

China's Health Diplomacy Activities During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: Problems that transcend national borders, such as climate change, environmental problems, migration, and epidemics, are increasing. Solving such issues necessitates cooperation and leads to a more intense relationship between health and foreign policy. The 21st century's Covid-19 virus has also created such an impact and made the health diplomacy activities of states very important. For this reason, health diplomacy activities and the effects of these activities, especially the aid provided by China during the Covid-19 process, have been analyzed and presented comparatively. While health diplomacy activities are multifaceted, they also create an attraction. Therefore, soft power and public diplomacy are also touched upon, but it aims to provide a background starting from the primary power debates. During the Covid-19 period, it was observed that many states paid more attention to the national fight against the virus and restricted aid. However, the Chinese state, acting as a responsible country while conducting a national struggle, also focused on health diplomacy activities and used it as a communication tool. In this process, it became one of the states that provided the most aid and increased its soft power. In general terms, it was concluded that the foreign medical aid it provided outside the Covid-19 process was not temporary but aimed at improving the health infrastructure. In this sense, it has been observed that health diplomacy activities should be increased for permanent health infrastructure to protect public health universally and solve global problems that transcend borders, such as Covid-19.

Keywords: Public Diplomacy, Health Diplomacy, China, Covid-19

Jel Codes: F35, F50, H51.

Covid-19 Salgını Döneminde Çin'in Sağlık Diplomasisi Faaliyetleri

Öz: İklim değişikliği, çevre sorunları, göçler, salgın hastalıklar gibi ulusal sınırları aşan problemler gittikçe artmaktadır. Bu tür problemlerin çözümü ise işbirliğini zorunlu kılmakta ve sağlık ve dış politika ilişkisinin daha yoğun kurulmasına neden olmaktadır. 21.yüzyılın en büyük küresel etkiye sahip olayı olan Covid-19 virüsü de böyle bir etki yaratmış ve devletlerin sağlık diplomasisi faaliyetlerini oldukça önemli hale getirmiştir. Bu sebeple Covid-19 sürecinde başta Çin'in yaptığı yardımlar olmak üzere bu yöndeki sağlık diplomasisi faaliyetleri ve bu faaliyetlerin etkileri karşılaştırmalı bir şekilde incelenerek sunulmaya çalışılmıştır. Sağlık diplomasisi faaliyetleri çok yönlü olmakla birlikte aynı zamanda bir cazibe de yaratmaktadır. Dolayısıyla yumuşak güç ve kamu diplomasisi alanlarına da değinilmiş, ancak konuya temel güç tartışmalarından başlayarak bir arka plan sunmak amaçlanmıştır. Covid-19 döneminde birçok devletin virüsle ulusal çapta mücadeleyi daha çok önemseydiği, yardımları kısıtlayıcı görülmüştür. Oysa Çin devleti ulusal mücadele yürütmekle birlikte sorumlu bir ülke olarak davranarak sağlık diplomasisi faaliyetlerine de ağırlık vermiş ve bunu bir iletişim aracı olarak kullanmıştır. Bu süreçte en çok yardım yapan devletlerin başında gelmiş, yumuşak gücünü de arttırmıştır. Genel anlamda Covid-19 süreci dışında da yaptığı tıbbi dış yardımların geçici değil sağlık altyapısını iyileştirmeye yönelik olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır. Bu anlamda halk sağlığının evrensel anlamda korunabilmesi ve Covid-19 gibi sınırları aşan küresel problemlerin çözümü için sağlık diplomasisi faaliyetlerinin kalıcı sağlık altyapısına yönelik olarak artırılması gerekliliği gözlenmiştir.

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Anahtar Kelimeler: Kamu Diplomasisi, Sağlık Diplomasisi, Çin, Covid-19

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1. Introduction

As the 21st century approaches the end of its first quarter, societies have unfortunately been confronted with the Covid-19 virus, which has resulted in the deaths of approximately 6,900,000 people. The virus has become a problem with a high transformative and transformatively impact in a short time. The pandemic, which emerged unexpectedly and caused a shock effect, was initially not taken seriously enough by many states. Many national and international institutions, which were expected to be prepared, were caught off guard, and the devastating impact of the virus was more significant for these countries. So much so that US President Trump, at the very beginning of everything, said in February 2020 that the pandemic would miraculously disappear when the weather warms up and made statements that belittled measures such as the use of masks and quarantine. The WHO, one of the leading international institutions in the fight against the virus, declared a pandemic only on March 11, 2020. Therefore, it has been observed that the capacity of many institutions has been insufficient and inadequate during the process. On the other hand, the measures taken by China, one of the first countries to encounter the virus, were criticized for being harsh. However, it has been observed that China has a higher and faster response capacity to the virus and has managed to keep the loss of life at the lowest levels compared to its dense population by following a sustainable and systematic policy on this issue.

The increase in globalization leads to problems that transcend nations and direct states to cooperate for their solution. The Covid-19 pandemic has also shown the importance of joint action and solidarity in this direction. Because although the national struggles of states were significant, they were not enough alone. It has been seen that the virus can affect the whole world very quickly, spreading again and again with new variations. Therefore, no state can be considered fully recovered from the pandemic until it ends worldwide. Although the importance of the concept of health diplomacy has re-emerged with the conclusion drawn here, contrary to expectations, it has not been sufficiently grasped by every state. For example, the US has entered into a struggle with the WHO, one of the most critical international institutional organizations in the fight against epidemics. It announced that it would ultimately cut its funding while support was expected. Likewise, the US and the EU's assistance to countries needing vaccines and medical supplies has remained very limited.

However, while conducting its national struggle, China provided medical aid, supported international organizations, conducted active diplomacy, considered the vaccine as a public good, tended to increase its bilateral and multilateral relations, and was able to apply health diplomacy for the proper purpose. This is because states can implement health diplomacy with two motives. One of them is to provide aid that it expects economic results by considering its national interest and that it can get fast and quick feedback, at which point it will not be possible to talk about universal values. The other is to contribute to the development of the universal health system and the protection of public health by investing in the health infrastructure of the state to which it provides aid. In the case of the pandemic, this is a result that will contribute to overcoming the pandemic faster.

Therefore, it is seen that the main motivation for China's health diplomacy is in this direction. However, it would be a mistake to think that this policy pursued by China is only specific to the pandemic period. With the Xi Jinping era, China has been more active in foreign policy. It calls for acting as a responsible country against problems, working together, and maintaining coordination and solidarity. It says peaceful common development and a better future can be achieved this way. For this reason, it should be seen that his health diplomacy activities during the pandemic are consistent with his discourses, indicating his general diplomatic functioning. Nye also states that this coherence as a necessary condition for success in soft power, from which it can be said that China has increased its soft power in this process. In particular, despite the creation of the perception of the "Chinese virus," it has been able to transform this perception into

the image of a country that is effective in combating the virus and has a high intervention capacity. The importance of the diplomacy applied here is high.

In our study, five topics have been designed to reveal China's health diplomacy activities in the Covid-19 process and the impact of these activities on China. First, the basic definitions and discussions related to it are examined by showing the importance of the concept of power with a background. Subsequently, soft power and public diplomacy titles and then, that of these concepts and what kind of goals states aim for in this way were explained. Subsequently, the topic of health diplomacy was introduced and the impact of health diplomacy in finding solutions to global problems, its place in China's basic understanding of diplomacy, and its relationship with soft power and public diplomacy were presented with a historical plan. Health diplomacy can be used as a tool of public diplomacy and can create an attraction for the state that uses it. Therefore, it is not possible to think independently. The following section aims to analyze China's activities in the Covid-19 process comparatively. In this sense, China has seen health diplomacy as a communication method and applied it with universal motives. It has carried out support activities for developing countries, taken international responsibility, supported relevant international organizations, and declared vaccination as a public good. In order to reveal all these relations, the primary literature was examined, relevant bulletins, statements, news, and reports were scanned, and some data on aid and Covid-19 were shared and supported.

2. Essential Power Concept

Power is one of the most frequently used and debated concepts in international relations, as it is the dominant analytical unit. Although it is associated only with the realist theory with a superficial look, many theories have utilized the concept of power in their explanations. It is possible to associate power with physical, military, cultural, and many other intensities. However, priority will be given to the main literature on the concept of power and a historical background will be created to understand the concept of soft power.

The discussion on power can be traced back to Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* and Thucydides' *The Peloponnesian Wars*. Therefore, it is important to realize how important and historical the phenomenon of power is in international relations. Sun Tzu instructed rulers on using force to defend national interests and survive in the international arena (Tzu, 2010). On the other hand, Thucydides explained the cause of the war in the Peloponnesian Wars, which he observed, as the suspicion and security concerns created by the strengthening of Athens in Sparta (Thucydides, 2009, p. 52). In this way, Thucydides for the first time provided an explanation for policies and events in the context of cause and effect. Kautilya (ca. 350-275 BC), who lived in India about a hundred years after Thucydides, was another name that revealed the importance of power in international relations. Kautilya states that the main goal of states is to maximize their own power, without the influence of moral values and ignoring them (Say, 2011: 360-361; as cited in Hacibektaşoğlu and Kodaman, 2022). Therefore, the concept of power has continued to be a subject in different geographies in different centuries.

The pioneer of modern thought on power and Realism is considered to be Machiavelli with his work *The Prince*. Machiavelli thinks that the most basic duty of rulers is to protect the interests of the state and ensure its permanence, and the most basic goal is to have power. At this point, he had an attitude that did not care about moral values.

According to Hobbes, another pioneer of realism, there should be a coercive force that would equally compel people who are in a state of war in the state of nature to fulfill their contracts with some fear of punishment (Hobbes, 1998, pp. 95-96). Human nature has three main causes of strife: competition, insecurity, and glory. The first makes occupy for gain, the second for safety, and the third for reputation (Hobbes, 1998, p. 83).

Therefore, with some of the basic ideas mentioned above, it is seen that Realism existed as an idea before it developed theoretically, and in this sense, as it deepened

systemically, the understanding that there is a constant struggle and competition in international relations as a basic assumption and that the leading actor is the state with an anarchic international system became dominant. In an anarchic environment, the primary tool used by states to survive, that is, to survive and to achieve their goals, was considered to be power, which is the primary motivation that drives people who are hundreds of years apart to think alike. However, different ideas have been put forward on the definition of power.

The first thing that comes to mind when discussing power is its manifestation through violence or coercion. However, in Morgenthau's definition, power is control over the thoughts and actions of others and is a psychological relationship (Morgenthau, 1997, p. 32). Here, the essence of power is not violence but deterrence. This is because recourse to military force ends this psychological effect. Therefore, the effective use of power is possible through the psychological effect created. In terms of realists, the struggle for power in the international system is seen as a balance of power and together with the use of diplomacy, it is recognized as the only mechanism that can preserve international peace.

From a behavioral point of view, according to Dahl, power is the capacity of one actor to make another actor do things that the actor would not otherwise do (Dahl, 1957, p. 203). Power is an element within the power of a social actor that enables it to overcome resistance in order to achieve a certain goal (Dahl, 1957, p. 201). Although it may seem like a narrow definition in one aspect, on the other hand, Dahl has provided clarity in terms of power.

Edward H. Carr puts forward three different elements of power: military, economic, and cultural. He argues that peace and stability can be maintained by having power in the international system and that sovereign states will pursue policies that do not allow the current situation to change (Carr, 2016, p. 84). According to Carr, the importance of military power stems from its use as a last resort. Because the use of military power is a sign that deterrence has failed (Özdemir, 2008, pp. 127–128).

The content and definitions of the concept of power have changed over time. While today the term power covers the economic and cultural fields and is recognized to be exercised by non-state actors such as private companies, it was previously equated with military and physical capacity, with the state as the single actor. Therefore, it is better to understand the concept of power as a type of inter-actor relationship rather than a universal definition. In addition, the context, i.e. the geography in which power can be exerted, is also important and the power of a state can vary regionally.

For Mearsheimer, power is the specific assets or material resources of a state, the purpose of states is survival, and powerful states have aggressive capacities (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 57). Power for states is a goal, the ultimate goal of great powers is to become hegemony, and states are maximizers of power, not security (Mearsheimer, 2001 p. 30).

Neorealists have been the main critics of Realism for their reduction of state behavior and power struggle to human nature. According to Kenneth Waltz, power is the only element that brings about changes in the international structure where anarchy is constant and thus produces differentiated results (Waltz, 1979: 98). However, Waltz did not see the concept of power as an end in itself, but as a tool that can be used when necessary. At this point, Waltz defines power as the distribution of capabilities. Because the outcome of the use of power is necessarily uncertain. To be politically acceptable, it needs to be defined in terms of the distribution of capabilities. While one actor may have a say in one issue, the relationship of control in another issue may be the opposite. In this sense, power can vary according to the issue and context. Power refers to the capacity to influence processes (Waltz, 1979, p. 192).

As can be seen, just as the definitions of power have differentiated, so have the tools used. Especially today, information and technology tools, legal norms, artificial

intelligence applications, and communication technologies have left military capacity relatively secondary. This situation is explained by the theory of soft power.

3. Soft Power

The phenomenon of soft power has been shifting away from the definitions and discussions on power in the previous section and has been focusing on the issues of attraction and persuasion. Although it is relatively new in the literature as a systematic theory, its clues can be associated with the statement of Sun Tzu, one of the most important analysts and policymakers who lived in ancient China, that "it is best to win without fighting." However, it was first systematically introduced into the international relations literature by Nye in 1990 with *Bound to Lead-The Changing Nature of American Power*. Its importance for our research will be in terms of the impact of health diplomacy activities on soft power.

In contrast to the above definitions of power, Keohane and Nye tried to define power in an environment of asymmetric interdependence. The power of actors is their position and ability to act within the system, control resources, or the potential to influence outcomes (Keohane, Nye, 2012, p. 10). In a state of interdependence, security and the use of violence lose their importance as states are bound to each other by numerous social and political ties. The most effective power today is the ability to manipulate public opinion, and hence the ability to persuade and bargain (Nye, 1990a, p. 156).

According to Nye, who basically distinguishes between hard and soft power, hard power, which is achieved through the control of tangible resources, is the ability to shape the behavior of others, while soft power is the ability to shape aspirations (Nye, 1990a, p. 166). The exercise of soft power can be possible through the appeal of culture and ideology. Compared to the realist conception of power, soft power has charm and attraction as opposed to coercion. Charm and attraction are the manifestations of the ability to direct the thoughts of the other party in the desired way (Nye, 2004, p. 6). While coercion and persuasion through coercion and coercion are at the center of hard power, the focus of soft power is on creating an agenda and creating a center of attraction through shared values and cultural policies (Nye, 2004, p. 7).

According to Nye, soft power is based on three sources: culture, political values, and foreign policy. Culture consists of high culture, such as literature, art, and education, which appeal to elites, and popular culture, which focuses on the entertainment of the masses (Nye, 2004, p. 11). He emphasizes that the mere expression of domestic and foreign political values put forward by governments cannot create an attraction, but they must be implemented through actual policies. Thus, soft power potential is strengthened or weakened (Nye, 2004, p.55). Therefore, in order to achieve success in soft power generation, states should create harmony with their statements and actions and avoid contradictions. In terms of foreign policy, soft power is the mobilization of states' objectives, and cooperation from others within a given structure, without threat or payment. The important point here is that policies with broad, multifaceted, universal content can easily be made more attractive to others than policies with a narrow and shallow perspective (Nye, 2004 pp. 60-61).

In this sense, these three factors are highly important. The attractiveness that can be created thanks to values that embody cultural and political values, values that contain universal factors, and the interests that they can reveal strengthens the possibility of states achieving the results they desire. In addition, both the domestic and foreign policies of states are potential sources of soft power. However, there is also a risk here, as policies can increase the capacity of soft power by influencing the opinions of other countries, or they can make it more ineffective in a negative sense. In this framework, according to Nye, policies that are selfishly crafted in the national interest and lack universal values and global acceptance may weaken soft power and will not influence other countries. However, soft power is the ability to attract and aims at cooperation rather than imposition (Nye, 2002 pp. 10-11).

4. Public Diplomacy

At this point, along with the discussion on soft power, it is necessary to briefly mention the concept of public diplomacy. It is known that the concept of diplomacy had a narrow scope in Ancient Greece and Rome with functions such as the classification of official documents (diplomas) and the evaluation of treaties. Diplomacy, which mediated the shaping of international relations, took on a more concrete structure and became institutionalized with the emergence of states. In this sense, diplomacy is the process of conveying the thoughts of the government directly to the decision-making mechanisms of other countries (Gönlübol, 1993, p. 112).

However, with the changes in the international system and the consequences of interdependence, instead of states having the sole say in foreign policy, diplomacy has started to be carried out with non-state actors through public diplomacy tools and states have turned more towards consensus and cooperation. Here, foundations, associations, non-governmental organizations, academia, trade unions, and many similar elements can be considered as actors.

The concept of public diplomacy was first used by Edmund A. Gullion, Dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, in 1965 and was defined as the international flow of information and ideas (Sancar, 2012: 79; as cited in Kömür, 2020). According to Gullion, public diplomacy is related to the influence of public attitudes on the formation and conduct of foreign policy and covers areas of international relations other than traditional diplomacy: public opinion building by governments in foreign countries, private organizations interacting with organizations of other countries, the process of intercultural communication. Anna Tiedeman defines it as a process of communication through which a government attempts to communicate its nation's ideals, ideas, institutions, and culture as well as its national goals and current policies to a foreign public (Tiedeman, 2004, p. 6).

In a period when communication, technology, and information revolutions are restructuring the world, the ability to influence public opinion and the agenda is of utmost importance. This is where the importance of public diplomacy lies. Soft power is one of the elements of public diplomacy. Public diplomacy tools that allow interaction between nations using soft power pave the way for economic, cultural, and political partnerships and peace. The main point to be emphasized is to use it correctly and effectively (Kömür, 2020, p. 90).

Joseph Nye has defined public diplomacy as soft power, which includes the use of cultural values, government policies, and alternative communication channels to achieve the desired goals of states in international politics, as well as the use of cultural values, government policies, and alternative communication channels to create admiration, agenda-setting, encouragement, and diplomatic efforts (Nye, 2004, p. 31). In this context, public diplomacy can be seen as a mechanism for communicating soft power in a systemic way, but it does not mean exactly the same thing.

According to Nye, public diplomacy has three dimensions. These are daily communications, strategic communications, and developing long-term relations (Nye, 2004 p. 107). Daily communications are the first and closest dimension that includes the position of domestic and international policies. In this dimension, it is very important that the news is consistent and holistic. When providing information to the press, it should be taken into account how it will be perceived by foreign public opinion. The foreign press is very important for the first dimension of public diplomacy. Strategic communications are similar to an advertising campaign or a political campaign and involve the development of certain issues. It plans symbolic events and communications to develop state policies in line with the set goals of improving the perception of the country in foreign public opinion. The third dimension of public diplomacy is to build long-term relations. This is achieved through student exchange programs, grants, internships, seminars, conferences, and communication with people in important positions through

media channels (Nye, 2004 pp. 108-109). In this sense, public diplomacy is very different from public relations and propaganda.

For all these reasons, it can be said that public diplomacy is a type of inclusive diplomacy that covers many fields such as health, football, culture, media, education, and so on. If we turn to the issue specific to China, it can be said that during the Covid-19 period, China preferred to carry out diplomacy activities as a responsible country aiming to increase cooperation and solidarity. In Spring 2020, Chinese public diplomacy, which can also be referred to as "coronavirus diplomacy", conducted in connection with the Covid-19 outbreak, was carried out through two channels in principle. First, China highlighted its success in fighting the disease, which also gave the rest of the world valuable time to prepare itself. The second channel involved assistance to other countries through the delivery of medical equipment, sharing know-how and sending medical teams. Regarding this assistance, the Chinese emphasized three main motivations: expressing China's gratitude for the help it received from other countries, presenting China as a global, responsible power that seeks to cooperate with the rest of the world, and signaling that it would increase future cooperation (Kobierecka et al., 2021, pp. 949-950).

5. Health Diplomacy

The first meetings on health issues were held in Paris on July 23, 1851, under the institutional name of the International Health Conferences. 12 countries came together at the conferences" (World Health Organization, 1958)

- The spread of contagious epidemics such as cholera and plague was discussed.
- Agreements were reached on coordinated actions.
- Regulations were developed to control and prevent the spread of disease without unduly restricting trade and mobility" (Kickbusch, 2013, p. 4).

The beginnings of health diplomacy can be traced back to these conferences. The emergence of problems that transcend the borders of nation-states such as climate change, environmental problems, access to clean drinking water, and public health, and the necessity of cooperation to solve them, have led to a significant change in traditional bilateral diplomacy and necessitated a presence in these areas. Nations have come together to seek solutions to health issues, and thus the relationship between health and foreign policy has begun to be established.

"Health diplomacy can be defined as winning the hearts and minds of people in poor countries by exporting medical care, expertise, and personnel to help those most in need" (Fauci, 2007, p. 1171). Following these two concepts, health diplomacy is perceived from a soft power perspective, where medical assistance aims to achieve non-medical objectives. By referring to economic and political objectives, it is interpreted as the typical aim of contemporary health diplomacy pursued by states to use health-related issues to achieve non-health political and economic goals (Kobierecka & Kobierecki, 2021, p. 942).

However, it is worth noting that this view is not valid for China and some countries. In fact, it is seen that China's motivation for the aid provided by China is not for non-health purposes, but for long-term infrastructural development aid, sustainable health services and cooperation. For example, Cuba's aid is of a similar kind. It is not for non-health purposes, but for social purposes with the motivation of "pay the debt". Therefore, the motivation of a capitalist state and the motivation of a communist state should not be considered the same.

In 1995, for example, the United States prepared its first national strategy to address HIV/AIDS, making the disease a security issue. In 2003, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) was launched by George W. Bush as an effective response to HIV/AIDS. Aid was provided to sub-Saharan Africa (Jones, 2010, pp. 1-2). In 2009, Obama introduced the Global Health Initiative (GHI), an approach to strengthen, streamline and

increase the effectiveness of US global health programs (<https://www.voaturkce.com/>, 2010).

The US and China are two global powers that use health diplomacy in the context of foreign policy. However, although both have projects in many regions, their approaches are different. The US has focused on a single disease with PEPFAR and GHI. This has divided the concept of health. Focusing on a single disease has led to the ignoring of diseases that arise due to social determinants of health. However, for a developed country, focusing on a single disease has its benefits in terms of foreign policy interests. It is much simpler and less costly for them to seek solutions to specific health problems by increasing their soft power and recognition without fully participating in development (Feldbaum & Michaud, 2010, p. 2).

Rather than focusing on a single disease, China, on the contrary, encourages sustainable healthcare development in the healthcare infrastructure of recipient countries through the establishment of horizontal primary healthcare programs by focusing on rural areas where individuals who have difficulty in receiving healthcare services live (Kadetz, 2014 p. 156). Therefore, as mentioned above, the objectives and expected results of health diplomacy activities may differ from country to country. It can be seen that China does not break away from its basic diplomatic functioning while conducting health diplomacy activities. Generally speaking, China seeks peaceful development, solidarity, and cooperation in the world. Therefore, it does not exempt itself from these calls and acts with the mission of acting as a responsible country. It says that the fate of humanity is interconnected and that only together can we prosper, not individually and separately. For this reason, it is necessary to evaluate its health diplomacy together without separating it from this understanding. With its activities in this direction, China aims to establish sustainable health services in the countries it supports, to protect universal public health, and to increase bilateral and multilateral relations. China-specific aid policies will be discussed in the sub-heading.

Health diplomacy serves as a bridge between states and peoples. Well-managed global health diplomacy can lead to the following key outcomes (Kickbusch and Ivanova, 2013, p. 11; as cited in Gezer, 2022);

- Better health: Better population health outcomes for each of the countries involved,
- Enhanced global solidarity: Improved relations between States and a commitment by a wide range of actors to work together to advance health, common goods for health, and support multilateralism;
- More equity: Results that are recognized as fair and support the goals of advancing human rights, reducing poverty, and increasing social justice.

Health is a shared value for all people. Health diplomacy is also a multifaceted issue, acting as an interface between health issues and foreign policy, and is therefore related to soft power and public diplomacy. Health diplomacy has the potential to fulfill one of the goals of public diplomacy, which is to build long-term relations with foreign publics. Improving the health of target societies and supporting infrastructural investments, especially through non-medical health aid offered without political or economic objectives, facilitates trust building, positively increases the perception, image, and reputation of the country, and the positive relations established expand cooperation and dialogue between countries in the long term (Kahraman & Cinman, 2019, p. 61).

Health diplomacy, which involves international cooperation in solving global health problems and uses transnational health services as an effective international policy tool, is one of the diplomacy models based on soft power. While hard power, achieved through the control of tangible resources, serves to shape the behavior of others, the function of soft power is the ability to shape their preferences and aspirations (Nye, 1990a, pp. 166-168). Therefore, it is possible to evaluate the framework of health diplomacy in this sense. Health diplomacy, which opens up a new field that includes goals such as improving

international relations on the one hand and improving global health on the other, especially in regions where poverty, instability and conflicts prevail, can also be defined as attempts to win their hearts and minds by exporting medical care, health personnel and experience. For this reason, it is possible to talk about the effective goals of policies and practices carried out within the scope of health diplomacy, such as expanding the interaction area by promoting universal values related to human life, human rights and human dignity (Battir, 2019, p. 155).

It is a fact that states gain prestige in the eyes of the international community in the short term as a result of the implementation of health diplomacy. However, its greater gain in the medium and long term will be realized in the form of increasing their effectiveness within the system and increasing their level of legitimacy in the eyes of the international community by gaining a privileged position among international actors to the extent of their contribution to the solution of global health problems (Battir, 2019, p. 161).

6. Covid-19 Pandemic Period and China`s Practices

It would be more enlightening to look at the practices of health diplomacy through the Covid-19 period, the aid provided and China's attitude. First of all, with reference to the table below, the total number of cases and deaths in some important countries are given. Therefore, it can be seen that the number of deaths in proportion to the population has been quite low in China. For this reason, it can be concluded that the zero covid policy, although widely criticized, has yielded positive results. During the peak periods of the outbreak, China preferred complete closure and quarantine, waiting for the variants of the virus to pass and the course of the virus to alleviate, and explained this situation by saying that it prioritized human life. As a matter of fact, it was one of the last countries to open up, but despite its large population, it was able to keep the loss of life at the lowest levels and survive the process with the least damage. On January 8, 2023, it downgraded the classification of the virus from category A to category B, lifted the quarantine obligation for foreigners, and launched the "Living with Covid" strategy.

Table 1. Covid-19 Data of Some Countries

Country	Total Cases	Total Deaths
China	99.239.252	120.905
USA	102.873.924	1.118.800
India	44.768.172	531.000
France	38.791.479	162.176
Germany	38.368.891	171.411
Japan	33.523.927	74.096
Italy	25.715.384	189.262
The United Kingdom	24.330.379	212.083
Russia	22.727.542	397.642
Turkey	17.004.677	101.419

Source: WHO, 12.04.2023.

China has become the first country to tackle Covid-19. The virus was observed in December 2019, when an increasing number of respiratory infections were reported. As the first line of defense against the virus, China has adopted the most comprehensive, stringent and comprehensive measures. Whether the global spread of the virus could be slowed was largely seen to depend on how effectively it could be contained in China. Chinese health authorities classified Covid-19 as a Category B disease requiring Category A measures. Meetings were held across the country to make contingency plans. Top-level alerts were activated in all 31 provincial-level regions. Entrances and exits to and from

Hubei province, especially the capital Wuhan, have been strictly controlled. More than 330 medical teams consisting of 41,600 medical workers from all over China, including the military, were brought to Hubei to help (Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, 2020, p. 5).

On the other hand, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020 and WHO Director General recognized it as a 'Pandemic' on 11 March 2020. Thus, the impact of the virus, which emerged at a time when the world economy was already shrinking and there were trade problems, began to increase in terms of international relations and diplomacy.

US President Trump, instrumentalized and negatively fueled the Covid-19 effect in international politics, voiced unfounded allegations that the virus originated from China and aimed to create a public opinion by isolating and antagonizing China. So much so that Trump has said that the pandemic should be called the Chinese virus, not Covid.

Similarly, Eduardo Bolsonaro, the son of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, said that this virus has a name and surname as the Chinese Communist Party. The Chinese ambassador to Brazil also tweeted that the Bolsonaro family is poison for the Brazilian state and nation (The Guardian, 2020).

However, at the beginning of 2021, the WHO team examined both the Wuhan Institute of Virology and the Huanan seafood market, took samples, and announced that the thesis that the laboratory was the first point of origin of the virus was not confirmed (<https://apnews.com/>, 2021). Unfortunately, this approach is not the first. Jews were blamed in the Black Plague epidemic, Irish Catholic immigrants in the 1832 Cholera epidemic, and Chinese in the 1876 Smallpox epidemic (Koç, 2021, p. 111).

On the other hand, China quickly established new hospitals in the first place and sent medical devices and health experts to many countries after controlling the virus with quarantine practices. This situation is closely related to the correct use of the concept of soft power. Assistance such as respirators, test kits, masks, vaccines, and consultancy was provided to many countries (Kuo, 2020). China has adopted the position of an internationally responsible country rather than a country pursuing national interests. Against the "America First" slogan of the US, China adopted the understanding of "joint action". While China provided masks, equipment, and vaccines, the US tried to buy them. While the US cut WHO aid, China increased it (<https://foreignpolicy.com/>, 2020). With the aid it has provided and the health diplomacy it has practiced, it has transformed itself from the perception of "the place where the pandemic originated" with an unfounded claim to the position of "the country that helps the world in the fight against the pandemic". It presented its success by emphasizing the concept of solidarity in the fight against the virus. The climate of fear and prejudice against each other that emerged in the early stages of the virus fortunately did not develop, and China did not waste the 40-year reform process and develop an inward-oriented system, and continued to carry out openness to the outside world, especially through aid (Temiz, 2020: 130). One of the reasons for this aid is that China believes in international cooperation and that the security of countries depends on each other. In addition, based on Confucius saying "if you desire to succeed yourself, help others to succeed", China quickly started to provide active aid after taking control of its internal situation (Wang, 2020: 153).

During Covid-19, the US and the EU pursued a relatively closed and limited aid policy. The EU's first priority was to help its member states. The EU published a package of 540 billion Euros to help its member states. This package provides three emergency safety lines for staff, businesses and EU countries (<https://ec.europa.eu/>, 2020). The EU announced a €350 million package to assist ASEAN countries in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic (<https://www.eeas.europa.eu/>, 2020). The US has provided emergency health and humanitarian assistance to ASEAN member countries amounting to approximately USD 18.3 million (<https://indiplomacy.com/>, 2020). In addition, USAID has provided more than \$10.6 billion to intensify the fight against Covid-19 worldwide,

pave the way for recovery, and strengthen global health security (<https://www.usaid.gov/>, 2023).

For instance, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić rejected the solidarity built under the EU umbrella, stating in a speech that the EU is "a fairy tale on paper". French President Macron, on the other hand, stated that the EU will collapse if damaged economies are not supported and if there is no joint fight against the pandemic. Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, on the other hand, stated that "difficult economic and political debates will emerge within the EU after the crisis is over" (Zweiri, 2020, p. 161). Czech President Milos Zeman, on the other hand, stated that when the pandemic started, they only saw China with them (<https://www.dw.com/>, 2020). Argentine Vice President Cristina Fernandez wrote a letter of thanks, stating that China has set an example for Argentina and that this process will deepen their relations (<https://turkish.cri.cn/>, 2020). It can be said that China, which has received similar responses from many states from Africa to Latin America, Europe and neighboring Asian countries, has contributed to its soft power in this sense.

However, while Covid-19 necessitated significant international cooperation, why this did not happen is an important question. The most important reasons are the inadequacy of international institutions that would increase solidarity in the fight against the pandemic, their attrition, mistrust and the preference of many states to engage in power struggle instead of cooperation. For example, although the US has been blaming China since the emergence of the virus, it closed its borders on January 31, 2020, in response to the WHO's call to China not to close its borders, described the WHO as China-oriented and announced that it stopped the funds it provided to the WHO on April 14 (<aa.com.tr>, 2020). Even though it also announced its decision to leave the WHO, this decision was not realized and was halted with the election of Biden.

Although the pandemic process has been experienced many times before in the world, the most important feature that distinguishes Covid-19 from others has been the magnitude of its transformative power. Because the central institution of the fight against the pandemic has been states, not international organizations, for the reasons mentioned. In this context, it was also noteworthy that the WHO and the EU were late in responding to the crisis, did not have an adequate mechanism, the members prioritized national priorities and were late in providing aid, and the 'one Europe' concept gave the appearance of collapse with the destruction of national borders. Therefore, most states started to return to zero-sum games by putting me first. For this reason, it is seen that criteria such as health system, emergency capacity and response effectiveness should be added to the definitions of power (Ulutaş, 2020, pp. 11-12).

China blames the growing suspicions against it with Covid-19 on either the malicious intentions of its rivals or the lack of recognition of China, and laments the emergence of a sinophobia. It has intensified its public diplomacy activities especially in the last two decades in order to paint its image positively in the eyes of international publics; for example, the broadcasts of China Radio International, which broadcasts in local languages, have been strengthened; and the number of Confucius Institutes has increased in order to promote and teach Chinese language and culture (Bilener, 2019, p. 248).

In this sense, China needs to turn to soft power with peaceful steps instead of a confrontational diplomatic language. Health diplomacy is not a new phenomenon for China. As of 1949, it initially pursued a unilateral foreign policy as it faced the US embargo. This process developed in the 1960s and in 1964, Zhou Enlai announced the "Eight Principles of Chinese Foreign Aid" (Salihi and Gökten, 2022: 1334). With China regaining its legal seat at the UN in 1971 and the visit of US President Nixon to China in 1972, the versatility of China's policy increased. By 2003, the emergence of SARS and the negative impact on the Chinese economy led China to match its peaceful development approach with health diplomacy practices. In the post-SARS world, China has played a greater role as a benevolent and responsible country.

In 2016, with the "China Health Vision 2030", China put forward a vision of a more efficient, modern and sustainable health system, with increased use of technology and easier access. In 2017, the "Health Silk Road" was also articulated, aiming to promote cooperation in the field of health with countries along the Belt and Road routes, preventing infectious diseases, strengthening health systems, exchanging medical personnel, and establishing joint research and development projects. In this sense, global health issues were intended to be addressed and a memorandum of understanding was signed between China and the WHO for the construction of a health silk road.

In the fight against Covid-19, which emerged at the end of 2019, as mentioned above, it has carried out a "Zero Covid-19" policy and although it has been criticized a lot, it has carried out an understanding that prioritizes human life above all else with the influence of Chinese culture. Despite the inadequacy of international institutions during the pandemic, China's early intervention also showed that it has a state organization with high capacity and contributed to its positive image. In particular, China's principles of solidarity and acting as a responsible country in the face of the US' "America First" and the EU's national interest-oriented justifications have drawn a different narrative of international relations.

In the first instance when the Covid-19 pandemic began, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang announced the Chinese government's medical and economic assistance to 82 countries, including the WHO and the African Union (<http://gr.china-embassy.gov.cn/>, 2020). China's Covid-19 diplomacy in the Pacific consists of four types of activities. The first is foreign aid, which aims to help during the pandemic. China has announced donating US\$1.9 million to PICs (Pacific et al.) to fund grants and medical supplies such as face masks, protective clothing, thermometers, and gloves. Likewise, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Samoa and Vanuatu received cash donations of US\$300,000, US\$200,000 and US\$100,000 respectively (Zhang, 2020: 1). According to Mwangi's report, China has sent 5.4 million face masks, more than one million test kits and thousands of protective suits to African countries. China has also sent medical teams to various African countries to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the private sector, for example, Jack Ma's Foundation has donated 4.6 million masks, 500,000 swabs and test kits, 300 ventilators, 200,000 protective clothing, 200,000 face shields, 2,000 thermometers to 54 African countries (<https://africa.cgtn.com/>, 2020).

This urgent aid, which took place in the first year of the pandemic, continued throughout the process. At the first meeting of the International Covid-19 Vaccine Cooperation Forum, China declared that it sees vaccine as a global public good and condemned vaccine nationalism, stating that it sees vaccine as a life-saving weapon, not a geopolitical tool. According to the 2021 statement, China has donated vaccines to more than 100 countries and exported more than 770 million vaccines to more than 60 countries. It has made a commitment to make the vaccine a global public good, sharing the full-length genomic sequence of the virus with the world (<http://ch.china-embassy.gov.cn/>, 2021).

At this point, to briefly mention what a public good is, it can be said that health also has an economic dimension. Essentially, health is a quasi-public good, but in terms of infectious disease, it is characterized as a global public good, and it is also a good that creates two kinds of externalities. Essentially, health is a quasi-public good, but in terms of infectious disease, it is a global public good, and it is also a good that creates two kinds of externalities. One aspect is the negative externality in terms of its ability to spread to everyone in the world, and the other is the positive externality created by the measures taken to treat the disease and prevent people from catching it (Yılmaz and Yaraşır, 2011: 9-10). According to the World Bank's definition of global public goods, these goods are goods, resources, services or policy systems with cross-border externalities that are necessary for poverty alleviation and development and require joint action by developed and developing countries (World Bank, Development Committee, 2007).

By treating those who carry infectious diseases, mass deaths can be prevented and social and economic negativities can be avoided. In addition, with R&D activities and medical interventions in this field, all societies attain a healthy status, and significant gains are achieved in the fight against poverty with the development of the country thanks to both ensuring equality of opportunity and the formation of human capital (Yılmaz and Yaraşır, 2011, 10).

The burden of infectious diseases can be very heavy for developing countries. If not enough resources are allocated to this area, the cost to developed countries of the spread of infectious diseases around the world will be much higher. Since the heavy burden to be borne by developing countries will reduce the level of development and increase poverty in these countries, the cost of global poverty alleviation measures will also increase. Therefore, it is necessary to recognize that China's contribution is not only for the recipient country but also provides global benefits.

By June 2022, China had provided more than 2.2 billion doses of Covid-19 vaccines to more than 120 countries and international organizations, and more than 100 countries had approved the use of vaccines produced in China, making China the largest donor. In the same period, it has donated 4.2 billion protective clothing, 8.4 billion tests and 372 billion masks to countries around the world. It has sent 37 expert teams to 34 countries and shared experience in epidemic prevention and control with more than 180 countries and international organizations. It has also co-produced vaccines with more than 10 countries, supported the exemption of intellectual property rights for vaccines for a large number of developing countries, and launched the "Belt and Road" vaccine partnership initiative with 30 countries as the largest global humanitarian aid activity since the founding of modern China (<https://www.indyturk.com/>, 2022). Therefore, almost all countries of the world have received support from China.

7. Conclusion

The emergence of more problems that transcend borders with the globalizing world has caused diplomacy to be shaped by new dynamics and to gain new dimensions. One of these dimensions is health diplomacy. In this sense, health diplomacy is in a different position in terms of its actors, interaction levels and context. The most important of these actors is the public opinion of countries. States have the potential to influence foreign publics through health diplomacy. However, this effect can be positive or negative. Because states can basically act with two types of motivation through health diplomacy activities: The first is to provide a short-term benefit and act in the national interest, which will have a negative impact; the second is to establish long-term relations with foreign publics, which is also one of the goals of public diplomacy.

It has been seen with the Covid-19 pandemic that local solutions to global problems are not beneficial and joint action should be taken. However, not all states acted with similar motivation in this process. When the health diplomacy activities of states during the pandemic process are analyzed, for example, it was seen that the USA restricted medical aid, withdrew its support to WHO and acted with the discourse of "America First". Similarly, the EU and many other countries prioritized their national interests, restricted the export of medical supplies and distanced themselves from coordination.

China, which was the first to meet the virus and gained experience in the fight against it, immediately started to share its knowledge and experience in addition to its national struggle. Despite its dense population and need, it provided medical supplies such as masks, gloves, clothes, etc. With the production of the vaccine, it also supported this process with vaccine aid and contributed to the fight against the pandemic in countries in need. In this sense, it was one of the countries that provided the most aid. At the beginning of the outbreak, it faced unfounded accusations about the emergence of the virus, but at the end of the outbreak, it was seen that it was able to establish correct communication with the relevant countries and managed to keep the loss of life at the lowest levels compared to its population by prioritizing human life.

As a result, it is seen that the economic and political responses of states to the pandemic have been different during the Covid-19 process. While many countries acted with the motivation of obtaining returns for national purposes, China considered public diplomacy as a communication tool through which it could convey its soft power and preferred to provide medical aid without singular goals. The reason for China's preference in this direction can be understood through its general foreign policy behavior. First of all, China attaches importance to international organizations and the dialogue within them. As a matter of fact, its support to the WHO should be seen in this context. In addition, most importantly, China believes that it is difficult for states to develop separately and that a prosperous society can be achieved by acting together with common development steps in peace. From this point of view, it emphasizes the necessity of acting as a responsible country in terms of its share and calls for solidarity. The fact that the aid it provides in the field of health is not temporary but oriented towards building long-term relationships and infrastructure should be read from this perspective. In this way, it is easier to build trust between the donor country and the recipient country and contribute to its soft power by creating an attraction and increasing bilateral cooperation and dialogue. The most important contribution is to improve the health infrastructure of these countries. As a general conclusion, it can be said that a universal and sustainable contribution can be made to the protection of public health. In this sense, the sphere of influence of health diplomacy, which opens a new field, is expanding and universal values can be promoted through human life.

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