemic Context

With the pandemic, Chinese diplomacy is transforming, turning its attention to global health issues as its priority. From public diplomacy, oriented to culture, towards which it has made financial, cultural and diplomatic efforts and invested in projects to be implemented in the international arena, China is focusing on public health and, forced by the circumstances caused by the SARS-Cov-2 virus, is launching a series of actions that show the diplomatic maturity that China aimed for ten years ago, with the emergence of ideas on public and cultural diplomacy and the intention to increase its soft power.

Viewed as a whole, chronologically, and following in parallel both the pandemic evolution and China's directions in diplomacy, two phases of Chinese diplomacy can be distinguished.

In the first stage, which coincides with the outbreak of the virus and its international externalization, we find an engaged government, Chinese representatives acting with openness and a sense of responsibility. This first stage can be identified with the generosity of the Chinese state, in the form of all the support that China provides, consisting of medical supplies, personnel, diplomatic cooperation and the suggestion of a model for managing the pandemic, a model which, according to Chinese specialists, has had a positive effect in the country. Chinese diplomatic actions at this stage also include objecting to the country's association with the virus, as the media has called SARS-Cov-2 the Chinese virus.

In the second stage identified by Western specialists in international relations, including Denny Roy, we see China's critical reaction to the governments of other states, especially the major world powers and international organizations, regarding the lack of involvement and methods that show incompetence in the fight against the virus. The Chinese government is sending the message through this criticism that the efforts of a single country are insufficient and may have delayed or even insignificant effects as long as there is no collaboration, no unity, to take the worrying trend of cases downwards. One example that

⁹ Yang, 17-19.

China condemns is the US initiative to impose financial sanctions on China for the emergence of the virus and the way its development has affected the whole world. China is countering these initiatives, reacting harshly through the spokesman for the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Zhao Lijian, who in turn floats the theory that the virus arrived in Wuhan via US soldiers participating in the World Military Games held in Wuhan before the first case of the coronavirus was discovered in a Chinese citizen. PhD Zhong Nanshan, a member of the National Health Commission, also makes vague but harsh accusations towards the US, suspecting the US as the source of the virus.¹⁰

The underlying reason for the change in attitude of the Chinese officials from goodwill and involvement in launching these harsh theories is their helplessness in the face of the undermining of efforts in recent years aimed at strengthening soft power. Nevertheless, China has not stopped offering support to the international community.

From Building a Community with a Common Destiny to Sino-scepticism

Perhaps the most important role in China's campaign to do its part in the global fight against the pandemic has been played by President Xi Jinping himself, who engages in an ingenious online diplomatic agenda, both internally, in China and externally with other world leaders. Xi Jinping, sober, engaged and responsible, present on all Chinese TV channels, in the Chinese online social media sphere, as well as in the international press and on social media outside China, which are restricted applications in China. Famous for his doctrine, already taught in Chinese schools, Xi Jinping brings together all of China's pandemic efforts under the umbrella of a metaphor that hides his own perspective on the pandemic, a theme also found in the Belt and Road Initiative: building a community with a common destiny.¹¹ This implies China's pledge to work with the rest of the world, especially the world's major powers, to achieve a common goal, namely ending the pandemic. By creating a link between the Belt and Road Initiative and the actions taken by the Chinese during the pandemic, they manage to avoid shaking up the Belt and Road Initiative, despite the gloomy predictions that experts have made.

The reason why the effects of Chinese engagement have not had the desired effects, or perhaps have not generated the amount of soft power manifested through influence and link-building with target countries, has been precisely China's offensive approach in the second phase of Covid diplomacy, namely repeated criticism of the West.

Mask diplomacy, as it has been called by the West, was the result of China's over-the-top diplomatic actions and, not least, aggressive criticism of the great powers. However, the

¹⁰ Denny Roy, "China's Pandemic Policy," *East-West Center*, no.144 (2020): 2-4, <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/publications/chinas-pandemic-diplomacy> (accessed on 05.05.2022).

¹¹ Zhao, Xiaochun, "In Pursuit of a Community of Shared Future, China's Global Activism in Perspective," *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies* (4/2018): 24-25, <https://www.worldscientific.com/doi/10.1142/S2377740018500082> (accessed on 05.05.2022).

effects of China's cowardly diplomacy have been short-lived, and the results have varied depending on the influence other political organizations have in the area.

Mask Diplomacy

With the spread of the virus, a serious problem has arisen throughout the world in the form of a lack of face masks, masks which, according to specialists and governments, have been required to be worn alternatively, either only in enclosed spaces or even in open spaces such as streets and parks, in order to prevent the spread of the virus. Stocks of surgical masks were quickly depleted, so the Chinese government is focusing on providing and distributing medical resources, not necessarily only masks, although these have been the world's priority. In addition to this aid, China is also supplementing the daily production of masks, so this crisis has been overcome in a relatively short time.

All of China's 'brothers and friends' have received aid, especially European countries with which China's government has partnerships or stable economic relations, or at least an interest in developing further relations.

European countries such as Italy, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Serbia and Slovakia have repeatedly expressed their appreciation and gratitude for the aid received from the Chinese government and beyond, making statements in favour of Chinese mask diplomacy. For example, Italy's foreign minister, following a conversation with his Chinese counterpart, obtains for his country, after only 12 days, a plane with nine Chinese experts and a lot of medical supplies. The President of Serbia, incidentally, becomes one of the most mediated presidents in the context of mask diplomacy, as he kisses the Chinese flag when he receives the aid.

Another feature of mask diplomacy is the constant media promotion of Chinese aid, overlooking the support the Chinese received when the virus broke out. A few sporadic reactions have only strengthened China's arguments about the need for responsible global leadership while at the same time the absence of the US and EU from the front line in the fight against covid-19.

Sino-scepticism - Criticism of China

As the virus spread widely, investigations against China and scepticism among Western leaders grew exponentially. In response to these criticisms, Chinese embassies based in Sino-sceptic states have had the extremely important task of using the media to send positive messages and urge cooperation. By March 2020, some 80 Twitter accounts claimed by Chinese embassies and consulates had become active and were frequently posting messages about Chinese aid to their countries. At the same time, not only positive messages are posted, but also messages expressing China's disappointment about Western leaders' misconceptions

about stigmatizing China and the Chinese people, China's medical product quality theory of test kits and protective masks, geopolitical plots and more.¹²

The West sees the aid coming from the Chinese as the propaganda machine of the Chinese, who have found the opportunity to create an image by using soft power to distract the public from the fact that this is not the country of origin of the virus. Also, the aid coming from non-political actors such as Jack Ma, who donated 100 million yuan for the research and development of coronavirus vaccines, Huawei company, other Chinese companies and civilians, according to European theories, are nothing but economic interests disguised in the role of humanitarian aid.¹³

EU officials also level accusations and express dissatisfaction with China, with Joseph Borrell mentioning the naivety with which the union has related to China, highlighting inconsistencies in the understanding of multilateralism between the EU and China and also accusing conflicts of interest.

These conflicts of interest refer to the fact that the Chinese government has focused in particular on countries in Europe where the Union has either not shown interest or not been present enough, or as in the case of Italy, has faced a worrying number of cases of disease, with the evolution of the virus getting out of control, to the despair of governments.

As a result of these interventions, at least in Central and Eastern Europe, China has gained influence or increased its existing influence, to the detriment of the EU, which will have to rethink projects and initiatives to attract countries targeted by China.

Looking at the whole picture, the economies of the whole world, not just China's, have suffered from the pandemic, but China's stagnation, according to Chinese specialists, has given people the opportunity to reflect on the relationship between man and nature, the fundamental goal of developing China and China's relationship with the world.¹⁴

The result of these actions was, surprisingly, not a change in the world order, as some specialists would have speculated, but a political competition between parts of the world with different political systems, ideologies, values and goals, and it gave China, on the other hand, the opportunity to attribute its successes to its relatively aggressive involvement in an unfortunate event that spread globally.

Prospects for Cooperation

China has offered help but has imposed its own Chinese solutions to fight the epidemic and has even used traditional Chinese treatments, little known in the West, which it has intended to apply outside its borders. At the same time, the West blames China for obtaining huge sums from the sale

¹² Zhang, 96.

¹³ A.Chen Wei, "Covid-19 and China's Changing Soft Power in Italy," *Chinese Political Science Review* (06/2021): 5-7, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8254633/>. (accessed on 05.05.2022)

¹⁴ Zhang, 102.

of medical products during the pandemic period, noting that commercial deliveries, which Chinese propaganda makes no mention of, far exceeded the level of aid it provided.¹⁵

Time will surely have the final say and will prove whether Chinese influence in the Covid context is a long-term one, manifested through partnerships or simply through the production of soft power in Europe, or will be a short-term one, expressed in an exacerbated manner given the gravity of the situation Europeans found themselves in at the time of Chinese intervention.

The Impact of the Pandemic on China's Diplomacy

Although engaged globally as never before in history, China has had the unpleasant surprise of not having its efforts unanimously appreciated by the world's other great powers. China has realized that its own development cannot be separated from the development of the world, and at the same time motivates its actions by indirectly urging understanding and support from the international community.

Opinions being divided, the view of China cannot be only positive or only negative, China after all being a complex country, certainly difficult for the West to understand, but it can be a considerable potential partner. On the other hand, China hoped that its involvement, in line with Confucian culture, would create relations, close ties that would later develop into international partnerships, but as in the case of the US or the EU, the pandemic has only deepened the competition between them and China.

Jean Pierre Cabestan publishes an article in which he discusses the conclusions that China should consider. According to the author, China has made a number of mistakes that have endangered its ultimate goal, which is to move closer to the West. The reason was the very fact that it focused on too many goals, putting itself in the spotlight through lack of US involvement, for example. At the same time, China's offensive campaign against the whole world has not absolved it of stigma or elevated it to the top rank of the great powers. Its anti-western attitude has only put many obstacles in its path to a prosperous diplomatic relationship with its critics.¹⁶

China's Relations with Europe

Although in South-East Asia, China has enjoyed relatively high popularity through its involvement in ASEAN by setting up funds to support action against the pandemic, in Europe the situation has been different.

¹⁵ John Seaman, "China as a partner, competitor and rival amid Covid-19," *Covid-19 and Europe-China Relations, European Think-Tank Network on China (ETCN)* (04/2020): 8, https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/etnc_special_report_covid-19_china_europe_2020.pdf (accessed on 06.05.2022).

¹⁶ Jean-Pierre Cabestan, "The Covid-19 Health Crisis and its impact on China's International Relations," *Journal of Risk and Financial Management*, 15/123 (2022): 5-7, <https://doi.org/10.3390/jrfm15030123> (accessed on 06.05.2022).

An illustrative example of this is the European Commission's view of China as a partner, competitor and rival at the same time.¹⁷ In the pre-pandemic period, the relations between Europe and China seemed to become more complex, due to China's increased interest in Europe, especially through the Belt and Road Initiative.

China's intervention exacerbated the problems between the US and China and the EU and China, and at the same time brought to light some dissension within Europe.

Ruan Zongze, executive vice president and researcher at the China Institute for International Studies, supports the general Chinese view and believes that problems of a global nature can only be solved within a global framework, through a multilateral approach, which is why the pandemic did not end earlier, pointing to the so-called lack of involvement of the US and EU respectively. He blames the disputes between the major powers on differences in outlook, acknowledging that in the wake of the pandemic, China's relations with the US have worsened, making it difficult to work together, while relations with Europe have stagnated.¹⁸ As for Romanian-Chinese relations in the context of the coronavirus pandemic, opinions are divided, with both voices declaring in favour of China and wanting closer cooperation with it, and opinions repeating those of the US or the EU, each with their own arguments. Mask diplomacy has not had a radical influence on Romania that would subsequently lead to improved relations between the two countries, as was the case with the Czech Republic or Italy, but rather a symbolic help that Romania has received through the embassy, while Romanian cities twinned with Chinese cities have received medical aid and exchanged messages of encouragement.

The Chinese Embassy in Romania, on the other hand, had an important achievement in arranging for Romania's participation in the 17+1 conference, where Romanian representatives obtained important information on SARS-CoV-2. At the conference, the Chinese representatives offered to support the countries that asked for help. However, Romania was not among the countries concerned as it did not take the initiative to ask for Chinese help or to establish a link.¹⁹ Thus, Romania's current position can easily be seen from these few examples, preferring to have symbolic relations with China. The Chinese Ambassador to Romania, Jiang Yu, publishes an article in China Daily called *Join Hands to Win Final Victory*²⁰ in which he mentions the efforts made by the Chinese government to contain

¹⁷ Seaman, 5.

¹⁸ Ruan, Zongze, "One World, Two Orders," *China Institute of International Studies* (2020): 37-38, <https://www.ciis.org.cn/english/PUBLICATIONS/202009/W020200914505488550839.pdf> (accessed on 06.05.2022).

¹⁹ Iulia-Monica Oehler Sincai, "Romania: China's actions amid Covid-19 generate contradictory opinions," *Covid-19 and Europe-China Relations, European Think-Tank Network on China (ETCN)* (04/2020): 57-58. https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/etnc_special_report_covid-19_china_europe_2020.pdf (accessed on 06.05.2022).

²⁰ Jiang Yu, "Join Hands to Win Final Victory," *China Daily*, May 2020, 1, <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202005/08/WS5eb49d4ea310a8b241154143.html>. (accessed on 06.05.2022).

the virus, President Xi Jinping himself took the lead, planned the response, monitored the situation and acted decisively, showing the way forward in the fight against the virus.

In conclusion, the article recalls that through China's goodwill, it has directly contributed to the global fight against the virus by providing significant sums to the World Health Organization, namely 50 billion dollars, has cancelled significant debts of more than 70 countries and has provided assistance to 150 countries and 4 international organizations, urging cooperation and a collective response from all countries. His Excellency's message is a collective one rather than one addressed directly to Romanian friends, but China's few Romanian admirers certainly needed such an assurance from China's representative in Romania.

Conclusion

The pandemic has caused a great deal of loss, both human and economic, but the world has shown that it can stand united in the face of a global threat such as the SARS-Cov2 virus. China's role in this context has been primary, with the whole world interested in the country's course of action. There has, of course, been a lot of controversy about the origin of the virus, how China received and delivered aid, the quality of the medical supplies it sent to the West, which countries received aid and which did not, the more or less valid reasons from the perspective of Chinese interests. China's help in overcoming the pandemic has indeed been significant, especially in the case of countries that have been severely affected by the corona virus, as was the case with Italy, but Chinese intentions have always been viewed critically, subject to doubt and accusations.

However, China has accused the EU and the US of a lack of commitment to overcoming the pandemic, and on the other, the accused countries have blamed China both for a lack of transparency in terms of research into the origin of the virus and for providing aid accompanied by the promotion of its own model of governance, of pandemic management, of treatment by traditional Chinese methods, which, in the view of the US and the EU, are threats to democracy. Indeed, China has used far too much of an offensive attitude, contradicting its own policies calling for dialogue, unity and building a community with a common future.

The pandemic could have been the context for improving relations between China and the rest of the world, in particular between China and the US, China and the EU, but only a few countries in Europe responded positively to Chinese support. As for the US, experts believe that the pandemic has accentuated the competition between the two great powers and has led to a greater distance between them.

Even in the case of countries that have benefited from Chinese aid, to say that soft power has been increased or that it has led to a strengthening of cooperation between the two sides is premature, as it takes time to prove whether China's efforts will be sustainable. Many experts have theorized that the pandemic will change the world order and lead to a reorganization of the major powers.

The two years under the patronage of the uncertainties generated by the virus corona have not yet led to a radical change, the only change being the strengthening of competition between the major powers, but even so, the world order has remained unchanged, with China getting the consolation prize of a slight temporary boost in soft power and the prospect of a responsible global great power.