



**EXPLAINING TURKISH PEOPLE'S NEGATIVE REACTION TO THE CHINESE COVID-19
VACCINE: THE ROLE OF TURKEY-CHINA RELATIONS**

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COVID-19 which basically threatened human health, has also damaged social, economic and political order in both global and national levels. When it was officially declared that Turkey buys a COVID-19 vaccine from a Chinese firm, Turkish people's reaction was negative which was indicated in social media, street interviews, and surveys conducted by research companies. With the purpose of understanding this negative reaction, Turkey-China relations are overviewed by focusing on some of the prominent problems between the two countries. It is questioned whether these problems had an impact on the negative reaction of Turkish people to the Chinese vaccine. The Xinjiang issue has been one of the important problems increasing the tension between Turkey and China. Recently, the cancellation of some important projects and some conflicting regional policies, have not hindered the increasing tendency to improve military cooperation and economic relations between the two countries. In addition to these issues, this paper mainly focuses on Turkey's high trade deficit against China since the mid-1990s and the invasion of Chinese cheap and unqualified goods of Turkish markets in the 2000s as the cause of the negative reaction of the Turkish people to the Sinovac vaccine. In this period, it is seen that Turkish consumer demand on cheap Chinese goods increased first and decreased in time because they are unqualified and harmful to health. In conclusion, it is discussed that this experience of Turkish people regarding Chinese goods has been the most significant cause of the negative reaction to the Chinese COVID-19 vaccine.

Keywords: COVID-19 vaccine, Perception on Chinese goods, Trade deficit, Turkey-China relations, Vaccination in Turkey.

TÜRK TOPLUMUNUN ÇİN COVID-19 AŞISINA OLUMSUZ TEPKİSİNİ AÇIKLAMAK:

TÜRKİYE-ÇİN İLİŞKİLERİNİN ROLÜ

ÖZ

Temel olarak insan sađlığına karşı bir tehdit oluşturmuş olan COVID-19, aynı zamanda iki yıla yakın bir süredir hem küresel hem de ulusal anlamda inşa edilmiş olan toplumsal, ekonomik ve siyasi düzeni de olumsuz etkilemiştir. Türkiye'nin bir Çin firmasından COVID-19 aşısı satın aldığı resmi olarak açıklandığında, sosyal medyada, sokak röportajlarında ve araştırma şirketleri tarafından yapılan anketlerde, Türk halkının bu duruma tepkisinin olumsuz olduğu görülmüştür. Bu yazıda, söz konusu olumsuz tepkiyi anlamak amacıyla, bazı belirli sorunlara odaklanılarak Türk-Çin ilişkileri gözden geçirilmiştir. Bu sorunlardan birinin, Türk halkının Çin aşısına olumsuz tavır göstermesinin nedeni olup olmadığı sorgulanmıştır. Sincan meselesi Türkiye ile Çin arasındaki gerilimi arttıran önemli sorunlardan biridir. Bunun yanında, yakın dönemde bazı önemli projelerin iptali ve çatışan bazı bölgesel politikalar, iki ülke arasındaki ilişkileri etkilemiştir; ancak askeri ve ekonomik işbirliğinin gelişmesini engellememiştir. Bu yazı, Türk-Çin ilişkilerine ilişkin bu meselelerin yanında Türk halkının Sinovac aşısına olumsuz tepki göstermesinin nedeni olarak 1990'ların ortasından itibaren Türkiye'nin Çin karşısındaki artan ticaret açığına ve 2000'lerde ucuz ve kalitesiz Çin mallarının Türk piyasalarını istila etmesine odaklanmaktadır. Bu dönemde Türk tüketicisinin, ucuz Çin mallarına yönelik talebinin önce arttığı, bir süre sonra bu malların kalitesiz ve sađlığa zararlı

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oldukları gerekçeleriyle azaldığı görülmüştür. Sonuç olarak, Türk halkının Çin mallarına ilişkin bu tecrübesinin Çin COVID-19 aşısına karşı olumsuz tepki gösterilmesinin en önemli nedeni olduğu tartışılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: COVID-19 aşısı, Çin malı algısı, Ticaret açığı, Türkiye-Çin ilişkileri, Türkiye'de aşılama.

1. Introduction

More than one and a half years have passed that global humanity experienced a new kind of crisis as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic has had consequences not only on human health but also on political, economic and social order established by humanity. The pandemic was globalized in a short period and it is indisputable that the main cause of this fact was globalization itself. In this period, there have been great numbers of victims although protective measures were adopted, such as masks, social distance, warnings for compliance with the hygiene rules. At the beginning of 2021, vaccination was reached as a new stage in the fight against COVID-19.

When it was officially declared that Turkey buys vaccines from a Chinese firm by the end of 2020, it was seen that Turkish public opinion was negative. In addition to the ones who are against vaccination, some Turkish people stated that they would reject especially the Chinese vaccine mainly because it is thought to be of poor quality. This paper purposes to explain the reason for this negative reaction to the Chinese vaccine through overviewing Turkey-China relations. Some prominent problems in the relations of the two countries are overviewed to question which one would be the reason behind this negative reaction to the Chinese vaccine. One of the main tensions between Turkey and China has been the Xinjiang issue and China's policies on Uighur Turks. There are also more recent conflicts between the two countries such as the expectations from the end of the war in Syria or the problems which have arisen as a consequence of military cooperation. On the other hand, this paper focuses on Turkey's trade deficit against China since the mid-1990s and the invasion of Chinese goods to the Turkish markets in the 2000s to explain the distrust of the Turkish people of the Chinese COVID-19 vaccine. The negative experiences of Turkish consumers who faced but unqualified Chinese goods in the past is seen as the main cause of their negative reaction to the Chinese vaccine.

2. Vaccination in Turkey

At the beginning of 2021, while new variants of the COVID-19 virus deepened the crisis, a variety of vaccines also appeared which have accompanied by the problems regarding the global supply and distribution. While the importance of equal, quick and affordable access to a vaccine has been emphasized since the beginning of the pandemic, developing countries found themselves in a severe competition for the vaccine (United Nations, May 20, 2020). It is possible to state that the Turkish government was aware of this competition since the beginning of the process and took some measures.

Phase-3 clinic works of Pfizer Biontech and Sinovac were progressed in Turkey. US-centered Pfizer, which is one of the largest pharmaceutical multinational companies

in the world cooperated with Germany-centered BionTech in 2018. The COVID-19 vaccine developed by this cooperation was accepted to be reliable by the Turkish public not only there is more confidence to the West in such issues, but also because Biontech was founded by two Turkish scientists, Uğur Şahin and Özlem Türeci. On the other side, Sinovac is a Chinese biotechnological company and is the producer of the COVID-19 vaccine which is named Coronovac.

Towards the end of 2020, Turkish Minister of Health, Fahrettin Koca after emphasizing that the effectiveness and reliability of the vaccine are the most important criteria, declared that a contract of 50 million vaccines was signed with Sinovac to be delivered in December, January and February. At that time, there had been negotiations with the other pharmaceutical companies, while clinic works on more than one Turkish vaccine also continued (Hürriyet, November 26, 2020).

On 30th December 2020, 3 million dozen Sinovac vaccines reached Turkey and first of all healthcare workers had been vaccinated. The following 10 million dozen Coronovac was used for nursing home residents, pharmacy personnel, and people aged 65 and older in line with Stage 1 in Turkey's vaccination schedule (TRT Haber, January 29, 2021). By the end of March 2021, another 10 million Coronovac and also 2.8 million Biontech vaccines were received by Turkey. After one month, it is stated that Sinovac does not send the vaccines it promised, and consequently a new deal is made for the Russian Sputnik V vaccine which will also be produced in Turkey (Euronevs TR, 30 April, 2021). In this process, it is declared by the Ministry of Industry and Technology that there has been progress in Turkish vaccines (Habertürk, 7 May, 2021). Towards the end of May, it is announced that a new agreement was made for the purchase of 120 million dozen Biontech vaccines, eliminating the dependency on the Sinovac vaccine (NTV, 22 May, 2021).

3. Turkish Public Reaction to the Chinese Vaccine

The official announcement of the agreement for the Chinese vaccine towards the end of 2020 was not welcomed by the Turkish people. While there were debates even on vaccine opposition, hesitant comments rose specifically against the Chinese vaccine. Mainly, Turkish people were in fear that the Chinese vaccine was of poor quality. This fact was indicated in social media and by street interviews, as well as surveys conducted by different research companies.

It is possible to present some examples from the data obtained by the research companies. For instance, Girişim Research Company asked "Which country developing the vaccine you would trust the most?" within the research conducted at the beginning of December 2020. According to the results, 46.8 percent preferred Turkey which was followed by Germany with 12.2 percent whereas China remained at 1.9 percent (Erdem, 2020). During the same period, in the survey conducted by Andy-Ar Research Company, while the rate of those who stated that they did not prefer vaccination was 61 percent, the confidence rates for the Turkish vaccine and the German vaccine were 41 percent and 29 percent respectively. On the other side, this survey also indicates that the confidence rate for the Chinese vaccine was only 5 percent (Par, 2020).

According to the survey results of the Ipsos Group announced in mid-December 2020, 11 percent of Turkish citizens trusted Chinese vaccine, while Pfizer has the highest rate of trust with 41 percent followed by British, American and Russian vaccines with rates of 29, 16 and 15 percent respectively (Ipsos, December 15, 2020). In the same period, according to the results of Istanbul Economics Research, while the rate of those who did not prefer vaccination was 34.5 percent, only 6.8 percent of Turkish people stated that they would prefer the Chinese vaccine (Türkiye Raporu, November 11, 2020).

By the beginning of January 2021, the MetroPoll company's research indicated that 48.5 percent of the Turkish people declared that they would not have a shot of the Chinese vaccine (Cumhuriyet, January 2, 2021). Similarly, the research of the ADAMOR research company indicated that the Chinese vaccine is not found to be reliable by Turkish people. In addition to the view that the Chinese vaccine is not qualified, this survey demonstrated that Turkish people also have problems with the fact that China was the place where the virus originated (Arpacık, 2021). Table 1 summarizes the results of the surveys about the Chinese vaccine conducted by different research companies.

Table 1 Summary of Research Company Results

Research Company	About the Chinese Vaccine
Girişim	1.9 % stated confidence.
Andy-Ar	The confidence rate was 5 %.
Ipsos	The confidence rate was 11 %.
İstanbul Economic Research	6.8% prefer the Chinese vaccine.
MetroPoll	48.5% stated that they will not be vaccinated.
ADAMOR	Chinese vaccine is not reliable.

Actually, it was not only Turkish people having problems with the Chinese vaccine. While China expects to increase its diplomatic power with the help of vaccine supply to other countries, it is stated that people in many other developing countries have also trust problems with the Chinese vaccine because of debates on its quality. Phase-3 works of the Sinovac vaccine were progressed in Brazil, Indonesia and Chili in addition to Turkey. By the end of 2020, Turkey declared a 91.25 percent effectiveness rate. On the other hand, in Brazil, where specifically President Jair Bolsonaro stated his distrust, the effectiveness rate was declared to be more than 50 percent rate. There were interestingly negative feedbacks from Pakistan where China has had good relations and invested 70 billion US Dollars (BBC Türkçe, December 30, 2020). Also, in Indonesia where the effectiveness rate was declared to be 65.3 percent, some of the doctors have stated their negative concerns about the Sinovac vaccine (Widiyanto, 2021). On the other hand, President Joko Widodo became the first person to be vaccinated in Indonesia (Tarigan and Milko, 2021).

In today's politics, public opinion is certainly one of the most important factors. On the other hand, it may not be the case when the issue is a global pandemic killing great numbers of people every day and hence public opinion would be ignored. This exactly happened in Turkey when the Sinovac vaccine entered the country and people who were in the program were simply vaccinated by consent despite the debates on the quality. In other words, the motive to survive prevailed over the discussions on the quality of the vaccine. In addition to this, it is important to mention that members of the Coronavirus Scientific Advisory Board, many other doctors, many politicians and opinion leaders, journalists, and popular artists gave their support to the vaccination process. Minister of Health, Fahrettin Koca who was vaccinated live on TV, was followed by the President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. In addition to these, it is possible to claim that there had been transparency on the side effects of the vaccine to some degree, specifically provided by the TV programs attended by medical scientists in related fields.

These efforts would be seen to play a role in changing the opinions of the Turkish people on both vaccination and the Chinese vaccine. Also, it is possible to claim that the groups of the population which were vaccinated at the beginning of the process, mainly healthcare personnel and people older than 65, are not the groups which would be strictly against vaccination. On the other hand, in mid-April 2021, it is reported that 14 percent of healthcare personnel and 23.6 percent of people older than 65 had not been vaccinated yet (Yılmaz, 2021). During the same period, the general rate of Turkish people who were not vaccinated despite they had the right, turned out to be 25 percent. It was stated that these were mainly the housewives who were afraid of the side effects of the vaccine, because of lack of knowledge. On the other hand, there have also been vaccine opponents (Babacan, 2021). Consequently, "vaccination persuasion teams" were established (Hürriyet, 27 April, 2021).

When 2.8 million dozen Biontech-Pfizer vaccines reached Turkey by the end of March, debates on the nationality of the vaccines rose again (Bloomberg HT, March 30, 2021). As it is also declared that people are given the right to choose the vaccine type, the Turkish public found itself in a great effort to answer the question of "Biontech or Sinovac?" In those days, this question was in the minds of Turkish people despite the fact that medical experts advised being vaccinated as soon as possible by any accessible vaccine. Consequently, the Turkish public has continued to discuss and compare the efficacy and side effects of these two vaccines. Within these discussions, it is seen that Turkish people's perception of the Sinovac vaccine has been improved to some extent as it was presented to have fewer side effects when compared to the Biontech vaccine, while it has low efficacy. On the other hand, the Sinovac vaccine was again under question in April, since it was not approved by the European Medicines Agency for vaccine passport. In July, those who had two doses of Coronovac were advised to have a third dose because of the distrust on efficacy, preferably Biontech vaccine.

In addition to the questions on the minds of the Turkish people regarding the reliability of the vaccines, the fact that China has conducted vaccine diplomacy has also been discussed widely. In other words, it is questioned whether China has had political expectations from the countries which received the Chinese vaccine. Within

this perspective, it is claimed that Turkey will be forced to sign an agreement on the extradition of Uighur Turks who have been in Turkey (Financial Times, February 24, 2021). Distribution of the vaccine has been important for China, especially to reverse the bad reputation of being the place where the virus emerged. Chinese vaccine has been served to have the advantages of being produced by inactive viruses and also being cheaper than the other vaccines. Rather than enforcing countries to take some actions for China's specific interests, China has presented its intention through the altruistic target of providing vaccines to the countries other than the developed ones (China Daily, February 3, 2021), in line with Giovanni Arrighi's argument in *Adam Smith in Beijing* (2007) that China will be a peaceful hegemon. Within these discussions, it is a question whether Turkey-China relations had an impact on the negative reaction of the Turkish people to the Sinovac vaccine.

4. Turkey-China Relations

Until 1971 which was the year Turkey recognized the People's Republic of China, Turkey-China relations were mainly determined by Turkey's position in the Western bloc and hence its perception of communism (Akdağ, 2019: 43). As a consequence of the high-level visits which began at the beginning of the 1980s, bilateral relations between the two countries gained significance. It was not a coincidence that the 1980s were also the years that both countries experienced economic and social transformation. Especially the policy of opening up the economy since the beginning of the 1980s in Turkey and China played a role in the improvement of the relations, specifically economic relations (Atlı and Ünay, 2014: 19-20). This improvement also increased the significance of high-level visits between Turkey and China which are summarized in Table 2.

In the first half of the 1990s, which was marked by the dissolution of the USSR, extremely changing political geographical settings gave rise to tensions between Turkey and China (Adibelli, 2016: 14). On the other hand, visits between the two countries began again by the mid-1990s. When the significance of these visits as presented in Table 2 is examined, it is seen that bilateral relations between Turkey and China have been mainly based on economic relations since the beginning, while political and military relations also gained significance in the following decades. Improving the relations has been significant for both countries. China has become a political and economic power both regionally and globally since the reform period began at the end of the 1970s and Turkey's geopolitical significance and NATO membership makes it valuable for China. In this process, there have been some problems in the relations between the two countries. It is a question whether some of these problems which are mentioned below would be seen as the cause of the negative reaction of the Turkish people to the Chinese COVID-19.

Table 2 *Important Visits between Turkey and China (Çolakoğlu, 2012 and Erkin Ekrem, 2012)*

YEAR	VISIT FROM TURKEY TO CHINA	VISIT FROM CHINA TO	IMPORTANCE OF THE VISIT
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		TURKEY	
1982	President Kenan Evren		Economic relations were prioritized.
1984		President Li Xiannian	
1985	Prime Minister Turgut Özal		
1986		Prime Minister Zhao Ziyang	
1995	President Süleyman Demirel		Political and economic issues were on the agenda.
1998	Foreign Relations Minister İsmail Cem		
1998	Vice Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit		
2000		President Zemin	A joint declaration was signed in order to strengthen relations. Also, agreements on energy were signed.
2002		Prime Minister Zhu Rongji	
2002	Vice Prime Minister Devlet Bahçeli		Visit included Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region
2004		Vice Prime Minister Huang Ju	Hopes to increase bilateral investment and economic cooperation.
2005	Minister of Foreign Affairs and Vice Prime Minister Abdullah Gül		Projects of Ankara-İstanbul Fast Train and Southeast Anatolia were on the agenda.
2009	President Abdullah Gül		Balancing trade deficit, increasing Chinese investment in Turkey and encouraging Chinese tourists were on the agenda.
2010		Prime Minister Wen Jiabo	Strategic Partnership Declaration.
February 2012		Vice President Xi Jinping	Significance of strategic partnership and economic cooperation were emphasized.

April 2012	Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan		Nuclear power plant planned to be built in Sinop, issues of Syria and Arab Spring were on the agenda.
2015	President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan		Around 100 businesspersons accompanied the President. Economic issues such as One Belt One Road, increasing Chinese investments in especially energy sector, scarcity of Chinese tourists were on the agenda. One of the issues was terrorism and there was also emphasis on respecting China's sovereignty and integrity.
2019	President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan		Political issues, economic and military cooperation were on the agenda.

4.1. Xinjiang issue

The Xinjiang issue, beginning in the 1960s, has been a longstanding problem between Turkey and China. Since the 2000s, this problem has put pressure on the relations between the two countries. Although Turkish President Abdullah Gül had a good visit to Urumqi in 2009, the visit was followed by increased tension between the two countries as a consequence of the severe protests in the region. Also, there were protests and demonstrations in Turkey towards the end of June 2015 in response to the prohibition of fasting in Ramadan in Xinjiang (Sputnik, December 31, 2015). Xinjiang issue and China's policies on Uighur Turks have been among the important factors that Turkish people, especially the nationalistic section of the society have a negative opinion about China.

On the other side, China's emphasis regarding the issue has been on the prevention of terrorism. At the beginning of 2021, *China Daily* stated that people's rights of freedom to religion are respected in Xinjiang and any opposite statement without evidence would be part of an anti-China program led by the USA (Chen, 2021). Actually, such a statement coming from the most important official newspaper of the Chinese government did not prevent the protests of the Uighur associations in Istanbul during the visit of the Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi on March 2021. Despite these tensions, the Xinjiang issue seems to be settled, especially under the threat of COVID-19. In other words, although there would be some Turkish people who are against Coronovac because of the Xinjiang issue, it is possible to claim that there is no significant relationship between the undesirable policies of China on Uighur Turks and the negative reaction of the Turkish people to the Chinese vaccine.

4.2. Turkey's Trade Deficit

As mentioned above, economic relations between Turkey and China were important since the beginning. The most significant issue regarding the economic relations between the two countries has been Turkey's high trade deficit with China since the mid-1990s. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute, this trade deficit had increased steadily until it reached its peak in 2016 with 23.12 billion USD and fell back to 15.90 billion USD in 2019. This decline would be seen as a consequence of mainly the overall decline in Chinese exports.

Such a big trade imbalance between Turkey and China has mainly stemmed from the two countries' similar trade structures based on labor-intensive products, making the two economies competitors in the third markets, while Chinese goods have had the advantage of being cheaper (Pan, 2016: 111). Obviously, Turkey's sustaining trade deficit with China has been standing as an important problem for the economic relations between the two countries as well as it is for the Turkish economy. On the other hand, it is also possible to claim that the presence of such a problem has been one of the driving forces of the continuity of the relations.

At the beginning of the 2000s, Turkey's increasing trade deficit with China also brought some problems to the Turkish markets. According to the research conducted by the Ankara Chamber of Commerce in 2003, Chinese goods have invaded almost every Turkish market. The research also indicated that Chinese goods had the advantage of cheapness when compared to Turkish goods; while they were mostly unqualified. Invasion of Chinese goods was so serious to the extent that 95 toys, 76 fittings, 45 eyeglasses, 25 carpets and 50 air conditioners out of 100 units of each of these goods in Turkish markets were made in China (Hürriyet, December 20, 2003). In addition to these, some of the Turkish businesspersons who imported cheap Chinese goods and sold them at high-profit rates such as 300 in Turkish markets also increased the negative effects of this unfavorable process (Çiçek and Koyuncu, 2007: 52).

Especially after China became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), severe competition with Chinese goods in EU and US markets turned out to be inevitable. Turkey also experienced the pressure of this competition especially in the textile and manufacture sectors; however, other sectors were also affected. China's exports of textiles to Turkey increased by 70 in 2003 when compared to 2002, while exports of plastics, pharmaceuticals and chemicals increased by 50, and office machine exports increased by 100 in the same year. Consequently, it was important to take necessary measures against this competition caused by the invasion of Chinese goods to protect Turkish markets. In this process, the Turkish Confederation of Employer Unions also pointed out the necessity that Turkish businesspersons get familiar with the Chinese markets and make themselves to be known to sustain in these markets. In addition to these, the Shanghai Representative of Garanti Bank, which is one of the leading Turkish banks, gave lectures to Turkish businesspersons to help them to be successful in Chinese business life (Çiçek and Koyuncu, 2007: 60-62).

It is known that Chinese goods were cheap mainly because their input costs were low. For instance, the price of a ton of ceramic products that were imported from China was 200 USD whereas it was around 600-800 USD in Turkey in 2003. It is also

stated that 1 litre of oil in China was only 496 thousand Turkish Liras (TL) whereas its cost was 1 million 866 thousand TL in Turkey. Similarly, one kilowatt of electric in Turkey and China were 174 thousand and 74 thousand TL respectively in the same year. In addition to these, the minimum wage in Turkey was two times the level in China where Chinese tax ratios were also lower (Özpeynirci, 2003). It is important to mention that the only advantage of the production of Chinese goods was not low input costs. Supports of the Chinese government to specifically exporters also played an important role in the process.

In this process, Turkish firms were in trouble as they had to deal with cheap Chinese goods while facing high input costs. Sinan Aygün, Head of Ankara Chamber of Commerce stated that every Chinese ship coming close to Turkish ports meant the closure of a factory in Turkey in those days. Such damage to Turkish firms was accompanied by illegal entries of Chinese goods to Turkish markets giving rise to a tax loss of billions of USD. In addition, there had been a tendency of Chinese firms to understate their export quantities, increasing Turkey's actual import quantities from China three to four times the official quantities according to the estimates. Also, Chinese counterfeit goods which were formed by putting the labels of big companies on unqualified products constituted an important problem for the Turkish economy (Özpeynirci, 2003).

Consequently, Turkey got some measures to deal with the China threat. Within the boundaries of the WTO principles, it was possible to open protective measure investigations which would be used when Chinese exports have an absolute increase and hence damaging Turkish markets. This measure was used by the USA and the EU against China. In addition to the existing quotas in textile and confectionary sectors and some other 30 groups of goods, and supervision measures to some other groups, Turkey has also implemented protective measure investigations to China since the second half of the 2000s (Türkiye Odalar ve Borsalar Birliği, 2009). In addition to these, Turkey has also used dumping investigations. By the end of 2002, there were 22 dumping taxes whereas 6 of them were against China and two out of three existing investigations with temporary measures were also against China (Hürriyet, (September 26, 2002). Also, increasing competitive environment has meant that these measures would have to be accompanied by efforts to decrease costs and increase efficiency in Turkish industries, and improve research activities for new products and new markets (Türkiye Odalar ve Borsalar Birliği, 2009).

Those days of Chinese goods dominating Turkish markets were obviously hard for Turkish producers. On the other side, Turkish consumers enjoyed cheap Chinese goods at the beginning of this process. In the second half of the 1990s, Chinese sale markets with the signboards of "everything worth 1 million TL" became widespread. In these shops, there was a variety of goods for low and middle-income consumers. The Chinese goods in these shops were extremely cheap, especially when compared to the ones made in Turkey and Europe. During those days, Turkish consumers enjoyed cheap Chinese goods and in the beginning, there were no complaints about the quality of these goods.

In time, Turkish consumers became suspicious about the quality of Chinese goods as a consequence of some negative experiences and in their minds, any good having problems with its quality and durability was related to the "Made in China" label (CRI Online, January 3, 2017). Especially, Chinese toys and stationery equipment have been questioned by Turkish parents whether they have some qualities which are harmful to the health of children. Consequently, it has become a regular practice for Turkish consumers to check out where any good to be purchased is produced. It has not meant that demand for "Made in China" products fell sharply; however, it turned out to be a criteria for having an idea on whether the product worth its price. In other words, Turkish consumers have preferred to pay less for Chinese goods because they are unqualified.

It is seen that Turkish consumers have not been alone to have problems with Chinese goods. A survey was conducted by YouGov in July 2019 to search for the perception of consumers in 23 countries to the country that a product is made. According to the results of the survey, "Made in Germany" goods have the highest positive perception, while Chinese goods are at the bottom with a 44 percent negative perception despite China's efforts (Smith, 2019). China was aware of the fact that its products were labeled as unqualified not only in Turkey but also in China's other trading partners. Consequently, China began to take some measures to clean the reputation of its goods. In this regard, China Homelife fairs were organized in 2009 in the countries which China had a high trade volume such as Poland, Brazil, Jordan, Egypt, Dubai and India. This fair was organized also in Turkey in 2014 as the first fair including only Chinese firms to improve the perception of Turkish consumers on Chinese goods. Under the slogan of "Chinese goods are not cheap because they are unqualified", 500 Chinese firms with 25 thousand trademarks attended China Homelife in Turkey (Büyükaşahin, 2014). In addition, China's national plan which was put into action in 2015 under the slogan of "Made in China 2025" has offered a broad perspective for improving the perception of Chinese goods.

Throughout the end of the 2010s, some Chinese technological trademarks such as Huawei, Xiaomi and Lenovo resembled China's efforts in improving the quality of its products. In line with this improvement, the total value of Chinese firms in "World's Most Valuable 500 Brand" prepared by *Brand Finance* exceeded one trillion USD at the beginning of 2019. It is pointed out that China which was identified with its unqualified and counterfeit products, became the first country achieving this amount after the USA. Chinese firms such as WeChat, Tencent, State Grid in addition to Huawei turned out to be remarkable elements of the "500 Brand" list (Öcal, 2019).

Despite the efforts of China to improve the perception of Chinese goods, it is possible to claim that the negative reaction of Turkish people to the Sinovac vaccine has been mainly related to the experience of unqualified Chinese goods. According to Associate Professor Şule Ergün, in the Department of Nuclear Energy Engineering at Hacettepe University, there is obviously a negative perception in Turkey on Chinese goods; however, it is not suitable to treat a nuclear power plant and an ordinary plastic toy as they are same (Sudagezer, 2018). This statement is exactly true for the Chinese COVID-19 vaccine, which reached Turkey at the beginning of 2021 and would not be compared to the cheap but unqualified Chinese goods that invaded Turkish markets at

the beginning of the 2000s. On the other hand, it seems that Turkish consumers have strong memories, and consequently efficacy of the Chinese vaccine has been discussed widely.

4.3. Cooperation and Opposition

Since the mid-1990s, Turkey has been in the intention of transferring technology, specifically military technology from China. This development was related to China's technological progress, while it was also one of the consequences of the transformation of Turkish foreign policy in the manner of putting a distance to the West in some specific cases (Ergenç, 2015: 292-293). Related to this transformation, Shanghai Cooperation Organization membership entered the agenda of Turkey alternative to the European Union membership. In this sense, Turkey's contact with China for military issues represents the intention of decreasing its dependency on Europe and the USA (Üngör, 2017a). This strategy would be seen to be determined by Turkey's relations with the West as well as the rise of China's political and economic power.

Within this perspective, there was an agreement signed in 1996 for Turkey's purchase of medium-range missiles from China, which was broken in 2012 as a consequence of the reaction of Turkey's Western allies. On the other hand, it is important to mention that this tension did not bring the end of the economic and military cooperation of Turkey and China. Chinese firms have been at the forefront whenever nuclear power plant construction is on the agenda in Turkey. In addition, Chinese firms have been interested in construction projects of ports, airports, bridges and highways in Turkey, and recently they have been mentioned in the İstanbul Canal project. Moreover, economic relations between Turkey and China expectedly gained a new momentum with the New Silk Road initiative since 2013 (Artan and Dikici, 2019).

Through improving the relations with Turkey, China's one of the expectations has been establishing cooperation in the fight against terrorism. In this regard, the Xinjiang issue has not been the only problem affecting the relations between the two countries. As it is known, the policies of Turkey and China regarding the war in Syria and their expectations on the future of the region do not coincide. Or there have been periodic problems influencing the relations of Turkey and China such as the Turkey-Russia crisis which broke up on 24th November 2015 after Turkey shot down the Russian warplane on the grounds that it violated its airspace. In sum, relations between Turkey and China, although the two countries are willing to improve economic and military cooperation, have also been affected by regional conjuncture and relations with the West in addition to the political, economic and security-related expectations of the two countries from each other (Lavi and Lindenstrauss, 2016: 120-122). It is a question whether this fact would be seen as directly causing Turkish people's negative perception of the Sinovac vaccine.

Although they are generally concerned with the preservation of the international interests of Turkey, it is possible to claim that there is no relation between Turkish people's hesitation to be vaccinated by Coronovac and the problems stemming from recent developments such as Turkey-China military cooperation or international issues

affecting the two countries' relations. Under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is actually difficult to state that Turkish people have been concerned much about the cancellation of the missile project in 2012 or contradictory regional policies of Turkey and China.

5. Negative Perception of China

It is purposed here to discuss that the cause of the negative reaction of the Turkish people to the Sinovac vaccine is mainly related to their experiences of unqualified Chinese goods they faced since the beginning of the 2000s, although China has put efforts to reverse this bad reputation. In addition to these memories, the negative reaction of the Turkish people to the Chinese vaccine would be seen to be related to the general negative perception of China. Global Attitudes Surveys conducted by Pew Research Center indicated that Turkish people's favourability of China was just 21 percent in 2014 and increased to only 37 percent in 2019. According to the 2014 and 2019 surveys, respectively 57 percent and 51 percent of Turkish people thought that China's growing economy has damaged Turkey (Pew Research Center, July 14, 2014 & Silver et al., 2019).

According to Üngör (2017b), there has been an intense "China opposition" in Turkey. This opposition has stemmed partially from trade imbalance; however mainly from the Xinjiang issue. In the roots of this issue, specifically within the nationalistic ideology, the opposition to China is also based on historically hostile feelings rooted in Central Asia and the anti-communist movement during the Cold War. Contrary to the criticisms of the West, Turkish opposition to China has not been related to the one-party regime as Üngör (2017b) also points out.

The thoughts and feelings of the people are among the important factors affecting the relations between the two countries. This is also true for the relations between Turkey and China. In this sense, it is seen that the Xinjiang issue matters also for the Chinese people as well as Turkish people. According to the survey of Hanqui.com which was conducted in 2012, Chinese people presented only 17.7 favorability age of Turkey (Karaca, 2013: 107-108). For improving the relations between the peoples of Turkey and China, it is important to increase the knowledge such as geographical, social and cultural characteristics about each other.

According to Karaca (2013: 107-108), improving cultural interaction, increasing the role of tourism, establishing joint projects, and conducting the media in both countries are the ways which would make Turkish and Chinese people know each other better and improve the relations between the two countries. Within this perspective, Confucius Centers in Turkey and cooperation in higher education by exchange of students and lecturers have been good ways to increase cultural interaction (Karaca, 2013: 117-118). On the other hand, the impacts of Confucius Centers are generally limited to campus residents of some big Turkish universities. In this regard, it is possible to claim that increasing the number of Chinese tourists would have a higher impact by bringing Turkish and Chinese people together. Increasing Chinese tourists in Turkey have been the issue of formal visits between the two countries since the 2000s. On the other hand, the number of Chinese tourists visiting Turkey is generally low when compared to the total number of Chinese tourists

traveling internationally. For instance, while the total number of Chinese tourists was 155 million in 2018, only 394.1 thousand visited Turkey, which increased to 426.3 thousand in 2019 (TUİK, 2020).

COVID-19 crisis added new issues to Turkey-China relations. At the beginning of the process, there were mutual aids such as masks, medical suits, etc. between the two countries (TRT Haber, March 26, 2021 and TRT Haber, February 1, 2021), while there were also problems. First of all, China was seen responsible as it is the place that the virus emerged. Because of this reason Chinese cuisine was strictly criticized (Artan, 2020 and Üngör, 2020). At the beginning of the process, it was thought that China produced COVID-19 in a laboratory to earn from selling its vaccine. Consequently, the efficacy and side effects of the Sinovac vaccine have been discussed widely in Turkey as mentioned above. Although Sinovac licensed Coronovac for production in five countries including Turkey on May 2021, official declaration from the Turkish Ministry of Health in the previous month that Sinovac did not send the promised vaccines was not good for the relations of the two countries. Finally, what China wants from Turkey in exchange for the vaccines, in other words China's vaccine diplomacy, has also been among the discussion points since the beginning of the process. Consequently, the Turkish government searched for alternatives and made agreements to buy Biontech and Sputnik V vaccines.

6. Conclusion

When compared to the other pandemics in history which affected narrower regions, the COVID-19 pandemic which has begun more than one and a half years ago put humanity in great trouble. There is no doubt that this pandemic crisis has not been the only negative consequence of globalization. On the other hand, it is accurately known that this awful experience has mercilessly damaged political, economic and social order at both national and global levels. In this process, masks, social distance, hygienic products, PCR tests, and vaccines turned out to be the most important part of civilization, replacing cinema tickets or a dinner in a restaurant with a lot of friends.

Turkish people were not pleased when it was officially declared that the Chinese vaccine was purchased. This negative reaction was indicated in social media, street interviews and surveys conducted by research companies. On the other hand, it is seen that the majority just got their shot despite their criticisms when the Turkish Ministry of Health began to implement the vaccination schedule. In the first stage of the schedule, health care workers and people older than 65 were vaccinated and the process continued as additional vaccines were received. The attempt to understand Turkish negative reaction to the Chinese vaccine is still valuable since discussions on the efficacy of the Chinese vaccine have continued. In this regard, this paper purposes to overview Turkey-China relations to explain the negative reaction of the Turkish public to the Chinese vaccine.

Turkey-China relations began in 1971 and developed specifically by high-level visits and economic relations although there had been interruptions caused by different factors. This paper concentrates on mainly three problems of the relations between the two countries to discuss whether these problems played a role in the negative reaction

of Turkish people to the Chinese vaccine. First of all, there has been an important political problem between Turkey and China that is the issue of the Xinjiang region. China's policies on Uighur Turks have been one of the most important causes increasing the tension between the two countries from time to time. There have been claims that China's vaccine diplomacy has also included some demands from Turkey about Uighur Turks. On the other hand, it is not possible to state that there is a great correlation between this issue and Turkish people's negative reaction to the Chinese vaccine.

The second problem has been related to economic relations. Not only high trade imbalance but also the invasion of cheap and unqualified Chinese goods to the Turkish markets in the 2000s has still lingered strongly in the minds of Turkish people. Turkish people gave up the consumption of the Chinese goods which are thought to be harmful for health, while have continued to consume the others with the will of paying less. Although it is known that there have been improvements in the quality of Chinese goods, Turkish people's perception of unqualified Chinese goods would be seen as the main reason for their fear of the Sinovac vaccine. Thirdly, more recent problems in the relations of Turkey and China such as the cancellation of the missile agreement or having different expectations on the end of the war in Syria would not be seen as having much impact on the Turkish people's perception of the Chinese vaccine.

Since 1971, there has been progress in the relations between Turkey and China. Obviously, improving the relations is significant for both countries, especially economic relations and military cooperation. In this process, China has become a political and economic power both regionally and globally. On the other side, the geopolitical significance of Turkey which is also a NATO member makes it important for China to improve relations. Within this perspective, the New Silk Road initiative has had a role in bringing relations closer. For the improvement of Turkey-China relations, the perceptions of the peoples of the two countries on each other are also important in addition to the diplomatic relations of the two states. In other words, Turkish and Chinese people would know more about each other and preferably would have good thoughts and feelings about each other. Without developing the relations between the peoples of the two countries in this manner, although there has been a deadly pandemic, it is normal that Turkish people relate the cheap and unqualified Chinese goods in their memories to the Sinovac vaccine. On the other hand, the Sinovac vaccine, despite the long discussions on its efficacy, would probably contribute to reverse the negative opinions of Turkish people on Chinese goods.

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