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Research Articles

International Journal of China Studies

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Research Articles

Research Articles

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China's Evolving Role in the United Nations: Analysis of the People's Liberation Army's Engagement in UN Security Operations

Gregory *Coutaz**
Tamkang University

Abstract

Under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, China has become a proactive participant in world affairs, showing a desire and an ability to contribute to global public goods. As a result, China's support for the United Nations has grown considerably. Today, China is the second largest financial contributor to the organization's overall budget, and the largest troop contributing country among the permanent members of the UN Security Council. This article examines China's engagement within the UN framework and, in particular, why the UN has been chosen by Beijing as one of the key venues through which to flex its diplomatic muscles and strengthen its influence abroad. To address this research question, this article adopts a case study approach that focuses on the deployment of People's Liberation Army (PLA) units for missions relating to counter-piracy and peacekeeping activities. Drawing on the literature on military diplomacy and the study of Chinese media, it provides a comprehensive assessment of Beijing's motivations in the pursuit of peace enforcement in international relations, and highlights the unique role played by the PLA in achieving this ambition.

Keywords: *China, United Nations, People's Liberation Army*

1. Introduction

China has had a long and storied history with the United Nations (UN). Although China endured great hardship and fought fearlessly against Japanese troops during World War II, the People's Republic of China (PRC) was not granted a representative seat at the UN as the legitimate government of China until 1971. Though the United Nations has been widely perceived by Chinese leaders as an instrument used by imperialist powers to promote their interests at the expense of the Third World governments and national liberation

movements, Beijing's attitude towards the global body kept oscillating between outright opposition and substantive passivism during most of the Cold War. It was not until the 1990s that China expanded its international profile by remarkably increasing its participation in various multilateral institutions. Adjusting to changing international and domestic conditions, China's initial distrust of the UN was gradually replaced by an engagement more in line with the prominent role it intended to play. Under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, China has become a proactive participant in world affairs, showing a desire and an ability to contribute to global public goods. As a result, China's support for the UN has grown considerably. Today, China is the second-largest financial contributor to the organization's overall budget and the largest troop contributing country among the permanent members of the UN Security Council. This article examines China's engagement within the UN framework and, in particular, why the UN has been chosen by Beijing as one of the key venues in which to flex its diplomatic muscles and strengthen its influence abroad. To address this research question, this article adopts a case study approach that focuses on the deployment of People's Liberation Army (PLA) units for missions relating to counter-piracy and peacekeeping activities. Drawing on the literature on military diplomacy and the study of Chinese media, it provides a comprehensive assessment of Beijing's motivations in the pursuit of peace enforcement in international relations, and highlights the unique role played by the PLA in achieving this ambition. This article is organized into three sections. The first section starts with a historical review of China's evolving behavioral pattern in the UN since that body's founding in 1945. The second section covers China's recent participation in counter-piracy and peacekeeping operations, including its contributions of both personnel and resources, and its efforts to improve the UN security engagement capabilities. The final section explores the motive behind involving the PLA in international missions and what potential gains China can expect to make of it. This article seeks to shed light on China's policy towards the UN and the importance conferred on the latter in China's overall foreign policy.

2. From Rejection to Engagement

The Republic of China (ROC) was the first country to enter what would become World War II when Japan began its full-scale invasion in 1937. As one of the major Allied powers, the ROC was naturally charged with the historic responsibility of forging a new post-war order. Together with the United States, the United Kingdom and Russia, the ROC, led by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, participated in a series of important diplomatic meetings in Washington in the late summer and early fall of 1944.

At these meetings, officially known as the "Washington Conversations on International Organization, Dumbarton Oaks," the four parties deliberated proposals for the future establishment of an international organization to maintain peace and security in the world. Almost one year after those meetings took place, the representatives of 50 countries were invited in San Francisco to officially sign the Charter of the United Nations. In recognition of the ROC's long-standing fight against the Axis powers, Wellington Koo, head of the Chinese delegation, was accorded the honour of being the first to sign. While both the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party of China (CCP) supported the formation of the UN, disputes over representation broke out after the PRC was founded four years later.[1] In November 1949, the Central People's Government requested that the UN immediately deprive the Nationalist delegation "of all rights to further represent the Chinese people in the United Nations" (Chai, 1970: 398). In subsequent years, the Soviet Union, along with other nations friendly to the PRC, introduced multiple proposals to formally replace the Nationalist delegates with a Communist delegation. However, the influence of the United States was such that it was able to assemble enough votes to block this resolution. The admission of newly independent developing countries gradually gave a greater voice to the non-Western world, changing the balance of power within the organization.[2] Increasing global support for Beijing at the expense of Taipei, combined with the diplomatic rapprochement between the Nixon administration and the CCP, sealed the fate of the Nationalists. On October 25, 1971, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 2758 which stated that the PRC is the only legitimate government of China. The resolution also replaced the ROC with the PRC as a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

Although the PRC's support of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations remained largely unaffected, Beijing's posture towards the organization was extremely critical from 1949 to 1969. This was particularly so at the time of the Korean War, and even more from the moment when the resolution condemning the PRC for aggression was passed in February 1951.[3] Chinese leaders and Chinese media repeatedly denounced the UN as a puppet of the United States, which could manipulate it with its automatic voting majority to serve the interests of imperialism (Luard, 1971). The deterioration in relations between the PRC and the Soviet Union further reinforced the Chinese perception that the UN had degenerated into an exclusive tool for the two hegemonic superpowers to suppress the rise of Third World nations. Beijing considered that the international political and economic order, controlled by the United States and the Soviet Union, was set up in favour of exploiting developing countries, which meant it could not be fair and impartial. As a result, the PRC took a position where it not only

refused to recognize the validity of the UN but also strongly opposed such an international regime. At the 22nd session of the General Assembly, the communist delegation declared on December 8, 1967: "Speaking frankly, the Chinese people are not at all interested in sitting in the United Nations, a body manipulated by the United States, a place for playing power politics, a stock exchange for the United States and the Soviet Union to strike political bargains, and an organ to serve the US policies of aggression and war" (Kim, 1974: 301-302).

Condemning the power and influence of Washington and Moscow, the PRC's interest in the UN declined in favour of a new and revolutionary foreign policy centred on rallying the support of the Third World. Convinced that the Third World had a formidable force at the global level, Beijing saw the need to cultivate closer relations with these countries partly for the purpose of challenging the dominance of both the United States and the Soviet Union and partly to win international legitimacy and recognition (Khadiagala, 1982). Thus, by the end of 1969, the PRC had diplomatic relations with 30 Third World nations. Of these 13 were African, 11 Asian, five Middle Eastern and one Caribbean. Between 1969 and 1971, the PRC established official relations with 22 African states (Ogunsanwo, 1974). Beijing's engagement with the Third World was not limited to ideological dispositions but also included economic and technical assistance.[4] Given the condition of the Chinese economy in the immediate post-Cultural Revolution period, this aid took a massive financial toll. Under the impetus of its Third World diplomacy, the PRC's attitude towards the UN steadily shifted to a more conciliatory and flexible posture. Abandoning its former polemical indictments against the organization, Chinese leadership began to launch a charm offensive to join the family of nations (Kim, 1974). As such, Chinese ambassadors who had been recalled during the Cultural Revolution returned to their posts with the mission to restore normal and friendly relations with the host country. The objective to restore the PRC's seat at the UN became a top priority. In 1970, Beijing came close to reaching its goal when the total number of votes supporting the PRC exceeded those against for the first time.[5] The Chinese leadership had been expecting that this would happen, but not that it would happen so soon. Mao Zedong admitted that "the victory at the UN Assembly this time is out of my expectation" (Niu, 2011: 12). One year later, the UN General Assembly would vote to definitely admit the PRC and to expel the ROC.

After its entry into the UN as the legitimate representative of the people of mainland China, the government in Beijing continued to pursue its Third World diplomacy by supporting the economic, colonial, racial, nationalist and anti-imperialist issues which made up the core of the main concern from most

developing countries (Kim, 1974). Reflecting on its own historical experience with the West, China used the principles of national independence and sovereignty in championing the causes of Third World nations. Addressing the UN in 1972, the Chinese delegation proclaimed: "[We] have consistently maintained that all countries, big or small, should be equal and that the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence should be taken as the principles guiding the relations between countries. The people of each country have the right to choose the social system of their own country according to their own will and to protect the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of their own country. No country has the right to subject another country to its aggression, subversion, control, interference or bullying" (Niu, 2011: 15). As the only developing country of the Security Council, China aimed to project itself as a new and different kind of superpower which would promote the demands of the Third World. Sadly for China, Beijing's limited means and resources, in terms of financial contribution as well as foreign service personnel, forced it to adopt a cautious and low-profile posture in its diplomatic behaviour and style at the UN. Caught between the rhetorical militancy and the pursuit of realpolitik, China acted with prudence and pragmatism in advancing its foreign policy interests within the organization.

Once it settled in at the UN, China proved to be neither the operational wrecker as many of its detractors had feared, nor the structural reformer as some of its revolutionary supporters had hoped (Kim, 1974). On contentious issues like the war in Vietnam and UN peacekeeping operations – considered by Beijing as foreign interference in the internal affairs of countries – China chose not to stage an open confrontation, opting to remain silent or at least not to participate in voting. From 1971 to 1976, China refused to vote in 46 of 158 votes, the most of any Security Council permanent members (Niu, 2011). However, the most salient example of the ambivalent character of China's UN diplomacy is to be found in its stand on the veto. On the one hand, Beijing never challenged the principle of the veto despite its previous attacks against its utilization by the hegemonic superpowers. China used to denounce the veto as an exclusive right of the great powers to abuse their privileges, ignoring the sovereignty and equality of nations. After its admission to the UN, China seldom attempted to clarify or rationalize its position on the veto and preferred instead to underscore its own international responsibilities for maintaining peace and security (Ogden, 1979). On the other hand, China exercised restraint in its use of the veto power, resorting to its usage only in situations or issues perceived to be affecting its vital national interests. Unlike Moscow, which used the veto 106 times between 1946 and 1965, thus paralyzing the normal functioning of the organization, Beijing cast its only veto of the Cold War period in 1972, when it barred Bangladesh from membership in the UN.[6]

While many in the West, especially in the US, had anticipated that China would emulate the Soviet Union's abuse of the veto, Beijing voluntarily refrained from using it, refusing to consider the veto power as a political tool during these early years.[7]

With the end of the Cold War and the emergence of a new international system, China gradually abandoned its championing of the Third World and its traditional anti-imperialist stand against hegemonic superpowers. Beijing's attitude became more open and tolerant, showing a sincere desire to become involved in world affairs. The Chinese leadership sought to play a more prominent role in large-scale multilateral institutions, expressing its desire to be recognized as a great power and no longer as a developing country.[8] China's participation in the UN became more participatory and more collaborative. This newly engaging behaviour was first and foremost motivated by two leading factors: the desire to end the unipolar world order, and the impact of globalization.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the United States became the only remaining superpower, functioning virtually unchecked. Although Beijing wanted to have a good relationship with Washington, it also believed that the US might wish to pursue a policy of containment against Chinese power (Liu, 2014). After the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre, the United States, along with other Western countries, slapped economic sanctions against China, depriving it of precious advanced technologies. China's human rights abuses became the most visible and constant points criticized by the US. Threatened with isolation on the international scene, Beijing engaged in vigorous efforts to promote multipolarity in order to balance Washington's global influence. In addition, the irresistible trend of globalization led to greater integration in trade, financial flows, investment and technology in the political and military fields. The 1997 Asian financial crisis, for instance, which caused economic slowdowns or recessions in most Southeast and East Asian countries, illustrated the risks associated with the process of globalization. At the time, the Asian market accounted for almost 40% of China's total exports (Hai and Zhong, 1999). Anything which could even potentially circumscribe its economic development model is anathema to Beijing. China's involvement in multilateral diplomacy became one way through which Beijing sought to mitigate the adverse effects of globalization. The emergence of non-traditional issues such as financial crisis, epidemics, migration, natural disasters, drug trafficking, terrorism and piracy, showed that nation-states were affected indiscriminately and could only be effectively dealt with through international cooperation. Facing these new challenges, China turned into a true international stakeholder, actively contributing to UN activities, with the aim of realizing both its own interests and the interests it had in common with other countries.

3. Counter-piracy and Peacekeeping Operations

One notable sign that China viewed its participation in world affairs as increasingly important after the Cold War was that Chinese leaders began to attend high-level UN conferences and deliver prominent speeches. Before the end of the Cold War, this had occurred only once, when Deng Xiaoping, then the vice-premier of China, attended the Sixth Special Meeting of the UN General Assembly in 1974. In the 1990s, Chinese leaders such as Premier Li Peng and President Jiang Zemin both participated in UN meetings and events. In September 2000, Jiang Zemin delivered a well-received speech at the UN New Millennium Summit, emphasizing that "the positive functions of the UN should be enhanced instead of weakened, and the authority of the UN should be maintained instead of harmed" (Niu, 2011: 25). However, it was China's commitment to UN peacekeeping operations (UNPKO) and attitude towards peace enforcement carried out by pivotal states that represented the most fundamental change in China's international behaviour. After decades of opposition to the principle of military intervention in the internal affairs of sovereign countries, China was now willing to endorse the use of force in the name of the United Nations. In the immediate post-Cold War era, China not only voted in favor of UNPKO but also decided to contribute personnel to its missions. In 1990, China sent five military observers to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) in the Middle East.[9] From April 1992 to September 1993, China deployed 800 PLA engineering troops in two batches to the United Nations Transitional Administration in Cambodia (UNTAC), marking the first time China contributed formal military units to a UN peacekeeping operation (He, 2007).[10]

In the face of the new international security landscape, China came to realize the necessity to make more substantial efforts in order to avoid the intensification of violent conflicts and seek peaceful solutions through the UN. New concepts such as "common security" and "globalized cooperation" made regular features in Chinese foreign policy discourse, which was reflected in Jiang Zemin's analysis in 2002: "As countries increase their interdependency and common ground on security, it has become difficult for any single country to realize its security objective by itself alone. Only by strengthening international cooperation can we effectively deal with the security challenge worldwide and realize universal and sustained security" (Wu, 2011: 160). Whereas China was once closed to the outside world, Chinese interests had by then become linked to crises abroad. As a direct consequence of Beijing's adoption of a more collective security approach, the size of China's peacekeeping force had, by the turn of the century, grown markedly in absolute terms. The total number of Chinese troops involved in UN peacekeeping operations increased from 49 in 1999 to 1,013 in 2005. As

a result, China ranked as the fifteenth largest UNPKO contributor worldwide (Staehle, 2006). Chinese military contingents, as well as police officers, were sent to conflict zones such as East Timor, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Liberia, Sudan and Haiti. Along with its contribution to peacekeeping personnel, China also greatly increased its financial responsibility. While the country's annual contribution to the UN's budget remained less than 1% throughout the 1990s, it rose rapidly in the early 2000s. China moved up on the list of the organization's largest contributors from 13th position in 2001 (1.5%) to ninth in 2004 (2.1%).[11]

Following its rise as an economic power, China strengthened its role and influence in the UN framework. Under the leadership of President Hu Jintao, China adjusted its diplomatic strategy by making the United Nations the most important arena for its diplomacy, through which China could be better engaged in multilateral institutions and international regimes. Beijing progressively pushed for Chinese diplomats to be nominated to high-level positions within the UN's administration. On October 24, 2005, Zhang Xinsheng, Vice-Minister of Education of China, was elected President of the Executive Board of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). On November 9, 2006, Margaret Chan, Director of the Hong Kong Department of Health, became the seventh Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO). The day after the appointment of Margaret Chan, another Chinese national, Zhao Houlin, was elected Deputy Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). On February 4, 2008, it was a Chinese economist, Justin Lin, who was appointed the Senior Vice-President and Chief Economist of the World Bank, making him the first citizen from a developing country to be appointed to this position (Niu, 2011). Ironically, while China's increasing voice and weight in world affairs suggested a desire to adopt a more responsible approach and to meet international demands for China to become a more fully engaged partner and global "responsible stakeholder", concerns over China's true motivations behind its international engagement began to emerge, especially in the United States and its allies.[12]

China's continuous economic success and growing international status attracted appreciation but also unease from the outside world, as reflected in the heated "China threat" debate. On the one hand, the international community, including the United Nations, expected a rising China to shoulder more responsibility and do more for international peace and security. On the other hand, a rising China sparked fear, especially in Western countries, that Beijing would pursue a hegemonic path and seek to disrupt the existing international order, as most rising powers have done in history (He, 2007). To assure the world of China's good will and benign intentions, Chinese leadership began to implement its "harmonious world-oriented" diplomacy.

In September 2005, Hu Jintao made a speech at the summit on the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations, titled "Making Great Efforts to Build a Harmonious World with Long-Lasting Peace and Common Prosperity". In front of an audience that included the heads of state of more than 170 countries, the Chinese President reiterated his country's commitment to adhering to the purpose and principles of the UN Charter and to supporting international efforts to settle disputes or conflicts through peaceful means and strengthen global cooperation.[13] Such thinking served as a guideline for China's contributions to UN activities, particularly those addressing matters related to peace and security.

In this regard, the mobilization of the international community to combat piracy off the Horn of Africa provided China with an opportunity to convert words into actions. In 2008, piracy in the Gulf of Aden became rampant and subsequently gained the attention of the media and policymakers around the world.[14] Acting under chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, the UN Security Council adopted four resolutions (UN Resolutions 1816, 1838, 1846 and 1851) that called upon states with sufficient capacity to take active part in counter-piracy operations (Kaufman, 2009). On December 18, 2008, the Chinese government announced its decision to deploy two guided missile destroyers and a supply ship of the PLA Navy to join the international naval flotilla. This deployment marked the first time in modern history that China's navy engaged in an operational mission outside of its claimed waters (Erickson and Strange, 2015). From the outset, China vowed to cooperate closely with its international partners. At the time of the first deployment, commander Admiral Du Jingcheng stated that, while the PLA Navy would "not accept the command of other countries or regional organizations", it was eager "to facilitate exchanges of information with escort naval vessels from other countries" (Erickson and Strange, 2015: 83). Beijing went to great lengths to promote a positive and constructive image abroad. The PLA established a regularly updated English language website, distributing copious details on its counter-piracy operations. The site even outlined tactics and procedures used by Chinese naval forces in conducting their missions. Additionally, the PLA Navy embedded journalists from various news organizations, including representatives from non-state media, on board the ships (MIT, 2009).

On December 26, 2018, China celebrated the 10th anniversary of its participation in counter-piracy operations. Over that period, the PLA Navy sent 31 convoy fleets, 100 ships, 67 shipboard helicopters, and more than 26,000 officers and soldiers to escort 6,595 ships. They successfully rescued, protected or assisted more than 70 Chinese and foreign ships in distress (Guo, 2019). In recent months, China has announced the deployment of its new generation of main combat ships in the Gulf of Aden, including its

latest guided missile destroyer, *Xian*, and its first domestically developed frigate, *Anyang*.[15] While the number of piracy attacks within the region has dramatically fallen since 2009, the UN Security Council has nevertheless repeatedly renewed its authorization for international naval forces to join in the fight against piracy.[16] The Council recognizes that piracy and armed robbery at sea continue to jeopardize regional stability and urges states that are able to do so to "deploy naval vessels, arms, and military aircraft; provide basing and logistical support for counter-piracy forces; and seize and dispose of boats, vessels, arms and other related equipment used in the commission of piracy-related crimes."[17] China's commitment to combat contemporary maritime piracy remains a priority and is likely to persist for the foreseeable future. China's *2019 Defense White Paper* mentions piracy several times throughout the various sections, indicating that countering piracy is important to many aspects of Beijing's diplomatic strategy. It also reiterates the PLA Navy's support for exchange and cooperation "with multiple naval forces in the area to safeguard the security of sea lines of communication (SLOCs)."[18] The inauguration in 2017 of the PLA's first overseas military base in Djibouti further reflects China's commitment to maritime security engagement. Located on the tip of the Horn of Africa, the Djibouti logistics support base, as it is officially known, has been described by Chinese authorities as a logistics facility to serve UN-authorized counter-piracy missions. Dedicated to nonmilitary activities, it will be used by the PLA Navy to "get more efficient and timely replenishment, maintain equipment, and allow the crew to rest" (Guo, 2019).

China's participation in UN peace and security actions has risen to a new level since Xi Jinping came to power. On June 19, 2013, in his first meeting with UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, President Xi stressed that: "China attaches importance to the UN and will firmly support it. Being a permanent member of the UN Security Council confers certain duties on China, and the country has demonstrated the capability to assume those duties. China will step up its efforts to promote the peaceful settlement of international disputes."[19] The following year, the deployment of combat troops to UN peacekeeping operations represented a significant departure from China's previous practice of providing enabling units only (i.e. police, logistics, engineering and medical units). The matter of sending Chinese combat troops to UNPKO had been under discussion since 2006, when Beijing offered to deploy armed forces to Lebanon, but did not follow through on the decision (Foot, 2014). The subsequent deployment of Chinese combat troops in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) coincided with the adoption of a more pragmatic position in relation to China's traditionally staunch adherence to the principles of state

sovereignty and non-intervention. Over time, Beijing has softened its non-interference policy and gradually acknowledged the necessity to protect civilian populations from gross human rights violations. For instance, China has been surprisingly receptive to the development of the UN's Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine. While China refuses the doctrine to become the grounds for regime change, it accepts the principle that the international community, with the authorization of the UN Security Council, may intervene across borders to end the worst forms of violence and persecution.[20]

Over the past decade, China has significantly upped its personnel and financial contributions to UN peacekeeping initiatives. In 2010, China had 2,039 military personnel deployed to UNPKO, making it the largest contributor among the permanent members of the UN Security Council (Niu, 2011). In 2015, this number surged to 3,084 peacekeepers deployed in 10 missions worldwide (CSIS, 2019).[21] China's contribution to UNPKO has earned applause and respect from the United Nations, as well as from national governments. In Mali, Chinese officers received praise from mission commander Jean-Paul Deconinck for their "excellent professional qualities" (Pauley, 2018). In 2019, all 395 members of the 6th Chinese peacekeeping force of the MINUSMA were recognized with the Peace Medal of Honor, the preeminent award given by the UN for contributions to peace. In South Sudan, it is the country's defense minister, Malek Reuben Riak, who expressed his gratitude: "At this juncture, I would like to register a special thanks to UNMISS in general and the Chinese and all the other peacekeepers for their specific roles in renovating and constructing South Sudan's infrastructure" (Oyet, 2019). China has also bolstered its financial support to the UN peacekeeping budget. In 2016, the Chinese government pledged US$1 billion to help fund UN peace, security and development activities, while in 2018 China supplied 10.3% of the organization's peacekeeping budget, up from 3.9% in 2012 (Moynihan and Muller, 2019). China's increased participation in UN peacekeeping efforts stand in sharp contrast to the United States' recent cutbacks in both personnel and financial contributions. Since the election of President Donald Trump, the US government has openly complained that the United States was shouldering an unfair burden of the cost of UN peacekeeping operations.[22] The approved budget for UNPKO for the 2020 fiscal year is US$6.5 billion, representing an average of 1.9% reduction from the approved budget from the previous year. Of that amount, the United States and China account for 27.9% and 15.2%, respectively.[23]

As the United States is pushing to reduce spending, China is stepping up its investments in peacekeeping. To comprehensively implement the commitments made by Xi Jinping to further support UN peacekeeping operations, China has established a permanent peacekeeping force of 8,000 troops.[24] The force includes members from 28 divisions and 10 fields, ranging

from infantry battalions and quick-response forces to helicopter and drone crews. China has also trained more than 2,000 peacekeepers from other countries and provided demining equipment to Cambodia, Laos, Egypt and ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) (Xiao, 2019). As a major contributor to both troops and financing, Beijing is uniquely positioned to act as a bridge between the perspectives of troop contributing developing countries and of richer donor industrialized countries, thereby lending more legitimacy to UNPKO (Fang, Li and Sun, 2018). China has become the pillar of UN peacekeeping, strengthening its engagement at a time when other UN members have raised doubts about the very relevance of UN peacekeeping missions, questioning whether the latter still match the current complex political realities. As with its participation in counter-piracy operations, China's involvement in UNPKO will continue. According to Major General Shao Yuanming, deputy chief of the Joint Staff Department of China's Central Military Commission, "China stands ready to work with all parties to enable UN peacekeeping operations to progress with times and play a bigger role in peace and security sector" (Xiao, 2019). In 2020, China will be hosting a joint exercise and training event for peacekeeping standby forces.

4. Motivations Behind the Involvement of the PLA in Overseas Missions

The realist paradigm argues that the pursuit of national interests remains the main reason for countries to involve themselves in international relations. Such national interests are subject to change over time, leading to adjustments in countries' foreign policy. Rising powers, in particular, are considered with enormous apprehension as they are perceived as potential sources of instability. While realists attribute most conflicts to a clash of interests, they fear that the self-definition of rising powers' interests will invariably expand along with their increasing capabilities (Kirshner, 2010). Determined by grand ambitions, rising powers are poised to act energetically, and even aggressively, to secure greater influence and thus maximize the prospects of their very survival. One cannot deny that changes in Beijing's interests have led to changes in China's foreign policy. It is, therefore, only logical to assume that China's activism in the United Nations is the result of a reactive response to the promotion of those interests. The analysis of China's recent contributions to UN activities reveals that Beijing's engagement is largely driven by a range of motivations that can be categorized as either defensively- or offensively-oriented.

Motivations that are defensively-oriented emphasize the need for a government to respond to external pressure. Through obligations, recommendations, or social learning, an independent government may feel obligated to modify its position and proceed to a change of policy. In the case of China,

its international engagement has been shaped by its desire to present itself as a global actor that is valued and can be trusted. In 1999, Prime Minister Zhu Rongji coined the phrase "responsible power", which aimed to portray China not only as a responsible economic player but also as a political one in maintaining peace and security. Greater participation in UN affairs was one way in which this goal was to be achieved (Niu, 2011). The decision of the Chinese leadership to become more involved in the international system came after China was accused of being mostly inactive and acting as a "free rider". From Robert Kaplan to US President Barack Obama, a chorus of voices has claimed that China is "free riding" on cooperation undertaken by the United States and other countries that provide benefits to the wider international community.[25] The allegation that China enjoys the advantages of collective action without actually contributing is not something new but dates back to the early 1990s, when Beijing modernized its nuclear forces at the same time that the United States and Russia were downsizing their arsenals and working towards arms control agreements (Kennedy, 2015). Whether the issue is preventing nuclear proliferation, fighting terrorism, or improving maritime security, China has been criticized for not doing enough to support international cooperation.[26] The deployment of the PLA in counter-piracy and peacekeeping operations enables Beijing to address those criticisms directly. By providing more global public goods, China seeks to demonstrate its genuine intention to shoulder more international responsibilities. China has come to realize that, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, it is expected to behave in a way that is more commensurate with its status as a great power.

China's growing commitment to the United Nations is also motivated by the need to portray itself as a benevolent actor that is willing to engage peacefully with the international community. China's rapid economic growth and military modernization have long been a source of open concern in Western countries, as well as in the nations adjacent to China. Beijing's increasing influence on the world stage has caused uncertainty and anxiety to the extent that China has been identified by some scholars and statesmen as a revanchist power, looking to change the balance of power to its advantage.[27] Whether the "China threat" is a valid perception or not, one thing is certain: China suffers from an image deficit. According to the 2019 Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Survey, the perception of China among the populace in almost all its major trade and diplomatic partners (with the exception of Russia) and all developed economies and free democracies was on balance negative.[28] Most respondents in Western Europe had unfavourable views of China, ranging from 53% in Spain to 70% in Sweden. Negative views of China predominated in both the United States and Canada, where 60% and 67% respectively perceived the country unfavourably. China's Asian

neighbours also had dim views of it. There was a disapproval rate of 85% in Japan, 63% in South Korea, 57% in Australia, and 54% in the Philippines. In most of these countries, the approval rates were at or near their historic lows.[29] Moreover, China appears to be losing ground in its battle for global and regional influence. Between the United States and China, 73% of Asian respondents favored Washington, versus 12% for Beijing. Worldwide, 76% of respondents declared that they had no confidence in President Xi Jinping (Huang, 2019). The Chinese government finds itself under intense pressure to enhance China's international image. Beijing knows that if it wants China to gain the international recognition it deserves; it must convince international public opinion that a rising China will be a constructive force for global governance and not a conspicuously disruptive one that threatens world peace and security.

Motivations that are offensively-oriented encourage a government to take proactive actions to secure international gains. The objective is to act with determination and opportunism to create more favourable conditions that will advance national strength. Driven by the ambition to protect and promote its overseas economic and political interests, China has made a considerable effort to expand its international profile. In the Indian Ocean, for instance, China has gone from essentially zero presence around a decade ago to the permanent presence of a sizeable fleet, which includes surface vessels and nuclear submarines (Brewster, 2019). The deployment of the PLA Navy in the region aims to prevent any attempt to limit or block China's vital access to energy resources and raw materials. Beijing attaches significant importance to the safeguarding of SLOCs, as the country's economic growth is highly dependent on seaborne trade.[30] Another mission of the Chinese military is to support and protect Chinese citizens living, working and travelling abroad. As Chinese businesses have increased their presence around the world, a growing number of Chinese citizens are now residing outside of China. Those citizens expect their government to offer them protection from overseas perils, such as maritime piracy, terrorism, insurgencies, and the disorder and violence that arise from weak governance or civil wars (Heath, 2018). In 2011, the PLA Navy and Air Force in Libya initiated China's first large-scale evacuation of Chinese citizens from a foreign country, safely repatriating more than 35,000 people. After that experience, China's military purchased more airlift and amphibious capability to facilitate the future evacuation of Chinese citizens from dangerous situations. In 2015, several Chinese naval frigates, carrying out anti-piracy patrols off the coast of Somalia, were diverted to Yemen to participate in the rescue of 908 people, of which 289 were non-Chinese citizens. The operation not only demonstrated Beijing's commitment to protect its overseas citizens, but also contributed to bolstering China's image abroad.[31] The Chinese leadership recognizes that upholding international stability is

crucial to the country's economic interests. By deploying the PLA in counter-piracy and peacekeeping operations, China seeks to prevent certain regions of the world from sliding into chaos. The protection of national assets and the Chinese diaspora, particularly in distant countries in Africa and the Middle East, has become a national priority.[32] China's involvement in UN activities also provides an opportunity for Beijing to exert greater diplomatic influence. Unlike in developed countries, populations in developing countries have a more favourable view of China.[33] China's strategic attention to the developing world dates back to the Cold War, when it identified itself as a developing country offering vocal and substantive support to the Third World. Today, China's ideological emphasis is gone, but its desire to lead in promoting the collective interests of developing countries has endured (Mitchell, 2006). It is Beijing's ambition to build a less Western-dominated international system, one that is more equitable, pluralistic and undoubtedly more reflective of China's ascendency. To do so, China needs to secure the cooperation of a global network of partners, starting with the developing world.

There is finally a military interest for China to participate in counter-piracy and peacekeeping operations. While the quality of the PLA has improved dramatically, its ability to fight and win wars remains questionable. China has not been in a major conflict since its 1979 war with Vietnam, and has not been involved in sustained combat for over sixty years, since the Korean War. Former director of the PLA General Armaments Department, Zhang Youxia, was quoted as saying: "Forgetting war will certainly bring about dangers. Only by getting ready for war fighting will one be able to fight and win…. Always maintain strategic alertness, resolutely overcome peacetime inertia and bad habits" (Chase et al., 2015: 76). China's participation in overseas operations represents an important stepping-stone in the PLA's transition to a modern and sophisticated force. From an exclusive focus on homeland defense and social stability missions, the responsibilities of the PLA have shifted outwards to support the country's expanding array of global economic and political interests. The PLA has used its deployment in counter-piracy and peacekeeping operations to train its personnel to operate in volatile and remote places, to increase decision-making and leadership skills under pressure, to improve logistical and intelligence support, to gain experience working along foreign contingents, and to test new military equipment. The PLA Navy and Air Force are both working toward achieving a power projection capability. The development of such capability will not only contribute to expand the reach of Chinese forces far from the mainland's shores but will also better prepare them to face contingencies in China's immediate neighbourhood. While the need to protect China's overseas interests has grown in importance, the issue of Taiwan and the maritime territorial disputes in which China is embroiled remain Beijing's principal

preoccupation. The Chinese leadership relies on the supremacy of the PLA to enforce its sovereignty claims over the island-nation, as well as over the East and South China seas.

China clearly sees the United Nations as "the best venue to practice multilateralism, and an effective platform for collective actions to cope with various threats and challenges."[34] From a Chinese perspective, the UN is an inclusive multilateral organization in which China enjoys significant decision-making power. Unlike any other UN member, China has the advantage both of holding veto power in the Security Council and of being an influential participant in the Group of 77 (G77).[35] This unique position allows China to benefit from the same prestige and privileges as the United States, and other great powers, while simultaneously being able to draw upon skeptical developing countries to counter the liberal agendas advocated by Washington and its allies. Moreover, there exists a strong congruence between China's norms and principles and those embodied within the UN itself (Foot, 2014). For instance, the solid attachment to the Westphalian vision of state sovereignty and the sovereign equality of nations reflected in the organization accords closely with Beijing's preferences. In the area of peacekeeping, China emphasizes the need for host-state consent and the host state's primary responsibilities to protect its citizens. When host-state consent is not obtainable, the Security Council is the only body able to authorize the deployment of international peacekeepers. Invoking chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, China strictly opposes peacekeeping missions that bypass the Security Council (Zurcher, 2019).

Despite the significance of the UN resolution as a core principle of peacekeeping, China's security engagement in overseas operations is not without pitfalls. First, China runs the risk of becoming embroiled in crises and places which are unfamiliar to its military forces. With Beijing's commitment to UNPKO, including in regions locked in civil wars, Chinese personnel are increasingly being placed in harm's way. On 1 June, 2016, terrorists attacked the barracks of the Chinese peacekeeping security unit located in Gao, Mali with a vehicle bomb, leading to the death of one Chinese peacekeeper and four injuries. A few weeks later, on 10 July, another two Chinese peacekeepers were killed and five more injured in a mortar exchange between the government forces and the rebel army in Juba, South Sudan (He, 2019). A total of 18 Chinese peacekeepers have lost their lives since China sent its first military observers to UNTSO in 1990.[36] The practice of UN peacekeeping has become more complex and more ambitious, resulting in more intrusive and more assertive missions. While China's participation in UNPKO enjoys domestic public support, it is not certain that this support will continue as Chinese troops increasingly find themselves in dangerous situations (Lanteigne, 2018).

Second, China's involvement in peace operations runs the risk of raising tensions with host governments. The resolution or management of civil conflicts requires the kind of intervention that may be perceived by the recipient states as colliding with law enforcement and sovereignty. Typically, those states consider that mission activities related to the monitoring and investigations of human rights violations interfere in their internal affairs and undermine their international standing. The challenge for China is to continue to expand its role in peacekeeping operations, while at the same time making sure to avoid damaging its bilateral relations with countries where it has strong economic and political interests.

Third, it will be difficult for China to escape the criticisms that come with greater external exposure. In recent years, there has been a series of scandals involving UN peacekeepers in African countries and Haiti.[37] Chinese personnel has never been accused of any inappropriate behaviour, but the growing participation of Chinese troops in UNPKO increases the risk of potential misconduct. Beijing views the PLA as a powerful instrument of statecraft whose proficiency is decisive in achieving its diplomatic ambitions. As such, it expects the PLA to successfully carry out its overseas missions, performing to the highest standards that are required of a world-class military. The problem for Beijing is that any poor performance or controversial behaviour by the PLA will be exploited by China's international competitors to discredit its engagement, whereas at the domestic level, any shortcomings will be interpreted as an embarrassment, thereby jeopardizing the credibility of Chinese leadership. No matter whether the motivations behind China's contributions to UN peacekeeping activities are defensively- or offensively-oriented, Beijing must be on guard not to commit the grave error of assuming that such involvement is entirely free of risk.

5. Conclusion

A comprehensive review of China's policy towards the United Nations reveals that, since the end of the Cold War, Beijing has actively supported the UN framework and contributed to global security. China's engagement in overseas military missions has been shaped by its new identity as a rising power. Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, this engagement has significantly increased in terms of both personnel and financial contributions. The United Nations provides China with considerable social status, both institutionally, through the Security Council, as well as through the praise that Beijing has garnered with reference to its peacekeeping duties (Foot, 2014). China has fundamentally changed its approach to UN-sponsored security operations. From an opponent to what it formerly considered a thinly veiled disguise for imperialist interventions, China has become a leader in UNPKO. The reason for this

remarkable evolution is to be explained by the fact that China has emerged as a state with global interests. It is, therefore, necessary for Beijing to be prepared to protect those interests by getting involved in issues that directly affect them. To achieve its ambitions and expand its international profile, China has come to rely on the expertise and power projection capabilities of its modernized armed forces. The participation of Chinese troops in counter-piracy and peacekeeping operations highlights the advancing role played by the PLA in China's foreign policy. Over the past decade, the PLA has undergone significant changes in its structuring and technological developments to make it into a leaner and more efficient force. This transformation has been accompanied by a series of drastic measures ordered by President Xi Jinping to strengthen the loyalty and discipline of the military. Those measures have included organizational reforms, curtailing the PLA's corporate interests, and a widespread purge carried out in the name of anti-corruption. Confident in its authority and control over the military, the Zhongnanhai has been more willing to assign broader responsibilities to the PLA. However, the growing presence of Chinese troops abroad has not gone unnoticed, and it is raising questions about Beijing's true ambitions on the world stage. The involvement of the PLA in overseas missions is increasingly perceived not only by the United States and its allies but also by many within the international community as a vehicle for China to expand its political and security interests and influence. It is now time for Beijing to allay these feelings of mistrust and suspicion and develop a coherent strategy that will present its security engagement within the UN in a positive light. A failure to do so will only add troubles to the already risky deployment of the PLA in potentially hostile environments.

Notes

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1. *Ta Kung Pao*, a pro-Communist independent daily, wrote that the opening session at the San Francisco UN Conference on April 25, 1945 was "the day of liberation for entire mankind." The *Central Daily News*, the Nationalist Party official newspaper, hailed the Conference as "a milestone in the all-out efforts of the anti-aggression nation to end war and to change the strength for war into a guardian for international peace" (Chai, 1970: 397).
2. In 1946, there were 35 member states in the UN. As the newly independent nations of the Third World joined the organization, by 1970 membership had swelled to 127. Retrieved from https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/asia-and-africa (accessed September 9, 2019).
3. By a vote of 44 in favour, to 7 opposed, with 9 abstentions, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 498, condemning the communist government of

China for committing acts of aggression in Korea and engaging in hostilities against UN forces. It was the first time since its foundation that the UN had condemned a nation as an aggressor. Retrieved from https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951v07p1/d120 (accessed September 10, 2019).

4. The 1970 aid diplomacy by the PRC represented 64.5% of the total Communist aid for the year; more significantly, it represented 42.8% of all PRC aid pledges since 1956 (Kim, 1974).
5. The votes were 51 in favour of the PRC and 49 (including US vote) against, with 25 abstentions (Chiang, 2018).
6. China vetoed Bangladesh's application for UN membership due to its concern over the legal status of Taiwan and its position that the parent's state consent was essential to a territory attaining independence and statehood. China also drew attention to "acts of the Soviet social-imperialism" and "their sinister designs to use others as counters or stakes to maintain and aggravate tension on the South Asia sub-continent." After Pakistan acknowledged Bangladesh's independence in 1974, China no longer blocked Bangladesh's application (Chan, 2015: 257-258).
7. Numerically, China's record compares favourably with those of the Soviet Union, the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, who exercised 10, 69, 24 and 14 vetoes, respectively during the period 1971-1991. Retrieved from https://research.un.org/en/docs/sc/quick (accessed September 21, 2019).
8. Over the years, China has increasingly engaged in multilateral diplomacy. It became involved in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1994, established the Shanghai Cooperation Council (SCO) in 1996, joined the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) in 1997, and became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 after a lengthy process of negotiation.
9. Set up in May 1948, UNTSO was the first-ever peacekeeping operation established by the UN. Since then, UNTSO military observers have remained in the Middle East to monitor ceasefires, supervise armistice agreements, prevent isolated incidents from escalating and assist other UN peacekeeping operations in the region to fulfill their respective mandates. Retrieved from https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/untso (accessed September 14, 2019).
10. As one of the largest and most complex UNPKO at the time, UNTAC was established to ensure the implementation of the Agreements on the Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict, signed in Paris on October 23, 1991. The mandate included aspects relating to human rights, the organization and conduct of elections, military arrangements, civil administration, maintenance of law and order, repatriation and resettlement of refugees and displaced persons, and rehabilitation of Cambodian infrastructure. Retrieved from https://peacekeeping. un.org/sites/default/files/past/untacbackgr2.html (accessed September 14, 2019).
11. From 1990 to 1999, China's financial contribution slowly increased from US$6,247,866 (0.7% of the total UN budget) to US$10,110,351 (0.9%). In the following years, China's financial contribution increased to US$15,328,088 (1.5%) in 2001, surpassing the contribution of its fellow UN Security Council member, Russia (US$12,411,407); US$17,156,324 (1.5%) in 2002; US$20,683,922 (1.5%) in 2003; and US$29,481,755 (2.1%) in 2004 (Browne & Blanchfield, 2013).

12. In a 2005 speech, US Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick used the term "responsible stakeholder" to address how China should wield its growing power and influence. The European Commission called upon China to engage with the international community in a 2006 policy paper, entitled "EU-China: Closer Partners and Growing Responsibilities." Japan, for its part, demanded that China paid higher UN membership fees. All these countries advocated for China to become deeper involved in the international system (Xu, 2018).
13. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, "Hu Jintao delivers an important speech at the UN Summit." Retrieved from https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/dslbj_665832/t212614.shtml (accessed September 18, 2019).
14. In 2008, the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) recorded 111 incidents related to Somali pirates, a trend that continued in 2009. At the end of 2009, the IMB had recorded 217 attacks on vessels with 47 successfully seized. Retrieved from http://piracy-studies.org/somali-piracy-and-the-international-response-trends-in-2009-and-prospects-for-2010 (accessed September 23, 2019).
15. China's 32nd convoy fleet to the Gulf of Aden and Somali waters set sail from a military port in Zhoushan on April 4, 2019. Retrieved from https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/china-deploys-new-missile-destroyer-frigate-in-its-anti-piracy-fleet/articleshow/68724333.cms?from=mdr&utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst (accessed September 30, 2019).
16. There were no pirate attacks reported in the Western Indian Ocean in 2018, including Somalia, the Gulf of Aden, or the Red Sea, in spite of pirate groups retaining the capabilities (Joubert, 2019).
17. UN Resolution 2442 (2018). Retrieved from https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13566.doc.htm (accessed September 30, 2019).
18. The State Council of the PRC, "China's national defense in the new era." Retrieved from http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper (accessed September 30, 2019).
19. Embassy of the PRC in the Republic of Kenya, "President Xi Jinping meets with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon." Retrieved from http://ke.chineseembassy.org/eng/zgyw/t1052186.htm (accessed October 7, 2019).
20. The R2P doctrine includes protection from acts of genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other human rights abuses. Retrieved from https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/about-responsibility-to-protect.shtml (accessed October 7, 2019).
21. As of 31 December 2018, China had 2,506 peacekeepers serving in seven UN missions. Retrieved from http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper (accessed October 9, 2019).
22. In 2018, US ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, said at a Security Council debate on peacekeeping reform that "Peacekeeping is a shared responsibility. With shared responsibility comes shared burdens and shared costs. One country should not shoulder more than one quarter of the UN peacekeeping budget, and we look forward to a more equitable distribution of the budget among Member States." Retrieved from https://usun.usmission.gov/remarks-at-a-un-security-council-open-debate-on-peacekeeping (accessed October 8, 2019).

23. United Nations Peacekeeping, "How we are funded." Retrieved from https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/how-we-are-funded (accessed October 8, 2019).
24. In 2015, Xi Jinping told the 70th session of the UN General Assembly that China would create a reserve force of 8,000 troops. The Chinese President also pledged US$1 billion to a 10-year joint China-UN peace and development fund and US$100 million in military assistance for African Union peacekeeping missions to fight terrorism on the continent (Zhang, 2017).
25. Kaplan, R. (2009, 6 October). Beijing's Afghan gamble, *New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/07/opinion/07kaplan.html?mtrref=www.google.co.uk&gwh=F5B985D8FEDF5B985D8FEDE09FD6FBADABD97240EE0&gwt=pay&assetType=REGIWALL; Feng, B. (2013, 13 August). Obama's 'free rider' comment draws Chinese criticism, *New York Times*. Retrieved from https://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/08/13/obamas-free-rider-comment-draws-chinese-criticism.
26. The number of articles containing both of the terms "China" and "free rider" in the Factiva database, for instance, increased from an average of 39 per year from 2005 to 2009 to 75 per year from 2010 to 2013 (Kennedy, 2015).
27. Richard Bernstein and Ross Murrow argue that "driven by nationalist sentiment, a yearning to redeem the humiliations of the past, and the simple urge for international power, China is seeking to replace the United States as the dominant power in Asia." According to Robert Kagan, China, "like all rising powers of the past, including the United States, wants to reshape the international system to suit its own purpose" (Haque, 2013: 112).
28. The 2019 Pew Research Center Survey was conducted among 34,904 people in 32 countries from May 13 to August 29. Retrieved from https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/09/30/people-around-the-globe-are-divided-in-their-opinions-of-china (accessed 22 October, 2019).
29. By comparison, opinions of China were largely positive in 2002. Then, the country's approval rates were 55% in Japan, 66% in South Korea, 52% in Australia, and 63% in the Philippines.
30. China has emerged as the most important trading partner of the Indian Ocean region, accounting for 16.1% of its total goods trade in 2017, up from 4.8% in 2000. China has become the world's top importer of both crude oil and natural gas since 2018, importing two-thirds of the energy it consumes. Almost half, 44% of China's oil imports come from the Middle East, while Africa accounts for more than 25% of the total oil and gas imported to China. Retrieved from https://www.offshore-technology.com/comment/chinese-investment-in-africa-oil-gas (accessed 28 October, 2019)
31. This marked the first time that the PLA helped other countries evacuate their people during an international crisis. A spokeswoman for Germany's foreign ministry confirmed that China had evacuated three Germans to Djibouti, adding that Berlin was "very thankful to the Chinese government for its support." Retrieved from http://ir-ia.com/news/china-rescues-225-foreign-nationals-from-war-torn-yemen (accessed 28 October, 2019).
32. This was spelled out in China's *2015 Defense White Paper*: "With the growth of China's national interests […] the security of overseas interests concerning

energy and resources, strategic sea lines of communication (SLOCs), as well as institutions, personnel and assets abroad, has become an imminent issue." Retrieved from http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Press/2015-05/26/content_4586805.htm (accessed 29 October, 2019).

33. According to the 2019 Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Survey, the perception of China in Africa was positive, with the four countries surveyed (i.e. Tunisia, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa) averaging 62% favourability. In Latin America, more Mexicans, Brazilians and Argentinians had favourable than unfavourable views of China. Retrieved from https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2018/10/01/international-publics-divided-on-china (accessed 29 October, 2019).
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The Little Pinks: Self-mobilized Nationalism and State Allies in Chinese Cyberspace

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Abstract

Previous studies on cyber politics in China have highlighted the antagonistic relationship between the state and society, either emphasizing on how the state controls online opinions or how the Internet politically empowers individuals. Recent studies went further to reveal the possibility of collaboration between the state and certain online groups. Following the new line of research, this paper presents a case study of the "Little Pinks" and argues that the heterogeneous cyberspace could spontaneously generate netizen groups that may well align and cooperate with the authoritarian regime. The Little Pinks is a group of influential young Chinese netizens who are nationalistic-oriented and readily defend their government online. Although Chinese authorities have attempted to guide and mobilize them, they are at most allies, but never a subsidiary of the government. They have demonstrated astonishing organizational capability in collective actions, which is derived from the vibrant fandom culture in the Chinese cyberspace.

Keywords: *cyber-politics, fandom groups, youth politics, nationalism, authoritarianism, China*

1. Introduction

At 7pm on 20 January 2016, a few days after Tsai Ing-wen was elected as Taiwan's president, tens of thousands of Chinese netizens skirted the Great Firewall[1] to "bombard" Tsai's Facebook pages and pro-independence news media with excessive pro-China memes and messages. In less than 24 hours, over 70,000 comments were posted on Tsai's page (Henochowicz, 2016 in *China Digital Times*, 4 August). The Chinese netizens who coordinated and executed the event is widely known as the "Little Pinks (*xiao fenhong*)", a group of youths who are nationalistic and ready to defend the Chinese government on the Internet.

The Little Pinks' collective actions are often targeted at events arousing widespread nationalism among the Chinese. As a result, they are often seen in recent years at events where patriotic sentiments are at an all time high (*The Economist*, 2016). Right after the arbitration against China's interest in the South China Sea disputes in 2016, the Little Pinks surged online to excoriate anti-Chinese individuals and entities, which boasted 13.1 million posts and some with thousands of comments as at the end of 2018 (Weibo, 2018). There were also attempts to take things offline. When South Korea decided to deploy the American anti-ballistic missile defence system in 2017, the Little Pinks again called out on various social media platforms to boycott South Korean supermarket chain store Lotte.[2]

Previous studies on cyberspace in authoritarian regimes have highlighted the antagonistic relationship between the state and society (Amichai-Hamburger et al., 2008; Mäkinen, 2006; Rød and Weidmann, 2015). Studies that focused on China also largely fall under this tradition. On one hand, studies on Internet censorship (Benney and Xu, 2017; King et al., 2014), and public opinion-guiding mechanisms (Han, 2015; King et al., 2017) attempted to explain how the state could exploit Internet technology to assert control and suppress the cyberspace. On the other hand, there are studies that highlighted the Internet technology's empowerment of individuals through the creation of virtual public sphere, allowing and encouraging different forms of expressions and criticisms against the state (Yang, 2009). Besides these two perspectives, however, there is also the possibility of cooperation between state and society.

Some recent studies have indeed suggested that the heterogeneous cyberspace could produce online groups that spontaneously cooperate with the government (Han, 2018). In this sense, even though authoritarian governments would always attempt to impose controls over cyberspace, the Internet can still develop a series of variegated and fragmented circles, groups, subcultures and cyber societies. China's Internet economy is largely a market economy dominated by private companies. This provides mediums for self-flourishing of various online popular cultures, fan cultures and youth subcultures, which make up the diversified and fragmented Chinese cyberspace.

Such diverse groups provide room and vitality for the generation and exchanges of different ideas. Indeed, there have been heated debates among a variety of ideas and ideologies on the Chinese Internet (Shi-Kupfer et al., 2017). Among these ideas, there are unorthodox ones, as well as those partially aligned with official discourse. It is also very possible that there are self-emerged opinions and perspectives in the cyberspace which are well-aligned with the regime, and will voluntarily turned themselves into allies of regimes (Han, 2018). In this aspect, Internet can spontaneously cooperate with the authoritarian state. The Little Pinks phenomena is one such prominent example.

While nationalism in contemporary China is well-studied, it is mostly seen as constructed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to bolster the legitimacy of its regime (Guo et al., 2007; He, 2018; Hyun et al., 2014; Zhao, 1998). However, since the 1990s, the rise of popular nationalism in China had been observed in cases of anti-Japanese and anti-American protests (Gries, 2005). Such bottom-up nationalism sentiments should be differentiated from state-led or state-constructed nationalism. As pointed out by Mearsheimer, "What makes nationalism in contemporary China such a potent force is that it is both a top-down and a bottom-up phenomenon" (Mearsheimer, 2014: 401). While the top-down approach is widely discussed in previous studies, the possibility of self-developed nationalism among the grassroots have not been thoroughly examined despite its importance in understanding the state-society relationship and civil society development in China.

Based on a case study of the Little Pinks, this paper argues that the heterogenous cyberspace in China has facilitated the spontaneous emergence of popular nationalism on Chinese Internet. Even though state-sponsored nationalism could possibly have created a macro-environment that is conducive for the rise of Little Pinks, Little Pinks were seldom directly organized by the state. They are products of the diversified Internet culture in China.

The Little Pinks possess self-mobilization and organizational skills that are deeply rooted in the Chinese commercial and fandom culture, in which intense online debates are very common between different fan groups. Their skills are evident in their abilities to formulate collective identity, establish organization and operation plans, and ride the tides of online discourse.

This paper also wants to argue that although the state has played a proactive role in co-opting and guiding the Little Pinks, the Little Pinks did not become a subordinate of the state. They are at most allies of the state. They are also only one strand of political attitudes among China's youth, where there is a decreasing trend of nationalism generally.

Nevertheless, studying this unique strand of nationalistic youth is important for the understanding of regime stability in an authoritarian setting. Several established studies have provided invaluable insights on the sources of regime support in China from the perspective of political culture or attitudes (Chu, 2013; Chu, 2016; Tang, 2016). This study hopes to contribute to the discussion by revealing how citizens could take voluntary political actions to defend an authoritarian regime. Our findings also aim to further the understanding on the foundations of bottom-up nationalism, whereby popular culture groups could provide resources for the organization and mobilization of nationalistic movements.

The empirical findings of this paper are derived from close reading of online posts, news reports and existing literature. The authors studied posts and discussion threads on Facebook, Baidu forums, Weibo and other relevant

social media sites to understand the Little Pinks' behaviours. Some of those can be clearly identified as posted by members of Little Pinks,[3] and others are discussions about them. The following sections will first briefly trace how the Little Pinks emerged and developed into one of the prominent nationalist groups online. Following that, a detailed study on the 2016 bombardment of Facebook pages will reveal the mobilizational and organizational abilities of Little Pinks, and explain how such abilities are derived from the fandom culture. Then, the paper shows how the party attempted to enlist and co-opt the Little Pinks. The final section will position Little Pinks in the general trend of nationalism among Chinese youth and demonstrate that the Little Pinks are not significantly contributing to a more nationalistic China.

2. The Birth of Little Pinks: From Literature Lovers to Patriotic Youth

The Little Pinks start-up was not due to any governmental initiatives, but as a natural product of the Internet. They originated from Jinjiang Literary City, an online portal for sharing original writings on romantic love. As the background of the website was pink, users of the site, most of whom are females in their 20s, were nicknamed "Little Pinks".[4]

These literature lovers also often visit a hidden forum on this Jinjiang site for political discussions. Their dominant political orientation is pro-Chinese government and they tend to argue against anyone who holds a negative view of the regime.[5] Gradually, the Little Pinks migrated from the hidden forum to different websites to speak out for the government. Other patriotic netizens, of both genders from within and without China, had also emerged to join them. They appeared in discussion forums like Tianya, KDNet, social media platforms like Weibo, subculture websites like AcFun and Bilibili, and fandom forums like Emperor Forum (*Diba*) on Baidu.com.[6]

The term "Little Pinks" was initially used by their rivals as a disparaging and demeaning label in their debates back in 2015. They used the term to deride the Little Pinks as "ideologically regressive, ignorant, and emotionally zealous" (Fang and Repnikova, 2018). Ironically, the Little Pinks accepted the term with pride and turned it into a trademark of their collective identity. As the group evolved, the term is now generally referring to young Chinese netizens who have a pro-government political stance and are ready to defend the government on various issues in cyberspace.

Three factors could have provided a conducive social environment for the emergence and rise of the Little Pinks. First, these young people, mostly born in the 1990s and 1980s, grew up in the period of China's rapid economic growth. Unlike their seniors who had experienced economic hardship and political turmoil and tend to position China in the world from a more modest

perspective, the Little Pinks are culturally and politically more confident (Wang and Zhu, 2016).

They are born in an era of boom, an era with China becoming the second largest economy in the world and "Made in China" products sweeping every corner of the earth. They hold a highly positive view of the "China Model" and development path, taking pride in the regime's achievements and deprecating Western political values (Shi, 2016). The country's economic growth has endowed them with a sense of pride and made them more inclined to become nationalistic, especially those who tasted the fruits of prosperity.

The second factor lies in the patriotic education campaign that started in the 1990s. The campaign is a full-scale and long-term project specifically aimed at instilling patriotism in the entire young generation, and in turn developing such sentiment into a new source of legitimacy for the Party. The curriculum was revised to give emphasis on the victimized role of China in its modern and contemporary history, and the role of CCP as the bearer of China's historic struggle for independence (Wang, 2008). The propaganda machine also selected lists of patriotic songs, films, books, historical sites and events to instil nationalism beyond the classroom and in the whole country (Zhao, 1998).

Studies on young generations have shown that this campaign is at least partially successful in shaping their political attitudes. By highlighting foreign powers' invasion and oppression of China, the patriotic education campaign has nurtured stronger loyalty towards the party-state, and greater support for tougher foreign policies against "foreign pressures" (Qian et al., 2017; Wang, 2008; Zhao, 1998).[7] More recently, a survey experiment based on a textbook reform in China between 2004 and 2010 found that the new curriculum has successfully inculcated in the students greater support for the regime, and higher scepticism of the West (Cantoni et al., 2017). Students with higher attendance in the political education courses had also indicated higher political trust towards the government and the party, and higher pride in the Chinese political system (Lu, 2016).

Third, the rise of Little Pinks is inseparable from the style of mainstream discourse on Chinese cyberspace, which encourages the expression of nationalistic sentiments. With state censorship and public opinion manipulation online, official nationalistic ideology has been the mainstream in the Chinese cyberspace, which to a large extent crowds out other opinions and limits the range of alternative discourses being discussed (Shi-Kupfer and Ohlberg, 2018).

This left Chinese netizens a lack of alternative frameworks and perspectives to understand different issues and the world (Han, 2019). Thus, political expressions and discussions of Chinese Internet users are very likely to replicate and reinforce the nationalistic discourse preferred by the regime,

framing their narratives with concepts of national identity and patriotism (Hyun and Kim, 2015). As a result, apart from the official propaganda, the nationalist discourse put forth spontaneously by netizens appeared to be influential on Chinese social media sites (Fang and Repnikova, 2018; Guo, 2018). The Little Pinks, as the main propagator of such a discourse, have become one of the prominent groups in the Chinese cyberspace.

3. "Facebook Expedition": How Little Pinks Take Actions

Generally, the Little Pinks is a group with fluid membership and no structured organization, hence the difficulty of being clearly defined. They are largely active on various fandom and subcultural sites frequented by youths and mostly engage in apolitical discussions related to their idols, shopping and dramas. In real life, most of them are strangers to each other, with rare physical interactions as they are located all around China and even across the world.

Due to their unstructured and capricious nature, the Little Pinks could not and is not controlled by any official entity or specific organization. This distinguished the Little Pinks from the "fifty-cent party", which is said to be employed by the government to defend the regime on the Internet.[8]

Only when ignited by occasional political event would they transform into a powerful and overwhelming group that acts to shape cyber discourse. In such circumstances when they take political actions online, they would display astonishing organizational skills and unanimous collective identity. A good example is the 2016 "Facebook Expedition", an event named by the Little Pinks for their bombardment of Tsai's Facebook page.

In this event, the fandom groups in the Emperor Forum played a crucial role. The organizers of this event, many of whom are active users of this forum, are ordinary netizens who were self-motivated to take up the responsibility. While it is difficult to identify the organizers of the Facebook Expedition due to the anonymity of Internet users and closed circles, the group of organizers have apparently inherited the organizing tactics of the Emperor Forum.

In the Emperor Forum, there are managers put in charge of each subforum, and all the managers would gather in a closed discussion group to share information and discuss about rules and regulations. After making a collective decision, the managers would then convey these formulated rules and regulations to their respective subforums and superintend accordingly. Users who break the rules will be blacklisted by the managers and required to issue a public apology for their "misconduct" before they can post any comment.

Similarly, for the Facebook Expedition, the organizers had clandestinely and collectively drawn up the plan, outlined rules and guidelines for actions, and prepared step-by-step instructions on how to use Virtual Private Networks

(VPNs) to circumvent the Chinese Great Firewall and access Facebook. The information was then disseminated by the organizers of social media platforms to their recruited participants (Zhang and Wang, 2016). With these plan, rules and instructions, the organizers were able to ensure that participants who joined were fully aware that the purpose of the Expedition was to carry out Facebook bombardment of the pro-independence camp in Taiwan. This thus created strong consensus among the recruited participants.

Efforts were synchronized and participants were made absolutely clear that the Expedition was scheduled to begin on 7pm of 20 January 2016. Even more specifically, instructions were given that 7pm to 7.30pm was allocated for the bombardment of Facebook pages of pro-independence Taiwanese media before moving on to Tsai Ing-wen's Facebook page (Qiu, 2016).[9]

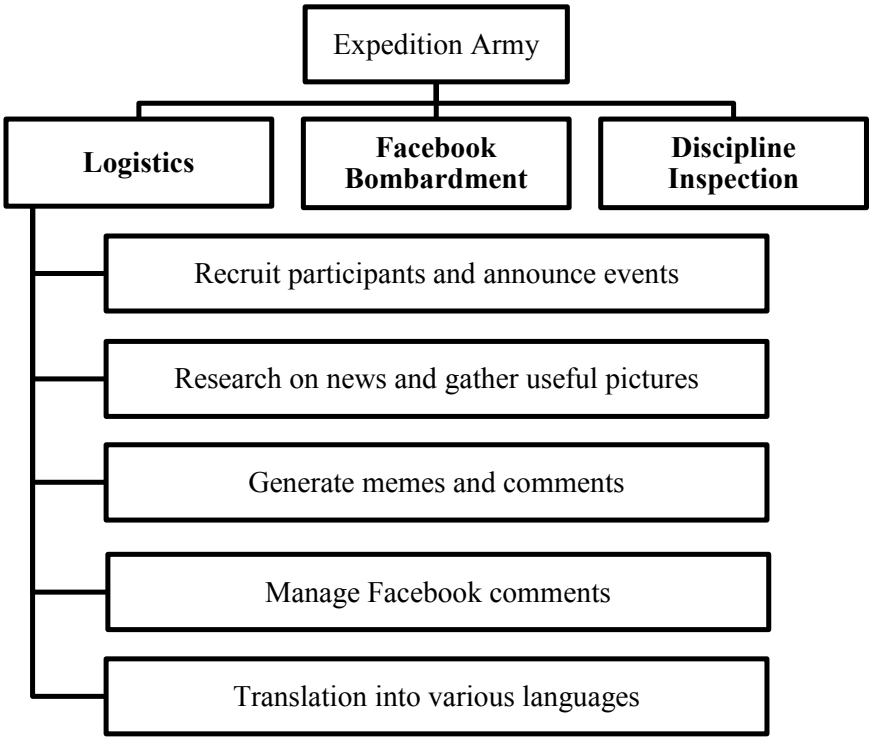
To show solidarity and common identity, the organizers had designed a graphic and encouraged all Facebook Expedition participants to use it for their profile pictures. The graphic has a map of mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and the nine-dash line in the South China Sea, as well as texts "Taiwan belongs to my country", "Taiwan is an inalienable part of China" and "We are Chinese" in both Chinese and English language. They also propagated a belligerent slogan, "Emperor Forum's expedition spares no lives (*Diba chuzheng, cuncai busheng*)".

The organizers laid out rules for participants and disseminated them via different platforms. Besides facilitating coordination, these rules were aimed at creating a "rational" and "civilized" image of Chinese netizens in their charm offensive against pro-independence Taiwanese. Rules laid out included: (i) no vulgarities and fake information, (ii) no insults or erotic photos, and photos of political leaders, (iii) oppose those who advocate Taiwan independence, but befriend all other Taiwanese, and (iv) act only according to the command (XiaojuhuayoueryuanPro, 2016). Those who broke the rules would be kicked out.

Recruited participants were divided into three major clusters (Figure 1), namely, the "Facebook Bombardment" group, "Logistics" team and the "Discipline Inspection" division, each assigned with specific tasks (Sina News, 2016). The "Facebook Bombardment" group was made up of participants who had access to overseas websites and who carried out the bombardment of memes and comments on Facebook. Many of them were Chinese students studying overseas with Facebook accounts (Fang and Repnikova, 2018). Others who did not have Facebook account could share the accounts provided by the organizers or other participants (Yang et al., 2017).

Besides executing the bombardment, they made efforts to publicize what they were doing and their political appeal to the entire cyberspace. The Expedition army provided live broadcast of their Facebook bombardment on video streaming websites such as Bilibili and DouYu, allowing other Internet

Figure 1 Organisational Structure of "Facebook Expedition Army"



Source: Compiled by authors based on information from online observations, and studies such as Guo, X., & Yang, S., 'Wangluo minzu zhuyi yundong zhong de oumushi chuanbo yu gongyi dongyuan' ['The Memetic Communication and Consensus Mobilization in the Cyber Nationalistic Movement']; *Guoji Xinwenjie* [*Chinese Journal of Journalism and Communication*] (November 2016); Long, Y., & Zhang, S., 'Diba tuandui shoudu huiying chuzheng fb' ['Emperor Forum Team Responses for the First Time Regarding Facebook Expedition'], (23 January 2016), available at http://www.guancha.cn/Celebrity/2016_01_23_349006_s.shtml (accessed 4 June 2018).

users, especially Chinese netizens without access to Facebook, to see what was happening. According to screenshots and recounts of audiences, there were tens of thousands of Internet users viewing the live broadcast during the event.[10]

The "Logistics" team was further divided into five major groups.[11] The first group helped to recruit more participants and pose announcements regarding their Expedition via various Chinese social media platforms. The second group researched on Taiwan's pro-independence news reports in order

to tailor rebuttals and arguments, and collect useful pictures for the third group, which was tasked to generate memes using Photoshop. The comments and memes generated were then passed to the "Facebook Bombardment" group for copying and pasting onto Facebook as comments. These groups constituted a production line to facilitate the massive influx of nationalistic comments on Facebook within a short period of time.

The fourth logistics group helped to manage Facebook comments by pressing "like" for favourable comments. Receiving more likes will allow a comment to be listed on top and become easily seen. On top of that, they would report to the Facebook system comments advocating Taiwan independence as "abusive contents", so Facebook would remove them. Sometimes, the Little Pinks' comments and Facebook accounts would also be deleted when they were reported by rival users. In this case, they would either recreate new accounts or borrow from other users "zombie" accounts that were created solely for this Expedition. This mutual removing of accounts was advantageous to the Expedition team, as many of them were not frequent users of Facebook. In contrast, their rivals, mostly Taiwanese in this case, tend to be regular users and had to bear a higher cost if their personal accounts containing social media profiles and contacts were deleted or frozen.

The fifth group was made up of participants with various linguistic abilities. They translated the generated comments into English, Cantonese, Japanese, Russian, German, French, Thai and so on to expand their influence and made their stance known to netizens from other countries and regions.

The "Discipline Inspection" division was put in charge of monitoring behaviours of participants. They would observe their participants' postings on Facebook, on their forum and in their chat groups. Once they discovered a participant breaking their rules, for example posting vulgarities, or turned against them by criticizing China, they would blacklist and expel the misbehaving participant from their contact groups (Gengzhige et al., 2016).

These groups of participants organized themselves by creating chat groups on Tencent QQ Chat. Two types of chat groups were being created: the first was according to different tasks assigned (as explained above) and the second was to serve as headquarters for coordination and issuing of instructions. Recruited participants had to be approved by chat group administrators who were the organizers before they could join the chat groups (Xinmeitianyu, 2016).

The "Facebook Bombardment" participants had also created groups to coordinate actions on Facebook, which still exist to date. Some of these groups have been kept active, and promptly called for bombardment of hostile foreign entities whenever triggered by new events. For instance, the news of three Chinese tourists being forcibly removed by police from a hotel in Sweden had led to the bombardment of the Facebook pages of

Sweden's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, national television broadcaster Sveriges Television, and its host Jesper Rönndahl.

4. Sources of Organizational Capability: Commercial and Fandom Culture

There are interviews showing the many Little Pinks grew out of the fandom culture (Wang et al., 2016; Wu, 2016). Their organizational and Internet debate skills during the Facebook Expedition resemble those of fan group debates. China's market reform in the recent decades gave rise to the rapid growth of its Internet economy, which in turn breeds a vibrant fandom culture in the Chinese online sphere. Being active members of various social media sites, especially fandom-related, is one reason why the Little Pinks could successfully recruit and mobilize participants for the Facebook Expedition, and why similar techniques of fandom debates were seen to be in use.

In fandom culture, people who share similar interest and pleasure towards a pop-/sub-cultural genre, a particular production or an individual would gather in communities. They are socially connected and engaged via their similar interest (Fiske, 1992; Zhang, 2016). Specifically, a group of fans would share their views, and encourage patronage and support for their idols. Through frequent interactions among themselves, they develop well-established organizational skills and rules. For instance, Chinese fans of Stefanie Sun, the leading Singapore singer, have set up and interact in fan pages on Weibo and Baidu forums to share the latest news, activities or products related to Sun. Sun's Weibo has attracted around three million followers to date.

Between different groups of fans, rivalry and arguments would put their organizational structure and discourse-setting skills to test. Studies found that some Little Pinks possessed immense media experience and skills gained from defending their idols and downplaying their idols' competitors in online debates (Wang et al., 2016).

The Little Pinks inherited from fandom culture four specific characteristics. First, they have learnt to forge common identities. Fans of a certain pop culture idol would adopt a common label as a form of self-identity (Chen and Lin, 2016). For instance, fans of Stefanie Sun would call themselves "zimi", which in Chinese means fans of Sun Yanzi (Chinese name of Stefanie Sun). Fandom groups would give demeaning labels to their rivals too. For instance, the Little Pinks were labelled by their opponents, and they retaliated with labels like "traitors", "US fans" and "Paving the Way Party", accusing their rivals of leading "foreign invaders" into the country (Shi-Kupfer et al., 2017). Such demeaning labels have also enhanced identities of the target groups.

Second, the Little Pinks have learnt tactics of collective actions from fandom culture. Debates between different groups over "whose idol is better" are very common, which often lead to bombardment of their rivals' Internet forums. Such actions in turn would reinforce their common identity (Wang et al., 2016). For instance, different fandom groups had indulged in heated disputes over which idol sings better in the 2009 television singing competition for female contestants. This had ultimately resulted in a bombardment of scornful comments on one of the contestant's forum on Baidu (Sina News, 2015). The Little Pinks, who inherited such a culture, also employed such tactics on the Facebook pages of Tsai and the pro-independence Taiwan media.

Third, the high intensity of such debates has forced individual fans to organize themselves so as to overwhelm their opponents and win the Internet battles (Chen and Lin, 2016). Fandom groups usually have a group of core members in charge of drawing up rules and organizing events. They would also produce guidelines to help new members analyze negative news related to their idols, and ways to refute criticisms with "rationality, evidence and constraint" (Wang et al., 2016). Such organizing methods were subsequently observed during the Facebook Expedition.

Finally, the Little Pinks have learnt from fandom groups ways to make use of the rise and fall of public sentiments online and the periodicity of online debates. In cases where their idols have been derogatorily smeared or splashed with negative news, the fandom groups would keep a low profile to avoid futile quarrels or unwanted public attention. After the news fizzled out, they would then emerge to defend their idols with arguments to discredit the critics and provide explanations for their idols (Wang et al., 2016).

In cases where they have the upper hand, they would inundate their opponents or targets of criticisms with derisive phrases and memes to paralyse the latter's communication platform and silent their voices. Just like the Facebook Expedition, the Little Pinks had taken advantage of the surging sentiments triggered by an event of a Taiwanese artist waving the Taiwan flag on a television show, as well as the presidential election in Taiwan. The anger of Chinese netizens was therefore garnered and mobilized for the Internet bombardment.

5. Relationship with the Party-State

The potential of Little Pinks was quickly recognized by the Chinese authorities. The Communist Youth League (CYL), the CCP's mobilization vehicle among the youth, has taken the lead to guide the Little Pinks (Sansan, 2016). While several of the CCP's mouthpieces, such as the *People's Daily* and *Global Times*, have also been working on the manipulation of online public opinions, it was mainly the CYL that played a major role.

The CYL, a former career accelerator for Chinese political leaders, has been compelled to redefine its role in the party-state system since President Xi Jinping came to power. Being a base for a competing faction led by his predecessor Hu Jintao, the CYL has not been blessed by Xi. Its organization has been streamlined and scope of activities restricted, while financial resources have been cut (Shan & Chen, 2020). As the CYL struggled to adapt, one of its efforts was to transform itself into an opinion leader for youth in cyberspace. It seeks to guide and mobilize Chinese youth in favour of the regime. To connect with the youth, the central CYL and many provincial/local CYLs have set up accounts on Weibo. The Central CYL account has attracted over 15 million followers, while the provincial/local CYL accounts attracted followers ranging from 100,000 to about two million.[12]

In an attempt to enlist the Little Pinks, the Chinese authorities defined all followers of CYL's Weibo accounts as Little Pinks.[13] In fact, the CYL's Weibo posts have went further to refer all post-1990s and post-1980s youth as Little Pinks, with an intention of expanding its influence to the entire young generation (Weibo, 2016a). Playing as the leader of Chinese youth, the CYL publicly praised Little Pinks' attack on Tsai's Facebook page (Wang, 2016) and encouraged them to do more for the "motherland". While the League was merely acting as a supporter during the Facebook Expedition, it has begun to create an agenda for the Little Pinks to wage Internet fights.

In July 2016, the central CYL's Weibo account accused Chinese movie director Zhao Wei of casting Taiwanese actor Leon Dai, a supporter of Taiwanese Independence, as its male lead. The League's posts ignited Little Pinks' rage. They lashed out at Zhao on the Chinese Internet and condemned her as a traitor (*BBC*, 2016). Ten days later, Zhao gave in and apologized, promising to cut Dai out of the film even though the movie had completed filming (Shen, 2016).

The CYL also tapped on fandom culture and pop idols to appeal to the Little Pinks. After the South China Sea arbitration, the CYL collaborated with a group of young rappers to produce patriotic music, such as one titled "South China Sea, South China Sea" (Vista, 2017). The League also reported that many Chinese pop idols had voiced their support for China's claim over the South China Sea (Hao, 2016), aiming to arouse their fans' nationalistic sentiments.

Within two months after the announcement of the South China Sea ruling (July and August 2016), the number of followers on central CYL's Weibo account more than doubled (Weibo, 2016a). When CYL created a discussion thread titled "South China Sea belongs to China", many Little Pinks joined to ridicule the arbitration using memes and caricatures, and even called for boycotts against the American fast food chain store KFC. As of the end of 2018, this discussion thread boasts 582,000 posts and more than a billion viewership (Weibo, 2016b).

However, the Little Pinks have not become a subsidiary of the CYL or the Chinese government; their relationship is at most that of allies. They resemble unpredictable guerrilla fighters in cyberspace who are difficult to be entirely enlisted. This is due to the unstructured and fluidity characteristics of the Little Pinks, as well as their diversified interests beyond fandom culture. Furthermore, fandom culture is based on consumerism, whereby fans exhibit strong individualistic orientation offline (Chen, 2017). This suggests that the Little Pinks are fragmented individuals, and each of their interest and identity could be shifting from time to time.

The Chinese government could only try to galvanize the Little Pinks using particular events, which are short-termed, to achieve political aims. At the same time, the government would need to use soliciting methods that cater to the Little Pinks' liking. More specifically, it was the CYL which adopted the lingos and discourse of the Little Pinks (Guo, 2018), instead of the Little Pinks courting the attention of the CYL.

The relationship between the Chinese government and the Little Pinks is one with cooperation and mutual exploitation, as the Chinese government also has misgivings about the Little Pinks. For instance, during the Zhao Wei incident, a WeChat subscription account run by the *People's Daily* sternly criticized the Little Pinks' conspiracy theories and insular nationalism (Situgezi, 2016). A governmental report published in 2017 recognized the influence of the Little Pinks, but also cautioned against its impetuousness and extremism (Zhu et al., 2016). During the Facebook Expedition, the authorities had also been monitoring their online activities, deleting some of the Little Pinks' posts and shutting down their live streaming (Han, 2019).

Beijing understands that nationalism is a double-edged sword. On one hand, this nationalistic weapon could induce political support from the citizens. On the other hand, popular demands could also increase pressure on the government (Weiss, 2014). Therefore, the Chinese government have supported such sentiments at certain instances, while suppressing them at other times.

6. Discussion: Little Pinks as One Strand among Chinese Youth

Overall, the Little Pinks is a prominent group of nationalistic youth that has emerged online in the recent years. Most of the Little Pinks were born in the 1990s, a period of China's rapid economic growth, which makes them culturally and politically more confident than the older generations. While the Little Pinks are generally unstructured and capricious netizens, they often demonstrate impressive organizational capability when taking collective actions. Such organizational capability is a product of the vibrant fandom culture in Chinese cyberspace where different fan groups often engage

in heated arguments. Generally, the Little Pinks are allies of the Chinese government who stand ready to swarm out as an Internet army to defend the government against unfavourable and critical comments. However, they are neither a subsidiary nor controlled by the Chinese government.

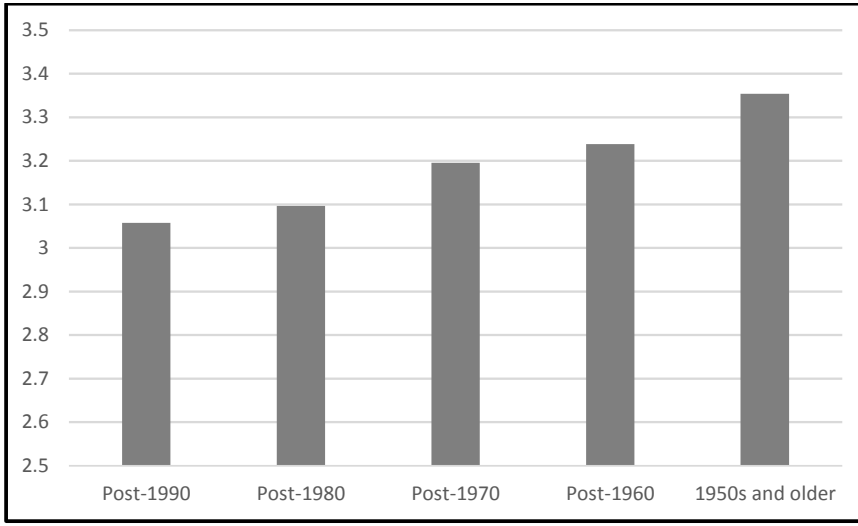
Examination of the Little Pinks and their behaviours has furthered our understanding of authoritarian regime stability. More specifically, it reveals that such stability is not necessarily maintained through coercion; in certain circumstances, citizens could spontaneously stand up for their government. Furthermore, the case of Little Pinks also shed light on the mechanism that produces bottom-up nationalism. Groups in popular culture, under some conditions, could lend support to collective organization and mobilization during events fuelled with nationalistic sentiments.

As a nationalistic group, the Little Pinks are different from their predecessors in China, such as the Boxers and the "Angry Youths".[14] They do not possess that xenophobia and vehement anger. They grow up in the era when China is enmeshed in rapid globalization. In fact, many of the Little Pinks have travelled overseas, with some residing overseas. They have better understanding of the outside world than the older generations, and they tend to express their political opinions in a relatively restraint and entertaining way (Wang et al., 2016).

Even though the Little Pinks could appear defensive of the Chinese government on matters of foreign affairs and sovereignty, they do not necessarily display the same attitude when it comes to domestic politics. They may be critical of the government in some specific local policy issues. For instance, when their patronizing sites and entertainment were cracked down by the government as a form of censorship or removal of content, they would also display discontent and rage on the Internet.[15] On forums such as the Douban Goose Group, a famous site where many female Little Pinks gather, the users have been unsatisfied with certain government measures that suppressed feminist movements.[16] Some scholars would argue that such critical stances could work in favour of the party-state. As long as such comments remain far from threatening the regime's stability, they would be allowed to act as a mechanism for the state to detect dissatisfaction and grievances in the society (Chen & Xu, 2017; Huang et al., 2019).

In the broader sense, the Little Pinks do not reflect the political orientation of the entire young generation in today's China. The general trend among Chinese youth is not veering towards widespread nationalism (Johnston, 2017). Public opinion surveys have revealed that the young generation in China is the least nationalistic cohort when compared to the older generations. As shown in Figure 2, Chinese citizens born in the 1990s and 1980s are significantly less nationalistic than the older generations.[17]

Figure 2 Level of Nationalism by Age Groups in China



Source: Created by authors using data from the 2015 Asian Barometer Survey.

While the Little Pinks attempt to defend the authoritarian regime, the young generation in today's China as a whole is in fact more critical than their seniors. Study had revealed that Chinese citizens are acquiring stronger democratic values, and their priorities are shifting toward the expansion of freedom and empowerment of citizens (Wang and You, 2016).

To date, the Chinese government still enjoys very high level of popular support and the Little Pinks is a manifestation of such a phenomenon among the young netizens. As pointed out by many China scholars, such high-level support is based on traditional Confucian values and Beijing's remarkable economic performance (Chu, 2013; Yang and Tang, 2010). However, economic development itself is expected to induce value change, putting emphasis on individual rights and self-expression, and weaken Confucian values (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). Furthermore, rapid economic growth cannot last forever. Indeed, Chinese economic growth rate has dropped from double digit to below 7% in recent years. Such a drop in economic performance could possibly affect the popular support enjoyed by Beijing.

As these two pillars of popular support are being gradually eroded and transformed, Chinese citizens' level of trust towards their government is also declining (Wang and You, 2016). When the number of "critical citizens" (Norris, 1999) among the young generation in China increases, it remains to be seen if the Little Pinks will be able to sustain their current vigour and influence in cyberspace.

Notes

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1. The Great Firewall refers to the system of Internet censorship enforced by the Chinese government to control contents in its domestic cyberspace and block out foreign sites such as Google, Facebook, Twitter and various foreign media.
2. Discussion threads were created on Weibo.com calling for boycott. Please see https://www.weibo.com/p/100808e8c877e980461f66175b6e4608fe7551/super_index (accessed 11 July 2018).
3. For instance, Facebook group titled "Diba Central Group Army (帝吧中央集团军)" available at https://www.facebook.com/groups/1101110389929793/, and Facebook comments under posts such as https://www.facebook.com/tsaiingwen/posts/10153130814816065; https://www.facebook.com/tsaiingwen/posts/10153129416971065; https://www.facebook.com/tsaiingwen/photos/a.390960786064/10153130814416065; https://www.facebook.com/tsaiingwen/photos/a.390960786064/10153130814411065; https://www.facebook.com/tsaiingwen/photos/a.390960786064/10153130863236065; https://www.facebook.com/tsaiingwen/posts/10153132757971065; https://www.facebook.com/tsaiingwen/photos/a.390960786064/10153129416696065; https://www.facebook.com/tsaiingwen/posts/10153133740766065 (accessed 5 June 2018).
4. Pink in Chinese culture is related to femininity.
5. In 2011, the patriotic group was infuriated by the liberal-leaning owner of Jinjiang site, who changed the serial number of their forum to 250 (which means "stupid" in Chinese) to insult them. Hence, the patriotic group left the Jinjiang site to set up their own site known as *Fengyi*. This change was too obscure to most people, who generally associate the Little Pinks with the pink-coloured Jinjiang site. Please see Fang, K. and Repnikova, M. (2018), "Demystifying 'Little Pink': The creation and evolution of a gendered label for nationalistic activists in China", *New Media & Society*, Vol. 20, No. 6, pp. 2162-2185.
6. Emperor Forum, based in Baidu.com, is one of the forums that boasts the largest memberships on the site.
7. Base on a four-city survey and interviews, Qian, Xu and Chen (2017)'s study finds that patriotic historical education has only limited effects on inculcating nationalism and negative impression of Japan. This finding, however, does not exclude the possibility that the patriotic education could have some influence on the development of nationalism among certain segments of the young generation.
8. "Fifty-cent Party" is a group of netizens employed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and were paid 50 cents for every positive comment on the CCP that they generated. For a study on Fifty-cent Party, please see King, G., Pan, J. and

Roberts, M.E. (2017), "How the Chinese government fabricates social media posts for strategic distraction, not engaged argument", *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 111, No. 3, pp. 484-501.

9. The targets of the Little Pinks' bombardment were *SET (Sanli) News* and *Apple Daily*, which were seen by the Little Pinks as pro-independence media.
10. See screenshots and recounts at: https://s.weibo.com/weibo/%23%E6%96%97%E9%B1%BC%E7%9B%B4%E6%92%AD%E5%B8%9D%E5%90%A7fb%E5% 87%BA%E5%BE% 81%23, http://news.kedo.gov.cn/c/2016-01-22/829770.shtml, https://twitter.com/ResetTor/status/689760152996589568 (accessed 7 June 2018).
11. Information of the five groups are derived from recounts of participants on their social media posts or blogposts, screenshots, news reports and academic studies, including: Tang, J. (2016), Wangluo shequn de zhengzhi canyu yu jiti xingdong – yi FB "biaoqingbao dazhan" weili [Political Participation and Collective Action of Online Community: Take "Expression Package Wars" as a Case]. *Xinwen daxue* [*Journalism Bimonthly*] (3): 96-101; *Apple Daily* (2016, 21 January) Liangan wangyou zuida jiaoliu zhi ye [The Night of Massive Interactions between Netizens from Across the Straits. Available at: https://tw.appledaily.com/new/realtime/20160121/780114/ (accessed 4 June 2018); Netizen's recount by blogpost (2016, 21 January), available at: http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_88d0c18b0102wc7k.html (accessed 4 June 2018).
12. Number of followers observed on May 2021.
13. The definition was put forth by a research done by *People's Daily* and subsequently adopted by the CYL. Please see Wang, X. and Zhu, M. (2016, 30 December) "Xiao fenhong" qunti shi ruhe jueqi de? [How did the "Little Pinks" arise?], *People's Daily*. Available at: http://yuqing.people.com.cn/n1/2016/1230/c405625-28990354.html (accessed 15 June 2018).
14. The Boxers are also known as *Yihetuan* or the "League of Harmony and Justice". They are members of a Chinese secret society that triggered the Boxer Rebellion in 1898 with violent actions against foreigners and Christians. Angry youths (or Fen Qings) are a group of young Chinese netizens mostly active in late 2000s and early 2010s. They tend to vent their dissatisfactions and angers with foreign or domestic affairs. Please see Yang L and Zheng Y (2012) Fen Qings (Angry Youth) in Contemporary China, *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 21, No. 76, pp. 637-653.
15. When an entertainment program "Baozou Big News", popular among youth, was ordered to stop its broadcast on streaming sites like Bilibili, many netizens went online to express their rage. The program was known for its comedic and parody style, which were appealing to many Little Pinks. It had also expressed support for the Facebook Expedition.
16. Based on authors' observations.
17. The data are from Asian Barometer Survey conducted in China in 2015. The survey item that measured nationalism is "[o]ur country should defend our way of life instead of becoming more and more like other countries" and "How proud are you to be a citizen of China?" Answers to both questions are on a 4-point Likert scale. The index of nationalism is the arithmetic mean of the two items,

with larger values indicating higher level of nationalism. In Figure 2, differences between all the age groups are statistically significant ($p<0.01$ in one-way ANOVA test) except for the differences between "post-1990" and "post-1980", and between "post-1970" and "post-1960".

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Superpower Responsibility, China, the South China Sea and the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Since the coming into power of President Xi Jinping in China in 2012, an important objective of Beijing's foreign policy has been to modify the international order to correspond with China's rising power and to fulfill the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation and becoming a superpower. As a superpower, China is expected to bear the responsibilities of providing public goods, maintaining stability, and upholding the norms and values that are respected by other states. This paper examines the Chinese attempt to emerge as a key player in international affairs and use two case studies of China's policy towards the South China Sea and its international responses to the Covid-19 pandemic to argue that Beijing has, to some extent, fallen short of the duties of a superpower.

Keywords: *world order, superpower, China, responsibility, South China Sea*

1. Introduction

At the 18th National Congress of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 2012, China revealed its ambition to have greater influence on the construction of a new world order. The Political Report of the Congress emphasized that China needed to adjust its policy towards multilateral organizations in order to promote the development of the international order and system in a way more suitable to China's interests. Following this line, the Political Report of CCP's 19th National Congress in 2017 reaffirmed that China would continue to play its role as a responsible power, actively participating in reforming and building a global governance system.

In reality, Beijing has sought to assert a greater role in international affairs. During his unofficial visit to the US in 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed a New Model of Great Power Relations between the two

countries. China also made efforts to influence existing international and regional regimes, such as offering its own interpretation of international laws, gaining better influence on the operation of the United Nations (UN), International Monetary Fund (IMF), East Asia Summit (EAS) and ASEAN Regional Security Forum (ARF), and actively introduced new initiatives and established and expanded its influence in multilateral cooperation mechanisms through China-led frameworks, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

On the other hand, Beijing's reputation in many parts of the world is not always positive. Sino-US strategic competition has intensified. China's relations are at odds with its neighbours, including India, Japan and some Southeast Asian countries, largely because of Beijing's unilateral actions to gain advantage in territorial and maritime disputes.

This paper contains four main sections. The first part is a theoretical discussion on a superpower and its expected responsibilities. It is followed by an analysis of China's strengths and its foreign relations strategy. The third and fourth sections analyze two cases of China's South China Sea policy and its Covid-19 diplomacy. The South China Sea is selected because it involves a wide range of social, political and legal issues and is considered by Beijing as China's core national interests. Meanwhile, China's Covid-19 diplomacy is an interesting case given that the pandemic has dominated world politics since early 2020 and China was the first country suffering from it. The overarching argument in this article is that China has met the criteria to assume the position of a superpower. However, the case of China's South China Sea policy reveals that it has not yet fully conformed with its Goliath's responsibilities.

2. Superpowers and Responsibilities

For many schools of thought, human history is defined by superpowers. In the absence of a central government in world politics, superpowers play vital roles in both waging major wars and managing international politics (Miller, 2002: 9). The concept of a superpower has different definitions. The traditional, realist account of a superpower emphasizes military capability, believing that a state can only be seen as a superpower if it acquires sufficient military might to fight a conventional war against other powerful states (Mearsheimer, 2001: 5; Wight, 2004). This approach, however, bears significant shortcomings, given that over-focusing on military capability fails to take into consideration the role of other actors, including second-tier states. It has little to offer in explaining alliances in which most superpowers have engaged in the course of history (Hurrell, 2006).

As international politics becomes increasingly complex and interconnected, a state's power, and thus the notion of a superpower, is more generally understood in a broader approach. A state's power is measured through a number of indicators, including military capability, economic size and quality, national resilience, future resources, population size, and manufacturing capabilities (Lowy Institute, 2020; Beckley, 2018; Organski, 1968). Researchers on this matter still disagree on the portion each criterion contributes to the overall strength of a superpower. They, however, agree that a superpower must acquire significantly huge resources and at the same time be big and efficient enough to perform its power projection at the world level (Beckley, 2018).

Even extensive statistics are not enough to define the rise to the status of a superpower. It must come with a strategy and the ability to translate national capability into preferred outcomes in international relations. This constitutes an outstanding character of a superpower. Japan for many decades after World War II enjoyed the position of the second largest and highly developed economy in the world. It also contributed a lot to international development through its foreign aid program worldwide. But it was not considered as a superpower largely because it voluntarily relieved itself off critical international security issues. So how much does measurable material strength of a state contribute to its overall position in the world, and how much does foreign strategy count? The Asia Power Index Project run by Australia's Lowy Institute construes a state's power as comprising 55 per cent of material weight and 45 per cent of external influence. In turn, influence is measured through economic, defence, diplomatic and cultural indicators (Lowy Institute, 2020).

"With great power comes great responsibility". This Peter Parker Principle and the more philosophical linkage between ability and responsibility have long been widely discussed, from philosophers to comic book texts (Copp, 2008; Dahl, 1974; Fischer, 2003; Howard-Snyder, 2006). Simply put, the more powerful an actor is, the greater responsibility it must take. In foreign affairs, the responsibility of a superpower is the willingness to provide public goods for the international community. Undoubtfully, the provision of public goods often entails costs that most states do not want to pay. Superpowers differ from others in that they make investment and bear the costs. But they do not provide public goods out of altruism. In return for the wealth that superpowers contribute, they are able to shape the system, through peaceful measures, for their own interests. The US pursues its national interests through providing and protecting global public goods, defined as, *inter alia*, an open economic system and international stability (Nye, 2002). As superpowers have different preferences and interests, they prioritize public goods differently, both in areas and in implementation. In official development aid (ODA) alone, China and the US differ greatly in their definition, sectoral

distribution, targeted recipients and institutional mechanisms for delivery (Regilme and Hodzi, 2021).

Regardless of the differences among superpowers in pursuit of their national interests, public goods that a responsible superpower provides or protects must breed greater security and stability. At the same time, superpowers, especially rising ones, may face a strenuous choice in providing either global public goods for a wider group of states or devote these goods to a smaller club in which they assume the leadership (Narlikar, 2011: 1609).

A responsible superpower also constructs or conforms to non-material international norms and regimes in a way that promotes international security and stability. These criteria may not consume huge resources but require superpowers to exercise self-restraint, to be benign, and to show their commitment to the international system and community. In the years leading to the end of World War II, the US, Britain, and the Soviet Union abandoned the "peace by dictation" approach and collaborated to establish the United Nations, a collective security model relying on the belief in an international system in which states have rights and responsibilities to preserve peace and security (Morris, 2013). Voluntary cooperation, together with the provision of public goods, in turn, provide superpowers the respect from other members. This respect is vital for the functioning of international mechanisms.

3. China as a Superpower

China is a world superpower by any means of material calculation. Its enormous population and economic size, together with Beijing's first detonation of a nuclear bomb in October 1964, even put China on the path towards the position of a superpower as early as in the mid-1960s (Roy, 1997; Clubb, 1964). As the second decade of the 21st century unfolds, after decades of sustained high economic growth rate, China has gained the comprehensive strength of a superpower. Since 2009, China has become the world's second largest economy. By 2019, before the Covid-19 global pandemic, its GDP was roughly 14.3 trillion dollars, accounting for over 16 per cent of global GDP and 2.8 times as much as that of Japan, the third largest economy in the world (World Bank, 2021a). It is currently the world's top exporting country and the largest trading nation (World Bank, 2021b). Economic advancement spreads into military capability. China is the world's second highest military spending country, more than the next four countries (India, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and France) combined (IISS, 2021). The country has acquired the most advanced military weapons and technology, including aircraft carriers, nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines, advanced combat and long-range strategic bomber aircraft, and global positioning satellite systems for

military purposes (IISS, 2021: Chapter 6: Asia). Beijing ranks fifth in the line-up of the world's largest arms exporting countries (Wezeman, Kuimova, and Wezeman, 2021).

The defining moment in China's superpower ambition, lies in President Xi Jinping's abandonment of China's long-standing low profile foreign policy doctrine of "hide your strength and bide your time". At the CCP's 19th National Congress in October 2017, Xi Jinping delivered a lengthy speech, stressed China's great dream and underscored a new era in China's foreign policy, in which Beijing would no longer shy away from world leadership. He said:

> It will be an era for all of us … to strive … to realize the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation. It will be an era that sees China moving closer to center stage and making greater contributions to mankind…. The [CCP] has united and led all the Chinese people in a tireless struggle, propelling China into a leading position in terms of economic and technological strength, defense capabilities, and composite national strength. China's international standing has risen as never before…. We must put national interests first …. The Chinese nation, with an entirely new posture, now stands tall and firm in the East. (Xi, 2017)

Well before this official statement, China had gradually put forth a strategy to gain influence and gradually build a rules-based order with China's characteristics from the existing pax-Americana order (Foot, 2006). Malcolm Jorgensen (2018) describes Beijing's strategy as promoting a "geo-legal order" in East Asia, in which the "rules" are designed by China and different from the existing global legal order. From a legal perspective, in June 2016, China and Russia issued a joint statement: "Promote international law", expressing their voice and political position to influence principles and activities of current international law institutions.

Politically, China's world order strategy is reflected mainly in its relations with the US and in multilateral mechanisms. President Xi Jinping proposed with then US President Barak Obama a new model of major power relations between China and the US during his unofficial visit to the US in 2012. This was a way to seek the US, and thus the world, recognition of China as a new superpower in the existing order (Zhao, 2015, 2018a; Kerr, 2013, Cheng, 2016). Washington, however, kept itself distant from China's idea, given that the proposal lacked clarity and required the US to respect China's "core interests" as the precondition (Zhao, 2017). Unable to persuade the US on a new model of relations, Beijing started to criticize the US and the West for their approach to today's world order. Chinese experts argue that the rules-based order is not neutral. The post-World War II rules-based order was built and influenced by the United States so that it enables Washington's expansion of power and influence in the world. As the global balance of power has

evolved into a state very different from that in the post-World War II era, the global order needs to be adjusted (Xue, 2019, 2020).

In respect of multilateral mechanisms, overall, China's attempts to develop a rules-based order in its favour has been implemented in three major directions (Tuan, 2018; Mazarr, Heath and Cevallos, 2018). First, Beijing has sought to gradually assert its role and influence in multilateral mechanisms where it has membership. This approach is evident in Beijing's strategy in a number of mechanisms, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and East Asia Summit (EAS) (Scott and Wilkinson, 2013; Bisley, 2017; Kolmas, 2016; Wong and Ho, 2011). Shortly after its accession to the earth's largest trading organization in 2001, Beijing put pressure on the WTO to downgrade Taiwan's membership status and took a firm stance over the review mechanism established to supervise its accession agreement. Upon gaining membership in the core negotiating group in 2008, China took a decisive turn, exhibiting a bold position in WTO negotiations, in approving newly acceded members, and settling disputes through WTO's dispute settlement mechanism. These moves both reflect and fortify China's elevation from a rule taker to rule maker within WTO and other mechanisms (Scott and Wilkinson, 2013).

Second, China actively participates in existing multilateral mechanisms and seeks to reform them from within. Benefiting the most from the current economic order, China has no interest in overthrowing this order overnight (Zhao, 2018b; Breslin, 2013). Beijing has gradually expanded and strengthened its position and got ready for any possible heightened disputes with the US (Foot, 2006). One very good example is China's successful effort to put the Yuan, the Chinese currency, in the IMF's monetary basket of reserve currencies in 2016.

Third, Beijing has created China-led institutions and asserted influence through providing certain public goods to these exclusive groups. The gigantic Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) put forth in 2013 is backed by financial institutions, including the Asian Infrastructure Development Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Silk Road Fund, which are major steps to break the Western monopoly in terms of finance and currency (Raine, 2013; Johnston, 2018). Countries participating in the BRI are offered favourable and low interest rate loans to build their infrastructure. The BRI and the subsequent establishment of financial institutions also establish a higher position for Beijing as a player in global economic governance (Liu, 2021). On the security and political front, Beijing has also invested in regional initiatives, such as the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). These exclusive mechanisms allow Beijing to deny US involvement in the region (Scott-Smith, 2019; Rogers, 2007).

4. China's Behaviour in the South China Sea

The influence of China's rise on world politics has long been debated (Ding, 2008; Pavlićević, 2018; Shah, 2021; Mearsheimer, 2014; Callahan, 2005; Allison, 2017). China's "peaceful rise" theory contends that China's development is beneficial for all other states and does not undermine international security (Zhang, 2015; Buzan, 2014). The political rhetoric of Chinese top leaders also seeks to persuade the world that Beijing will neither seek hegemony nor challenge the security and interests of other states (Xi, 2017). On the other hand, adherents of the "China threat" thesis, such as Friedberg (2011), Roy (1994), Shambaugh (2004), Christensen (2015), Mearsheimer (2001) and Allison (2017) argue that, during the course of its growth, China would naturally move from a status-quo power to a revisionist state, challenging international order in its favour.

Being revisionist does not necessarily imply being irresponsible. However, the question of whether China is a responsible superpower is closely associated with the "peaceful rise" versus "China threat" debates. This is because to determine whether China is a responsible superpower requires an analysis of China's performance either as a rules-taker or a rules-challenger and whether the challenges are for the sake of international security and stability.

To label China as a responsible superpower compels a comprehensive analysis of a host of developments. However, we can modify the argument made by Parello-Plesner (2011) and contend that a responsible superpower is identified by events as much as by grand strategy. In other words, the policy choice of a superpower in specific events, especially in situations where its national interests and the interests of the international community are not reciprocal, is a defining factor of a responsible superpower. Unfortunately, China's behaviour in the South China Sea seems not to support the view that China is an emerging, responsible actor in this specific area.

Observers of the South China Sea have well noted the strategic values of the South China Sea and detailed Beijing's strategy and activities in this region (Fravel, 2011; Raine, 2013; Tuan, 2018; Guilfoyle, 2019; Zhang, 2017; Zhao, 2018a; Turcsányi, 2018; Hayton, 2014; Storey and Lin, 2016). Overall, Beijing's South China Sea policy fails to portray China as a benign and responsible power in the South China Sea in three ways.

First, China fails to protect and preserve the common heritage of mankind. The 2016 Award of the special South China Sea Arbitration between the Philippines and China concluded that China's artificial island building in the Spratlys in the period from 2013–2016 has breached Articles 192, 194(1), 194(5), 197, and 206 of the UNCLOS (Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2016: 397). These articles require states to take all measures necessary to protect the maritime environment, including rare or fragile ecosystems and habitats

of depleted, threatened or endangered species. For the activities that deem polluting and harmful to the maritime environment, states need to assess the potential effects of such activities and communicate reports to competent international organizations (Nordquist, Nandan and Kraska, 2011).

Second, China's behaviour violates the sovereign rights of smaller claimants and challenges the legitimate rights of other states, fuelling tension in the South China Sea. The 2016 Award made authoritative conclusions that China has "breached article 77 of the [UNCLOS] with respect to the Philippines' sovereign rights over the non-living resources of its continental shelf in the area of Reed Bank" and "breached Article 56 of the Convention with respect to the Philippines' sovereign rights over the living resources of its exclusive economic zone" (Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2016: 286). Other littoral states also voice concern that China's excessive claim and unilateral actions in the South China Sea would undermine regional and international security and stability.

Third, China's legal interpretation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) concerning the situation in the South China Sea is disruptive to the international legal regime on the sea (Mastro, 2021). As early as 2003, the CCP introduced the concept of "three warfares", comprising psychological warfare, information warfare, and legal warfare, in its guiding documents for the activities of the Chinese military (Lee, 2014; Scobell, Lai and Kamphausen, 2011). The legal warfare branch, or lawfare, is designed to frame the legal environment to justify Chinese actions and promote Chinese political agenda in foreign policy. This lawfare has become an offensive weapon capable of hindering opponents and realizing China's political objectives (Cheng, 2012). Beijing's lawfare in the South China Sea came into the spotlight after the release of the Award of the special South China Sea Arbitration between the Philippines and China in July 2016. Beijing is a signatory of the UNCLOS and, therefore, is bound by the Award. Whilst repeatedly affirming its respect for international laws and the UNCLOS, China wholly rejected the Award and continued its disruptive activities in the South China Sea, including harassing foreign fishery and petroleum exploration vessels and deploying advance weapon systems on artificial islands in the Spratlys.

To justify its non-compliance, China has thrown a cat among the pigeons, offering an uncommon interpretation of the UNCLOS. In 2016 alone, Beijing sent two diplomatic notes to the UN and issued a Declaration of the Chinese Government and a White Paper on China's position in the South China Sea. Three years later, in another round of lawfare from December 2019 to late 2020, Beijing sent at least five diplomatic notes and one official letter to the UN (Thao, 2020). Chinese Society of International Law, a *de facto* Chinese

government-related agency, in 2018 published a lengthy "critical study" of the South China Sea Award (Chinese Society of International Law, 2018). In 2020, a Chinese research institution published another lengthy research criticizing the Award of the Arbitral Tribunal (National Institute for South China Sea Studies, 2020). These studies mainly repeat China's position in the South China Sea and are seen as an attempt to "rewrite international law in the South China Sea" (Darmawan, 2021). Moreover, all these documents are to claim, *inter alia*, its historic rights and sovereign rights over the bodies of water around the structures in the South China Sea, which are either alien or run contrast to the recognized principles of the UNCLOS (Dupuy and Dupuy, 2017; Kopela, 2017).

Why does China fail to rise as a responsible superpower concerning the disputes in the South China Sea? Beijing has long recognized the long-term and strategic position of the South China Sea for its security and development (Hayton, 2014; Fravel, 2011; Cáceres, 2014). Since the end of World War II, Beijing has employed military tactics, including resorting to armed force to seize the Paracels and parts of the Spratlys. However, since 2009, Beijing has adopted an increasingly comprehensive and openly assertive approach to the South China Sea.

To begin with, the growing power gives China the capability and confidence to take unilateral action and challenge other states. Chinese use of force to take from Vietnam the Paracels in 1974 and some structures in the Spratlys in 1988 is best explained through the window of opportunity thesis, taking into account that Vietnam in these periods was faced with grave domestic concerns and international challenges. China's 1995 occupation of the Mischief Reef was a silent move, being a *fait accompli* when discovered by Manila. On the other hand, Beijing's purposive stand-off with the Philippines leading to the seizure of the Scarborough Shoal in 2012 is distinctive because it openly challenged a US non-NATO close ally when no remarkable window of opportunity was found. Following that event, Beijing conducted artificial island building in all seven features it occupied in the Spratlys; other claimants, the US and the international community only managed to voice concerns. These incidents best exemplify China's confidence and capabilities in pursuing its agenda in the South China Sea (Chang, 2012).

In addition, China's employment of a number of tactics collectively named as salami-slicing, hybrid warfare or grey zone, is hard to fight against. Simply put, these tactics aim to disrupt an opponent's actions using measures below the threshold of war, such as dominating the opponent piece by piece, to avoid engaging in open hostilities. This approach takes advantage of a grey area in politics and international law to gain political goals (Erickson and Martinson, 2019; Skingsley, 2020; Baruah, 2015; Patalano, 2018). The

US and regional countries have recognized the emergence of this tactic and a number of proposals have been made to respond, such as treating China's coast guard and maritime militia vessels the same as naval vessels and strengthening international cooperation to preserve international legal order (Holmes and Yoshihara, 2017; Sevastopulo and Hille, 2019). These measures, however, have not yet been sufficient to halt Beijing's advancement in the South China Sea.

Last but not least, history counts. Beijing's current inclination to unilaterally advance its objectives in the South China Sea stems from the low and bearable costs for its past actions in the South China Sea. Beijing had to pay very modest costs, if any, for its first steps towards the South China Sea after World War II. As recently as 2012, China's seizure of Scarborough only generated a moderate response. The 2016 Award of the arbitration in the South China Sea is a land-slide victory for the Philippines. However, it was followed by a conciliatory approach by the Duterte Administration. This approach may give advantage to the hawkish views within the Chinese policy-making circle concerning the South China Sea.

5. China's International Role in the Covid-19 Global Pandemic

China's international role during the Covid-19 pandemic is another compelling, although controversial, case study on the role of China as a superpower. As this pandemic is still evolving, it may require more time to produce completed judgement on Beijing's performance. However, this issue has already invited a number of initial assessments (Dorman, 2020; Wen, 2021; Esteves and Van Staden, 2020; Khalil, 2020; Karásková and Blablová, 2021). Overall, China's Covid-19 diplomacy has gone through two stages. The first stage is characterized by Chinese government's attempt to control information concerning the outbreak of the disease. When the pandemic became a global one, China moved to the second stage, offering support to other countries through "mask diplomacy", and then "vaccine diplomacy" in the "new normal" (Wen, 2021). In general, Beijing has given priority to national interests and paid attention to domestic audience. Its Covid-19 diplomacy is a mix between geopolitical calculations and humanitarian responsibility, in which the former has greater weight than the latter (Dorman, 2020).

To begin with, when the first Covid-19 cases were detected in Wuhan City in 2019, China tightened information control of the nature of the pandemic, punished doctors who raised this phenomenon in the media (Khalil, 2020). Only by the end of December 2019 did Beijing alert the World Health Organization (WHO) about the disease, but with a reassurance that the disease is "preventable and controllable" (Wu et al., 2020). When WHO's auspice team of international doctors came to Wuhan to study on the origin

of the Covid-19 virus in 2021, they reported to WHO Director General that they encountered difficulties in accessing raw data from China (Ghebreyesus, 2021). While China's information censorship of the Covid-19 origin may intend to protect its internal social order and save its face in international arena, it represents China's failure to fully comply with rapid data sharing responsibility as guided by the WHO's 2016 Guidance for Managing Ethical Issues in Infectious Disease Outbreaks (WHO, 2016: 38).

When Covid-19 started to spread out and became a global pandemic, devastating the US and many European countries in around March 2020, China had already managed to control the disease by imposing bold lock-down and quarantine measures in many of its main cities. Beijing started the second phase, termed Covid-19 diplomacy. This phase is both to redeem China's own image as a responsible superpower and to assert China's influence. In his remark at the G20 Virtual Summit in March 2020, Chinese President Xi Jinping elaborated a vision of a China-centred global response to the pandemic with an expanded role of the G20 (Xi, 2020). This reflects China's long-term strategy to transform the international environment to make it "compatible with China's governance model and emergence as a global leader" (Tobin, 2018). Xi's speech was later commentated in Chinese media as a promotion of China's concept of a community of common destiny for mankind (Xinhua, 2020; Zhang, 2020). In an intensified Sino-US strategic competition, Beijing's move also implies its growth and governance model is better, thus more appealing, than that of the US (Sheng and Geng, 2020; Verma, 2020: 205).

Operationally, China has offered financial and medical aids to heavily-hit countries, including those in Southeast Asia, Europe, Latin-America, the Pacific island states, and Africa (Dorman, 2020; Verma, 2020; Xinhua, 2020). Mask diplomacy, and later vaccine diplomacy are claimed as a successful example validating China's international responsibility in combating the pandemic. Beijing's assistance bears humanitarian value in this emergency situation. This move is, however, not unconditional. Countries receiving Chinese assistance are selective and they are under pressure to accept China's political goals and international visions, such as entering some form of relations with China, reducing cooperation with Taiwan, and acknowledging the concept of community of common destiny (Zhang, 2020; Eto, 2020; Kolmas, 2016; Rudolf, 2021). Beijing also plans to issue vaccine passport for people who get Beijing-approved jabs. This puts pressure on those frequently travelling to China to use Chinese vaccines (Huang, 2021). The mixture between gaining hearts and minds by proving its responsibility and at the same time taking opportunity during the pandemic to advance its strategic influence is the outstanding feature of China's Covid-19 diplomacy.

6. Conclusion

Power always comes with responsibilities. By most, if not all, criteria, China has emerged as a fully-fledged superpower in world politics. It is, therefore, expected to bear the responsibilities of a superpower. Beijing has been actively searching to modify the international system and world order corresponding with the shift in balance of power. It has also provided certain public goods to the international community. However, case studies of China's behaviour in specific issues reveal different levels of responsibility that Beijing commits. China falls short of the test of being a responsible Goliath in the South China Sea, where China considers of its "core interest". Its policy and actions in the region fail to protect the Common Heritage, violate the legitimate interests of smaller claimants, and disrupt the international legal regime of the ocean notably represented by the UNCLOS. Beijing's confidence in challenging not only smaller claimants but also other stakeholders stems from the shift of power in its favor, the wise exploitation of the gap in international legal regimes, and the lessons from past events. When it comes to handling the Covid-19 pandemic, China has made more obvious contribution to global effort to halt the pandemic. However, from another perspective, China has taken the opportunity brought about by the pandemic to fulfill its own strategic goal of asserting its role and influence over the world. Afterall, it is natural for every countries to pursue their self-interests in international relations. But as an emerging superpower, China must do more to prove itself as a responsible one.

Note

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The Changing Image of China in the COVID-19 Pandemic from the Perspective of Mainstream Spanish Media

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Abstract

This article aims to explore the depiction of China by mainstream Spanish media during the COVID-19 pandemic. 105 articles were collected from *El Mundo*, *El País*, *La Vanguardia*, *ABC* and *El Periódico*, and analyzed by topic: domestic information diffusion and epidemic prevention measures in China, Chinese aid in Spain, and opinions about them. The main finding is that China's image portrayed by these newspapers changed from draconian and Machiavellian, given the country's massive strict quarantine and censorship, to villainous, due to cover-up of epidemic information and governance failures that Spanish media condemned in retrospect, and then to opportunist, to a helper of use but not genuine, after China started to aid Spain while taking advantage of the inaction of the Occident. However, the Spaniards' acceptance of these media-portrayed images varies: despite intense criticisms of governance failures and censorship characterized by the authoritarian system, Spaniards only consider "the virus from China" as an important threat, instead of the expansion of Chinese ideologies. The opportunist depiction was accepted by a considerable proportion of Spaniards, thinking China had gained economically from the pandemic and even improved its global reputation. Aid from ethnic Chinese in Spain, from private firms in China and from the Chinese Government were positively felt. Besides, the fact that Spanish citizens increasingly blamed their Government for incompetence might also explain why there was limited damage to China's image.

Keywords: *China's image, Spanish media, COVID-19 pandemic*

1. Introduction

Being the first country to detect the novel coronavirus, China's moves were closely followed by the world media, and any change in its international

image was magnified. In addition to the anglophone media, Spanish-language media in Spain have been reporting extensively on the actions taken by the Chinese Government, Chinese citizens, and the Chinese community in Spain since January 3, 2020. Months later, Spain became one of the European countries most affected by the pandemic.

Prior to the pandemic, Spain and China maintained generally positive diplomatic relations since their establishment in 1973. Ex-Chinese President Hu Jintao's visit to Spain in November 2005 marked the establishment of comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries. In October 2014, Spanish ex-Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy officially visited China and Chinese President Xi Jinping also paid a state visit to Spain in November 2018. In 2019, bilateral trade between the two nations reached 35.469 billion US dollars, a year-on-year increase by 5.2%.

Once a global colonial empire, Spain continues to play an important trans-regional role in the development of the world economy and the dissemination of news, its influence stretching to Africa and Latin America (Xu, 2014). The country's colonial history also made Spanish the third most spoken language in the world. Since the 2000s, given Spain's increasingly digitalized, commercialized and internationalized media in other regions, especially in Latin America (Wei and Chen, 2018), mainstream Spanish media can be an important platform to exhibit China. For instance, *El País*, the Spanish newspaper ranking second in terms of daily readers in 2020, which reached 951,000 (Orús, 2021), also produces a Hispanic American edition and a Mexican edition (both in Spanish), as well as a Brazilian one (in Portuguese). According to ComScore, the year 2015, two years after the emergence of the Portuguese version, saw *El País* newspaper become one of the top ten newspapers in Brazil, with more than two million monthly active users.

1.1 Previous Media Opinions and Ratings of China

A 2013 study about the coverage of China by Spanish newspapers *El País*, *El Mundo* and *ABC* during the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China found that the positive depictions of China consisted in economic, diplomatic and social development achievements, describing China as a "power (*potencia*)", while the negative image was reflected in three areas: corruption, political system and Internet censorship, and the China threat theory (Jia and Zhu, 2013).

According to Wei and Chen's (2018) study of mainstream Spanish newspapers' coverage of China-related issues, they portrayed China as an "important great power", but still tended to gaze at the country using a Western discourse by questioning its economic achievements, and to create

a biased image by using totalitarianism-related terms to describe its political system and deliberately highlighting China's military strategies, which suggest China is not a peaceful country as it claims to be. Nevertheless, the study noted that some Spanish media like *El Mundo* wrote more rigorous reports than anglophone media were, and could make distinct and independent judgments about the nature of the same news, which would help contribute to a more diverse Chinese image.

Regarding Spaniards' perception of China, the percentage holding a very favourable/somewhat favourable view of China was generally in decline since 2005, with ups and downs. Favourable rating topped in 2005 at 57% and slumped to 31% in 2008. Rising again to 55% three years later, in 2016 only 28% of Spanish interviewees regarded China positively, and in 2019 the figure stood at 39%. On the other hand, the survey shows the proportion of interviewees responding with "unfavourable" rose to 53% in 2019 (Pew Research Center, 2020).

However, Elcano Royal Institute (Real Instituto Elcano in Spanish), a Madrid-based think tank, observed less dramatic changes in the Spanish's rating over China. Using a 0-10 scale, China's rating varied from 4.7 to 5.3 from 2012 to 2020. Based on the fieldwork carried out from March 6th to March 19th, its report *Barómetro del Real Instituto Elcano (BRIE) n°41* (2020) indicates a slight improvement in China's rating, scoring 5 out of 10 in March 2020 compared to 4.7 in November 2017 (Esteban, 2020; Elcano Royal Institute, 2020).

1.2 Existent Image about Overseas Chinese in Spain

According to Spain's National Institute of Statistics (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas), the population of ethnic Chinese in Spain grew from 12,036 in 1998 to 202,093 in 2019. In the report *Chinese Immigration in Spain: What image?* (*La Inmigración China en España: ¿Qué Imagen?*), which studied 75 articles extracted from mainstream Spanish newspapers, Merino Sancho (2008) indicated that the predominant topic of these articles was the competence of Chinese commerce: 14 similar reports expressed concerns about the expansion of Chinese small businesses in Spain, in parallel with the outflow of Spanish local businesses towards China (Huang, 2014; cf. Merino Sancho, 2008). The author, while arguing against the existence of xenophobia against the Chinese community, concluded that though the perception of Chinese immigration had improved compared to the 1990s, there was a certain fear or a suspicion more related to business competition than to political or social domains, and that criticisms of the Chinese community's lack of integration into local society were well-founded (Merino Sancho, 2008).

2. Methodology

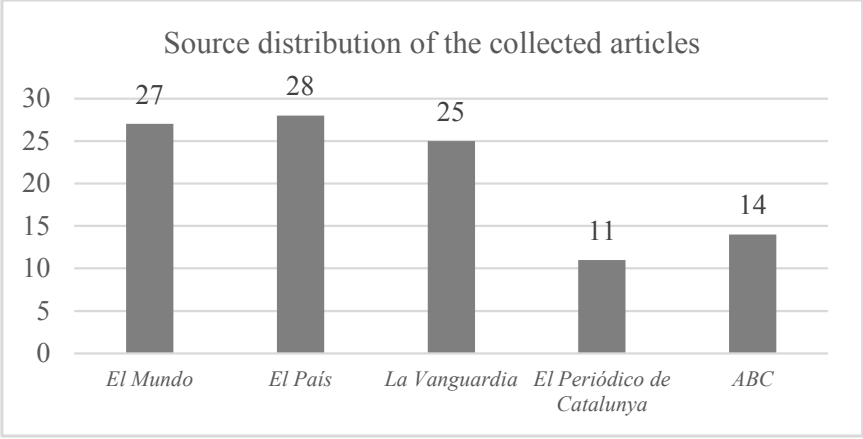
2.1 Topics of Interest

To examine how the depiction of China has changed in Spanish media during the pandemic, five major Spanish newspapers, in terms of circulation, were studied: *El Mundo*, *El País*, *La Vanguardia*, *El Periódico de Catalunya* and *ABC*. Articles related to China and coronavirus were collected from the websites of *elmundo.es*, *elpais.com*, *lavanguardia.com*, *elperiodico.com* and *abc.es*, either with the integrated search engine in their portals or Google advanced search. Keywords (or their combined form) for research corresponding to each topic are listed as follows:

> *Wuhan*, *virus*, *coronavirus*, *China*, *pandemia*, *neumonía*, *cierre*, *confinamiento*, *cuarentena*, *Asamblea de OMS*, *donación china*, *ayuda china*, *donación a España*, *China pagará*, *litigar a China*, *consecuencias para China*, *pedir compensación a China*

In total, 105 reports and editorials from January 3, 2020 to July 12, 2020 were collected from the five newspapers.

Figure 1 Distribution by Newspaper of the Collected Articles

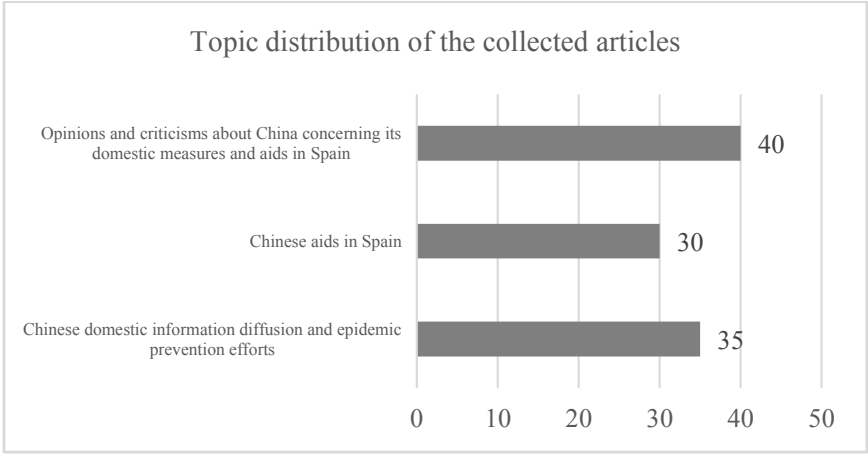


2.2 Collection of Articles

The 105 articles collected were later categorized into the following topics (see Appendix) and interpreted accordingly:

I. Chinese domestic information diffusion and epidemic prevention efforts
II. Chinese aid in Spain
III. Opinions about China concerning its domestic measures and its aid in Spain

Figure 2 Distribution by Topic of the Collected Articles



In sections or subsections where necessary, a summary of the source of information related to the three topics above used by the articles is also made (from Table 1 to Table 11). The number of articles extracted from each newspaper in each section (see Appendix) is displayed in brackets following the newspaper's name in the first row. The "author" rows show how many articles are contributions of correspondents in Spain or in China, or of a certain news agency. The "source" rows demonstrate the number of articles that include a certain source cited by the author. Multiple sources of the same type, e.g., different experts, are not counted repeatedly.

3. Content Analysis

3.1 Domestic Information Diffusion and Epidemic Prevention Efforts in China

3.1.1 Information about the Virus's Infectivity: Record of Cover-up

Reports from January 3rd to January 20th about the appearance of the disease described it as "mysterious pneumonia", "of China" or "of Wuhan", mainly citing official sources such as the Center of Disease Control and Prevention and National Health Commission of China, as well as Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post*. Public suspicion on major Chinese social media like Weibo was also cited. On January 20th, *El Mundo* in *Mortal coronavirus from Wuhan has already come out of China* said that the Chinese authorities kept silent at the beginning, but on January 19th decided to "put an end to the silence" to "stop evil rumors" by clarifying that the new virus was not SARS

and the outbreak would be "preventable and controllable", just before human-to-human transmission was confirmed.

El País's *A virus similar to SARS, responsible for the mysterious Chinese pneumonia* on January 11 reviewed China's infamous secrecy over the epidemic which raged over the country 17 years ago, so its image was already shadowed by the lack of transparency, even before the infectivity of the virus was made clear. On January 21, the same newspaper wrote that "reasonable doubts about data transparency still exist, given that the epidemic was kept secret for weeks, even though the Chinese Government has greatly improved its reactions compared to the handling of SARS". That history stimulated speculations and condemnations of cover-up against China later.

3.1.2 Lockdown of Wuhan: Draconian and Responsive

Reports about the lockdown of Chinese cities were generally descriptive, quoting Chinese authorities or correspondents located in China who were also put under lockdown. Apart from descriptions of the grim reality, some articles considered the restriction of movements "drastic", "draconian" and "an unprecedented social experiment". China was then presented as hardline and bold, instead of cautious or considerate, imposing forceful measures on its citizens, but responsive to a potential political crisis triggered by the virus through resolute *ad hoc* measures, even if the efficiency of such measures remained unclear. The depiction of China as hardline coincided with that by the Chinese state-run media.

On January 22, *El País* reported that the city of Wuhan would be closed, saying that China had begun to take drastic measures to stop the virus, and that its efforts were applauded by the WHO for being a "robust response to the crisis". On January 23, *El Periódico de Catalunya* also reported the shutdown of Chinese cities, citing Xi Jinping's affirmation that China had taken strict measures of epidemic control and treatment. *El Periódico* commented that Wuhan was "very likely to remain in global history due to the coronavirus". Its report, entitled *Vacations in quarantine in Wuhan due to the coronavirus*, pointed out the lockdown was "an unprecedented social experiment aimed to stop the epidemic that threatened to become a global crisis". On January 26, however, the same newspaper expressed doubts about the reliability of movement restriction measures and exhaustive measurement of temperature. The piece of news also mentioned exhaustively other *ad hoc* measures adopted by Chinese authorities.

As consequences of the outbreak began to surface, *Wuhan Coronavirus: fear for a pandemic* by *La Vanguardia* on January 28 said the coronavirus crisis was already affecting the economy and politics, since the local authorities in Wuhan reacted late and inappropriately, as admitted by

the Mayor of Wuhan, which resulted in Chinese leaders being increasingly questioned by their citizens. In an article published later that day, *La Vanguardia* also quoted WHO's praise: China took the outbreak "seriously" and the highest-level authorities had shown transparency.

3.1.3 Quarantine and Confinement: Epidemic Control at all Costs

The lockdown created a draconian image for China early on. Apart from the establishment of special supply chains of living goods in most areas under lockdown, a series of new and strict *ad hoc* epidemic prevention measures were noticed by Spanish media, such as improvised quarantine barricades, removal of hundreds of incompetent officials, and harsh repression of public anger through censorship, which caused numerous detrimental side effects, etc. On the other hand, positive results of these extreme measures were also mentioned and reviewed. After the virus became evidently under control in mid-February, *La Vanguardia* noticed that China could start boasting about its experience through its well-oiled propaganda machines. Therefore, China was depicted as a Machiavellian virus fighter during the period, even at the cost of extensive violation of individual rights and crippling the national economy.

Spanish media's coverage of life in quarantine mainly consisted of descriptions by correspondents in Beijing or Wuhan, and pieces via phone interviews or instant messaging applications like WeChat, intermittently recounted in first person. Using a story-telling narrative, these reports tried to reproduce the grim reality with first-hand observations, a way to better empathize with readers, exposing trapped Chinese citizens' complex and developing emotions, which were predominantly negative – fear, trauma, skepticism, anger, fury, etc., as well as their criticisms toward the authorities. Some reports also explicitly expressed worry and sympathy for the Chinese, but not for the "communist regime". For example, in *Vacations in quarantine in Wuhan due to the coronavirus* on January 24, *El Periódico de Catalunya* told the stories of several citizens affected by "traumatic" quarantine measures and explained that "only the Confucian idea that prioritizes the common good over the individual can prevent an uproar". The article described the Chinese as "a people who had suffered tragedies one after another during the past two centuries".

On February 10, *El País* noted that "the drastic measures in force impede China's attempt to restart the economy" after the total shutdown of three weeks, quoting a white-collar worker in Beijing affected by the quarantine, and the surveys of UK Chamber of Commerce in Beijing and that of the US in Shanghai, respectively.

Other reports pointed out China's ultimate target of defeating the virus and the actual achievement: On January 31, *La Vanguardia* quoted Chinese

officials' affirmation that "China is capable of containing and defeating the coronavirus". *ABC* on February 23 acknowledged the positive results of the massive quarantine that lasted for a month, reflected by the decreasing number of new infections, but *ABC* again labelled the measures as "draconian", such as confining everyone at home as if in a "warzone".

On March 10, *El Mundo* covered Xi Jinping's victorious announcement in Wuhan, considered "a clear signal for the world that China has won the battle against the coronavirus". *El Mundo* added, "although Xi's visit was showered with complimentary propaganda from the state-run media, it had brought hope about reopening the city". On the same day, *La Vanguardia* said that thanks to the "the largest quarantine in history" China managed to control the virus and bought more time for other countries to brace for the epidemic, but also noted the resurgence of Chinese propaganda, taking the example of *Global Times* which emphasized that "China has acted as a great responsible nation", and its criticism toward US elites who dismissed the Chinese epidemic prevention measures "out of ideological or political prejudices".

In retrospect, *ABC* (on March 31) and *El Mundo* (April 1st) both wrote that the lockdown of Wuhan might have avoided more than 700,000 infections, quoting a joint work by researchers.

3.1.4 Use of Technology: Towards a Technological Leviathan

Among the actions taken by China, what had particularly sparked the concern of the Spanish media was the wide range of unprecedented technologies, which allegedly have connections with, or are controlled by the "omniscient and omnipotent" Chinese Government, especially by its police forces, even if not all the operator(s) of these hi-tech systems and apparatuses are the state authorities or state-owned enterprises. In such observations, these efficient methods reportedly involving violations of individual freedom and privacy via collection of personal data, etc., could be considered evidence that further characterizes the Chinese regime as a totalitarian and authoritarian one which takes on all things of society. Besides, there were also episodes of xenophobia in China.

In *Chinese Technology against the coronavirus*, *El Mundo*'s correspondent in China wrote, for example, "China is a totalitarian state where the use of the technology has been crucial to monitoring and controlling the population during the coronavirus epidemic", citing SMS notifications, Alipay Health Code, disinfection robots, thermic drones and helmets, carrier drones, facial recognition systems and collection of mobile locations. *El Mundo*, quoting *The New York Times*, warned that the Health Code "seemed to share information with the police (*parece compartir información con la policía*)",

"establishing a model for new forms of automated society control which could persist (*estableciendo una plantilla para nuevas formas de control social automatizado que podrían persistir*)", and that facial recognition and the collection of smartphone data worked the same. The article also said the authorities guaranteed the collected data would only be used for epidemic prevention, citing Xinhua News Agency.

El País in February also had been aware that COVID-19 was unlocking some countries' capacity of massive surveillance. It wrote more straightforward criticisms against China's technological measures, "China has always been steps ahead in terms of massive surveillance […]. Now it even boasts about its capacity and perfection". To support its argument, the newspaper discussed several "surprising methods" including facial recognition cameras capable of detecting who violated the quarantine, the unknowing tracking of smartphone locations, quoting *The Wall Street Journal*, and police drones, citing the Chinese official media *Global Times*.

On May 15, *El Mundo* posted an article authored by Belgian painter Koen de Cock entitled *The 'Chinese' art of confinement*, who recounted the forced quarantine he experienced, during which he felt he "had lost control of his own life". It can be regarded as a black tale of the omnipresent Chinese technologies, like mobile apps and QR codes "for healthcare use", and their penetration into everyone's life, whether local people or foreigners. The most outstanding example was the efficient tracking of people's whereabouts, while the tracked subjects remained unaware, including the author himself. Furthermore, the story provided evidence of how the Chinese Government keeps everything in its own hand. Apart from depicting how he was deprived of his personal freedom, de Cock exclaimed that local Chinese people began to demonize foreigners as more imported infections were recorded.

In contrast, *La Vanguardia*'s article *How has China informed of the pandemic?* on April 19 was much less critical of Chinese technologies. Authored by a reader correspondent in China, it showed how the Government used SMS and WeChat Applet to inform the citizens of the development of the epidemic and precaution measures. Shocked at the efficiency of these communication measures, the author exclaimed that such "clear, consensual and logical" information was lacking in Spain. Though the article argued against the stereotype about China, such as the intensified surveillance by omnipresent CCTVs and smartphone apps, the description of the daily bombardment of messages undoubtedly strengthened the image of a "Big Daddy Government".

In sum, regarding the source of information of the four articles in 3.1.4, *El Mundo* and *La Vanguardia* both used the accounts by European citizens in China. Nevertheless, in *Chinese Technology against the coronavirus*, *El*

Table 1 Sources of Subsection 3.1.4

3.1.4 Domestic Information Diffusion and Epidemic Prevention Efforts in China: Use of Technology

	Newspaper / Source Category	*El Mundo* (2)	*El País* (1)	*La Vanguardia* (1)	*El Periódico* (0)	*ABC* (0)
Author	Correspondent in China	2*		1**		
	Correspondent in Spain					
	The newspaper's editorial office/Columnist		1			
Author/Source	News agency of continental Europe					
	US/UK news agency					
	Expert/Scholar/WHO		1			
	Other/Unspecified		1			
Source	US/UK media & newspaper	1	1			
	Hong Kongese media & newspaper	1				
	Mainland Chinese official media & newspaper	1	1			
	Other mainland Chinese media & newspaper					
	Chinese authorities			1		
	Interviewee in China					

Note: * One of the articles was authored by Koen de Cock, reader correspondent in China.

** Authored by Brigette Musafira, reader correspondent in China.

Mundo's correspondent in China, when trying to prove the abuse of collected personal data via technology, only quoted claims from *The New York Times* and the Hong Kong-based *Asia Times*, without presenting proof. Also, the claims cited from *The Times* included ambiguous words like "seem (*parece*)", "could (*podrían*, in conditional)". Similarly, when *El País* tried to prove the massive tracking of people in China, it did so by citing *The Wall Street Journal*.

3.1.5 Mass Screening in Wuhan: An Efficient Example for the World

After the reopening of Wuhan, there had been recurrence of COVID-19 cases. China then used its capability to conduct massive tests to set itself as an example in worldwide epidemic prevention. What we could see from the reports was an efficient and ambitious China which was not overly confident.

On May 12, *El Periódico de Catalunya* first wrote about the massive test for 11 million Wuhan citizens, describing the measures to prevent the second outbreak as "neither lukewarm nor scarce", which "does not go beyond China's capabilities".

Moreover, a report by *El Mundo* on May 15 said the massive testing would cost an equivalent of 234 million euros, commenting that "China would assert its authority by demonstrating its ability to conduct tests for a whole city with more residents than New York". The article quoted the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which manifested intolerance of failure and determination to set a model for the world, but *El Mundo* considered the proclamation an example of the studied official narrative of "China is one step ahead of the world".

3.1.6 Summary of Source of Information in Section 3.1

In sum, articles concerning China's measures to tackle the virus were predominantly authored by China correspondents, with exceptions like the newspapers' editorial office, or European news agencies like EFE and AFP. Apart from Chinese authorities, expert and scholarly sources were also frequently cited, along with the Hong Kong newspaper *South China Morning Post*. *Global Times* and Xinhua News Agency were among the most quoted mainland Chinese official media, while the liberal magazine *Caixin*, for its investigations into the management of the epidemic, was the non-official Chinese media frequently cited by *El Mundo* and *El País*. The two major newspapers as well as *El Periódico* also contacted several affected Chinese citizens via telephone or WeChat, as mentioned in 3.1.3.

Table 2 Sources of Information of the Analyzed Articles of Section 3.1

3.1 Domestic Information Diffusion and Epidemic Prevention Efforts in China

	Newspaper / Source Category	*El Mundo* (11)	*El País* (9)	*La Vanguardia* (6)	*El Periódico* (6)	*ABC* (3)
Author	Correspondent in China	9*	8	3**	5	1
	Correspondent in Spain		1			
	The newspaper's editorial office/Columnist	1	1	2	1	
Author/Source	News agency of continental Europe	1	1	2		
	US/UK news agency		2			
	Expert/Scholar/WHO	3	5	3	4	1
	Other/Unspecified	2	3	2		2***
Source	US/UK media & newspaper	1	1			
	Hong Kongese media & newspaper	2	3		2	1
	Mainland Chinese official media & newspaper	1	4	2	1	
	Other mainland Chinese media & newspaper	4	2			
	Chinese authorities	7	3	4	2	1
	Interviewee in China	2	2		1	

Note: * One of the articles was authored by Koen de Cock, reader correspondent in China.

** 2 out of 3 authored (or co-authored) by Ismael Arana, *La Vanguardia*'s correspondent in Hong Kong SAR, China. The rest by Brigette Musafira, correspondent reader in China.

*** One authored by "Agencies" and another by "Servimedia".

3.2 Chinese Aid in Spain

3.2.1 Aid from Overseas Chinese in Spain

Twelve collected articles covered aid and donations offered by ethnic Chinese living in Spain and voluntary groups. Most were neutral statement of facts, with occasional praise for participants' spontaneity, modesty, sense of responsibility and contributive spirit. In contrast to previous stereo-types about Chinese immigrants, most of these reports, through interviews with heads of organizations formed by Chinese, as well as with individual volunteers, emphasized that Chinese were proactively integrating into local society, showing solidarity with Spaniards (as reflected by tweets from Spanish netizens showing support and gratitude), and even cooperating with local governments (as confirmed by Spanish newspaper interviews with officials), therefore resulting in an improved image of overseas Chinese in Spain. Comparatively, their connections with Mainland China were downplayed by the reports.

The first coverage of Chinese aid in Spain, on March 15, was two reports from *La Vanguardia*, one about the donation of medical supplies to local hospitals in Madrid, and the other, praising the donation as "exemplary", about ethnic Chinese offering healthcare materials to police stations. *El País* noted their deeds in Madrid were spontaneous, speaking highly of the modesty and selflessness of the "nameless" volunteers and donators, and using an interviewee's affirmation to exemplify their support for Spain: "Although we are Chinese, Spain is also our country". Comparatively, *La Vanguardia* later quoted the perception of overseas Chinese by the vice-president of the Association of the Chinese in Spain: "They do not form a closed community but a hospitable and open one, and they all want to contribute."

On March 23, *El Mundo* wrote about the Valencian Government's purchase of medical supplies from China via the entrepreneur Chen Wu Keping, "a man deeply rooted in Valencia" who kept connections with the local government and had a strong sense of Spanish identity, for whom a local official called for "respect". On March 31, *La Vanguardia* covered the donations of protective gears by the Chinese community in Navarra. On April 5, *El País* reported on Johni Zang, a wholesaler of Chinese origin and secretary general of Chinese Corporations Federation in Spain, who organized donations thanks to his connections in China. According to the report, Zang, who "had no memories of China" and was saddened by suffering Spain, was collaborating with the Barcelona Government, but showed much modesty about his work.

On April 9, *El Mundo* in *The four Chinese benefactors to the aid of Spain* reported on Jennifer Zhang, President of China Club; Chen Wu Keping, entrepreneur; Estela Li, coordinator of China-Spain Volunteer Alliance against the Coronavirus; and Chen Chen, President of the Association of

Young Chinese Student Entrepreneurs. Jennifer Zhang reportedly coordinated the embassy and "all Chinese enterprises" that wanted to send supplies to Spain; for example, she made possible the donation of 100,000 masks by the Shanghai-based company Ctrip. Chen Chen had been dedicated to contacting Chinese universities for donations. Estela Li helped to connect Spanish doctors with counterparts in Wuhan, whose deeds were further elaborated on and praised by *La Vanguardia* in *Doctors from Wuhan instruct Spanish doctors in the coronavirus*. Apart from stating the organization's non-profit nature, the report also showed translation accuracy as proof of Li's sense of responsibility.

The report *COVID-19: the united network of Chinese* by *El Periódico* on April 26 observed that Chinese in Catalonia already began to create a network of information, translation, and donations with China in an operation to help police officers and medical staff, even before the epidemic hit Spain. Most Chinese in the report work as doctors or are medical students in Barcelona.

3.2.2 Aid from Private Companies in China

Aid from Jack Ma, founder of Alibaba, were covered by *El Mundo*, *El País* and *La Vanguardia*, and those from Ren Zhengfei, President of Huawei, by *ABC*. Ma was depicted by *El Mundo* as a puppet promoted by China to improve its "villainous" image, and his donation was considered some sort of propaganda.

On March 19, *El Mundo* showed skepticism about China's intention to discard its villainous image and to become the antiviral hero, which would "certainly require the action of several of its prominent figures" like Jack Ma: "First, announcing with its propagandistic mouthpieces that its draconian methods to stop the COVID-19 have worked. Then, when the global community copies some of its measures, the time to fill the void with solidarity has come. With names." Ma was initially described as "an entrepreneur dedicated to education and philanthropy like Bill Gates", but *El Mundo* continued its query, "an aid in his name, but under the red flag banner, has been sponsored by the biggest fortune of the Giant of Asia".

On March 21, *ABC* reported on Huawei's donation of one million masks in the name of Ren Zhengfei, in collaboration with the Spanish group Inditex. Compared to Jack Ma, reports about Ren were less ideologically-packed.

3.2.3 Aid from the Chinese Government and Issues

As for interactions at the governmental level, none of the newspapers called China "a partner" of Spain, but still shed light on China's promise to aid

Spain on March 16 and 17, exchanged words of support, praises of each other's efforts between the two governments. However, there were very few reports about specific donations to Spain from a particular branch of Chinese Government. Furthermore, there were reports of when and how Chinese supplies arrived in Spain, without specifying the manufacturers or donators. When some COVID-19 test kits bought from China were found defective, related incidents were widely covered by the Spanish newspapers, but the criticisms were mostly directed against the Spanish Government, instead of China. In brief, China was depicted as a helper of some use, but less upright than the overseas Chinese acting spontaneously for Spain: the aid from China were considered more of a promotional campaign. As concluded by *La Vanguardia*, the coronavirus stimulated "Chinese solidarity" with Spain: all the donations added up to an international solidarity effort by China.

On March 16, both *ABC* and *El Mundo* reported on the promise on behalf of China made by Wang Yi, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to send urgent medical aid to Spain. However, *ABC* still considered the promise hollow, and criticized China for forcing factories to restart amid the outbreak. Then, according to *El Mundo*, on March 22 the Madrid Government chartered two planes with medical gears from China. On April 1, *ABC* signaled that an airplane with medical supplies bought by Madrid from China had landed in Spain.

On March 26, it was reported by *El Mundo*, *El País* as well as *La Vanguardia* that 9,000 rapid test kits bought from China were found defective. The Chinese Embassy in Spain responded that the Ministry of Health of Spain had bought from an unlicensed enterprise. The three newspapers did not criticize the Chinese Government for the incident, but criticisms from the opposition parties against the Spanish Government were cited instead. *ABC*'s report on April 20 also revealed that a cockroach was found in a box of masks from China purchased by the Valencian Government.

The only donation by a Chinese provincial government reported in detail was that from Gansu Province to the Spanish region of Navarra, by *La Vanguardia* on March 31. *La Vanguardia* also posted an article by Lin Nan, consul general of China in Barcelona, which was entitled *Unity, cooperation and hope: three Chinese stories in Catalonia during the pandemic*. Calling for unity and cooperation in the case of global challenges, the article reviewed the good deeds of overseas Chinese in Spain, praising their integration into the local society, as well as the mutual help between the Catalonian Government and China, and praised the Spanish medical professionals.

3.2.4 Summary of Source of Information in Section 3.2

The articles in section 3.2 (Tables 3–5) were mainly authored by Spanish correspondents, but 6 out of 9 articles from *La Vanguardia* came from

Table 3 Sources of Subsection 3.2.1

3.2.1 Chinese aid in Spain: Overseas Chinese in Spain

	Newspaper / Source Category	*El Mundo* (2)	*El País* (3)	*La Vanguardia* (4)	*El Periódico* (2)	*ABC* (1)
Author	Correspondent in Spain	2	3	2	1	
	Correspondent in China					
	The newspaper's editorial office/Columnist					1
Author/Source	News agency of continental Europe			2	1	
	US/UK news agency					
	Other/Unspecified					
Source	Spanish authorities	1				
	US/UK media & newspaper					
	European political organization	1				
	Leader/Spokesman of European countries	1				
	Spanish social network		1	1		
	Chinese authorities					
	Ethnic Chinese interviewee in Spain	2	3	1	1	1

Table 4 Sources of Subsection 3.2.2

3.2.2 Chinese aid in Spain: Private companies in China

	Newspaper / Source Category	*El Mundo* (1)	*El País* (1)	*La Vanguardia* (1)	*El Periódico* (0)	*ABC* (1)
Author	Correspondent in Spain		1			
	Correspondent in China	1				
	The newspaper's editorial office/Columnist					1
Author/Source	News agency of continental Europe					1
	US/UK news agency					
	Other/Unspecified			1		
Source	Spanish authorities		1	1		
	US/UK media & newspaper					
	European political organization					
	Leader/Spokesman of European countries					
	Spanish social network					
	Chinese authorities	1				
	Ethnic Chinese interviewee in Spain					

Table 5 Sources of Subsection 3.2.3

3.2.3 Chinese aid in Spain: Aid from Chinese Government and Issues

	Newspaper / Source Category	*El Mundo* (4)	*El País* (2)	*La Vanguardia* (4)	*El Periódico* (0)	*ABC* (3)
Author	Correspondent in Spain	3	2			2
	Correspondent in China					1
	The newspaper's editorial office/Columnist					
Author/Source	US/UK news agency					
	News agency of continental Europe	1		3		
	Other/Unspecified	3	1	1		1
	Chinese authorities	1	1	2		
Source	Spanish authorities	3	2	2		2
	US/UK media & newspaper					
	European political organization					
	Mainland Chinese official media & newspaper	1				1
	Other mainland Chinese media & newspaper					
	Ethnic Chinese interviewee in Spain					

European news agencies like Europa Press or EFE. All reports by *El Mundo*, *El País* and *ABC* directly quoted Chinese helpers in Spain, while *El País* and *La Vanguardia* also cited responses from Spanish netizens. Most articles about government aid quoted authorities in both countries, as well as Xinhua News Agency.

3.3 Opinions, Criticisms and Praises

While *El Mundo* and *El País* doubted China's data transparency in January, as mentioned in 3.1.1, criticisms of China's delay in informing the public and WHO were mainly retrospective. In February, disapprovals were focused on censorship, which peaked with Dr. Li Wenliang's death. *El Periódico* argued the uproar was an "experimental relaxation of censorship" allowed by the Chinese Government, but such "trial-and-error experiment" eventually failed. As a result, intensified censorship resumed to maintain social stability. China's technological methods that might violate individual rights and privacy were already discussed in section 3.1.4. After mid-March, *El Mundo*, *El País*, *ABC* and *La Vanguardia* observed China's opportunism through its "mask (medical) diplomacy", pointing out its intention to clean up its image, set itself up as an antiviral hero and ally other countries against the US. *ABC* claimed that China would end up weaker even if it took proactive diplomatic actions. In April, as the pandemic swept Europe hard and as China revised the death toll, Spanish newspapers demanded greater transparency from China and condemned data manipulation. The release of Fang Fang's *Diary of Wuhan* in Spain in early July revived criticisms of China's lack of speech freedom. There was also praise for the efficiency of Chinese preventive measures.

3.3.1 Delay and Cover-up: Exaggerated Praises

While some articles in 3.1.1 doubted if China was hiding information in January, criticisms about China's cover-up were reviews rather than synchronized with the development of the epidemic. For instance, *El Mundo* on June 3 reviewed Chinese authorities' "delayed" and "reluctant" communications with the WHO, citing the Associated Press (AP)'s investigation, and, according to *Caixin*, the National Health Commission's secret order to destroy or archive the virus samples in January. *El Mundo* also quoted a professor who said to AP that more lives could have been saved if China and WHO had acted more swiftly. The newspaper commented that while AP's information did not support the accusation from the US of China's collusion with WHO, it suggested the latter's praise for China's transparency was exaggerated.

Table 6 Sources of Subsection 3.3.1

3.3.1 Opinions about China concerning its domestic measures and its aid in Spain: Delay and cover-up

	Newspaper / Source Category	*El Mundo* (1)	*El País* (0)	*La Vanguardia* (3)	*El Periódico* (0)	*ABC* (0)
Author	Correspondent in Spain					
	Correspondent in China	1				
	The newspaper's editorial office/Columnist			2		
Author/Source	Expert/Scholar	1				
	US/UK news agency	1		1		
	News agency of continental Europe					
	News agency of Japan					
	Other/Unspecified			1*		
	Writer					
	WHO	1				
Source	US/UK media & newspaper					
	Leader/Spokesman of UE/European countries except Spain					
	Leader/Spokesman of UK/US	1				
	Hong Kongese media & newspaper					
	Mainland Chinese official media & newspaper					
	Other mainland Chinese media & newspaper	1				
	Spanish leader/authorities					
	Chinese leader/authorities	1		1		
	Interviewee in China					
	NGO					

Note: * Source marked as "Chinese media".

Contrastingly, on January 29 *La Vanguardia* seemed to consider China's slow move reasonable: "[…] China was reluctant to provide accurate information. But not only the Chinese government do so. To keep people calm, the authorities of several countries tend to be conservative when informing of the danger of infectious diseases."

Another piece of evidence of delay and cover-up was Xi Jinping's order to combat the epidemic on January 7, which did not go public until mid-February. Also citing AP, *La Vanguardia* said on February 17 that the President was aware of the severity of the epidemic two weeks before publicly acknowledging it. The report commented that Xi's speech intended to build up a decisive image for the Chinese leader, but it also exposed him to criticisms of why the citizens were not alerted beforehand.

In sum, evidence used to criticize China's delay and cover-up was predominantly contributed by AP, apart from the liberal Chinese magazine *Caixin*.

3.3.2 Censorship: Monolithic, Impenetrable, Intolerant and Machiavellian

Observations of Chinese censorship could be divided into three parts: before COVID-19 broke out in Europe, Spanish media had been criticizing China's censorship which silenced the alarm raised by several doctors in Wuhan and thus increased the damage of the epidemic, as well as the calculated relaxation and tightening of censorship before and after Dr. Li Wenliang's death. China's remedial actions for the incident, including the suppression of provocative remarks, also strengthened its Machiavellian image. Since these newspapers observed that every Chinese citizen obeyed the Government and lacked motives for resistance, China could be described as "monolithic and impenetrable". Months later, Spanish media continued to report on the censorship of Chinese social media which blocked views and ideas different from the official ones, portraying a China intolerant to dissidence.

Most of the reports did not distinguish the issuers of directives (Ministry of Publicity of China) from operators of censorship (social networks like Weibo and WeChat), considering the censorship mechanism as a whole, except *La Vanguardia*'s report (using part of a message from EFE) on February 6 on Amnesty International's denunciation of China's censorship, where the NGO condemned the collusion between Chinese authorities and the social networks and the press in China which helped to intensify censorship.

While Amnesty International asserted that China's censorship increased the damage caused by the coronavirus, the death of Dr. Li Wenliang on February 6 became a landmark event and evidence of its vicious aftermath. His death, according to *El Mundo* and *El Periódico*, closed a brief window of censorship relaxation, reflected by the unprecedented, but ephemeral, public

outcry after the death announcement: *El Mundo* considered it a strategy of the Chinese Government, allowing citizens to let off their accumulated fury over the days of lockdown, while *El Periódico* regarded it as a failed experiment of censorship relaxation, given that more severe and extensive censorship resumed soon after the outcry. Both *El Periódico* and *La Vanguardia* predicted Chinese citizen's lacking resistance.

To be specific, *El País* described Dr. Li as "the ophthalmologist who 'was retaliated against' because of warning about the epidemic". *ABC* on February 6 stated that "Li's death has unleashed a dangerous outcry against the authoritarian regime of the Communist Party." The same day, *La Vanguardia* briefly mentioned the public reaction online and quoted the Supreme Court's criticism of the police which had detained the doctor, and its regrettable social impact.

Regarding the unprecedented uproar, *El Mundo* in a retrospective report *The forgiveness from Li Wenliang, the doctor silenced by China who warned about the coronavirus* on March 20 said that "the Great Firewall", synonym of Chinese censorship, "was deliberately allowed to break", so that the people could somehow vent their frustrations. In comparison, *El Periódico* considered the flooding criticisms as evidence of a trial-and-error experiment conducted by the Government, which allowed on purpose more freedom of expression to facilitate transparency after learning from the "calamitous" handling of SARS, but the consequent tightened media control signaled its failure. *El Periódico* pointed out that the same system that enabled swift reaction also strengthened the virus, due to the long-standing flaws of China's vertical hierarchy that hardly stimulated transparency, and that the fury on the Chinese Internet suggested a paradox, or an imminent conflict between a society that demanded freedom of expression and a Government that had just seen the risks of granting it moderately. *El Periódico* expressed much pessimism about the prospects of free speech in China, arguing that the revolution that many Western experts were expecting would not be triggered even if Li was revered by Chinese citizens.

In *The virus that threatens the Chinese regime* published on February 11, *La Vanguardia* also noticed the short-lived relaxation of censorship, adding that Dr. Li was also a member of the Communist Party of China and he did not intend to act against it. The article observed that Li's death provoked a political and social crisis, leading to emerging opinions from the West that China could be on the verge of collapse. In *La Vanguardia*'s interview with Jason Y. Ng, a Hong Kong dissident writer, the interviewee argued that Chinese citizens, increasingly unconfident about the communist leadership, started to question its ability to handle the crisis, but he also expressed his disappointment at Chinese citizens who were too satisfied with the economic achievements brought by the communist leadership to react against it.

China's Machiavellian image was even strengthened by its remedial actions for the incident of Dr. Li, such as the follow-up censorship. In *The anger over virus management poses unprecedented challenge for Xi Jinping*, *El País* noted the alarmed Chinese Government was responding to the looming political crisis by prioritizing the control of media and Internet. *El Periódico* also informed about Xi's order of tightening media control, since "(the media) continued to collect evidence of the Chinese Government's irresponsible acts", commenting that "these instructions metaphorize the dysfunctions of a system where officials are more concerned with personal salvation than with solution of problems". *El Mundo* also quoted Beijing's justification of maintaining censorship from the state-run media *Global Times*: "Some people had been using the widespread grievance caused by Dr. Li's death to incite anti-China sentiments on social networks, and even social movements."

Further remedies included the Central Government's dispatch to investigate Li's death, which, according to *El País*, not only was a strategy apparently to appease the public, but it also drew a clear distinction between the central and the local government; in other words, the Central Government tried to shift the blame to its subordinates, while trying to label itself as efficient. In *The virus that threatens the Chinese regime*, *La Vanguardia* quoted a Chinese columnist, who predicted that once the virus was contained, the Chinese leaders would again praise the superiority of the authoritarian model, the key to mobilizing resources nationwide.

With regards to *Diary of Wuhan: 60 days of a city in quarantine* authored by Fang Fang, most Spanish newspapers regarded it as a courageous testimony amid censorship and the suppression of dissidence.

El Mundo first noticed the writer in April, who reportedly was censored by Beijing because of questioning the official number of deaths, and highly valued her work: "Unintimidated by censorship and criticisms, her diary was an antidote to the shower of deceitfully positive and heroic Chinese propaganda", which depicted the sufferings of a nation and condemned those who hid the truth.

In July, *El País* labeled Fang Fang as dissident and praised her bravery in its article *Bear witness*, where it claimed that dictatorships now take new forms as technology advances, exemplified by Internet censorship, a more effective weapon against dissidents such as Fang Fang. *El País* described China as "a regime where everyone obeys and where the only acceptable reality is the one dictated by official media", and Fang Fang's act as dangerous and heroic. "The Chinese political power and its propaganda wrap up facts with decorations, aiming to strengthen its despotism and privileges, as well as hiding up its incompetence, corruption, errors and negligence," criticized the newspaper.

Table 7 Sources of Subsection 3.3.2

3.3.2 Opinions about China concerning its domestic measures and its aid in Spain: Censorship and data manipulation

	Newspaper / Source Category	*El Mundo* (2)	*El País* (5)	*La Vanguardia* (5)	*El Periódico* (1)	*ABC* (3)
Author	Correspondent in Spain		1	1	1	
	Correspondent in China	2	2	1***		1
	The newspaper's editorial office/Columnist		2	3		1
Author/Source	Expert/Scholar		3*	1*	1	
	US/UK news agency					
	News agency of continental Europe					
	News agency of Japan					
	Other/Unspecified		1*		1	1****
	Writer	1	1	2**		1
	WHO	1				
Source	US/UK media & newspaper			1		
	Leader/Spokesman of UE/European countries except Spain					
	Leader/Spokesman of UK/US					
	Hong Kongese media & newspaper		1			1
	Mainland Chinese official media & newspaper	1	2	2	1	1
	Other mainland Chinese media & newspaper				1	
	Spanish leader/authorities					
	Chinese leader/authorities	1	2	2		1
	Interviewee in China			1**	1	
	NGO		1	1		

Note: * Includes opinions from the sinologist Bill Bishop.

** In one of the articles authored by the newspaper's editor/columnist Lluís Amiguet, the interviewee is a Hong Kongese writer and dissident.

*** Authored by Ismael Arana, the newspaper's correspondent in Hong Kong SAR, China.

**** Author marked as "EP".

ABC also applauded the female writer's courage to testify at the risk of being deprived of freedom and Internet access, and spared no effort in criticizing the Chinese regime as "monolithic and impenetrable", as well as its lack of transparency and flagrant censorship that the pandemic had revealed: "(The *Diary*) denounces the official's incompetence in a country which claimed to be perfect but screwed up from the first minute […] and accused the dissidents of being traitors and beat them up publicly."

La Vanguardia viewed the *Diary* differently, highlighting Fang Fang's modesty, her ability to empathize with the Spanish people, the objectivity of her writing, and her partial trust in the Chinese Government, instead of praising her bravery or delving into her ideological resistance: "In a constant fight against the censors […] she insists on cooperating with the Chinese Government, which she praises whenever she thinks appropriate actions are taken."

Regarding the source of information in 3.3.2, the NGOs cited by *El País* and *La Vanguardia* were Reporters Without Borders and Amnesty International, which had long been condemning censorship in China. Fang Fang's accounts of the censorship she had undergone were amply used by these newspapers except *El Periódico*. *El Mundo* and *El Periódico* both cited *Caixin*, while the most cited official Chinese media was *Global Times*. *El País* and *ABC* both quoted *South China Morning Post*.

3.3.3 Demands for China's Transparency during the Outbreak in Europe: Deceptive and Evasive

As COVID-19 swept Europe in March, major Spanish newspapers launched new criticisms of China's information transparency, calling its official statistics "deceptive or misleading (*engañoso*)" and condemning the country's evasion of responsibility.

"Many experts doubt these numbers because of the habitual opacity of Beijing which tends to conceal or minimize any sensitive information that undermines the image of the CPC and President Xi Jinping," claimed *ABC*'s article *"Deceptive" coronavirus numbers in China make Europe fear a worse catastrophe* on March 21st, which blamed China for worsening the crisis in Spain and other European countries, calling the Chinese figures "dangerously deceptive" because they principally referred to the situation of Wuhan instead of the whole of China, while any large European cities could easily repeat the Wuhan scenario. Similarly, *El Mundo*'s article *The shadows of efficacy in the Chinese battle*, citing Reporters Without Borders, blamed China's media control for escalating the disease into a pandemic, illustrated by the delayed and uncomplete information provided to international media before January 13th. *El Mundo* further questioned the official statistics, especially the

relatively small amount of infections and deaths compared to Europe, which, according to various sources cited, were achieved at the cost of patients rejected by hospitals and unregistered asymptomatic cases. In April, *El País*'s editorial *China: the coronavirus and papier-mâché* recognized China's capacities of epidemic prevention, but still insisted that the country could not provide truthful information and again criticized the data manipulation.

Suspicions arose again as the Chinese authorities revised the death toll in Wuhan. On April 17th, *El Mundo*'s *The world distrusts China: deaths from coronavirus in Wuhan go up by 50%* claimed that China still intended to divert criticisms when the focus on the pandemic's origin and accountability was increasingly shifting to the country, as confirmed by the urges from the US, UK and France.

The same day, *ABC*'s editorial *China should answer* examined Beijing's suspicious reluctance to allow investigation into the Wuhan Institute of Virology, and the dubious shutdown of the laboratory which published the virus genome, commenting that "The Communist Regime's horror of transparency can have catastrophic effects" for impeding the development of vaccines. *ABC* described Xi Jinping as "not interested in telling people the truth" "a self-proclaimed benefactor of humanity" for his lavish aid of medical supplies. *El Periódico*'s *Did China tell all the truth about the coronavirus?* claimed that deaths in Wuhan could be ten times that of the official figure and emphasized China's biggest mistake was the delay and the poor quality of information provided to WHO, citing AP and *South China Morning Post*. In *All the truth*, *El País* argued that Chinese authorities possessed more extensive information about the virus, and referred to the infection count in democratic countries as benchmark for China's honesty: "If there is a big difference in the statistics between China and other countries, especially democracies, then the suspicions are well-founded that China is not telling all the truth".

When demanding transparency from China, *El Mundo*, *El País* and *La Vanguardia* quoted the accusation from Mike Pompeo in an interview with *Fox News*, as well as urges from Emmanuel Macron and Dominic Raab, UK Minister of Foreign Affairs. Sources from US/UK news agencies were those from Associated Press and Bloomberg. It is worth mentioning that the anonymous doctor who denounced data manipulation in Wuhan to Kyodo was cited by both *El Mundo* and *ABC*. Newspapers except *El País* used sources from *Financial Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post*. Apart from the *South China Morning Post*, a range of Hong Kong media such as RTHK and *Apple Daily* were quoted by *El Mundo*, which also cited Chinese official media like *Global Times* and *People's Daily*, the liberal Chinese magazine *Caixin*, an interviewee in Wuhan, and Reporters Without Borders. Both *El Mundo* and *La Vanguardia* used sources from Chinese authorities and official media.

Table 8 Sources of Subsection 3.3.3

3.3.3 Opinions about China concerning its domestic measures and its aid in Spain: Demand for transparency

	Newspaper / Source Category	*El Mundo* (2)	*El País* (1)	*La Vanguardia* (2)	*El Periódico* (1)	*ABC* (2)
Author	Correspondent in Spain					
	Correspondent in China	2		1**		1
	The newspaper's editorial office/Columnist		1	1	1	1
Author/Source	Expert/Scholar			2		
	US/UK news agency	1		2	1	
	News agency of continental Europe					
	News agency of Japan	1				1
	Other/Unspecified			1****	1***	
	Writer	1	1	2**		1
	WHO				1	
Source	US/UK media & newspaper	1		2	1	2
	Leader/Spokesman of UE/European countries except Spain	1	1	1		
	Leader/Spokesman of UK/US	1	1	2		
	Hong Kongese media & newspaper	1*			1	
	Mainland Chinese official media & newspaper	1		1		
	Other mainland Chinese media & newspaper	1				
	Spanish leader/authorities					
	Chinese leader/authorities	2		2		
	Interviewee in China	1				
	NGO	1				

Note: * *Apple Daily HK* and *47 News* were erroneously marked as Japanese media in the article.
** Correspondent in Hong Kong SAR, China.
*** Source marked as "agencies".
**** Source from *Radio Free Asia*.

3.3.4 Villain Turned Hero: Opportunist and Weak

China was once considered "a villain" due to its numerous "mistakes" when COVID-19 first broke out, but some Spanish newspapers noticed the changing role of the country as it tried to control the coronavirus, starting from *La Vanguardia*, which predicted on March 10 that China would attempt to improve its damaged international image through the denominated "medical diplomacy" (see articles in 3.1.3 in Appendix). According to *China, from villain to antiviral hero*, *El Mundo* thought the negative perception of authoritarian China began to change in February as WHO praised its draconian measures, and then "the mouthpieces of Beijing had been launching editorials boasting about China's deeds at home and abroad", especially after Chinese aid to coronavirus-stricken countries were made known. *El Mundo* concluded that China wanted to set itself as an example for the world even if the country struggled to resume normality. Similarly, *El Mundo*'s *The forgiveness from Li Wenliang, the doctor silenced by China who warned about the coronavirus* said in retrospect that China was observed trying to clean up its mistakes and to "set itself up as a savior" now that it had proclaimed victory over the virus.

Despite coverage of the aid from the Chinese Government and entrepreneurs, the major Spanish newspapers hardly considered it genuine: None of them said China was doing the right thing at the right time, but instead they said the country was taking advantage of the inaction of the EU and the US to expand its geopolitical influence. Moreover, *El Mundo*, *El Periódico* and *ABC* depicted China as "outwardly strong but inwardly weak", contrasting the "iron fist" of the Communist Party and its combative diplomacy with China's weakened domestic economy and its inability to lead the global economy. Particularly, *ABC* said that China was making a fortune through medical aid and called China "not trustable". The speech from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China quoted by *El Mundo* even seemed to portray a condescending China that pointed out the inaction of Spain and then flaunting its ability to support.

When writing about Jack Ma and other Chinese participants in aiding Spain, on March 19 and April 9, respectively, *El Mundo* said the Chinese wanted to improve their image, changing "from villains to heroes" if "(they) knew on which side to stand in these moments". In *The four Chinese benefactors to the aid of Spain*, *El Mundo* argued the global configuration presented opportunities for China: the European Union's inaction and the dearth of solidarity among European countries (also see articles in 3.2.2 in Appendix).

On March 29, *ABC*'s article *China launches the "mask diplomacy" to improve its image* claimed that China and the US are vying for global hegemony, but the former's image has been greatly damaged amid the COVID-19 outbreak due to the authoritarian regime's usual lack of trans-

Table 9 Sources of Subsection 3.3.4

3.3.4 Opinions about China concerning its domestic measures and its aid in Spain: Opportunist

	Newspaper / Source Category	*El Mundo* (3)	*El País* (1)	*La Vanguardia* (0)	*El Periódico* (0)	*ABC* (1)
Author	Correspondent in Spain					
	Correspondent in China	3*				1
	The newspaper's editorial office/Columnist			2		
Author/Source	Expert/Scholar	1	1			1
	US/UK news agency					
	News agency of continental Europe	1				
	News agency of Japan					
	Other/Unspecified	1				
	Writer	1**				
	WHO					
Source	US/UK media & newspaper					
	Leader/Spokesman of UE/European countries except Spain	2				
	Leader/Spokesman of UK/US	1				
	Hong Kongese media & newspaper					
	Mainland Chinese official media & newspaper	1				1
	Other mainland Chinese media & newspaper	1				
	Spanish leader/authorities					1
	Chinese leader/authorities	3	1			1
	Interviewee in China					
	NGO					

Note: * China correspondent Lucas de la Cal as source, not author, who verified if Llosa's books were banned in China.
** Mario Vargas Llosa.

parency and not being a trustable partner of the international community. "The ever-skillful Chinese regime is taking advantage of the containment of the coronavirus in its territory to send medical aid to countries in distress," said *ABC*, pointing out that China was accumulating wealth since only a small proportion of the aid was donation. The newspaper concluded China could cultivate its soft power and improve its image but would be further weakened by the crisis due to its seriously affected economy, which was not expected to recover quickly.

Similarly, *El Periódico* also questioned China's economic capacity, "The fiascos of defective masks and test kits […] have shown that China is in no condition to lead the global economy." Its editorial *Did China tell all the truth about the coronavirus?* on April 17 (also see 3.3.3) also criticized China, where "savage capitalism prevails, led by the iron fist of the Communist Party", for taking advantage of the shortage of medical supplies to showcase its power.

Regarding Chinese diplomacy in the pandemic, *El País*'s *Activism of Chinese diplomacy in the era of COVID-19* warned against the expansion of China's governance model. The author, a China specialist at the European Union Institute of Security Studies, argued that China's diplomacy not only aimed to promote its "superior" model, presenting itself as saviour of the world, but also to accelerate the restructuring of global governance, especially given the wide use of controversial Chinese technologies and their possible exportation to other countries.

El Mundo also observed the "combative spirit" promoted by Xi Jinping and described the Chinese diplomats as combatants in its article *'Wolf Warriors': fighters of the Chinese diplomacy* on May 18, who flooded the global social networks with threats, attacks, sarcasms and conspiracy theories with the purpose of diverting the focus on the pandemic's origin. On March 17, *El Mundo* reported on the refutation of Mario Vargas Llosa's "defamation" and "irresponsible and biased opinions" by the Chinese Embassy in Peru, which could be regarded as evidence of China's more aggressive diplomacy.

3.3.5 Expansion of Authoritarianism: Opportunist and Fallacious

When Europe struggled to cope with the health crisis, *El País* became increasingly critical of the authoritarianism characteristic of China, exemplified by the article *Return to the Middle Age?* by Mario Vargas Llosa, who called China a "dictatorship". *El País* was also wary of the expansion of authoritarianism in democracies, exemplified by the growing attractiveness of the successful "fallacious example of China", and central government's increased executive power conferred by emergency laws and measures.

Table 10 Sources of Subsection 3.3.5

3.3.5 Opinions about China concerning its domestic measures and its aid in Spain: Expansion of authoritarianism

	Newspaper / Source Category	*El Mundo* (0)	*El País* (3)	*La Vanguardia* (0)	*El Periódico* (0)	*ABC* (0)
Author	Correspondent in Spain					
	Correspondent in China					
	The newspaper's editorial office/Columnist		2			
Author/Source	Expert/Scholar		1			
	US/UK news agency					
	News agency of continental Europe					
	News agency of Japan					
	Other/Unspecified					
	Writer		1*			
	WHO					
Source	US/UK media & newspaper					
	Leader/Spokesman of UE/European countries except Spain					
	Leader/Spokesman of UK/US					
	Hong Kongese media & newspaper					
	Mainland Chinese official media & newspaper					
	Other mainland Chinese media & newspaper					
	Spanish leader/authorities					
	Chinese leader/authorities					
	Interviewee in China					
	NGO		1**			

Note: * Mario Vargas Llosa.
** Source from Human Rights Watch.

In his article, the Nobel Prize laureate denied the Chinese example, a "combination of free market and political dictatorship", as an ideal model for developing countries, compared the pandemic to the medieval Black Death and vehemently condemned the Chinese political system, accusing it of cover-up and censorship, "None of these could be happening all over the world if the PRC were a free and democratic country, instead of being the dictatorship it is."

The authoritarian fallacy warned China's rapid recovery led to praises for authoritarianism in the West, reflected by the increasing attractiveness of China's efficient model to leftist European politicians. In *Crisis and opportunity for authoritarianism*, the same newspaper argued that the virus created an opportunity to consolidate authoritarianism, a trend already on the rise "not only in the US and China, but also among democracies".

Apart from Llosa's article, the other two were authored by columnists, quoting Francis Fukuyama's affirmation about the gradual death of the democracy of today, as well as concerns from Human Rights Watch.

3.3.6 Praises: Efficient and Unenviable

Scarce praises came from *El Mundo* and *La Vanguardia*, highlighting China's efficiency. Also, *El País* acknowledged the tremendous global responsibility that China was bearing.

El Mundo's *The figures of the successful experiment of Wuhan* on March 23 commented that the Chinese model to control the virus had worked as far as efficiency was concerned, introducing several key characteristics of the victory in Wuhan, how the city was returning to normality, and train cargos of medical supplies bound for Spain. In 3.1.3, *La Vanguardia* affirmed the positive effects of the quarantine in China for the world, and in 3.1.4, the newspaper also called the epidemic information from the Chinese Government diffused to citizens "clear, consensual and logic".

El País in *China is moving forward* recognized China's strategy proved to be successful and even exemplary, described Chinese society as "modern and mature" and able to confront global challenges, saying that China's public health system equipped with dutiful staff, disciplined citizens and facilities enabled by the authoritarian system had managed to stop the coronavirus, which, however, was "not at all enviable nor imitable (by the West)". Although *El País* argued opportunist China had taken advantage of the inaction of the West and would spread propaganda about its victory, it also affirmed that China was playing the role of "responsible global partner" and "even the most responsible one", one "pivotal in coping with the current crisis." That contradicted views from *El Mundo*, *El Periódico* and *ABC* about China's inability to lead the global economy.

Table 11 Sources of Subsection 3.3.6

3.3.6 Opinions about China concerning its domestic measures and its aid in Spain: Praises

	Newspaper / Source Category	*El Mundo* (1)	*El País* (1)	*La Vanguardia* (0)	*El Periódico* (0)	*ABC* (0)
Author	Correspondent in Spain					
	Correspondent in China	1				
	The newspaper's editorial office/Columnist		1			
Author/Source	Expert/Scholar	1				
	US/UK news agency					
	News agency of continental Europe					
	News agency of Japan					
	Other/Unspecified					
	Writer					
	WHO					
Source	US/UK media & newspaper					
	Leader/Spokesman of UE/European countries except Spain					
	Leader/Spokesman of UK/US					
	Hong Kongese media & newspaper	1				
	Mainland Chinese official media & newspaper					
	Other mainland Chinese media & newspaper					
	Spanish leader/authorities					
	Chinese leader/authorities					
	Interviewee in China					
	NGO					

4. Discussion: Source of Information and the Similar Stance between Spanish and US/UK Media

Evidence contributing to a more negative China image was mainly from US and UK news agency and media, and secondarily from Kyodo, Hong Kong media and *Caixin*. In subsection 3.1.4, the claims of China's abuse of personal data during epidemic prevention were supported by *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and Hong Kong media. In section 3.3, Chinese censorship was exemplified by the writer Fang Fang and condemned by Amnesty International and Reporters Without Borders. The key evidence of China's "cover-up" was provided by Associated Press, and evidence of data manipulation was from Hong Kong media (mainly *South China Morning Post*), the Chinese magazine *Caixin*, Kyodo, and interviewees in China, including a Hong Kong dissident. When no evidence could be presented about the causality between China's "cover-up" and the spread in Europe, such as the discovery of identical viral genome in both regions, Spanish newspapers then quoted the urging that China be transparent from the US, UK and French leaders. Sources from the Spanish EFE and other news agencies of continental Europe were mainly about the initial development of COVID-19 in China and Chinese aid in Spain. No sources from the US or UK media were used in the coverage of Chinese aid nor the acknowledgement of China's achievements. Even *La Vangaurdia*, considered ideologically center-leftist by Spaniards (Pew Research Center, 2018) and less critical of China, cited numerous sources from the US and UK, a reflection of the considerable influence of the two countries' discourse of China.

As already noted by Mao Wei (2020b) in his study of Anglophone media framing of China amid the pandemic, there were overwhelmingly more negative and stereotypical interpretations of the country than neutral or positive ones. Apart from quoting US and UK media, *ABC*, *El Mundo* and *El País*, considered rightist or center-rightist (Pew Research Center, 2018), also exhibited similar criticisms regarding China's epidemic information disclosure, draconian quarantine measures, censorship and political system (Mao, 2020a; 2020b). The three newspapers tend to share these opinions with the Anglophone media probably for the following reasons:

(1) Blame-shifting tactics

Given that the coronavirus was first reported in China, the country became an easy target for criticisms. After Spain became increasingly affected by the pandemic, it naturally needed a diversion. Therefore, apart from criticizing the Spanish Government, Spanish media picked up on reports by the US media and news agencies to condemn China's domestic cover-up and censorship as transforming the epidemic into a pandemic.

(2) Spain's transition from dictatorship to democracy

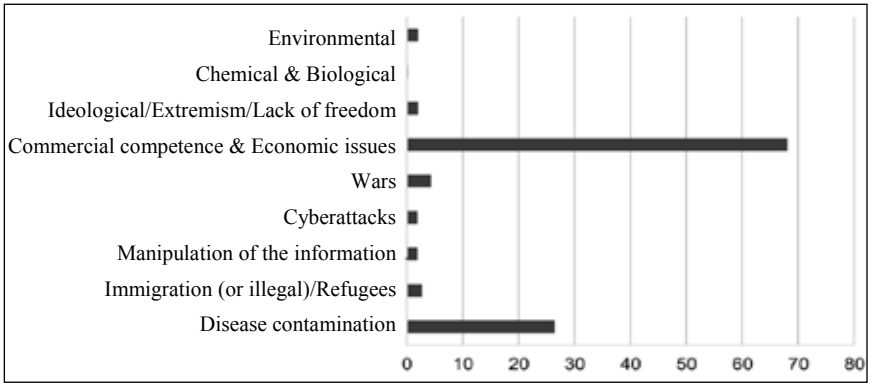
The lingering influence of the Francoism, particularly international isolation from the 1940s to 1950s, have made the Spaniards sensitive to ideological differences. As the draconian quarantine measures were implemented in China and then in Spain, the revival of totalitarianism or authoritarianism heightened the alert of *ABC* and *El País*. For example, *El País* warned against the rise of authoritarianism and defended parliamentary democracy in editorials in 3.3.5.

(3) Economic competence between democratic Spain and authoritarian China

As numerous reports observed the exceptional efficiency enabled by the authoritarian systems during epidemic prevention, such efficiency can deductively be applied to the domain of commerce, represented by China's state-owned enterprises. The poll "Threats from China" (Figure 3) conducted from March 2 to 19, 2020 also revealed that nearly 70% of Spanish respondents who rated China's level of threat over 3 (out of 10) still consider economic competence as the predominant threat from China. *El Periódico* also acknowledged "savage capitalism prevails in China". Therefore, questioning the authoritarian political system which gave birth to and directs the state capitalism in China is marketable in Spain, because these criticisms, especially those from *El País* in 3.3.5, highlight democracy, which Spain still enjoys, as the core of Western superiority, and thus can provide some sort of consolation for Spaniards in economic distress.

Even though the newspapers have correspondents in China, who experienced in person the epidemic prevention measures and acquired first-hand information through remote interviews with affected citizens, they can make mistakes about the basics of the country: *ABC*'s Shanghai correspondent

Figure 3. Threats from China (2020): Multiple spontaneous response



Source: *Barómetro del Real Instituto Elcano (BRIE) nº41* (2020): 12.

mistook Canton (Guangzhou) for the whole Guangdong Province, when reporting on the number of infections in megacities. So did *El Mundo*'s correspondent in the mention of "racist attacks" in Guangdong. Besides, the credibility of interviews was also questionable. For example, in *El Mundo*'s *The Shadows of the Chinese Efficiency*, the claim of asymptomatic patients rejected by hospitals was corroborated by the pseudonymous Wuhan resident Lily via Telegram, who was informed about these cases by several WeChat group chats. It was possible that such information circulating in the instant messenger apps was comprised of mere hearsay sparked by the aftershock of panic or generated for sensationist purposes.

5. Conclusion: Varied Acceptance of Depictions, Limited Damage to China's Image

Shadowed by the infamous history of cover-up of SARS, China was depicted as slow and passive, wasting time before human-to-human transmission was confirmed, but not unresponsive to the looming political crisis triggered by the epidemic. With the shutdown of Wuhan, China was described as draconian and bold, conducting an "unprecedented social experiment". As the country imposed strict and resolute epidemic prevention measures, its image became more Machiavellian, trying to achieve the target at all costs.

Criticisms against China's censorship and data manipulation broke out following the death of Dr. Li in February. As more "evidence" was gathered, his death also shifted the media focus to the supposed delay and cover-up of epidemic information by Chinese authorities before February. The Spanish newspapers used negative views from Chinese citizens who questioned the Government and called for transparency and free speech under censorship to further strengthen the government's Machiavellian image. The release of *Diary of Wuhan* in Spain revived criticisms of censorship and suppression of dissidents. Chinese technologies to combat the epidemic, including their use against dissidents, further characterized the Chinese Government as one that attempts to control almost every aspect of society.

With the mention of the term "medical diplomacy" by *La Vanguardia* on February 11, and as China started to send aid worldwide, the country was then regarded as opportunistic and a "saviour of the world", intending to propagate its "superior" authoritarian ideologies with its more proactive diplomacy. Spanish newspapers regarded the Chinese Government as a helper of some value, since Spain could not afford losing any partner in the battle against the COVID-19 (Esteban et al., 2020), but the image of China was not as genuine and respectable as the ethnic Chinese living in Spain. The Spanish media consensus was that the Chinese in Spain shared a sense of identity with Spaniards and were spontaneously helping Spain. Also, due to a major

revision of the death toll in China, and the global responsibility China was already bearing, the newspapers urged China to be more transparent, with some framing China as an unreliable partner evasive about the truth. Jack Ma, one of the entrepreneurs sending aid to Spain, was even considered as a puppet of Communist propaganda. China was also depicted, particularly by *El Mundo*, *El Periódico* and *ABC*, as "outwardly strong and inwardly weak," due to its affected domestic economy and inability to lead the global economy. *El País* is the newspaper that is most wary of China's ideological expansion and the only one to call China a "dictatorship", while *La Vanguardia* never expressed similar concern.

These Spanish newspapers continued to recognize China as a power and refer to it as "the Asian Giant (*El Gigante Asiático*)". *ABC* and *El Mundo* described the country as "totalitarian". On the other hand, praise helped build up China's image as a bearer of global responsibility and efficient fighter against COVID-19. However, China's efficiency was also questioned by *El Mundo*.

Regarding the acceptance of these images of China by Spaniards, the newspapers did not make the Spanish citizens' perception of China significantly more negative. According to Elcano Royal Institute's survey carried out from March 2 to 19, 2020, while there was even a slight improvement of China's rating (from 4.7 to 5) from 2018 to 2020, what has drastically changed was the perception of China as a threat: the threat level rose from 4.1 to 5.3 (Royal Elcano Institute, 2020). That was partially linked to COVID-19, given the continuous coverage of the disease in China since January 3. Among those Spanish respondents who rated China's threat level over 3 (out of 10), 25% identified "disease contamination (*contagio de enfermedades*)" as a threat to Spain, but economic competence (almost 70%) continued to be the most important source of threat (Figure 3).

Moreover, neither criticisms of China's politics were widely accepted by Spaniards. Despite intense criticisms concerning censorship following the death of Dr. Li Wenliang in early February 2020, as well as of authoritarian systems, it can be noticed that "ideological threats/extremisms/lack of freedom (*Ideológica/extremismos/falta de libertad*)", "immigration/refugees (*Inmigración/refugiados*)" as well as "manipulation of information (*Manipulación de la información*)" are not considered to be notable menaces (Figure 3), and the rise in their level are insignificant compared to the survey by the same institute in 2017; by then, none of the 291 respondents who rated China's threat level above 3 thought China's politics posed threats, and only 2 of them were worried about China's manipulation of information.

Since the most intense criticisms against China failed to amplify the "ideological threats" from China, COVID-19 has not exerted a very significant

positive nor negative effect on the perception of China in Spain, probably due to the existence of several trends counterbalancing each other.

Firstly, governance failures such as lack of transparency and censorship reported by the five major Spanish newspapers can be linked to the initial spread of the virus in China, and even in Europe (though no solid evidence was presented), which resulted in the item "disease contamination" increasingly perceived as a threat from China. Secondly, the support from the Chinese Government, companies, and the aid from the Chinese community in Spain in particular, were known and felt by the Spaniards (Esteban, 2020). A 2020 survey by Central European Institute of Asian Studies (CEIAS) also indicated that 49% of 1,500 Spanish respondents thought China had helped Spain (Turcsányi et al., 2020).

There is probably a third factor that accounted for the limited damage to China's image: Spaniards blamed their own government more for the domestic outbreak than governments of other countries. According to a joint survey by *ABC* and GAD3, a Madrid-based consulting firm, 35.1% of respondents considered adequate the Spanish Central Government's measures to combat the crisis between March 12 and 16, but the percentage fell to 31.1% between March 23 and 27, and to 27.7% between March 30 and April 3. In May, only 26.3% welcomed the measures taken by the Spanish Central Government (GAD3, 2020; Calleja, 2020). This was also corroborated by public distrust sparked by the purchase of unlicensed Chinese medical products by the Spanish Ministry of Health, as reported by *El Mundo* and *El País*. Towards the defective Chinese products, the Spanish Government adopted a conciliatory attitude (Esteban et al., 2020) instead of blaming China, which further angered the Spaniards.

In other words, the "rally round the flag effect," or the increased short-run popular support of a country's government or political leaders during periods of international crisis (Goldstein and Pevehouse, 2008), was insignificant in Spain. Neither the leaders of Spanish Central Government nor the King demanded compensation from China. Instead, Chinese assistance and cooperation, though never rated above the aid from other countries, have been regarded positively by the heads of Government and State (Esteban et al., 2020).

Although Spanish citizens do not appear to be interested in suing China, this does not mean they think China is an upright hero and a "great and responsible nation", as proclaimed by the Chinese official media *Global Times*. None of the newspapers ever wrote China was doing the right things at the right time. The above mentioned CEIAS report also showed that approximately 47% of respondents thought China gained economically due to the pandemic; 17% agreed that China's international reputation improved, while more than 40% agreed that Spain's foreign policy priority should be

stopping Chinese geopolitical expansion (Turcsanyi et al., 2020), an indication that the depiction of an opportunistic China is well received by readers.

Despite praises about the exceptional performance of the Chinese authoritarian system, skepticism still prevailed. *El Mundo*, *El Periódico* and *ABC* observed that despite the enormous global responsibility assumed by China and the precise timing of its opportunistic moves, the country kept stumbling with its affected domestic economy and quality issues of medical products, and therefore they might use the slogan "great and responsible nation" as a satire, while *El País* was more alert to the expansion of authoritarianism beyond China since it was playing an increasingly influential role in the solution of the global health crisis.

6. Appendix

6.1 Articles in 3.1

Díez, P.M. (2020, February 23). Un mes de cuarentena frena el coronavirus en China, pero Corea del Sur declara la alerta roja. *ABC*. Retrieved from https://www.abc.es/sociedad/abci-cuarentena-y-control-frena-coronavirus-china-pero-extiende-mundo-202002230700_noticia.html

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How China's FDI Affects Malaysia's Export Performance?

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Abstract

Malaysia has been experiencing increasing FDI inflows over the past decades with the changing of major contributors. Currently, China is the largest contributor to Malaysia's net FDI inflows, while its contribution was limited in the past decade. This paper aims to provide additional evidence to the literature of the FDI's impact on export performance through disaggregating the FDI and utilizing the quarterly data between Q1:2010 and Q1:2018. The empirical results based on the autoregressive distributed lag (ARDL) approach reveal that China's FDI helps promote Malaysian export activity except for the export of machinery, equipment and parts. The latter is, however, crucial in long-run growth through promoting technology advancement. This implies that China's FDI inflow to Malaysia has a more significant impact on economic performance in the short run. Therefore, Malaysian policymakers need to provide better incentives to attract higher value-added FDI into the country to benefit in the long run.

Keywords: *export, foreign direct investment, Malaysia, China, ARDL*

1. Introduction

The role of foreign direct investment (FDI) in enhancing the host country's economic performance is widely recognized. According to UNCTAD (2016), 78% of changes in global investment policies between 2001 and 2015 are intended to promote and facilitate FDI. Furthermore, Asian developing countries implement nearly half of the liberalization measures.

This trend is particularly apparent among Southeast Asian countries by expecting that FDI will accelerate economic growth and development (Kinuthia and Murshed, 2015), including its ability to promote the host

country's exportability. Multinational corporations (MNCs) are believed to have a more remarkable ability to afford the cost of penetrating the foreign market, such as establishing the export network, transport infrastructure, and knowledge of foreign consumers' taste. Thus, FDI inflow enables domestic firms to learn from MNCs and reduce the entry cost in penetrating the foreign market (Crespo and Fontoura, 2007).

Besides its direct impact on the host country's productivity and economic performance, FDI also contributes indirectly to the economic performance by accelerating the internationalization process. Though countries with a greater degree of liberalization were expected to experience better growth (Wade, 2004), freer trade and financial integration are never an easy task but risky and costly. Among all, export activities are the simplest form and lowest cost method of internationalization. Countries usually start with trade activity (i.e., export) and turn to a more complex way later (i.e., FDI) in the internationalization process (Suárez-Porto and Guisado-González, 2014).

Recent studies, however, suggest that focussing only on attracting FDI is insufficient in promoting growth. FDI will help enhance the host country's export performance if it aims to grab the comparative advantages of the domestic market to penetrate the international market (Sharma, 2003). Nevertheless, FDI will offer a limited improvement in industries with a higher technology component to seek cheap labour and focus on only labour-intensive industries. The latter industries are, however, critical for long-run growth (Tang and Zhang, 2016). Knowing whether FDI will promote technology improvement is vital as only specific FDI contains such feature (Ford, Rork and Elmslie, 2008). These arguments are particularly crucial for countries with FDI as a key-driven force for growth like Malaysia. For instance, FDI has significantly promoted Malaysia's development since the colonial period (Kinuthia and Murshed, 2015) and driving the success of industrialization in the 1980s (Ang, 2008). Moreover, its impact on export activity – a channel that FDI promotes growth – is essential for Malaysia as Malaysia's economic growth is driven by export (Baharumshah and Rashid, 1999). Without a better understanding of FDI, Malaysia could only have benefited from FDI in the short run while being stagnant in the long run without the advancement in technology.

There is a rapid expansion of China's outward FDI in recent years due to a conscious policy known as "Go Global". This policy aims to refocus the Chinese economy to be away from the export of cheap commodities but more toward the export of capital. The Chinese government coordinates and guides Chinese investment abroad to ensure the effectiveness of outward FDI, besides encouraging Chinese enterprises under all forms of ownership to invest in overseas operations and expand their international market shares.

Consequently, the growth rates of Chinese outward FDI and other forms of capital are being significantly increased.

Being the first ASEAN country that indicated her interest in participating in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Chinese investments in Malaysia increased drastically after 2013. Before that, Malaysia was a relatively small recipient of Chinese investment, while Singapore was the region's largest recipient (Tham, 2018). As a result, China is now the largest contributor[1] of net FDI inflow in Malaysia, with 14.4% of total net FDI inflow in 2016 compared to only 0.8% in 2008. The investments are spread over many sectors, from infrastructure to manufacturing and services (Gomez et al., 2020; Tham, 2018).

FDI and trade literature argues that FDI also brings in capital and creates employment apart from technology transfer opportunities. Likewise, Chinese investments in Malaysia, particularly in the manufacturing sector, has the same potential as other FDI. However, the extent of technology transferred depends on several factors, including local firms' and workers' absorptive capacities, global and regional strategies of multinationals involved, and the investment policies of the host country (Tham and Siwage, 2020).

Although researchers support that FDI tends to bring benefits mentioned earlier to the host country, Malaysians are concerned about Malaysia's involvement in BRI projects. To be specific, debates concentrate on the risks of investment in large-scale non-manufacturing activities (e.g.: mega infrastructure projects) with loans guaranteed by government funds. Furthermore, the Malaysian domestic market is relatively small, making it less attractive to the world producers. It is believed that China uses Malaysia as a springboard to enter the ASEAN market (Tham, 2018) with a population size of more than 655 million. Another issue that Malaysian businesses, especially SMEs are concerned about is the tendency of China to control the whole supply chain in their outbound investments.

Besides, Malaysia has a lower rate of innovation creation and development of forward and backward linkages than regional peers (Sufian, 2020). Therefore, it is crucial to establish a comprehensive and supportive ecosystem to spur the spillover effects from FDI. Having well-integrated upstream and downstream industries can increase Malaysia's comparative advantage and competitiveness in international markets.

The rapid growth of net FDI inflows into Malaysia, specifically the FDI from China, motivate this study to investigate the relationship between China's FDI and export activities in Malaysia. The study attempts to determine whether the FDI inflow from China to Malaysia can explain the increasing export trend in Malaysia.[2] Nevertheless, the impact of rapid growth in FDI, specifically sourced from China, on promoting economic growth is yet to be revealed. This study intends to provide new insights into the existing literature of FDI–growth nexus.

The remaining of this study is organized as follows: Section 2 reviews some literature related to this study. Section 3 then discusses the methodology and data used in the analysis. The empirical result is presented in Section 4, and the last section concludes.

2. Literature Review

The FDI–growth nexus has been analyzed in many studies. For instance, Gorg and Greenaway (2004) summarized 40 studies in FDI spillovers that ranged from developing countries to developed countries and from as early as the 1960s to the recent 2000s. Several channels are suggested to link the FDI with growth. One of the channels, namely export promotion, stresses the role of FDI in promoting domestic firms' export capacity more through collaboration or imitation of MNCs' practices. Many studies have explored the significance of this channel and suggested it as a critical factor in promoting the host country's productivity, at least among fast-growing countries (Montobbio and Rampa, 2005). Though the direction of causality is inconclusive, it is widely accepted that a significant link between export activities and productivity exists. For instance, some argue that the relationship exists because of "auto-selection", where countries enhance their productivity to promote export. Some, however, found a reverse causality. It is suggested that "learning by exporting" is possible (Suárez-Porto and Guisado-González, 2014), especially among developing countries due to a more significant technological gap with developed countries (Yang and Mallick, 2014). Domestic firms are expected to enhance their post-export performance by receiving feedback and information from international buyers and competitors. Besides, the growth of export in some countries is even greater than their economic growth, e.g. India, mainly because of FDI (Sharma, 2003).

Export promotion effects from FDI inflow, however, does not guarantee a long-run benefit. FDI exerts only limited impact on the domestic market's export activity when the investment aims to capture market share in the domestic economy. In contrast, FDI will promote the domestic market's export activity to capture the comparative advantage presented in the domestic market to penetrate the foreign market. Domestic firms are then exposed to learning from the MNCs regarding foreign market penetration. The impact of FDI in export is therefore ambiguous as it depends on the motive of FDI (Sharma, 2003).

Recent studies found that even a deeper analysis is needed to understand FDI better. Besides whether FDI is grabbing domestic market share or gaining from domestic comparative advantage, it is essential to ensure that the type of comparative advantage is appropriate. Countries with lower labour cost as comparative advantage attract only cheap labour seeking FDI. Though it

promotes labour-intensive production, it offers very little help in upgrading technology. However, the latter is crucial in fostering medium and high tech industries' performance, improving the long-run growth (Tang and Zhang, 2016). Thus, opening up the economy to attract FDI is just the first step but ensuring the existence of the "right" FDI is the key to long-run growth. This is particularly crucial for countries with limited domestic innovation or when MNCs dominate the industries, usually in developing countries. FDI is the primary engine behind high-tech export instead of domestic innovation (Braunerhjelm and Thulin, 2008; Sandu and Ciocanel, 2014). This is attributable to the phenomena that although innovation helps in promoting export, its role is varied for innovator and non-innovator countries (Roper and Love, 2002). Domestic innovation is less related to export capacity among developing countries as they tend to import technology from foreign countries (Montobbio and Rampa, 2005).

Recent studies found that outward FDI from China affects the host countries' export performance among the FDI source countries. For example, Timini and El-Dahrawy Sánchez-Albornoz (2019) suggested that FDI from China stimulates trading activities, productivity and technology transfer in Latin America. Meanwhile, Ha (2019) reported that Chinese FDI in Vietnam focuses on export-oriented sectors, leading to more robust export performance. Nevertheless, the latter study also highlighted that FDI from China could lead to overexposure to risks, pollution and transfer pricing.[3] This positive linkage between Chinese FDI and host countries' trade performance is also found among EU countries and Western Balkan countries (Jacimovic et al., 2018; Ma et al., 2019) and non-EU countries (Abeliansky and Martínez-Zarzoso, 2019). On the other hand, Wu and Chen (2021) examined the implication of China's outward FDI on the export and import intensity between China and 64 Belt and Road countries. Overall, the export intensity has demonstrated a negative sign while the import intensity shows the opposite sign. The results, however, are inconsistent when the sample is grouped according to income level.

These findings are vital for Malaysia. On the one hand, Malaysia relies heavily on FDI in promoting growth, especially during the industrialisation process in the 1980s (Ang, 2008). Therefore, both short-run and long-run effects of FDI are always a concern for Malaysian policymakers. On the other hand, a relatively lower wage rate attracted FDI to Malaysia in earlier years (Ismail and Yussof, 2003). However, medium and high-tech industries could have limited gains from the FDI inflow. Besides, the major contributor of FDI in Malaysia also changed in recent years. China is now the largest contributor of net FDI inflows. The Malaysian government is welcoming such a change with the expectation to benefit from China's Belt and Road initiative. For instance, Malaysia tries to develop itself as an offshore renminbi centre in

trade, investment and financing. Malaysia is the second country in Southeast Asia (after Singapore) to launch the renminbi cross-border settlement scheme in 2009 (Malaysia, 2016). Therefore, a question arises: can Malaysia's export activity benefit from the FDI, particularly from China, in the long run?

By looking at the impact of FDI inflows in Malaysia, specifically sourced from China, on Malaysian export performance, this study is expected to contribute to the current literature gap by providing a deeper analysis of the relationship between FDI and export activities.

3. Methodology

This study employs a model similar to others, e.g. Sharma (2003), in examining the impact of FDI on export activities. However, although export activities will be affected by foreign demand and domestic supply (Sharma, 2003), this study focuses on technology transfer. Thus, we employ the domestic supply function as follows:

$$X_t = \alpha + \beta_1 FDI_t + \beta_2 INF_t + \beta_3 TOT_t + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

where X is the total export, FDI is the foreign direct investment inflow, INF is the infrastructure facilities, TOT is the terms of trade. Foreign direct investment inflow is used to capture the impact of technology spillovers as proposed in the literature (Azman-Saini, Baharumshah and Law, 2010; Durham, 2004; Tee, Azman-Saini and Ibrahim, 2018) to consider the FDI influence on economic growth (Crespo and Fontoura, 2007; Greenaway, Sousa and Wakelin, 2004).

In order to examine the specific impact of China's FDI on Malaysia's different categories of export, equation (1) is extended to three equations as below:

$$X_t = \alpha + \beta_1 ChinaFDI_t + \beta_2 INF_t + \beta_3 TOT_t + \varepsilon \quad (2)$$

$$XManu_t = \alpha + \beta_1 ChinaFDI_t + \beta_2 INF_t + \beta_3 TOT_t + \varepsilon \quad (3)$$

$$XMac_t = \alpha + \beta_1 ChinaFDI_t + \beta_2 INF_t + \beta_3 TOT_t + \varepsilon \quad (4)$$

where X is the total export, $XManu$ and $XMac$ are the gross export of higher technology products, i.e. gross export of manufactured product and gross export of machinery, equipment and parts, as proposed by Coe, Helpman and Hoffmaister (1997). $ChinaFDI$ is the foreign direct investment inflow from China. Equations (2), (3) and (4) will capture the impact of China's FDI on Malaysia total export, the export of manufactured products and the export of machinery, equipment and parts, respectively.

The empirical study of this paper is conducted using quarterly data for Malaysia over 2010:Q1–2018:Q1 as there is a significant increment of

China's FDI in Malaysia during this period. Therefore, the export performance (including gross exports, gross export of manufactured product, gross export of machinery, equipment and parts) is considered a dependent variable in the empirical regression.

A positive link is expected between export performance and infrastructure facilities, represented by government spending on the economic sector, as its efficiency determines the cost (Sharma, 2003). On the other hand, the terms of trade are expected to promote export performance due to better incentives for export from higher export price (Sharma, 2003; Vianna, 2016). Nevertheless, the relationship varies on the terms of trade as a positive relationship exists only with the past terms of trade. In contrast, a negative relationship exists when the current or future terms of trade is in the model (Backus, Kehoe and Kydland, 1994).

FDI inflows, the total FDI from a specific source (i.e. China), are the variables of interest in this paper and proxied by the net FDI inflow in Malaysia. All of the above data are sourced from various Bank Negara Malaysia publication issues, Monthly Highlights and Statistics except terms of trade drawn from the Department of Statistics Malaysia.

The autoregressive distributed lag (ARDL) model introduced by Pesaran, Shin and Smith (2001) is employed in this paper due to several advantages. Firstly, it does not restrict that all data to have the same order of integrations. Thus, it is applicable for regressors of the I(0) or I(1) order of cointegration (Pesaran and Pesaran, 1997). Furthermore, endogeneity is also less likely a problem with the ARDL model since it is free from residual correlation. Thus, estimation is possible even when the explanatory variables are endogenous (Harris and Sollis, 2003). Besides, the true parameters produced are consistent with the small sample size (Jalil, Mahmood and Idrees, 2013), which is relevant for this paper with limited observations of 32 quarters.

ARDL framework from equations (1), (2), (3) and (4) are as follows:

$$\Delta X_t = \delta_0 + \sum_{i=1}^{p} \delta_1 \Delta X_{t-i} + \sum_{i=1}^{p} \delta_2 \Delta FDI_{t-i} + \sum_{i=1}^{p} \delta_1 \Delta INF_{t-i} + \sum_{i=1}^{p} \delta_1 \Delta TOT_{t-i} + \gamma_1 X_{-1} + \gamma_2 FDI_{t-1} + \gamma_3 INF_{t-1} + \gamma_4 TOT + \varepsilon_t \quad (5)$$

$$\Delta X_t = \delta_0 + \sum_{i=1}^{p} \delta_1 \Delta X_{t-i} + \sum_{i=1}^{p} \delta_2 \Delta ChinaFDI_{t-i} + \sum_{i=1}^{p} \delta_1 \Delta INF_{t-i} + \sum_{i=1}^{p} \delta_1 \Delta TOT_{t-i} + \gamma_1 X_{-1} + \gamma_2 ChinaFDI_{t-1} + \gamma_3 INF_{t-1} + \gamma_4 TOT + \varepsilon_t \quad (6)$$

$$\Delta XManu_t = \delta_0 + \sum_{i=1}^{p} \delta_1 \Delta X_{t-i} + \sum_{i=1}^{p} \delta_2 \Delta ChinaFDI_{t-i} + \sum_{i=1}^{p} \delta_1 \Delta INF_{t-i} + \sum_{i=1}^{p} \delta_1 \Delta TOT_{t-i} + \gamma_1 X_{-1} + \gamma_2 ChinaFDI_{t-1} + \gamma_3 INF_{t-1} + \gamma_4 TOT + \varepsilon_t \quad (7)$$

$$\Delta XNoneManu_t = \delta_0 + \sum_{i=1}^{p} \delta_1 \Delta X_{t-i} + \sum_{i=1}^{p} \delta_2 \Delta ChinaFDI_{t-i} + \sum_{i=1}^{p} \delta_1 \Delta INF_{t-i} + \sum_{i=1}^{p} \delta_1 \Delta TOT_{t-i} + \gamma_1 X_{-1} + \gamma_2 ChinaFDI_{t-1} + \gamma_3 INF_{t-1} + \gamma_4 TOT + \varepsilon_t \quad (8)$$

where $\mathcal{E}$ is the white noise error term and Δ is the first difference operator.

An *F*-test will first be conducted to analyse the joint significance between the variables with the null hypothesis of no cointegration (H0: $\gamma_1 = \gamma_2 = \gamma_3 = \gamma_4 = 0$) against alternative hypothesis (H_A: $\gamma_1 \neq \gamma_2 \neq \gamma_3 \neq \gamma_4 \neq 0$). The computed *F*-statistic is then compared with the upper and lower critical values from Narayan (2005) instead of Pesaran et al. (2001) as the former is specifically for smaller sample data (Alhassan and Fiador, 2014). The null hypothesis will be rejected if the computed statistic exceeds the upper critical bound. In contrast, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected if the computed *F*-statistic is below the lower bound. At the same time, the cointegration test is inconclusive if the statistic falls between the bounds.

If a cointegration relationship is found, the long-run elasticities can be calculated from the respective lagged variables divided by the lagged dependent variable. Short-run elasticities are represented by the first differenced variables in the estimated unrestricted error correction model (UECM) (Hoque & Yusop, 2010). Several diagnostic and stability tests will be conducted to evaluate the robustness of the model.

The descriptive data statistics including the maximum values, minimum values, mean and standard deviation are presented in Table 1. In addition, this paper transforms all the data into their natural logarithm form to enable the capture of the variables' elasticities (Hoque and Yusop, 2010).

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

	Max	Min	Mean	SD
X	12.146170	12.409590	11.963820	0.121560
XManu	11.893910	12.213500	11.695760	0.155935
XMac	8.914827	9.251417	8.542315	0.229464
FDI	9.293719	9.863754	8.511318	0.298091
ChinaFDI	6.597819	8.120798	0.146643	1.312645
INF	8.003397	8.895884	7.400246	0.378357
TOT	4.743576	4.887309	4.654075	0.045205

Notes: *X*, *Xm*, *Xxm*, *FDI*, *ChinaFDI*, *INF* and *TOT* are gross total export, gross export of manufactured product, gross export of machinery, equipment and parts, total net FDI inflow, net FDI inflow from China, infrastructure facilities and terms of trade, respectively.

4. Empirical Results

Although ARDL is applicable for regressors of I(0) or I(1) order of cointegration, it may not be able to handle the data with I(2) or beyond. Therefore, this paper is applying two stationary tests, namely, the Augmented Dickey-Fuller (ADF) test and Philip-Perron (PP) test, to ensure the stationary

Table 2 Unit Root Tests

	ADF		PP	
	Intercept	Intercept & Trend	Intercept	Intercept & Trend
		Level		
X	-0.7627	-2.7153	0.05933	-2.6992
XManu	-0.1878	-2.7604	0.7195	-2.5804
XMac	-0.9808	-3.6950**	-0.6846	-3.5123
FDI	-6.4734***	-6.7385***	-6.4974***	-7.7436***
ChinaFDI	-4.5098***	-9.4948***	-4.5676***	-5.5583***
INF	-5.3210***	-5.3847***	-5.3350***	-5.3877***
TOT	-2.7967	-3.3997	-4.3717***	-4.4702***
		First Difference		
X	-5.6395***	-4.8181***	-9.3203***	-9.6698***
XManu	-6.0222***	-1.1170	-7.6165***	-10.6819***
XMac	-7.4837***	-7.3356***	-15.8740***	-15.6646***
FDI	-3.6262**	-5.8071***	-24.8637***	-33.1693***
ChinaFDI	-5.5553***	-5.4287***	-26.5261***	-25.8061***
INF	-10.8510***	-10.7266***	-12.8399***	-12.6017***
TOT	-6.9733***	-7.0312***	-13.3686***	-16.8089***

Notes: *X*, *XMac*, *XManu*, *FDI*, *ChinaFDI*, *INF* and *TOT* are gross total export, gross export of manufactured product, gross export of machinery, equipment and parts, total net FDI inflow, net FDI inflow from China, infrastructure facilities and terms of trade, respectively. The numbers shown are t-statistics. *** and ** represent 1% and 5% level of significance, respectively.

level of data. Table 2 shows that none of the data is cointegrated of order 2, [I(2)] or above except for XManu. XManu is insignificant for the equation of intercept and trend at the first difference in the ADF test. Nevertheless, it is significant under the PP test, and thus this paper considers the variable is cointegrated of order 1. The results, therefore, justify that the data is suitable to apply the ARDL estimator.

The *F*-statistics is then computed and compared with the critical values provided by Narayan (2005), which are more suitable for a smaller sample size than the one provided by Pesaran et al. (2001). This paper first estimates the relationship between FDI and export, and the result is reported in Table 3. Four models have been set up for the analysis purpose. The first model aims to analyze the general impact of total FDI inflows in Malaysia's export activity. Therefore, Model 1 uses total export in Malaysia as the dependent

Table 3 Bound Tests for the Existence of Cointegration

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
F-statistics	9.0498	9.1722	13.5417	0.2896
			Critical Values	
			Lower	Upper
1% significant level			5.333	7.063
5% significant level			3.710	5.018

Notes: Dependent variables are total export in Model 1 and Model 2, the export of manufactured products in Model 3, the export of machinery, equipment and parts in Model 4. Total FDI inflows are used in Model 1, FDI inflows from China are used in Model 2, Model 3 and Model 4. The critical values are taken from Table 3: Unrestricted Intercept and No Trend (Narayan, 2005).

variable and total FDI inflows as an explanatory variable. The following models are then set up to reveal China's FDI impact on Malaysia's export activity at a different level. Model 2, Model 3 and Model 4 subsequently replace the total FDI with FDI from China with other dependent variables: total export in Model 2, the export of manufactured products in Model 3 and export of machinery, equipment and parts in Model 4.

Except for Model 4, the *F*-statistics from all models are above the upper bound's critical values. These findings imply that the null hypothesis of no cointegration within the models can be rejected for Model 1, Model 2 and Model 3. In other words, a long-run relationship exists in these models. However, there is insufficient evidence to support the impact on the export of machinery, equipment and parts from China's FDI in Malaysia.

The estimated coefficients for the long-run relationship are shown in Table 4. All the models have passed the diagnostic tests, including normality test, auto-correlation test and stability test. The result in Model 1 indicates that the effect of FDI on total export is positive and significant, which is in line with the general belief that FDI led export growth among Asian countries (Majeed and Ahmad, 2007). This paper then disaggregates the FDI by focusing on only FDI from China as shown in Model 2; the result reveals a similar relationship between China's FDI and export activity.

In order to understand better the impact of China's FDI on Malaysia's export, Model 3 and Model 4 replace the dependent variable with the export of manufactured products and export of machinery, equipment and parts, respectively. Model 4 indicates that there is insufficient evidence to suggest China's FDI having a significant impact on Malaysia's machinery and

Table 4 Estimates of the Long-run Coefficients

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Dependent Variable	*X*	*X*	*XManu*	*XMac*
FDI	0.9098***			
	(4.8642)			
ChinaFDI		0.2424***	0.2967***	-0.1909
		(8.1626)	(6.9385)	(-0.4947)
INF	0.2746**	0.6517***	0.6920***	-0.2856
	(2.5700)	(7.1221)	(5.7325)	(-0.3205)
TOT	-2.5675***	-1.2153***	-2.1608***	-7.5648
	(-4.6722)	(-3.9168)	(-4.3681)	(-0.7865)
Jacque-Bera	1.4901	0.9379	0.6288	0.0347
Breusch-Godfrey Serial Correlation LM Test	0.1195	1.6590	3.4756	0.9936
Breusch-Pagan-Godfrey Heteroskedasticity Test	0.9170	0.7291	0.7146	0.9154
Ramsey RESET Test	0.5061	0.3747	0.0009	0.2840
CUSUM Test	Stable	Stable	Stable	Stable
CUSUMSQ Test	Stable	Stable	Stable	Stable

Notes: *X*, *XManu*, *XMac*, *FDI*, *ChinaFDI*, *INF* and *TOT* are gross total export, gross export of manufactured products, gross export of machinery, equipment and parts, total net FDI inflow, net FDI inflow from China, infrastructure facilities and terms of trade respectively. *** and ** represent 1% and 5% level of significance respectively. The t-statistics are shown in parentheses.

equipment export. This outcome is not a surprise as no long-run relationship is found in the bound tests in Table 3. This could be because China is upgrading the industries by emphasizing high value-added goods (Ohashi, 2015) and thus offshoring the existing production to countries with investment-friendly policies, e.g. Malaysia (Malaysia, 2016). As a result, China's FDI exerts a limited impact on producing high value-added goods in the host country.

Meanwhile, recent studies in FDI also highlight the importance of host countries' ability to gain from the presence of FDI, e.g. economic freedom (Azman-Saini, Baharumshah, et al., 2010; Tee, Azman-Saini, Ibrahim and Ismail, 2015) and financial development (Azman-Saini, Law, & Ahmad, 2010; Durham, 2004). Possibly, Malaysia did not possess sufficient "absorptive capacities" to meet the threshold. A future study by including the absorptive capacity in the model would help to improve the findings.

The findings of other variables in the models align with previous studies except for Model 4, as indicated by the cointegration test (Table 3). The improvement in the infrastructure facilities does promote export performance as it is expected to reduce the trade cost, especially in developing countries (Portugal-Perez and Wilson, 2012). Meanwhile, a negative relationship is presented between the terms of trade and export performance which is similar to Backus et al. (1994).

A series of diagnosis and stability tests are performed to ensure the reliability of the results. The tests included the Jacque-Bera Normality Test, Breusch-Godfrey Serial Correlation LM Test, Breusch-Pagan-Godfrey Heteroskedasticity Test, Ramsey Reset Test to check the correct functional form and stability, CUSUM and CUSUM square tests for the constancy of coefficient in the models. As a result, the null hypothesis of these models are failed to be rejected by all models and suggested that the long-run coefficients reported are reliable and stable.

Table 5 reports the estimates of the Error Correction Model for the short-run relationship within the models. The significant ECM shows that there is a short-run relationship exists in all models except Model 4. In addition, all

Table 5 Error Correction Model

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Dependent Variable	*X*	*X*	*XManu*	*XMac*
FDI	0.003901			
	(0.2566)			
ChinaFDI		0.0091**	0.0068	-0.0094
	(2.7819)	(1.6335)	(-0.9592)	
INF	0.0081	-0.0250	-0.0256	-0.0141
	(0.3416)	(-1.3561)	(-1.0738)	(-0.3936)
TOT	0.0648	-0.4257	-0.4060	0.2714
	(0.3568)	(-1.7751)	(-1.4838)	(0.6175)
ECM(-1)	-0.3898***	-0.5146***	-0.3695***	-0.0492
	(-3.6730)	(-5.2213)	(-3.9048)	(-0.6969)

Notes: *X*, *XManu*, *XMac*, *FDI*, *ChinaFDI*, *INF* and *TOT* are gross total export, gross export of manufactured products, gross export of machinery, equipment and parts, total net FDI inflow, net FDI inflow from China, infrastructure facilities and terms of trade respectively. *** and ** represent 1% and 5% level of significance respectively. The t-statistics are shown in parentheses.

variables show an insignificant impact on export performance in the short run except China's FDI in Model 2. In short, the results indicate that China's FDI is positively linked with Malaysia's total export and export of manufactured products. The latter, however, is only presented in the long run.

5. Conclusion

FDI is widely recognized for its impact on economic growth, affecting export performance as one of the major channels. Malaysia is a classic example of this hypothesis. Many have found that export-led growth and FDI inflows are among the main growth engines in Malaysia. Nevertheless, Malaysia had experienced a change in terms of major FDI contributors in recent years. For instance, China is now the largest contributor to FDI inflows in Malaysia. However, it contributed little a decade ago.

This paper aims to investigate the influence of this change in major FDI contributor in Malaysia towards the export performance and contribute to the current literature of FDI's impact. Specifically, this paper assessed if China's FDI affects export activities in Malaysia and, if it does, whether such influence is on the export of more excellent technological components or the opposite. Furthermore, this paper takes a further step to achieve the objective than conventional analysis by disaggregating both the FDI and export activity.

Several main findings can be summarized. First of all, FDI is positively linked with Malaysia's exports, as suggested in the literature. Secondly, China's FDI is exerting a similar effect which is promoting export performance. This effect is presented for both the total export and a narrower export channel, the export of manufactured products containing more excellent technological components. Thirdly, there is insufficient evidence to support the impact of China's FDI on the export of machinery, equipment and parts, which contains even greater technological components.

The following policy implications are proposed from the results. First, the study finds that there is a limited influence of China's FDI on the export of high technology products, even though China's FDI promotes overall export activities in Malaysia. Threfore, the investment policies in Malaysia would need to be improved in order to benefit better from the FDI. Secondly, current investment policies should integrate the efforts of attracting FDI of higher value-added products. It is expected that the FDI inflows with greater technological components are able to benefit the economic performance in both the short run and long run through improving the productivity and innovation performance of the host country.

Notes

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1. Excluding SAR of Hong Kong.
2. Growth by 56% from 153.37 billion in 2000 to 240.499 billion USD (constant at 2010 price) in 2016 (adopted from *World Development Indicators*).
3. Ha (2019) explained that transfer pricing behaviour is found among foreign companies. Among the behaviour categorized as transfer pricing is to overstate the investment values and input prices. The host countries will suffer from ineffective FDI and lower tax income.

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China's Role in Malaysia's Export Recovery in Covid Times

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Abstract

International trade plays an important role in Malaysia's economy and growth performance. The emergence of the coronavirus disease in 2019 (Covid-19) and declared a pandemic at the beginning of 2020 has led to an unprecedented economic crisis in Malaysia, as in most other countries. As the number of Covid cases increased after the first case was discovered in January 2020, the government implemented different degrees of Movement Control Orders (MCO) from 18th March till the current day at the point of writing this paper. The lockdown in Malaysia as well as many other countries led to supply and demand shocks, which has in turn affected the country's cross border trade. Exports dropped continuously in the first five months of 2020 before recovering. The purpose of this article is to identify the key trade partners that contributed towards Malaysia's export recovery in 2020, especially the role of China given the fact that it is Malaysia's largest trading partner since 2010. Specifically, it examines how economic recovery in the major trade partners are correlated with Malaysia's export recovery as well as the causal relationship underpinning the export recovery in 2020. The study shows that trade recovery in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic goes beyond domestic policy and production measures. Economic recovery in partner countries played a role too.

Keywords: *trade, empirical study of trade, international economic order and integration*

1. Introduction

International trade has always played an important role in Malaysia's economy. International trade as a percentage of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) peaked at 220 per cent in 2000 before falling to 127 per cent in 2019 (World Bank undated). Trade has also contributed to the country's

economic growth. Makun (2017), for example, found that trade openness had a positive impact on output growth from 1980 to 2013, together with human capital and sound economic policies. Other earlier studies have focused more on the contribution of exports to growth. Ahmad and Rashid (1999) and Sulaiman and Saad (2009), for example, found a positive and significant impact for exports on growth. However, the dependence on trade for growth also implies that Malaysia's economy is vulnerable to external shocks as well as demonstrated in the case of the Asian Financial Crisis (AFC) in 1998, the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) in 2008, and the recent trade war/dispute between US and China (Tham, Kam and Tee, 2019).

The emergence of the coronavirus disease in 2019 (Covid-19) and declared a pandemic at the beginning of 2020 has led to an unprecedented economic crisis in Malaysia, as in most other countries. As the number of Covid cases increased after the first case was discovered in January 2020, the government implemented different degrees of Movement Control Orders (MCO) from 18th March till the current day at the point of writing this paper.[1] The lockdown in Malaysia as well as many other countries led to supply and demand shocks, which has in turn affected the country's cross border trade. Exports dropped continuously in the first five months of 2020 before recovering.

The purpose of this article is to identify the key trade partners that contributed towards Malaysia's export recovery in 2020, especially the role of China given the fact that it is Malaysia's largest trading partner since 2010. Specifically, it examines how economic recovery in the major trade partners are correlated with Malaysia's export recovery as well as the causal relationship underpinning the export recovery in 2020. The study first examines the extent of trade between Malaysia and its major trade partners by analyzing the composition and the nature (domestic or re-exports) of exports. A panel causality test is conducted to examine the pattern of major trade partners' economic recovery and Malaysia's export recovery.

This study shows that trade recovery in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic goes beyond domestic policy and production measures. Economic recovery in partner countries played a role too. Identifying the key trade partners contributing to Malaysia's export recovery also means further efforts to facilitate and maintain trade with these countries are important. It also implies the need to diversify export markets to mitigate the aforementioned external shocks and safeguard against the future uncertainties during and beyond COVID times.

2. Literature Review

The role of the partner country in improving trade flows has been highlighted in two longstanding literature on trade models, namely the *Gravity model*

by Tinbergen (1962) and Anderson (1979), and the classic *export demand model* by Khan (1974), Goldstein and Khan (1978). The former argued that trade is positively determined by the economic mass of the trading partner(s) but adversely affected by the distance between them. Economic mass of trading partners represent the market size and depth of the partner country. The latter also explained the impact of partner country "buying power" (or income) on exports, factoring in relative prices (or exchange rates) in a standard supply-demand function. Both literature therefore suggests that the economic performance of partner country is important in generating demand and creating market potential for trade. Trade creation during a crisis such as COVID-19 is especially important not only due to the need to facilitate the movement of medical devices or vaccines (OECD, 2021), but also the need to restore, revitalize and rebuild the economy (UNCTAD, 2020).

There is not much literature, however, on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Malaysia's trade. The World Bank's Economic Monitor on Malaysia in 2020 focused on enhancing the social protection system for surviving the storm (World Bank, June 2020a) and the agricultural sector and food security (World Bank, December 2020b).

There is more in the literature on Malaysia-China trade. Chan and Hooi (2012) examined the role of the exchange rate in Malaysia-China trade and found that China has a complementary role in this trade, thereby implying that China's currency strategy does not negatively affect Malaysia's exports.

Devadason however focused on Malaysia-China trade. In the case of the network trade with China (Devadason, 2009), she found the network trade between the two countries appeared to have improved the quality of Malaysia's exports to China. In a later study on framing the bilateral trade relations within the context of a Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement (RCEP), Devadason (2015) found that the relative advantage of Malaysia in trade with China within an ASEAN context are most likely to be altered in an expanded grouping such as the RCEP.

Four other studies also explored Malaysia-China trade. Tham and Kam (2015) examined the bilateral trade relations within the context of the existing trade route and the potential for changes with the emergence of new trade route under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Likewise, Yeoh et al. (2018) investigated Malaysia-China trade, investment and economic cooperation within the ASEAN and Maritime Silk Road context. Both studies indicate possible changes in the bilateral trade relations within the context of the BRI. Tham and Kam (2019) studied a specific BRI initiative in Malaysia, namely the Digital Free Trade Zone (DFTZ), and its potential for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to expand their exports to China, within the existing bilateral trade relations. Finally, Hong et al. (2019) showed that diplomatic relations can boost Malaysia's exports to China.

Since past studies show an important and robust trade relation between Malaysia and China, it is important to assess whether these trade links have been able to facilitate Malaysia's export recovery.

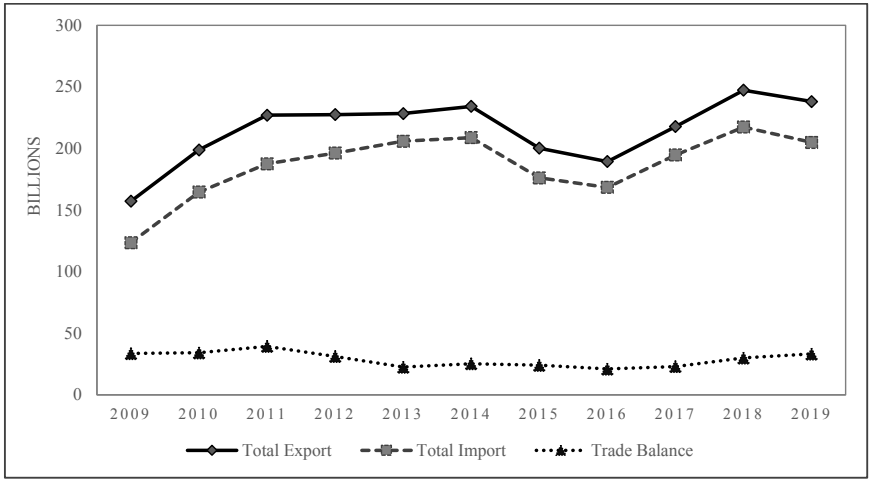
3. Overview of Malaysia's Total Trade Trends pre-2019 and During COVID Times

Malaysia's exports and imports have been on the rise from 2009 to 2014. Figure 1 shows that both trade flows declined from 2015 to 2016, before increasing in 2018 and dipping again in 2019. The figure suggests that even before the COVID-19 pandemic, trade is moderating in Malaysia. The country thus ushered into 2020 with a declining trend in trade.

In a period of one decade, Malaysia has an average trade surplus around USD35.5 billion. But, exports declined more than imports resulting in a trade deficit on April 2020, Malaysia's first since 1997. However, recovery came in subsequent months with exports improving faster than imports, thus rendering a sharp increase in trade surplus (Figure 2). A steady recovery in exports and imports started in June 2020 in part due to the gradual lifting of restrictions due to COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia and the global markets (Matrade, 2020).

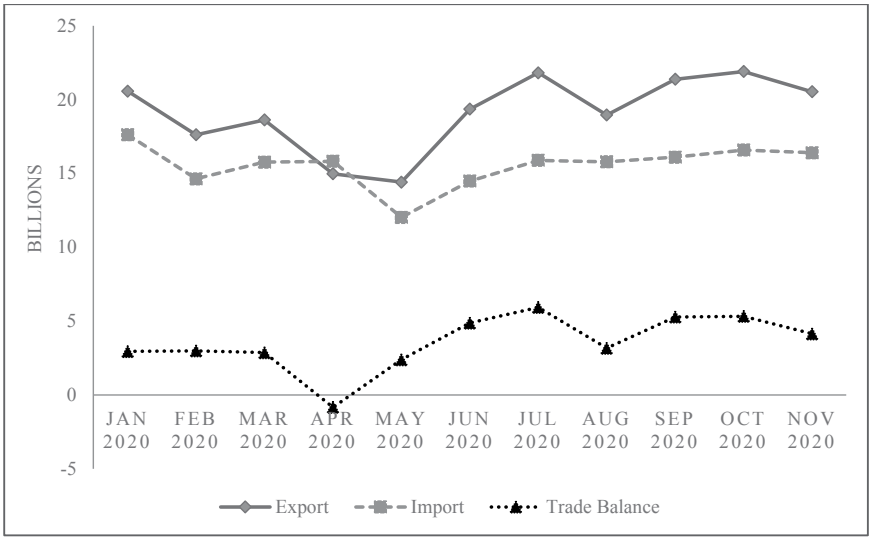
Re-exports, defined as goods that are taken out of the country in the same form as they were imported without any transformation, have been increasing in tandem with the increase in domestic exports since 2015, based on available data (Figure 3). A short decline of both occurred in 2019 (consistent with Figure 1). While the value of domestic exports are much

Figure 1 Malaysia Trade 2009–2019 (USD)



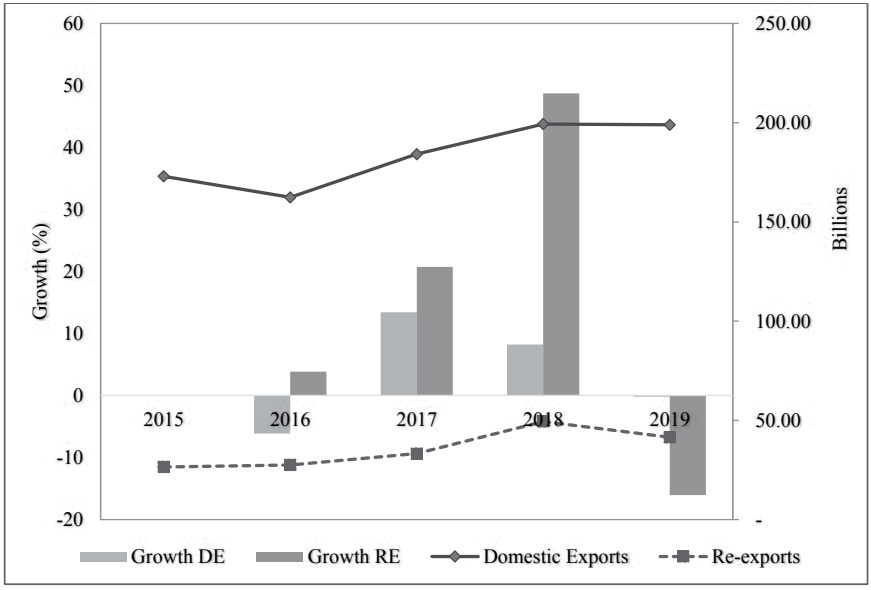
Source: UNComtrade.

Figure 2 Malaysia Monthly Trade 2020 (USD)



Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) (converted into USD).

Figure 3 Malaysia Domestic Export (DE) and Re-export (RE) 2015–2019 (USD and %)

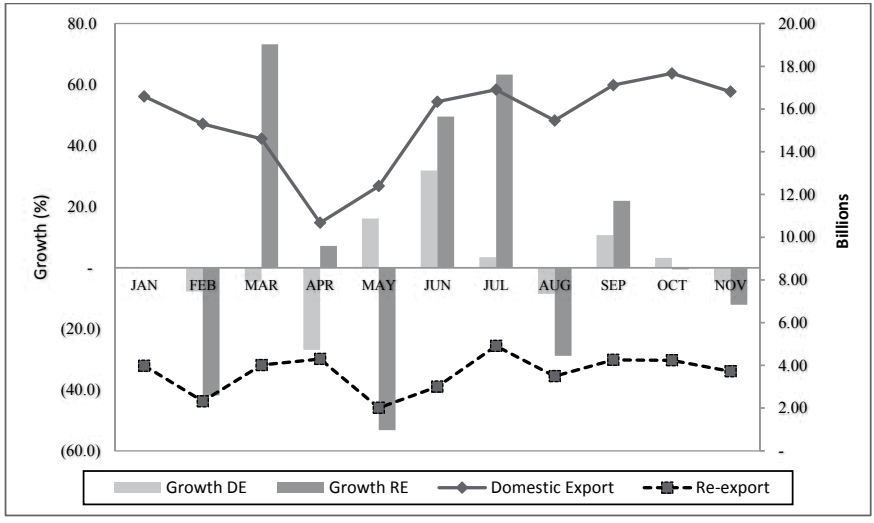


Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) (converted into USD).

higher compared to re-exports, the rate of increase or growth in re-exports are much higher than domestic exports from 2016 to 2018. Re-exports growth increased by more than 50 per cent from 2017 to 2018. Domestic exports on the other hand, experienced a smaller growth rate in comparison. Re-exports increased 5 times more than the increase of domestic exports. In 2020 (Figure 4), monthly data shows a decline in domestic exports, while re-exports is increasing, thereby implying that Malaysia's exports between January to April 2020 are driven by re-exporting activities. Domestic exports made a strong recovery after April and has been trending upwards in general until November 2020. Re-exports fell in May but also trended upward in subsequent months. It should be noted that the growth of re-exports are generally higher than domestic exports in Malaysia since 2015, based on available data. The increasing importance of re-exports can be attributed in part to the use of incentives to attract regional distribution hubs to Malaysia (Tham, Kam and Tee, 2019).

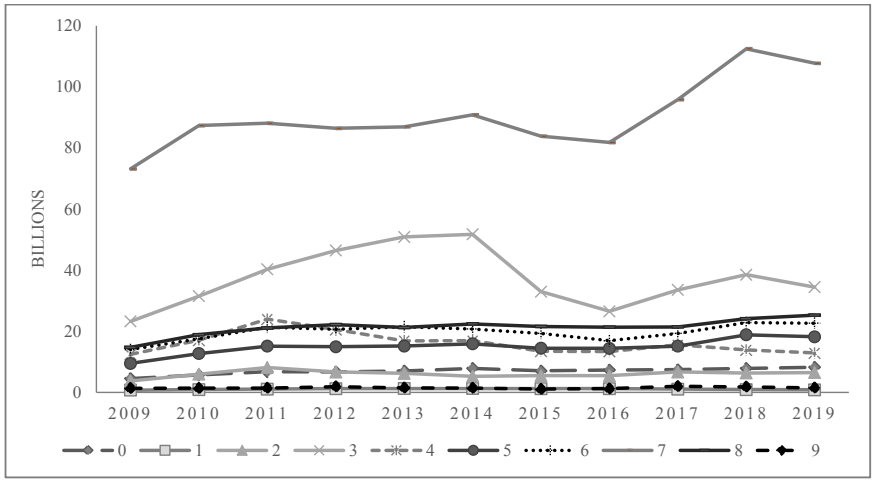
Since 2009, Malaysia's exports has been concentrated on *machinery and transport equipment* (SITC 7) (Figure 5). Other key exports include *mineral fuels, lubricants and related materials* (SITC 3), *miscellaneous manufactured articles* (SITC 8) and *manufactured goods* (SITC 6). Exports of machinery and transport equipment increased significantly since 2016 and peaked at USD112 billion before experiencing a short decline in 2019. In 2020 (Figure 6), machinery and transport equipment experienced a short decline from January to May. It recovered sharply in subsequent months (up to July 2020)

Figure 4 Malaysia Monthly Domestic Export and Re-export 2020 (USD)



Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) (converted into USD).

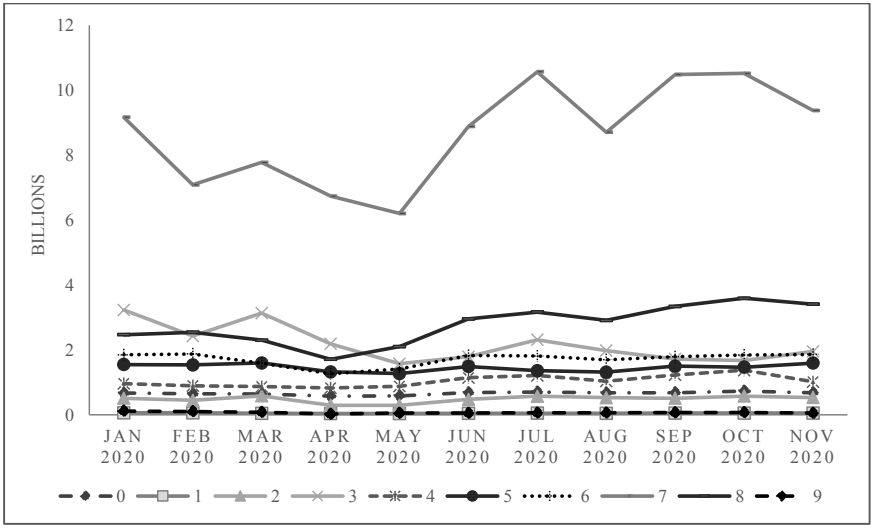
Figure 5: Malaysia Total Export 2009–2019 by SITC (USD)



Note: SITC: 0 – Food and live animals, 1 – Beverages and tobacco, 2 – Crude materials, inedible, except fuels, 3 – Mineral fuels, lubricants and related materials, 4 – Animal and vegetable oils, fats and waxes, 5 – Chemicals and related products, n.e.s., 6 – Manufactured goods, 7 – Machinery and transport equipment, 8 – Miscellaneous manufactured articles, 9 – Commodities and transactions, n.e.s.

Source: UNComtrade.

Figure 6 Malaysia Total Monthly Export (2020) by SITC (USD)



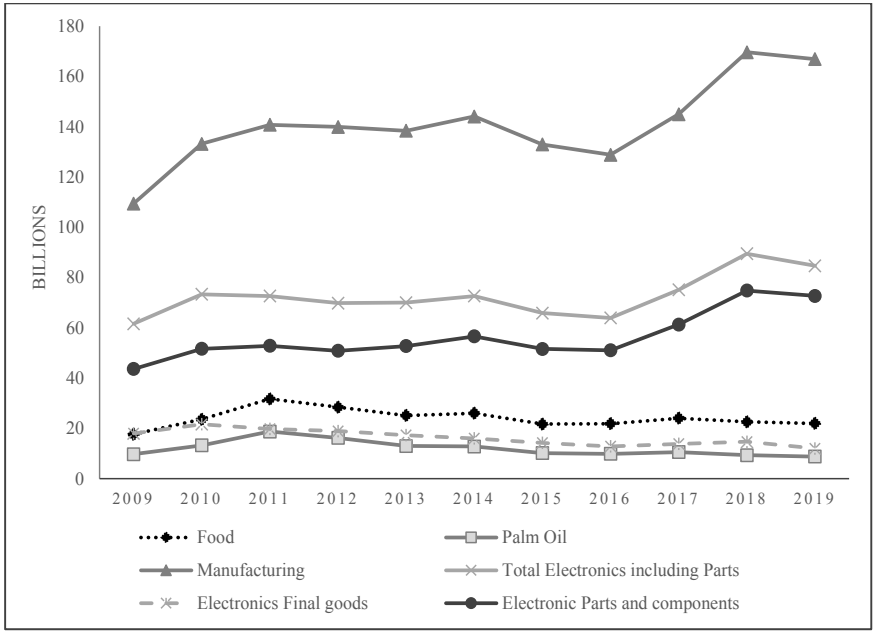
Note: SITC: see note in Figure 5 above.

Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) (converted into USD).

before slowing down in November. Monthly exports of mineral fuels, etc. has declined since March 2020. Miscellaneous manufactured articles increased significantly post-April 2020 to become the second largest export goods up to November 2020, the latest data available at time of writing.

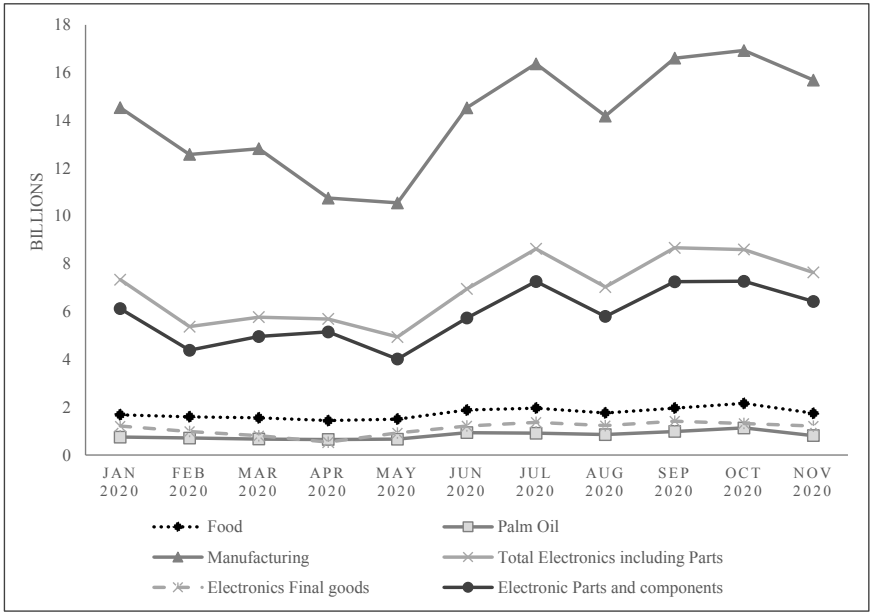
Figure 7 further disaggregates the export products. Malaysia's exports is driven primarily by manufacturing goods (see Appendix 1 for goods classifications). Within manufacturing, electronics goods (final goods and parts and components) contribute the most to the country's total exports. While the former has been on a decline since 2010, exports of electronics parts and components has been on the rise since 2009. This shows that Malaysia's exports are strongly connected in the global value chains, as most of the products exported are electronic parts and components. International demand for Malaysia's food products (which includes palm oil) increased from 2009 to 2011, but this has subsequently declined until 2019. The demand for food products, however, was maintained throughout 2020 (Figure 8) compared to manufacturing and total electronic goods – which declined significantly from January to May before making a recovery in June 2020. The decline is most likely due to global supply chains disruptions due to the COVID pandemic and the halt in demand from destination partners.

Figure 7 Malaysia Key Exports 2009–2019 (USD)



Source: UNComtrade.

Figure 8 Malaysia Monthly Key Exports 2020 (USD)

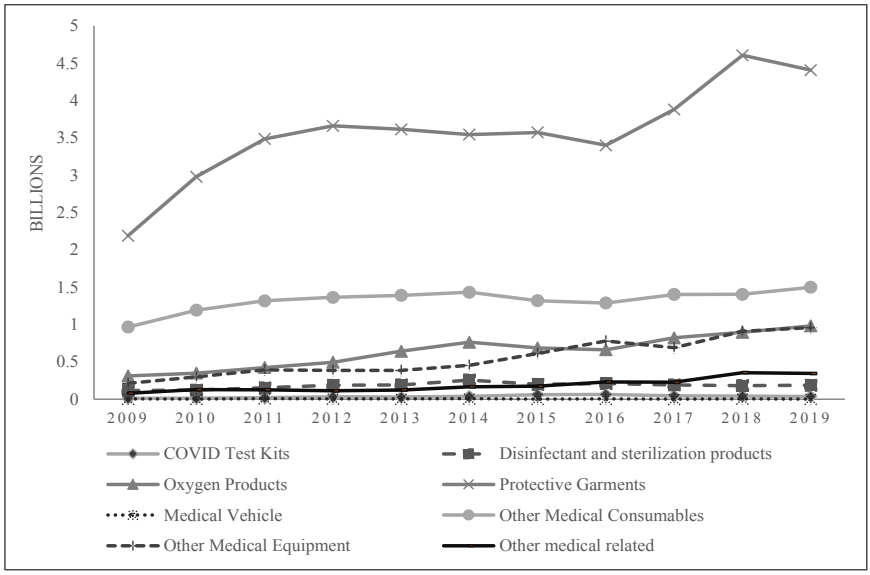


Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) (converted into USD).

The COVID-19 crisis has also brought to attention certain export products that are pertinent and specific to the crisis. This is due to an increase in trade-related measures taken by different countries[2] that may have impeded trade flows of "COVID-19 medical supplies".[3] Figures 9 and 10 show the trade flows of these products from 2009 to 2020. Malaysia, being one of the top global surgical and medical gloves (HS 401511) exporters[4] in 2019 has continued to reap the benefits (Figure 10) from the surge in global demand due to the pandemic, coupled with export restrictions from some countries.[5] Other medical consumables, oxygen products and other medical equipment are also important exports of Malaysian medical supplies. However, they pale in comparison to rubber gloves' monthly exports in 2020.

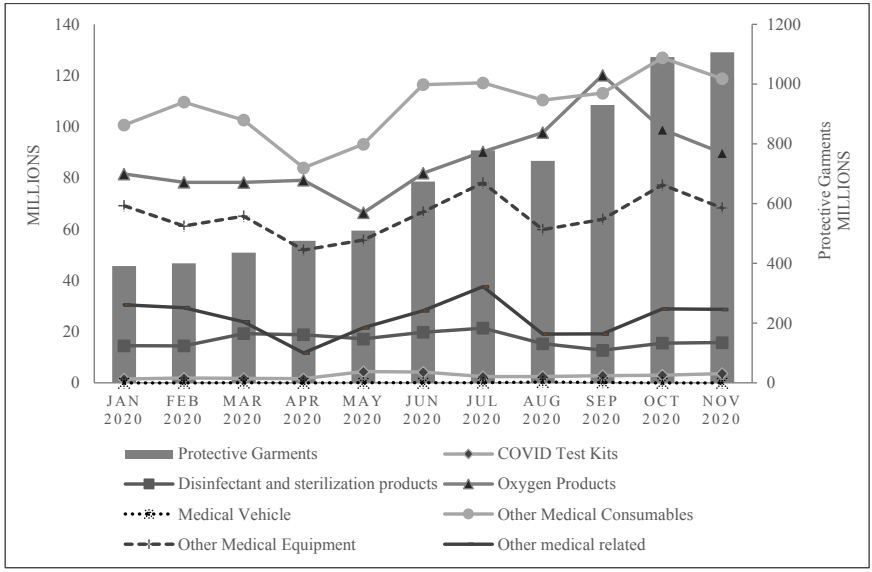
The top-5 monthly trade partners for Malaysia from 2019 to 2020 are China, Japan, United States (USA), Hong Kong and Japan (Figure 11). The top trading partners are interchangeable between China and Singapore from January 2019 to March 2020. However, the share of Malaysia's exports flows dominantly into China from April 2020 before moderating and with Singapore's demand catching up in October 2020. Exports' share to the USA also increased in May, lagging one month behind China's recovery in export demand. While Hong Kong (China), Japan and Thailand are also top

Figure 9 COVID Specific Products (2009–2019)



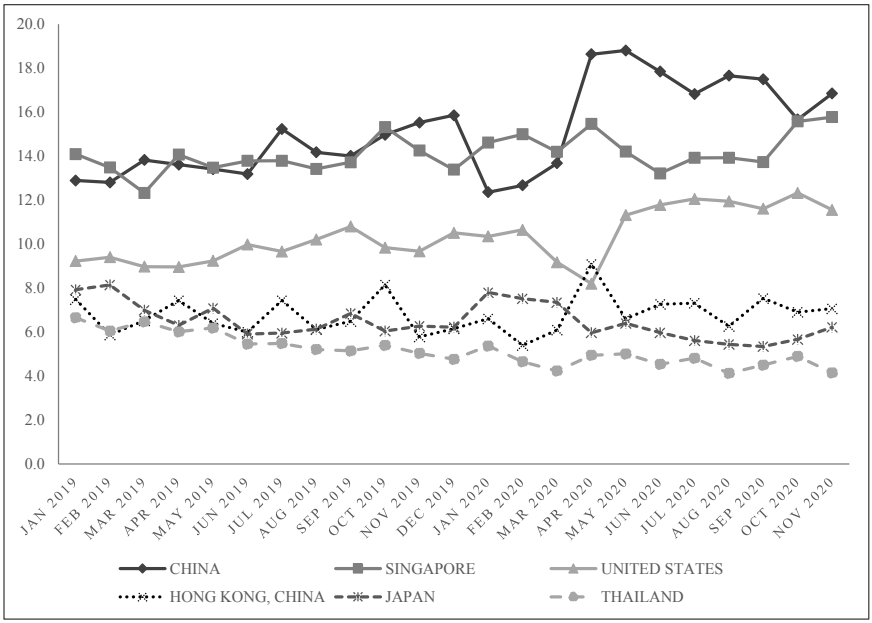
Source: UNComtrade.

Figure 10: Malaysia Monthly COVID Specific Exports 2020 (USD)



Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) (converted into USD).

Figure 11 Share of Malaysia's Monthly Top Export Partners to Total Monthly Exports (%)

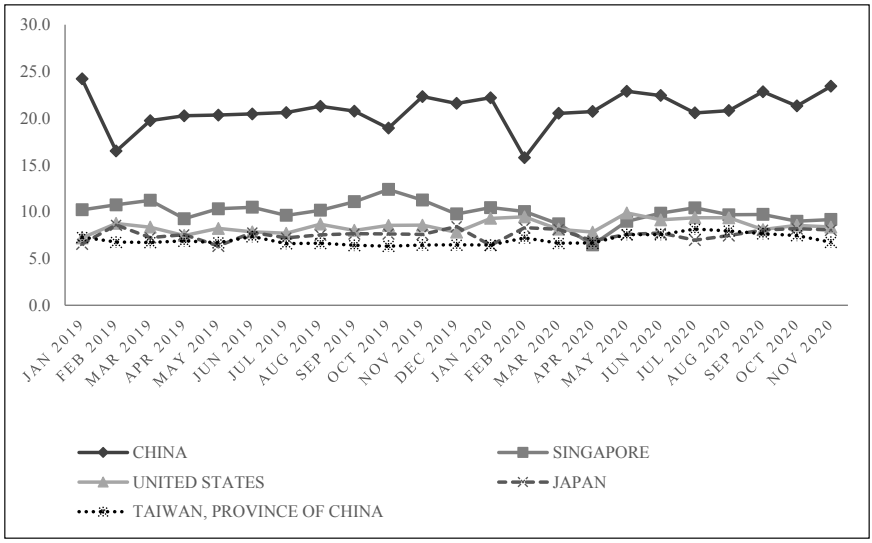


Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) (converted into USD).

destinations for Malaysia's exports, the exports shares of these countries have been fluctuating since January 2019. The export shares to Hong Kong (China) and Thailand have been declining since May 2020 while exports to Japan has recovered since September 2020. Since Malaysia's export recovery started in May 2020 (Figure 2), it is therefore conjectured that the recovery is driven by the recovery in demand from some of these key trading partners.

Since Malaysia is actively involved in the global value chains, most of Malaysia's exports are dependent on imported inputs (Tham et al., 2016; Kam, 2017). Export recovery is therefore also driven by the recovery in imports, especially in intermediate inputs. Figure 12 shows Malaysia's import performance and its top-5 import partners. On average, Malaysia's total imports coming from China is nearly 20 per cent of Malaysia's total monthly imports from 2019 to 2020. Imports from Singapore is the second largest although this has declined sharply from September 2019 to April 2020, but it has increased thereafter. Other key import partners are the USA and Taiwan, Province of China. Imports have been increasing steadily in tandem with matching exports for key partner countries such as China, Singapore and Japan.

Figure 12 Share of Malaysia's Monthly Import to Total Monthly Imports (%) from Partner Countries

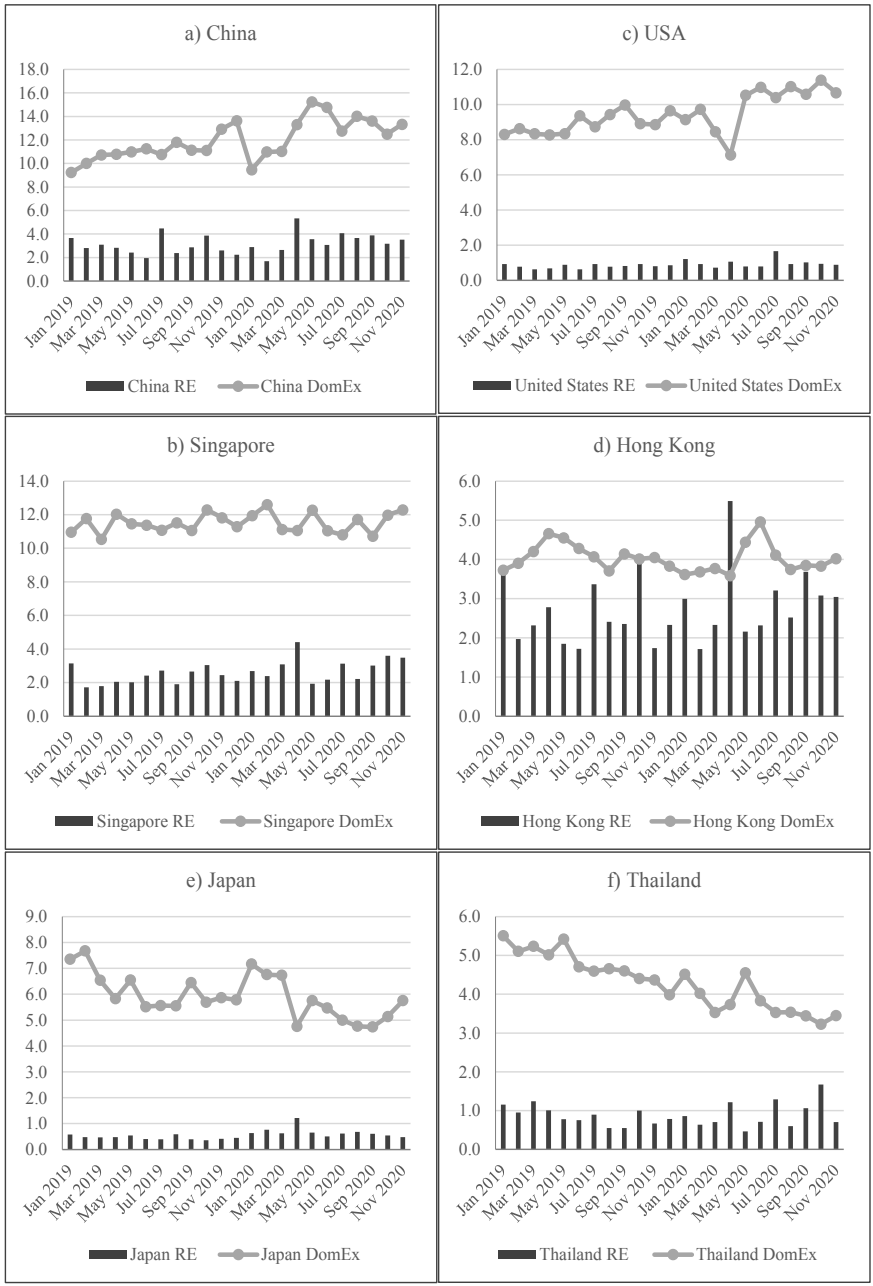


Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) (converted into USD).

Examining the shares of domestic and re-exports to total monthly exports from 2019 to 2020, Figure 13 shows that there are three different groups of countries in terms of Malaysia's top domestic exports destinations. The first, are countries where Malaysia has increasing domestic exports (China and USA); second, are partner countries where Malaysia's domestic exports (Singapore and Hong Kong (China)) has stagnated, and finally are partner countries where Malaysia's domestic exports has been declining (Japan and Thailand).

Figure 13a shows that the share of domestic exports to China has been increasing monthly since 2019. When the COVID pandemic was identified in China in December 2019, domestic exports fell sharply in January 2020. However, Malaysia's subsequent exports recovery to China (from Figure 11) is driven strongly by domestic exports which increased from its lowest at 9.5 per cent in January 2020 to 15 per cent of total gross exports in May 2020. There was a surge in re-exports to China from 1.7 per cent (February 2020) to 5.3 per cent (April 2020). The figure however, fell in May 2020. Both domestic exports and re-exports to China moved in the opposite direction in subsequent months. Similar to China, Malaysia's exports to the USA (Figure 13b) are mostly domestic-exports driven. The share to the USA is also increasing but to a lesser extent compared to China. Unlike China, the share of re-exports to the USA is very small (on average less than 2 per cent), suggesting that the steady increase in exports to the USA is mainly domestic exports driven.

Figure 13 Monthly Domestic and Re-Export (% Total Gross Export) by Top Partners (%)



Note: DomEx: Domestic Export, RE: Re-export. Source: DOSM (converted into USD).

Domestic exports' share to Singapore (Figure 13c) is also high but unlike China and the USA, it is more consistent – hovering around 10 to 12 per cent. The trend in re-exports to Singapore has three peaks: April (4.4 per cent of gross exports), July (3.1 per cent) and October (3.6 per cent). While the share of domestic exports to Hong Kong (Figure 13d) is low in comparison to other top export destinations (below 5 per cent), re-exports activities are the highest for this destination. In April 2020, re-exports share to Hong Kong is larger than the domestic export share, hence solidifying the nature of trade to Hong Kong are mainly entreport or transshipment oriented.

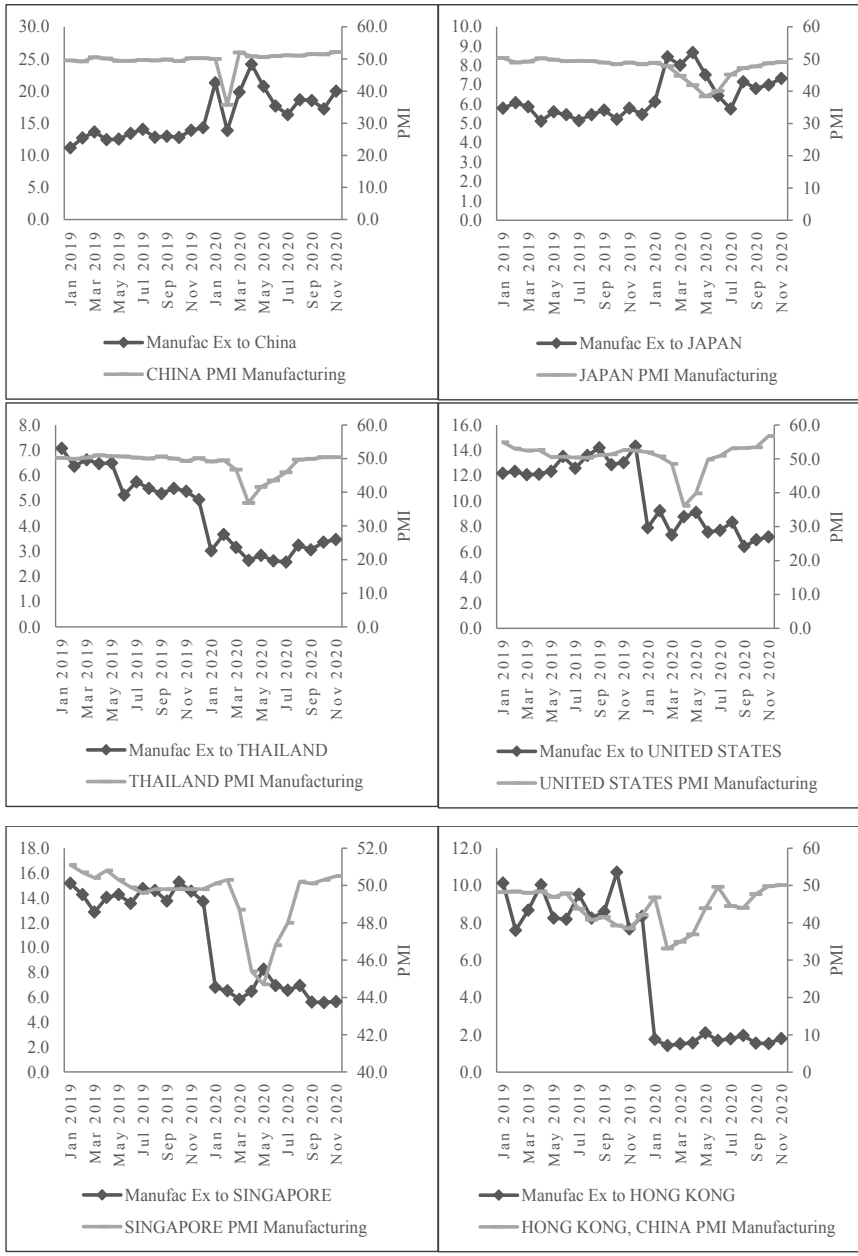
The final group consists of countries where Malaysia has a declining share in domestic exports. Figure 13e and 13f shows that domestic exports to Japan and Thailand are both declining. Japan however, has a short up-tick from September to November while Thailand has an increase in November 2020. The share of re-exports to Japan is smaller than Thailand and has been declining. On the other hand, re-exports to Thailand has been increasing for the past two years.

4. Correlation Analysis: Malaysia's Export Recovery with Partner Countries' Economic Recovery

Malaysia exports recovery may be attributed by the recovery of its key partners. However, the question is "which partner" contributed to the growth of Malaysian exports? To examine this question, one has to track the growth or performance of the partner's country in 2020. Ideally, the matching of partners' monthly GDP growth data with Malaysia's exports may provide a trend analysis on this issue. However, in the absence of available monthly GDP data across different countries, the Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) is used as a proxy for economic performance of the country. More specifically, this study uses the manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI)[5] as an indicator of the overall health of the partner's economy. Figure 14 traces the pattern of manufacturing PMI of Malaysia's top export partners vis-à-vis Malaysia's export share to that destination. A caveat here is that, the analysis only shows the correlations or the movement of trends in these two indicators. It is by no means implying any causal relationship. We leave the causality analysis in the next section. Results in Figure 14 are separated into two groups: one where both PMI and Malaysia's manufacturing exports move in tandem (China, Japan and Thailand), and the other a diverging pattern (USA, Singapore and Hong Kong (China)).

China's manufacturing performance has been rather stationary since January 2019, moving marginally above and below the score of 50. In January 2020, the sector achieved a score of 50 but it plunged to 35.7 in February due to the COVID crisis. However, it recovered quickly in March, peaking at 52.0 before dropping slightly to 50.6 in May. Hereafter, the PMI

Figure 14 Monthly Manufacture Export Share (%) and PMI of Key Partners (2019-2020)



Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) (converted into USD) and <https://www.investing.com>.

of China has been increasing steadily and peaking at 52.1 in November 2020. Matching China's PMI performance with Malaysia's manufacturing exports to China, the trend moved closely together during the period of market shocks (decline and recovery months between January and April). When China's PMI declined from January to February 2020, Malaysia's exports share to China also declined significantly from 21.3 per cent to 13.9 per cent. When China's PMI improved, so did Malaysian manufacturing exports to China peaking at 24.2 per cent in April 2020 before moderating for a few months and picking up again from July to November 2020.

Similar to China, Malaysia's manufacturing export shares to Thailand and Japan have increased in tandem with Thailand and Japan's improvement in PMI scores. Japan's PMI score started to improve in June 2020 from 38.4 to 49.0 in November 2020. Malaysia's export share to Japan only started increasing in August 2020, moving slowly from 7.2 per cent to 7.3 per cent in November. Malaysia's manufacturing exports to Thailand has been declining since January 2019 while Thailand's PMI remained more or less unchanged until March 2020. Then, the country experienced a sharp decline in PMI from February 2020 to April 2020. It recovered from May to June, and along with Malaysia's manufacturing export share to Thailand which grew from 2.6 per cent to 3.5 per cent.

In examining the trends of the second group, the Malaysian manufacturing export share to the USA fell significantly from December 2019 (14.3 per cent) to January 2020 (7.9 per cent) even before the sharp decline in the USA PMI (between March (48.5) and April (36.1) in 2020). The USA's PMI recovered strongly from May (39.8) to November (56.7) 2020. However, Malaysia's manufacturing export shares to the USA is diverging from the PMI recovery trend. Instead, both trends moved in opposite directions. This diverging pattern is also seen in Singapore and Hong Kong (China). When Singapore's PMI recovered from May (44.7) to November (50.5), Malaysia's exports to Singapore continued to decline from 8.3 per cent to 5.3 per cent (May to November 2020). Similarly, when Hong Kong's PMI recovered from 33.1 to 50.1 (February to November 2020), Malaysia's manufacturing export share to Hong Kong (China) remained stagnant around 1.8 per cent after plunging from 8.3 per cent back in December 2019. These results merely imply that the recovery in manufacturing in USA, Singapore and Hong Kong (China) may not have contributed to Malaysia's exports recovery in 2020.

5. Causality Analysis: Malaysia's Export Recovery with Partner Countries' Economic Recovery

The findings from the previous section shows that the share of Malaysia's manufacturing exports increased along with the recovery of the manufacturing sector of some partner countries. While trend and correlation is established,

the issue of causality is still in question. This section examines the causality issue and determines which country's recovery facilitated the recovery of Malaysia manufacturing exports. A panel consisting of 6 top exports destination across monthly data for two years (a total of 144 observations) is analyzed on two key variables: manufacturing export share of Malaysia (MES) and the manufacturing PMI of partner country (PMI). The standard requirement (or pre-requisite) to run a Panel Causality test is to ensure that both variables are stationary. Testing for stationarity is conducted using the Im, Pesaran and Shin (2003) (IPS) test.

The standard Panel unit-root test is specified as follows:

$$\Delta y_{it} = \emptyset_i y_{i,t-1} + z'_{it}\gamma_i + \epsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

where y are the focal variables (MES and PMI). The null hypothesis is H_0: $\emptyset_i = 0$ for all i against the alternative H_1: $\emptyset_i < 0$.

The IPS test is used because the panel is not strongly balanced. The initial test is for the presence of a unit root of focal variables in levels, and then in their first differences. $\emptyset$ is panel-specific, indexed by i. IPS assumes ϵ_{it} to be independently distributed normal for all i and t, and allows for this term to have heterogeneous variances σ_i^2 across panels. The results in Table 1 show that the test do not reject the null hypothesis of non-stationarity of manufacturing export share (MES) but they reject it with respect to manufacturing PMI of partner country (PMI). We further examine using a one-period differences on manufacturing export share and the IPS test shows a rejection of the null hypothesis. The results therefore conclude that MES is I(1), i.e. with a trend characterized by the presence of a unit root while PMI is I(0).

Table 1 Findings from Panel Unit Root Test (IPS test) and Panel Causality Test

a.	Panel Unit Root Test	IPS test Z-t-tilde-bar (p-value)
1.	Manufacturing export share (MES)	0.1531 (0.5608)
	• Manufacturing export share (first difference)	-2.2949 (0.0109)
2.	PMI Manufacturing of Partner Country (PMI)	-1.7602 (0.0392)**

Note: ** indicates p-value statistically significant up to 95%.

5.1 Panel Causality Results

The empirical model specification used to analyze the causal relationship between manufacturing export share of Malaysia and the manufacturing PMI of partner country is the following:

$$\Delta lnMES_{it} = \alpha + \sum_{k=1}^{K} \beta_k \Delta lnMES_{it-k} + \sum_{k=1}^{K} \gamma_k lnPMI_{it-k} + \epsilon_{it} \quad (2)$$

where i = 1,…, N refers to partner country, t = 1,….,T months, and ϵ is the stochastic error term. MES refers to Malaysian export share in manufacturing to i, while PMI refers to i country manufacturing PMI. Using Granger causality tests, both Δ*lnMES* and *lnPMI* must be stationary. In equation (1), PMI granger causes MES when the coefficients γ_k is statistically different from zero. Swapping the variables, the causality can be examined in reverse. Invoking the Dumitrescu-Hurlin (2012) Granger causality test, the coefficients can vary across country but invariant over time (meaning the use of fixed effect estimator). Hence the null hypothesis becomes:

$$H_0: = \gamma_{i1} = \gamma_{i2} = \cdots = \gamma_{ik} = 0 \qquad \forall_i = 1, \ldots\ldots N \quad (3)$$

which implies to the absence of causality for all countries in the dataset. The alternative hypothesis is the presence of causality between PMI and MES for some but not all countries. Dumitrescu and Hurlin (2012) noted that for panels with time series smaller than the cross sections (T > 5+3K) such as in the case of this study, the test uses an approximated standardized statistics, ($\tilde{z}$) which is normally distributed. The opposite direction is also tested between *lnPMI* and Δ*lnMES*. If the test also rejects the null hypothesis, one can conclude that PMI and MES have dual causality. If the null is not rejected, it means causality runs from MES to PMI.

Table 2 shows the Granger causality of the focal variables. On the full sample, the p-value of the Z-tilde statistic is significant, allowing the conclusion that manufacturing PMI of top partner countries granger cause Malaysia's manufacturing export shares. This implies the presence of causality between PMI and MES is found for some, but not all partner countries. To identify country-specific causality, a similar test is conducted on individual countries. The results show that the manufacturing PMI of China, Japan and Thailand all contributed to the recovery of Malaysia's export. This is consistent with the movement of both indicators in Figure 14. While the PMI of Japan may have a stronger causal effect (in terms of statistical significance) on Malaysia's exports, Figure 14 shows the largest causal impact in terms of export size (share) is China. This implies the importance of China's manufacturing recovery towards the increase of Malaysia's exports. No causal effect of the manufacturing PMI by the USA, Hong Kong and Singapore is found on Malaysia's exports.

Conclusion

Malaysia, at the time of writing, is experiencing export recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Led by both domestic and re-exports, manufactured goods such as E&E and COVID-related products such as protective garments

Table 2 Panel Causality Results

b.	Panel Causality test	Dumitrescu & Hurlin (2012) Granger Non-Causality Test Z-bar tilde (p-Value)		Relationship
		A	B	
i)	Overall Panel	2.9325 (0.0034)**	-0.5240 (0.6003)	PMI manufacturing granger cause manufacturing export share.
Country Specific				
ii)	China	1.9447 (0.0518)*	-0.3542 (0.7232)	China's PMI manufacturing granger cause Malaysia's manufacturing export share.
iii)	Singapore	-0.0315 (0.9748)	0.0289 (0.9769)	No causal relation between Singapore's PMI manufacturing and Malaysia's manufacturing export share.
iv)	USA	-0.5369 (0.5914)	-0.6176 (0.5369)	No causal relation between USA's PMI manufacturing and Malaysia's manufacturing export share.
v)	Hong Kong, China	-0.6099 (0.5419)	0.5013 (0.6161)	No causal relation between HK's PMI manufacturing and Malaysia's manufacturing export share.
vi)	Japan	2.2342 (0.0255)**	-0.6452 (0.5188)	Japan's PMI manufacturing granger cause Malaysia's manufacturing export share.
vii)	Thailand	1.7090 (0.0874)*	-0.5365 (0.5916)	Thailand's PMI manufacturing granger cause Malaysia's manufacturing export share.

Notes: i) A = H_0: PMI Manufacturing does not Granger-cause manufacturing export share.
H_1: PMI share does Granger-cause manufacturing export for at least one panelvar / country.
B = H_0: Manufacturing export share does not Granger-cause PMI manufacturing.
H_1: Manufacturing export share does Granger-cause PMI manufacturing for at least one panelvar / country.
ii) Based on IPS test, manufacturing export share is lagged one period to remove unit root.
iii) All p-values are in parentheses. *indicates statistically significant up to 90%, **indicates statistically significant up to 95%.
Source: Estimated by Author.

have been increasing in 2020. The recovery is partly due to the gradual lifting of COVID-pandemic restrictions in Malaysia. However, the ease in restriction on the production/supply side is only one part of the story. Another reason for the recovery is the recovery on the demand side (partner countries) – which the findings of this paper suggests, are also important in supporting Malaysia's exports recovery.

Although China is our main trading partner, our findings show that apart from China, economic recovery in Japan and Thailand also have a causal impact on the export recovery in Malaysia. Moving forward, this means that Malaysia should maintain or strengthen its trade relationship with China while diversifying more of its exports beyond China into other countries as for example, to Japan and Thailand, to diversify risks and to capture gains from the economic recovery in these countries. An important caveat here is this does imply that Malaysia should forgo its other trade partners, which are not included in the analysis. The findings merely suggest the need for market diversification in times of crisis. Therefore, on the Malaysian side, policies that enhance trade facilitation and maintain market openness are needed to seize the benefits of economic recovery of its trade partners.

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Notes

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1. See the list of MCO at https://www.flandersinvestmentandtrade.com/export/nieuws/corona-virus-%E2%80%93-situation-malaysia (accessed 14 May 2021) and Ain Umaira Md Shah et al. (2020).
2. The WTO has made an effort to monitor these measures to ensure transparency among its members. https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/covid19_e/trade_related_goods_measure_e.htm

3. These COVID-Related products are defined by World Customs Organization (WCO) in http://www.wcoomd.org/-/media/wco/public/global/pdf/topics/nomenclature/covid_19/hs-classification-reference_2_1-24_4_20_en.pdf?la=en
4. https://wits.worldbank.org/trade/comtrade/en/country/ALL/year/2019/tradeflow/Exports/partner/WLD/nomen/h5/product/401511
5. https://asean.org/storage/2020/07/ASEAN-Policy-Brief-3_FINAL_.pdf
6. The study focused on the manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) of partners because it measures the activity level of purchasing managers in the manufacturing sector. The study assumes the recovery in Malaysia partners' PMI drive the recovery of Malaysia manufacturing exports (which is the top exporting sector). Data of the index are compiled by IHS Markit for more than 40 economies worldwide through questionnaire responses from a survey panel of senior purchasing executives (or similar) at around 400 companies. An improvement in economic conditions will show a score above 50. A score of below 50 shows a decline in the manufacturing sector while a score of 50 indicates no change from previous performance. The strengths of this indicator lies not only in its availability (in monthly time series) but also the extensiveness in examining the performance of the sector. The purchasing managers will evaluate the manufacturing sector based on the following criteria: Manufacturing output, New orders, New export orders, Backlogs of work, Output prices, Input prices, Suppliers' delivery times, Stocks of finished goods, Quantity of purchases, Stocks of purchases, Employment, Future output (see https://ihsmarkit.com/products/pmi.html for further methodology).

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Appendix 1: Goods Classifications

Goods	SITC Rev. 3
Food	0,1,22,4
Palm oil	4222, 4224
Manufacturing	5, 6, 7, 8, less 667 and 68
Electronics final goods	751, 752, 761, 762, 763, 775
Electronic parts and components	759, 764, 772, 776
Total electronics including parts	Electronics final goods + Electronic parts and components

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Marxism and the Role of the State in the Soviet and Chinese Experience

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Abstract

This article reflects on the contrast between theoretical Marxism, especially its views on the state, and the actual developments in Russia and China, in which Marxist inspired revolutions created totalitarian states similar to Oriental despotism, and this became especially clear in China, where totalitarian arrangements fit well with native traditions. While Communist rule reinforced the country's totalitarian traditions, it hardly hampered the country's economy. Actually, the opposite happened: totalitarian China engaged in speedy progress and would most likely emerge as a global leader in the foreseeable future.

Keywords: *Marxism, totalitarian state, despotism, China, Russia*

1. Introduction

Marxism as the professed ruling ideology of China is ironical, given that China today is governed by an omnipresent and powerful party-state, while Marx approached the strong state as an attribute of the oppressive socio-political order which preceded the socialist regime. He actually ignored the role of the state in the future socialist society as an important, actually crucial institution for socio-economic development. In this downplaying of the role of the state, especially the strong state, Marx followed the centuries-long tradition of Western thought. With all his great insight into the future and many great predictions, he failed, in general, to understand not just the rise of the totalitarian state in socialist societies in the future, but even more so, its essential role for not just socialist societies' success but for their very survival. Still, experience shows that a strong, actually totalitarian, state is essential for socialist societies. It protects society from external threats, speeds up economic development, and is related to social mobility. It plays an especially important role in China, where the state was the only force which

could secure the very existence of Chinese civilization and its people, and increased China's global footprint.

This article reflects on the contrast between theoretical Marxism, especially its views on the state, and the actual developments in Russia and China, in which Marxist inspired revolutions created totalitarian states and enabled their transformations into rising global powers. Totalitarian state power in fact has always been instrumental for rapid economic development.

2. The Origin of Marx's Views of State

Marx was a child of his time and civilization/culture. Western civilization has a strong anti-statist streak, which increased after the French Revolution, during the so-called Romantic era. Most political thinkers and philosophers of this time had extolled the political liberties and looked at the strong state critically. The late Middle Ages had been marked by social decomposition and the rise of strong, absolutist states as an antidote to this process, but the dawn of European modernity had also been marked by the opposite process. It was the creation and continuous strengthening of what is usually called "civil society," self-controlled, self-policed urban communities. As their strength and cohesiveness grew, their members' views of the strong state changed. In the beginning of the early modern era, the king, the symbol of the strong state, was divine. In another narrative, the king had "two bodies" (Kantorowicz, 2016).

One represented the king as a person, and this "body" could be corrupted and weak. The other "body" was the embodiment of the state and its law. And this body was divine, for it maintained the order, in the holistic meaning of the word. Still, with the strengthening of self-policing and self-controlling abilities of "civil society," the image of the state changed dramatically. This had a direct implication on the image of the ruler and the strong state. The King lost his divine, eternal body, which epitomized the law and order in its holistic meaning. Consequently, the King, or the strong state in general, became useless or even harmful. Consequently, any external restraints or regulation of socio-economic life was seen as harmful, and the king, especially an absolutist king, was seen as a tyrant.

The entire Enlightenment, the dominant trend in the 18th century, has been marked by an anti-statist trend, and the liberation from "tyrants" was the battle cry of both the American and French Revolutions. It is true that the French Revolution was marked by Jacobin dictatorship and Napoleon. Still, for many European intellectuals, these events were just aberrations, and zigzags on the way to the final affirmation of political liberty and weak state. It was not accidental that in the context of this narrative, writers, poets and painters from the post-French Revolution era – usually known as Romantics – glorified "rebels," whatever rebels could be. At the same time, the state had

never emerged in this narrative as a positive force. This anti-state view had percolated in philosophy and political thought, and they influenced Marx, either indirectly or directly.

3. Marx's View of State

The Western intellectual traditions shaped Marx's view of state. In Marx's view, the state, while acquiring a certain level of independence from society, was still deeply connected with the society or, to be precise, with the ruling elite which controlled the "means of production." Thus, the major role of the state was to protect the elite, and employed violence towards this very goal. The ferocity of the capitalist state was due to the fact that its capitalists, a small minority, should rule over the majority – the workers. It was this isolation of the capitalist elite that predicated the repressive, controlling nature of the capitalist state in Western Europe. The story would be absolutely different in the case of a socialist revolution and workers' control over the "means of production." At that point a strong state would not be needed to deal with the minority, e.g. representatives of the defeated and "expropriated" capitalists. The state could be quite weak, and in the process of the development of the socialist society and its transition to communism, the state would "wither away."

Some observers believed that Marx assumed that true democracy could emerge only in the case of complete destruction of the state (Abensour, 2011). Not only would the state be useless as a repressive institution, but also in performing many other functions. Marx did not see much of a role for the state as promoter of economic development, or even organizers of economic activities. Everything, Marx implied, would be done at the grass-roots level, in a fully developed and self-controlled and self-organized civic society. The profound anti-statism of Marx's reasoning was thus squarely placed in the context of European tradition. Even less did Marx envisage the role of the socialist state as being important for national sovereignty in socialist societies. Nationalism and national sovereignty were seen by Marx exclusively as attributes of bourgeois society. In Marx's view, the proletariat revolution was to be a global phenomenon. Marx proclaimed that the "proletariat of all countries" shall "unite" for the common struggle and the "proletariat has no motherland." The state, especially the strong state, was absolutely useless for the proletariat.

4. Russian Marxists and Reassessment of Marx's Views on the State

Marxism became an important intellectual and political trend in Europe by the late 19th century. In Russia, the Marxist Party (Social-Democratic Party) also emerged, and Bolsheviks – the party's radical branch or, to be precise, a fully

independent party by 1912 – took power in 1917, and was able to survive despite all odds. It was the October (Bolshevik) Revolution of 1917, and more than 70 years of socialist regime provided the great impetus for development of the revolutionary movement globally, including China. As Xi Jinping said, "A hundred years ago, the salvos of the October Revolution brought Marxism-Leninism to China" (Mitchell, 2017).

Russian Marxist Social-Democrats fully embraced Marxism, with its anti-statist drive. In their minds, the strong state was clearly connected, not with socialist revolution and related socio-economic progress, but with reaction. Consequently, Vladimir Lenin, Bolshevik leader, believed that victory of the workers, the very beginning of the socialist transformation, would lead to a dramatic decline in the state's power. Lenin made his views clear in his work, *State and Revolution*, which he composed on the eve of the Bolshevik takeover (Lenin and Service, 1993).

At the same time, the Russian Revolution and Civil War were marked by a dramatic rise of the Soviet state. After the end of the Civil War, the power of the Soviet state increased even more and reached its crescendo in the 1930s. After several decades of its history, the Soviet regime, especially the 1920s and 1930s, started to be assessed by Western observers and historians who became attracted to the Soviet experience during the Cold War. Some of them were Cold War warriors, anti-Communist historians who saw only the problems and dark side of the Soviet historical experience. They deal with millions who were worked to death in the camps (Solzhenitsyn, 1974), died from famine (Conquest, 1987), or were consumed by terror (Conquest, 2007). In all of these horrors, the socialist totalitarian state was directly involved. Moreover, after Stalin's "revolution from above" in 1929, which eliminated the last traces of private property, the Soviet state became truly totalitarian, resembling Oriental despotism (Wittfogel, 1981).

While dealing with the problems and costs, those historians who dealt with repression and the control of the totalitarian state were blind to anything positive which the strong state had brought about. There were no discussions on speedy industrial development, elimination of illiteracy, or social mobility. The story was different with those who were usually called "revisionists," who approached the Soviet, and implicitly Chinese, experience differently. One should note here that "revisionists" had dominated academia in the 1960s and 1970s, and marginalized the more conservative historians. "Revisionists" admitted the great socio-economic progress in the USSR: the rapid industrial development, cultural and social uplifting of millions, social mobility and the great progress in science (Fitzpatrick, 1970b). They also implicitly praised the Soviet regime in its victory in what Soviet/Russians called the Great Patriotic War, the mortal struggle between the USSR and Nazi Germany. Still, the totalitarian state had disappeared from their narrative almost completely.

And needless to say, how this strong totalitarianism had emerged was not discussed at all. The authors of this work would have discussed neither the mass starvation, use of slave labour of Gulag inmates on a grand scale, nor even the spate of terror of the Great Purges. The works of John Archibald Getty could be a good example here. He presented the Great Terror as just the result of disconnected events, cleaning of bureaucratic machinery and as a force which Stalin could not actually control. Getty was also a well-known revisionist (Getty, 1987).

As a matter of fact, many of them discarded the very notion of the totalitarian state as an all-embracing Leviathan which controlled all aspects of societal life. They usually noted the aspects of societal and personal autonomy from the state as an indication that the state had no totalitarian propensities or simply failed to instill control and therefore the socialist state emerged as a peculiar democracy. The falseness of this approach could be seen, if one compared these socialist totalitarian regimes with their ancient prototype: Oriental despotism. One could assume that neither Egyptian pharaohs nor Chinese emperors could control any local bureaucrats or the average person. Even the present-day Chinese Communist totalitarian regime could not do this, despite the wide use of electronic surveillance. Still, the Orwellian "Big Brother" – both in the modern and ancient modifications – exercised full control over what could be called the "command heights" of society and, if needed, dealt with society as the leader wanted: either marshal flocks to build Great Walls or alternatively dig for gold in the tundra of Kolyma. And in all cases, the leader wasted lives of millions; needless to say, no autonomy for persons or groups existed in these cases.

And while conservative historians and political scientists saw in the totalitarian state only problems – and here, they paradoxically also followed the Marxist template – the liberal/radical historians and political scientists saw just the achievements and did not relate them to the totalitarian state, its coercive power, enslavement and, in many cases, terror on a large scale. The last one became either marginalized or caused by the masses' grass-roots desire to deal with a corrupt bureaucracy. Terror, as practically everything else, emerged not from above but from below. In the "revisionist" narrative, the changes in the USSR, including Stalin's era, were due not to direct intervention of totalitarian, all-powerful state, but because of changes in society. The "history from above" became "history from below," in which the state plainly responded to its people's wishes, or was carried out by impersonal and the irresistible current of *Weltgeist*.

Thus, while conservative intellectuals saw in the strong, totalitarian state only damnation, as was the case with Marx, the liberals/Leftist intellectuals did not see this state at all. Moreover, they ignored the fact that control over the "command hand" of economy led not to the state "withering away," and/

or flourishing of grass-roots democracy, albeit in idiosyncratic form, but to the rise of the totalitarian state, with absolute power. In the revisionist narrative, the states fall from the equations and disappear from the scene. Still, a closer look at the work of the totalitarian state in the USSR clearly shows that the country's achievements were clearly connected with the totalitarian state and implicitly with all of its monstrosities. One might note that these monstrosities were not a byproduct of the regime's achievements, but an essential prerequisite for these achievements. To what degree the achievements of the regime were related to its brutality, its "Orientalism" is not completely understood, either by more conservative historians or "revisionists," who modified their stance after the collapse of the USSR. Sheila Fitzpatrick, one of the "revisionist" doyennes, noted in the early 2000s that the USSR was "a prison or a conscript army," and at the same time a "soup kitchen," i.e., it had different and, in a way, contradictory features. These views were strongly criticized by the late Martin Malia, who before his death was a professor at the University of California, Berkeley. In his view, the sheer idiocy of these statements was not just the fault of Fitzpatrick, but of the entire body of "revisionist" scholarship (Malia, 2001). Still, even for "modified" "revisionists," the very notion that terroristic brutality and state-sponsored slavery was the road for the regime's success is not acceptable, possibly on a purely emotional and related cognitive level.

5. Totalitarian State and the Achievements of the Socialist Regime

"Revisionists" credited the USSR with rapid industrialization. Still, the speed of the industrial transformation – essential for the country's readiness to face the hostile West – would be impossible without the totalitarian state. It was the totalitarian state which used slave and semi-slave labour to build factories, mines and railroads, construct canals and buildings. One should look here for the template not in the presumed enthusiasm of shock workers, anxious to build socialism, as many American leftist, liberal historians claim (Kotkin, 1997), but in the template of the great pyramids and Great Wall builders.

It was the totalitarian state and centralized economy which made possible the concentration of the resources to transform the USSR/Russia into a first-class industrial and military power. It was the totalitarian state which allocated the crucial resources for scientific development which was essential not just for the end of illiteracy but to ensure the country's quick catching up with the West and finally, after WWII, actually surpassing the West in many ways. As a matter of fact, these technological and scientific breakthroughs indicated the fallacy of the common views popular in the West, that it was only Western capitalist democracies which, in this narrative, created the conditions without which technological and scientific progress could take place.

"Revisionists" often noted the social mobility in the USSR, where the workers and peasants could quickly be promoted and reach top positions in the state apparatus, industry and science. This upward mobility was, they implied, absolutely impossible in the modern West, where most of the poor could not change their condition. One might add here that this ignoring of the poor could be seen in the present American policy of so-called "affirmative action." The policy supposedly is aimed at helping the underprivileged. Still, the major thrust of this policy actually ignored them, plainly because it ignored social classes completely. The importance of class, i.e., support of the masses in their social mobility, and this was at least the thrust of Soviet power in the early years of the regime, was often totally ignored by American liberals. For them, the Soviet regime actually ignored class distinctions completely and dealt exclusively with minorities. And this was what made the regime "progressive" (Martin, 2001). The reason for this approach for American institutions of higher education reflected the needs of U.S. elite, despite political sloganeering. "Affirmative action," while allegedly helping the poor, actually reproduced multi-ethnic and multi-cultural elite with little chance for the truly downtrodden to engage in social mobility. Thus, middle-class and upper-class representatives of minorities had a much greater chance of being admitted to top universities than poor representatives of the majority. The Soviet state put emphasis on social position and used its power to elevate workers and peasants to high social positions. Many of them were also of minority origin.

This manifestation of social mobility had nothing to do with democracy as it is usually understood in the West. The roots of this mobility were mostly, albeit not exclusively, in the totalitarian power of socialist states. Stalin could elevate a humble member of lower classes to the top of the social/political hierarchy. This despotic "democratism" has had its other side. Absolute despots could easily elevate people, but with the same ease could send them to hard labour, or to their death. Neither this or that aspect of socialist totalitarian state had been predicted by Marx. The story, of course, was different with the leaders of the Soviet state. Indeed, while Marx saw no role for the state in this socio-economic and technological development, the Soviet leaders openly proclaimed the crucial role of the state in the transformation of Soviet society. While the totalitarian state played a crucial role in societal transformation, socio-economic and scientific progress, the totalitarian state became even more important for China, due to the country's tradition and specificalities. The totalitarian socialist state had fulfilled here several crucial roles, and many of them were interconnected:

1. It ensured the country's independence and assertive position in the world, without which economic and social development would have been impossible.

2. It channeled the nation's resources in the most important areas of economic and scientific development.
3. It ensured equitable redistribution of the most crucial resources, such as water.
4. It helped social mobility.
5. It ensured China's transformation into a global power.

In acting for the benefit of society, China's totalitarian state actively relies on the thousand-year-old traditions of Chinese civilization and what is often called "Oriental despotism," with its totalitarian underpinnings. Indeed, here, oriental despotism, blasted by Marx and Karl Wittfogel as well as generations of Western thinkers, provided China with a smooth transition to the totalitarian present, which was basic for the country's very existence and future success.

6. The Problem of Sovereignty and Strong State in the Chinese Context: Karl Wittfogel Equation

Chinese economic and related socio-political developments have been historically connected with the notion of what is called, in the context of Marxist and even non-Marxist thought as the "Asiatic mode of production" and related "Oriental despotism," the society in which the ruler has not just absolute power but also control over the "means of production" – land and ultimately the people themselves. He was actually the ultimate proprietor of the land and the people. The Asiatic mode of production and related Oriental despotism have attracted considerable attention from Western scholars (Krader, 1975; Bailey and Llobera, 1981; O'Leary, 1989; Dunn, 2012; Brook, 1989; Curtis, 2009; Singh, 1983; Sawer, 2013; Tichelman, 2013; Choudhary, 2016; Da Graca and Zinarelli, 2015). Discussions on the "Asiatic mode of production" and related Oriental despotism were also covered in various articles, including those which deal with Marx's view on the subject (Tökei, 1982, 1983).

While the study of Oriental despotism has a long history, the most important contribution to the subject – or at least the most controversial one – was made by Karl Wittfogel, German-American sinologist.

Wittfogel launched his political and intellectual career as a leftist. "Wittfogel's political career is still somewhat of a mystery" (Bailey and Llobera, 1979: 551). According to his biographer, "Wittfogel joined the Independent Social Democratic Party in 1918; the Independents sympathized with the Bolshevik Revolution, but did not espouse applying Bolshevik methods in Germany like the Spartacists" (551). Wittfogel was hardly parochial in his intellectual and political aspirations, and played an active role in Comintern (Communist International), the umbrella organization for

communist parties all over the world. Moscow was logically the centre and, as a specialist in China, Wittfogel became engaged in collaboration with Soviet sinologists.

"In the 1920s Wittfogel became one of the leading Comintern specialists on China and became associated with L. Madyar, S.M. Dubrovski, E. Varga and D. Riazanov. E. Varga was one of the first to draw certain theoretical conclusions on the basis of both Marx's recently published *New York Daily Tribune* articles on events in China (E. Varga: 'Les problèmes fondamentaux de la revolution chinoise,' *La correspondence internationale* No. 561, 16 June 1928)" (551). In totalitarian society, even the most abstract discussion immediately acquired political implications, and they were not positive, at least from the Kremlin's perspective. "The possibility that the Asiatic mode of production (hereafter AMP) had been dominant in recent Chinese history placed the anti-feudal nature of the Chinese bourgeoisie in doubt, and hence the Stalinist strategy of a bourgeois-proletarian national revolution in China" (551).

As a result of this, Wittfogel had become *persona non grata* among intellectuals in the USSR. "Whether by virtue of his association with E. Varga or through his own critique of Stalin's policy in China, Wittfogel's academic work was condemned by the Congresses of Tiflis (1930) and Leningrad (1931)" (551).

By the middle of the 1930s, Wittfogel underwent dramatic intellectual/political evolution. "The crucial period for locating Wittfogel's political about-face is from 1934, when he was released from a Nazi concentration camp and began his 'fieldwork' in China under the auspices of both the *Institute für Sozialforschung* and the Institute of Pacific Relations, until 1939, when he states that he officially broke with the Comintern after the signing of the German-Soviet pact" (551).

The very fact that Wittfogel became disenchanted with Stalinist USSR did not mean that he became an ardent anti-Communist. Actually, his intellectual evolution was different. By that time, Wittfogel most likely became a Trotskyist. Indeed, in Trotsky's view, Stalinism was not a "real" socialism but bureaucratic perversion. The "real" socialism was, in this narrative, related not with totalitarian state, but with grass-roots democracy; the very fact that Trotsky was hardly a proponent of democracy in his position as Red Army Commander-in-Chief does not matter much in this new context. Wittfogel apparently struggled in his attempt to deal with Chinese history in the context of his Trotskyist views; the crucial breakthrough took place in 1947.

"While his biographer, Ulmen, speaks of the progressive disenchantment of Wittfogel with the Soviet Union beginning around 1930-31, it is unclear what role, if any, Wittfogel continued to play in the Comintern China policy of the 1930s. Ulmen tells us that Wittfogel discarded five drafts of the sequel to Wirtschaft under Gesellschaft Chinas (1931) before beginning the final

draft in 1947 which was published a decade later as *Oriental Despotism*. The crucial turning point for Ulmen is 1947…" (551).

Wittfogel changed his view once again, not just because observation of the late Stalinist USSR, but also because of reading the Plekhanov-Lenin debate. The point here is that Georgii Plekhanov, the first Russian Marxist, believed that control over land in Russia was the very foundation of Oriental despotism, the framework of Russian polity for centuries. Nationalization of land after the socialist revolution would just reinforce this trend, regardless of political slogans. It was these ideas of Plekhanov's which became the catalyst for Wittfogel's fresh look at Soviet and later the Chinese experience. Indeed, "the reading of the Plekhanov-Lenin 1906 debates sparked off in Wittfogel 'the same combination of intellect and passion that had made him so compelling a revolutionary in the 1920s and 1930s'" (551).

From that point on, Wittfogel quickly moved to the Right and his views became quite handy in the political milieu in the USA, when the Cold War was launched. "Wittfogel's testimony before the McCarran Committee, particularly his attack on O. Lattimore, and his membership of the so-called Committee for Cultural Freedom, identified him with McCarthyism" (552). By that time, Wittfogel's views were marked by "anti-Soviet and anti-Chinese tracts" (552) and testified by his many works (Wittfogel, 1950: 445-462; 1953; 1955; 1964; 1958; 1960: 29-34). At the same time, he was unable to predict the China/Soviet split, even in the early 1960s. His belief that the socio-economic and political affinity between Red China and the USSR would predicate their unity shattered his reputation as the man who understood the interplay of communist state geopolitics. Indeed, his "reliability as a 'Communist-watcher' was considerably impaired when he predicted in 1963 'in the years ahead the global communist strategy will be Krushchev's strategy'" (Bailey and Llobera, 1979: 552; Wittfogel, 1962: 698).

While Wittfogel was the author of many works, he is mostly known for his *Oriental Despotism*. As in the case with many other works in social sciences and humanities, its impact on social science was mostly due to the political and related intellectual changes, both in the West and the USSR. In many ways it was related to the breaking of the old paradigm. One of the new trends was a fresh view of socialism, related to Nikita Krushchev's attack on Stalin and Stalinism. The new approach came from a new intellectual/political species – the anti-Soviet Left. And their views were often related to similar views of the Right, creating, in some cases, a peculiar intellectual alliance or symbiosis, even when both sides rejected the very notion of its existence. One of the major trends here was the final realization that state control over the "means of production" does not lead to the creation of a society without "exploiters." The ruling class in socialist societies could well exist without private property on the "means of production." Bureaucracy, in this reading,

was not just the agent of proprietors, as was the case, for example, in capitalist societies, but a ruling class in itself.

Milovan Djilas' *New Class* was an important contribution to this subject. An ardent Yugoslavian communist, Djilas became disenchanted with both the creed and its application to real political life. In his *New Class: Analysis of the Communist System*, Djilas argued that the socialist regime was hardly egalitarian and was ruled by the new privileged class: bureaucrats (Djilas, 1957). The publication of the book in 1957 had corresponded not just with Krushchev's intensifying forays against Stalin, but also with the publication of Wittfogel's *Oriental Despotism*. In any case, the new trends in the USSR had also stimulated the new interpretation of Marxism, and clearly influenced Wittfogel.

"The publication of *Oriental Despotism* in 1957 coincided with the beginnings of the breakdown of Stalinist orthodoxy after the 20th Party Congress. E. Welskopf's *Die Produktionsverhältnisse in Alten Orient und der Griechisch-Romischen Antike*, Akademie Verlag, Berlin, 1957, was one of the first studies to emphasize the importance of Marx's *Grundrisse*, which had been republished in German in 1953. There is no doubt that the wider circulation of the *Grundrisse* gave impetus to the renewed discussion of the AMP among Marxists, but Wittfogel's work played no less a role" (Bailey and Llobera, 1979: 555).

Following the new intellectual trend and transformed Marxist lenses, Wittfogel looked at both pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary China and the USSR and discovered that the socio-economic constructions were essentially the same, regardless of the difference of slogan. Party bureaucracy as a new class was essentially the same as Chinese imperial mandarins. He noted that "it was not necessarily the ownership of the major means of production, land and water, but their *control* which made the ruling bureaucracy of Oriental society a *class*" (545). The Oriental despots, similar to modern socialist dictators, lived by terror, and this was the major output of their rule. A little later, this vision of socialist regimes would be reinforced by scores of intellectuals. One of course should mention here Alexander Solzhenitsyn, whose monumental *Gulag Archipelago* would reinforce Wittfogel's conclusions in the future. (There is no information as to whether Wittfogel had any direct influence on Solzhenitsyn.)

While Wittfogel's findings were in tune with the new trends (e.g. represented by Djilas), they were still shocking for Western liberals and Leftist intellectuals in the late 1950s. "Wittfogel's possible new sociology of class has been swept aside by his political desire to demonstrate that the state in certain societies (Oriental and 'totalitarian') constitutes a class; a shocking notion of which only a reactionary could be capable in 1957 but far less problematic in the 1970s when the Soviet model of socialism is hardly the ideal of many of the world's communist parties" (546).

While Wittfogel's findings were attacked by the Left and Liberals for what they saw as an emphasis on terror and general misery of socialist societies – one might note that Solzhenitsyn would be attacked in the future for the very same reason – the others could not accept Wittfogel because of another consideration. Oriental despotism and related "Oriental mode of production" and the socialist regime were not just brutish but, in the context of this narrative, doomed to economic stagnation. In any case, they could not compete with the capitalist West. Stagnation is also related to the "Third World" and therefore was unacceptable in the context of "multiculturalism," which had become the ideological mantra for the Left since the late 1950s and early 1960s. For this very reason, some of them plainly rejected the very existence of the "Asiatic mode of production."

"Meanwhile, orthodox Marxists maintain that the theory of the AMP is 'politically harmful and methodologically incorrect,' since it 'is associated with the view that oriental society was stagnant and therefore that European capitalism played a messianic role' (Godes, 1981: 104). According to them, '[e] very attempt to give an affirmative answer to this question must lead to only one answer, to a recognition that the AMP is nothing other than feudalism' (Ibid., 103)" (Li Jun, 1995: 335).

Thus, laying Oriental despotism as the foundation of Chinese history and demarcating it from classical European antiquity – with the idea of personal rights, property, and democracy – transformed China – and, of course, not only China – into a peculiar pariah, in the context of broad historical narrative. This, predictably, led to a negative response. For the "multiculturalist" Left, the Chinese path was just an appropriate "alternative modernity" (Karl, 2005: 61). At the same time, for Chinese scientists, the Asian mode of production was at least partially rehabilitated as nationalistic protest against "historicist unilinearity," imposed by the West (p. 66), and which implied that the Asiatic mode of production, related Oriental despotism and, of course, the absence of even the seeds of "human rights," doomed China to stagnation and decay, both in the past and in the present. One might state that more centrist Western scholars have a more balanced view on Wittfogel (Starr, 2014: 37). At the same time, the fresh view, supported by an increasing body of scholarship, indicated quite the opposite: Oriental despotism and the related Asiatic mode of production was the framework for China's millennia of economic prosperity, at least in comparison with Europe.

7. Oriental Despotism and China's Economic Progress

The fresh look at the historical narrative indicated that the relationship between Oriental despotism and economic stagnation does not work. Even Wittfogel, with his predominantly negative view of Oriental despotism,

acknowledged that the transition to Oriental despotism helped the development of productive force. "This transition originates in the expansion and intensification of agriculture through irrigation and the development of handicraft and commercial activity" (Bailey and Llobera, 1979: 544). The increase of arable land was due to "expansion of government-coordinated drainage and irrigation work" (p. 544).

Thus, it was clear even from Wittfogel's narrative that the despotic state was essential for the development of agriculture. One could assume that China, like other states with the "Asiatic mode of production," had much more developed agriculture than in many parts of Europe, or at least was not inferior to it. Still, it was not agriculture, but other branches of the economy where China was not just on a par with Europe but actually surpassed it for centuries.

Historically, China was a quite developed society and the leader in many areas of science and technology. Printing, gunpowder, silk and porcelain are four of the most well-known inventions which emerged in China hundreds, if not thousands, of years before they emerged in Europe. These were hardly the only inventions in which China was ahead of the West. Joseph Needham, the seminal historian of Chinese science, proved this some time ago in many of his works. His views are supported by other scholars who noted that premodern China was indeed quite a developed society.

"China's premodern achievements in science and technology were even more remarkable" (Lin, 1995: 270). "It is not surprising that based on this 'advanced' technology, Chinese industry was highly developed. The total output of iron was estimated to have reached 150,000 tons in the late eleventh century. On a per capita basis, this was five to six times the European output" (p. 127). The high economic performance led to high standards of living. Indeed, its prosperity "astonished even that sophisticated Venetian, Marco Polo" (p. 270). Indeed, for centuries, China was not just a great economic force, but one of the richest powers by per capita income. Indeed, "on a per capita basis, China was the wealthiest part of the world from 1200 to the 1300s – aside from Italy" (Holodny, 2017).

It was not just economy. China was the first country to develop the means for modern commerce and war. Indeed, it was China which introduced paper money and "gunpowder into human life" (Andersen, 2017). Chinese cultural achievements were also evident and variations of Chinese written "language was adopted across much of Asia" (Andersen, 2017). "In short, China by the fourteenth century was probably the most cosmopolitan, technologically advanced and economically powerful civilization in the world" (Andersen, 2017).

In comparison to China, most of Europe, possibly to the end of the Renaissance, "was poorer and underdeveloped" (Lin, 1995: 270). The

Chinese economy slowed down somewhat by the 18th century. "Evidence documented in the monumental works of Joseph Needham and his collaborators shows that, except in the past 2 or 3 centuries, China had a considerable lead of the Western world in most of the major areas of science and technology" (p. 220).

Still, some Western scholars believed that the Chinese economy either surpassed the European economy or at least was on a par with it through the 19th century. This was, for example, the view of the late Albert Feuerwerker, the prominent specialist in Chinese studies from the University of Michigan. He noted that indeed, "late imperial China – from the tenth century to the nineteenth – experienced in world perspective a remarkable millennium of premodern economic growth" (Feuerwerker, 2004: 324). According to Daniel Chirot, "China remained the most advanced part of the world until the 16th century, and only fell behind Europe in the 19th" (Chirot, 2011: 64). And the economic growth was in many ways responsible for rapid rise in population (Feuerwerker, 2004: 321), despite the periodic cyclical decline due to famine and related calamities (Chu and Lee, 1994).

The economic growth and comparatively high level of economic well-being throughout most of the imperial era, all calamities and related mass starvation notwithstanding – one should remember here that mass starvation, pandemic diseases and similar calamities were attributes not just of China but Europe as well – contributed to a high level of literacy (Feuerwerker, 2004: 322).

Why did China's economy decline later, in absolute and even more so in relative terms? And this process accelerated since the beginning of the 19th century. There are, of course, many explanations. One of the most common explanation is that China's mandarins lost interest in technological improvements and discarded technological innovations from the West. The brightest Chinese had been engaged in preparation for tests, mostly based on Confucian classics, to enter the ruling bureaucracy; technology was forsaken and money-making was discouraged, at least officially, for merchants were placed at the bottom of the social structure, according to the Confucian template. It was this ideological and related societal structure which, according to Max Weber, was the major reason why China did not develop capitalism, and by the second half of the 19th century, by the time when Weber published his research on China, China started to experience a clear economic decline *vis-à-vis* Europe.

This of course played a considerable role. The entire bureaucratic system of the late Manchu China became ossified, but it was not the only reason, and possibly not the reason at all. Indeed, while some observers regarded the problems in Chinese culture in excessive focus on philosophical abstraction, other observers saw Chinese problems as absolutely opposite:

Chinese culture was too pragmatic. Dmitry Merezhkovsky, one of the leading Russian writers in the beginning of the last century, noted here, "But we have before us, a centuries-old culture founded on strict positivism in service to the principle of utility. The name of this truly grandiose culture is China, its essence is petrification, the defeat of the human spirit by a slow death" (Glebov, 2017: 53). Thus, cultural specificity and Mandarins' unwillingness to embrace technological innovation were not the only reasons for economic underperformance. Or, possibly, they were not the reasons at all. There were other reasons.

One of them, often ignored by observers, is the weakness of the Chinese state; it was much weaker than the Russian state. China was a victim of external pressure. Despite what seemed to be the absolute power of the emperor/empress dowager, China as a state was weak in dealing with foreign powers, and this had most negative implications for the Chinese economy and technological progress. While many Western observers ignored this aspect of China's problems, there are a few who acknowledged them. This was, for example, the case with Professor Stephen C. Thomas.

Thomas rejected the notion that China's socio-political and cultural framework were responsible for China's inability to catch up with the West in the 19th and early 20th centuries. He called this the "blame the victim" explanation (Thomas, 2006). Thomas rejected the notion that China's bureaucracy was so ossified that it was unable to understand the importance of technological innovation from the West (p. 13). As a matter of fact, "Chinese officials and entrepreneurs initiated Chinese-owned steam shipping, a modern coal mine, a steam railway, a telegraph company, and modern mechanized cotton mills. The Qing government also approved the setting up of a modern iron and steel mill and a Western-style bank" (p. 22). Here, the Qing government's involvement in the economy clearly relied on the millennia-long Chinese tradition, and it actually helped economic development rather than hindered it. Already-quoted Albert Feuerweker noted: "On balance, the actions of the state probably helped rather than hindered the long-term growth of population and total output" (Feuerwerker, 2004: 322).

The state played a rather positive role in the past and could have well played the same positive role in the late imperial period. Indeed, "the Chinese experience of managing and participating in complex bureaucratic organizations may have left a positive legacy for the twentieth century" (Feuerwerker, 2004: 322; von Glahn, 2016).

Still, China was not able to achieve this economic and technological progress, because the Chinese state was weak. Indeed, in his view, an important prerequisite for economic progress was that "a country needs to have enough sovereignty to keep control of its economy and foreign trade…" (Thomas, 2006: 11). Still, the military defeats and China's subservient

position toward Western powers and Japan prevented China from engaging in technological and economic progress.

"At the same time, the global system with its military-backed Western colonization activities, forced on Qing China a series of 'unequal treaties' that deprived China of much of its sovereignty and funds to pay for foreign-technology based industrialization" (p. 4). There were several ways in which China's enemies took funds which China needed for economic and technological progress. First, "Qing China was forced to pay huge war indemnities in 1842, 1860, 1896 and 1900, that saddled the Chinese government of economy with immense unproductive expenses and after the huge 1896 indemnity that Japan imposed on China, the Chinese government suffered large deficits of about 18% of its central government income" (p. 6).

Secondly, "because of the existing unequal treaties prevented China from raising tariffs on foreign trade to pay off these deficits, the Chinese government beginning in 1895 had to seek huge foreign loans. Between 1895 and 1911, the Qing government paid out 476 million taels in principal and interest to foreign creditors for the foreign loans to pay the Japanese indemnity and the 1900 Boxer indemnity, which was more than twice as much as the total investment in all foreign, joint, and Chinese-owned modern manufacturing established in China between 1895 and 1913" (p. 6). Third, there were drains on resources because of opium sent to China from the West. It was so extensive that even members of the British Foreign Office compared those British merchants who dealt with opium in China with "robbers (Harrison, 1895; Allen, 1853)."

Fourth, it was the inability of Chinese businesses to engage in equitable business with the West. "Another cost of China's loss of sovereignty, though also one hard to quantify, was the unequal treaty stipulation that prevented China from holding foreign businesses legally accountable." 'Extraterritoriality' took away China's normal sovereign right to enforce Chinese laws against foreigners for theft, embezzlement, contract violation, and commercial fraud. Chinese businesses could be cheated by foreigners without legal recourse" (Thomas, 2006: 19). China was absolutely powerless in dealing with one of its major enemies – the UK. For example, "the Chinese government had to sue (mining engineer and later US president) Herbert Hoover and his employer the British Mining Company Bewick Moreing in a British court in London legal redress regarding Hoover's questionable takeover of the Chinese-owned Kaiping Coal Mines during the 1900 Boxer Rebellion. Although the Chinese government won the case against Bewick Moreing in British courts in 1907, the British Embassy back in Peking refused to enforce the judgment, saying that it would hurt British interests in China (fn). The British company kept control of the mine until 1949" (19). The very fact that weakness of the state and its semicolonial positions were the major

reason for the country's economic underperformance was not a uniquely Chinese phenomenon. The same could be said for another country of "Oriental despotism" – India. As an independent subcontinent, India "was responsible for 23% of global GDP. When the British departed in unseemly haste 200 years later, this percentage had dropped to just over 3% (Book reviews, 2018).

The weakness of the Chinese state had led to its final collapse in the beginning of the 20th century. The country lapsed into anarchy, was divided by warlords, and finally invaded by Japan. It was no surprise that the economy declined even more. All of this was ended by the 1949 revolution.

8. The Despotic State and its Implication in Post-revolutionary China

The totalitarian socialist state which emerged after 1949 was to deal with the lack of Chinese sovereignty. The revolution in this case was not only social but also national in the sense that it restored China's sovereignty as a state. It finally released China from unequal treaties and other similar matters which had drained China's resources. It unified China. And this created the essential prerequisite for economic growth.

The 1949 Revolution could be seen, like many other phenomena, from many different perspectives. One could well interpret the 1949 Revolution from Wittfogel's perspective as a "reactionary revolution" (Lee, 1982). The reason why the Chinese Revolution – and in the context of Wittfogel's theory, the Bolshevik Revolution was "reactionary" as well – is clear. The notion of revolution, at least in the modern, post-French Revolution meaning of the word, implied not just dramatic changes in socio-economic and political makeup of society, but also a political liberation. As a matter of fact, Hannah Arendt, the seminal Jewish German-American philosopher and political scientist, regarded political liberties as essential attributes of true revolution (Arendt, 2006).

The Chinese Revolution had led to an absolutely opposite result: total enslavement of the populace by a new edition of Oriental despotism. As in the case with the Bolshevik Revolution and Soviet regime, the Chinese experience has its own "revisionists" who argue that Mao's China was not totalitarian. In their view, the Cultural Revolution demonstrated not just the regime's weakness, but also implicit democratization, for purging the Party bureaucracy from below was a hallmark of the Cultural Revolution. Still, for other observers, the Cultural Revolution had nothing to do with shaking the foundations of the totalitarian state. It was plainly the way for Mao to purge the Party of those who could potentially create problems for him (San, 1977). From this perspective, the Cultural Revolution was not drastically different from Stalin's purges when, as some revisionists claimed, the masses hailed the tough treatment of corrupt bureaucrats. One might add here that Cultural

Revolution modes of dealing with the bureaucracy is not just a peculiar method of the socialist totalitarian state. The absolute rulers of the past often either appealed to the masses during the purges of the elite – here the rulers emerged as avengers of the masses – or/and actively used "assistance from below" to conduct the purges. Ivan the IV ("the Terrible"), whom Stalin liked in the same way that Mao appreciated the First Emperor of Qin, engaged in mass purges of the traditional aristocracy. Here, he also appealed to help from below. His henchmen, "*oprichniki*," were usually people of comparatively low social positions, upstarts and foreigners; all of them were outside the body of traditional Russian aristocracy. This "democratic" aspect of Ivan did not reduce his absolute power. Similar to the masses from the time of Stalin's purges and Mao's Cultural Revolution, they acted only because they received the order from a charismatic leader. If the masses got out of hand, as was the case with Mao's supporters by the end of the Cultural Revolution, the leader employed the army to restore order.

Thus, neither Mao nor Stalin were "democratic," at least as the term is understood in the West, and the Cultural Revolution, together with similar actions during Mao's long rule, led to the death and suffering of millions. Still, Mao was proclaimed to be a great leader in the post-Mao era. What is the reason for this? One could find what seems to be an easy answer. Mao's cult is maintained by the ruling Communist Party as the way to prove the regime with legitimacy. Still, it could not explain Mao's continuing popularity on a grass-roots level, manifested by the stream of visitors to Mao's mausoleum. "And each year, hordes of Chinese descend upon Mao Zedong's rural hometown, Shaoshan, to pay homage" (Campanella, 2018).

For some, Mao's era was the era of social justice and equality, and the state dealt mercilessly with corruption. Still, Mao's popularity is not just due to his image as social equalizer, avenger of the populace's grievances, and creator of a truly "democratic" society, in which simple, uneducated peasants could be elevated to high social positions; all of these characteristics of the regime became increasingly mythologized as time progressed. There are other aspects of Mao's personality and his regime which are pleasing to the populace regardless of all calamities which Mao brought to the Chinese, especially peasants. Mao was the ruler who finally ended the Civil War, the prolonged period of anarchy which engulfed the country after the collapse of the Manchu dynasty, 1911-1912 (Courtney, 2018). Indeed, even those observers who believed that China continued industrial development after the collapse of the Manchu dynasty still acknowledged that little was done after the Japanese full-fledged war against China, for the invasion had "the crippling effect on the Chinese economy" (Chang, 2017).

All of these calamities most likely killed as many people as the Great Leap Forward. More importantly, the preservations of these conditions implied

that these horrific losses of human life would continue indefinitely, and could be arrested only by the re-creation of a strong or actually totalitarian, distinctly Oriental Chinese state. The mind of the average Chinese, especially peasants, has here – as in the past – two mutually exclusive drives. On one hand, they resent the state which uses them as material for the state's projects and source for maintaining the bureaucratic elite. On the other hand, the same peasants realize that the same state is essential for their survival, for it is the despotic state which maintains basic order. Peasants both hate and fear the state embodied in the rulers' bureaucracy and, at the same time, worships the same state. State and the ruler, Mao in this case, has actually "two bodies," if one would remember the definition of Ernst Kantorowicz. In his view, the kings from this era had "two bodies" in the minds of the local populace. One of the king's bodies was mortal and potentially sinful. The other body, which symbolized the state and law, never died; it was also pure, and without any flaw. This template could well be applied to understand the populace's approach to Mao. Mao, the totalitarian socialist state which he embodied, has the real historical "body" which, among his attributes, has starvation and terror for millions. Mao's other "body" is related with the unity of the state which promotes national independence, economic growth, equitable distribution of resources and social mobility. The populace also understood that the end of the strong state would inevitably lead to chaos (Ellison, 2017).

The positive images are also related to a sense of state glory and prestige. A strong ruler could be glorified, plainly because of his power and terror in a peculiar Orwellian way and, in this context, those countries which did not enjoy absolute rulers are despised. Aleksei Malashenko, well-known Russian political scientist, noted that the Chinese despise Russia and believe that Russia is a decaying state (Malashenko, 2012). One might state that Western observers also saw many problems with Putin's Russia and they usually connected them with Putin's authoritarian rule. Still, one could assume that the Chinese elite's skeptical view of Russia might be related to quite the opposite assumption: Putin does not have as much power as Chinese leaders and this is the reason for Russia's decline.

As time progressed, it was this wholesome "body" which became remembered and enhanced the totalitarian template which ensured China's speedy growth. One might note here that totalitarianism's positive image is not just due to China's specificity, and could be found among similar societies. In post-Soviet Russia, Stalin enjoyed popularity among a considerable segment of the Russian population. This positive view usually marginalized or ignored terror and starvation, and emphasized Stalin as the man who brought order, purged the corrupt bureaucracy, won the war against Germany, and stimulated economic development. Thus, a considerable segment of the population internalized the importance of a strong totalitarian state and

saw it implicitly as a force which brought positive outcomes to the country. One, of course, can be sure: this internalization of the necessity of a strong government would survive only in the context of explicit/implicit fear. Without a coercive framework, the populace would immediately discover the "second," negative body of the state, which in this case would plainly fall apart as happened often throughout Chinese history. Yet chaos would once again drive the populace to crave strong government. Thus a totalitarian regime not only evolves from Chinese cultural context, reinforced by borrowing the Soviet experience, but is also a model which ensures the country's quick economic and geopolitical advance.

9. Economic Development of the Totalitarian State: China's Example

The strong socialist state in China had followed in many ways the Soviet template. "The Chinese government took control of most large economic enterprises and industries, as well as the financial sector, and began to channel investment into economic development" (Thomas, 2006: 24). Following the Soviet model, the Chinese state focused its resources on the key elements needed for economic progress: industry and infrastructure. Despite the tragedies caused by the Great Leap Forward (According to reliable sources, dozens of millions were starved to death.) (Dikötter, 2010; Manning and Wemheuer, 2011) and the Cultural Revolution (Dikötter, 2016), China's achievement was impressive, at least in comparison to similar countries. "China's economic growth rate was faster than that of India and of most other similarly poor countries, and the government's social and economic policies had vastly improved the education and health levels, and life expectancy of most Chinese (World Bank, unpublished, 1978)" (Thomas, 2006: 25; Alvarez-Klee, 2018). According to some reports, "LE has more than doubled, from 35 years before 1949, to 76.3 in 2015" (Chen et al. 2018).

This combination of tens of millions starved and rising life expectancy and improved medical services seems to be incomprehensible and illogical. Still, the same model could be found in other totalitarian societies when two polarities exist and, in a way, are interconnected. During the era of revolution and especially the Stalinist era, the cream of Russian intelligentsia was destroyed or, as was the case in the beginning of the Soviet era, emigrated. At the same time, the literacy and general education level had increased considerably all over the USSR by the end of Stalin's rule. Thus, as in China, the state engaged both in destructive and constructive work; both functions of the state were interwoven.

After 1978, the economic control was loosened and market forces started to play a bigger role in the economic development of the country. Still, the state continued to control the "command heights" of the economy. Wayne

M. Morrison, from the Congressional Research Service, noted that "despite China's three-decade history of widespread economic reforms, Chinese officials contend that China is a 'socialist-market economy.' This appears to indicate that the government accepts and allows the use of free market forces in a number of areas to help grow the economy, but the government still plays a major role in the country's economic development" (Morrison, 2018: 29). Elaborating on this point, Morrison emphasized the role of state-owned enterprises in the Chinese economy. He stated that "they continue to dominate a number of sectors (such as petroleum and mining, telecommunications, utilities, transportation, and various industrial sectors); are shielded from competition; are the main sectors encouraged to invest overseas; and dominate the listings on China's stock indexes. One study found that SOEs constituted 50% of the 500 largest manufacturing companies in China and 61% of the top 500 service sector enterprises. Not only are SOEs dominant players in China's economy, many are quite large by global standards. Fortune's 2016 list of the world's 500 largest companies includes 103 Chinese firms (compared to 29 listed firms in 2007). Of the 103 Chinese firms listed, Fortune identified 75 companies (73% of total) where the government owned 50% or more of the company. Together, these 75 firms in 2016 generated $7.2 trillion in revenues, had assets valued at $20.7 trillion, and employed 16.2 million workers. Of the 28 other Chinese firms on the Fortune 500 list, several appear to have financial links to the Chinese government" (p. 30).

The result of the combination of the state control over major "means of production" and elements of market economy was stupendous. From 1978 to 2012, China's economy rose 9.4% per annum. It could decline to 7 to 8% in the future, from 2012 to 2024 (Hirst, 2015). Still, even this growth is much higher than in any country in the West. The centralized planned economy and totalitarian state, without which the planned economy would be impossible, made it possible for the Chinese government to shift priorities. At present, the stress is increasingly not on quantitative, but the qualitative dimension of production. "The Chinese government has made innovation a top priority in its economic planning through a number of high-profile initiatives, such as 'Made in China 2025,' a plan announced in 2015 to upgrade and modernize China's manufacturing in 10 key sectors through extensive government assistance in order to make China a major global player in these sectors'" (Morrison, 2018: 29). The quoted author from the Congressional Research Service believed that China could reach these goals and would not be dependent on the US and other Western countries for modern technology. And this bothered the US government. "However, such measures have increasingly raised concerns that China intends to use industrial policies to decrease the country's reliance on foreign technology (including by locking out foreign firms in China) and eventually dominate foreign markets. U.S.

Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer has described the Made in China 2025 initiative as a 'very, very serious challenge, not just to us, but to Europe, Japan and the global trading system'" (p. 29).

Indeed, these plans look quite plausible, due to the profound changes in present-day China's culture. Indeed, in the past, with all of China's technological achievements, Chinese scholars from the pre-revolutionary era often disregarded technology as being inferior to the humanities, wrapped in Confucian cocoons. It deals with the eternal, whereas technology deals with fleeting terrestrial, and while some observers, like Merezhkovsky, believed in the pragmatism of the Chinese mind, the reality was the opposite: as in the case with similar societies, the mind of the elite was often focused on the abstract and only tangentially related to reality. This has changed. "Deng evinced a near-religious reverence for science and technology, a sentiment that is undimmed in Chinese culture today" (Andersen, 2017). Now "China has largely focused on the applied sciences. It built the world's fastest supercomputer, spent heavily on medical research, and planted a 'great green wall' of forests in its northwest as a last-ditch effort to halt the Gobi Desert's spread. Now China is bringing its immense resources to bear on the fundamental sciences. The country plans to build an atom smasher that will conjure hundreds of 'god particles' out of the ether, in the same time it took CERN's Large Hadron Collider to strain out a handful. It is also eyeing Mars. In the technopoetic idiom of the 21st century, nothing would symbolize China's rise like a high-definition shot of a Chinese astronaut setting foot on the red planet. Nothing except, perhaps, first contact" (Andersen, 2017). It has already built the biggest radiotelescope to find extraterrestrial reason. China also projects its technological proofs far and wide. "The country has already built rail lines in Africa, and it hopes to fire bullet trains into Europe and North America," through "a tunnel under the Bering Sea" (Andersen, 2017).

Centralized, planned economy and related totalitarian state also helped China to withstand the economic crisis of 2008 much better than the US (Morrison, 2018: 28). China was clearly affected by the 2008 crisis. "The Chinese government responded by implementing a $586 billion economic stimulus package (approved in November 2008), aimed largely at funding infrastructure and loosening monetary policies to increase bank lending. Such policies enabled China to effectively weather the effects of the sharp global fall in demand for Chinese products. From 2008 to 2010, China's real GDP growth averaged 9.7%" (p. 5).

Some observers noted that China already "overtook the United States as the world's largest economy in 2014" and "IMF predicted that by 2022, China's economy will be 46.6% larger than the U.S. economy on a PPP basis" (9). One should note that "in terms of trade, China has become much less reliant on exports than in the past" (p. 37). This transition is quite important

for diminishing China's dependence on foreign, especially American, markets. It would make Beijing less dependent on Washington's largesse, and reorient China to accomplish the Belt and Road Initiative, which will project China's influence far and wide in Eurasia. Here, the totalitarian state facilitates the development of the Chinese economy. At the same time, the strong economy reinforces the power of the state. Both the totalitarian state and centralized economy, with planning for generations to come, exists in dynamic synergy.

10. The Totalitarian State and Social Mobility

The tradition of totalitarian state, deeply rooted in Chinese history, is also related to high social mobility. In any case, it was much higher in China than in many countries in the West. "Most scholars agree that there was a high degree of social mobility in traditional China. The chief means of upward mobility were the civil service examinations, which were virtually open to all" (Wang, 1960). The socialist regime, especially after Deng's reforms, had rested on this tradition, whereas the strong state was deeply connected with social mobility.

The most important reason for this social mobility was the rapid economic progress, which, as was noted, would have been impossible without a totalitarian state. For several decades, China experienced rapid economic growth, and it "enabled China, on average, to double its GDP every eight years and helped raise an estimated 800 million people out of poverty" (Morrison, 2018: 28). With increasing income for a broad segment of the Chinese population comes more educational opportunities for the brightest members of Chinese society. And this striving for educational excellence was reinforced by thousand-year-long Chinese tradition, tightly interwoven with the tradition of the totalitarian state.

11. Providing the Distribution of Essential Resources: Solving the Water Problem

National defense, asserting national independence, rising of economic potential of the country and ultimately improving the living conditions of the citizens, and encouraging social mobility – all of these aspects of modern Chinese life could be found in Soviet Russia. For all of this, the totalitarian state was essential. Still, there is one aspect of Chinese life which is unique to China: the strong state's role in distribution of the most vital resource: water.

Equitable and efficient distribution of raw materials and resources is one of the essential hallmarks of the socialist, centralized economy, and the totalitarian state which props it up. In China, not only was there unequal distribution of water – China's south has much better water resources than

the north – but the country's staple crop, rice, demands a lot of water. Consequently, the distribution of water resources and maintenance of the irrigation systems is essential for Chinese, or actually any other "hydraulic" civilization, if one would use Wittfogel's definition. It was not surprising that maintenance of the irrigation systems and canal building was one of the hallmarks of Chinese civilization. It has been one of the essential *raisons d'être* for the very existence of Oriental despotism, the traditions of which were smoothly transmitted to socialist totalitarian arrangements of Red China. The plans for grand canal-building had been firmly embedded in the national psychology and was easily reactivated when the nation needed a new grand canal, similar to projects from China's past. The continuity between Oriental despotism of the past and present-day totalitarian regime is well manifested in the clear connection between the grand constructions in the distant past to those which had emerged recently. The grand projects of this type have been well lodged in the Chinese political culture. Conner Beff noted that "Infrastructure projects designed to solve big national problems and that achieve otherworldly scale are a cultural priority as old as China. The 2,500-year-old, 5,500-mile Great Wall of China was designed to safeguard the nation from northern invasion. More recently, China finished the Three Gorges Dam in 2008, which generates as much electricity as 25 big coal-fired plants, holds back 600 kilometers (375 miles) of the Yangtze River, and is so big that it makes the Hoover Dam – the iconic U.S. water engineering project of the 20th century – look like a bathtub toy" (Beff, 2011). It was not surprising that the idea of a new grand canal was resurrected easily when the need for such construction became clear.

The problems with the water supply became extremely acute in recent years and were due to the rapid industrial development and urbanization of the north. Naturally the idea of transferring of water from south to north had emerged in the minds of the Chinese elite soon after the victory of the 1949 Revolution. At that point, the South-North Water Transfer project was conceived.

The problem with the water supply in the north was noted by Mao Zedong soon after the Revolution. "The solution, as Mao Zedong first said in 1952, is to 'borrow a little water from the south.' Southern China is home to four-fifths of the country's water sources, mostly around the Yangtze River Basin. It took another 50 years after Mao's suggestion for China to start work on it. Finally, on December 10, [2014] the first phase of the South-to-North Water Diversion Project (SNWDP), or *nanshuibeidiao*, began operating" (Kuo, 2014). "On Friday, December 12, for the first time, Beijing residents who turned on their faucets to rinse vegetables or take showers may have been using water piped to the arid capital from distant Hubei province. The middle leg of China's ambitious and controversial South to North Water

Project – the world's largest water transfer project ever – has just opened" (Larson, 2014). The project of mammoth proportions truly rivaled the great constructions from China's past. "The project's eventual goal is to move 44.8 billion cubic meters of water across the country every year, more than there is in the River Thames. The infrastructure includes some of the longest canals in the world; pipelines that weave underneath riverbeds; a giant aqueduct; and pumping stations powerful enough to fill Olympic-sized pools in minutes. It is the world's largest water-transfer project, unprecedented both in the volume of water to be transferred and the distance to be traveled – a total of 4,350 kilometers (2,700 miles), about the distance between the two coasts of America. The U.S., Israel, and South Africa are home to long-distance water transfer systems, but none on this scale" (Kuo, 2014).

The project was extraordinary, not just by its magnitude but also sophistication. "The 1,400-kilometer waterway was constantly monitored by 100,000 sensors which watched over the water quality and other matters" (Staedter, 2018). The project could not be accomplished without a totalitarian state and planned economy. Only these socio-economic and political arrangements could lead to full success and the reason is clear. It is the totalitarian state which could allocate the huge resources for a project, the completion of which could take generations. Only a totalitarian state could reconcile regional interests and deal with local narrow parochialism. It is only the totalitarian state that could plan and see far into the future. All of this would be impossible in the USA's capitalist democracy. As a matter of fact, as the author of the quoted *The Atlantic* article acknowledges: "It's the kind of operation, observers of China say, that would never have a chance somewhere like America. The project requires the coordination of at least 15 provinces – several of them water-rich areas that will have to give up some of their own water. It involves building over hundreds of archeological sites and eventually through religious ones as well. Almost half a million people will have to be relocated. The cost is budgeted at some $60 billion and is likely to exceed that considerably. In the U.S., proposals for large-scale water transfers from the Great Lakes to the west or south of the country have been repeatedly put down. It would seem to be an example of the power of an autocratic central government to enact the kinds of far-reaching national transformations that, in a democracy, get bogged down" (Kuo, 2014).

12. Conclusion

While assessing Marxism, one should remember not just the historical framework of the doctrine's birth, but its cultural and civilizational setting. One could assume that Marx himself, fully aware of any man's, even geniuses' limitations, would assess his own doctrine from this angle if he were

alive today. The 18th and 19th century European thought had a strong anti-statist streak, and it strongly influenced Marx, who downplayed the role of the state in future socialist societies. The USSR and China demonstrate that the socialist society reinforces and strengthens the state which became important not just for socio-economic progress of the socialist societies, but for their very survival. The state was often quite brutish. Still, without this application of rough power, the state could hardly achieve much. Indeed, the socialist state achievements were intimately related to the Hobbesian power. At the same time, paradoxically enough, one could conclude that the very existence of the strong state provides the ultimate validation of Marxism. Indeed, according to Marx, the superiority of one socio-economic formation to another is measured by the level of the development of productive forces, the vitality of the economy. And here the dynamism of the Chinese economy, which has already surpassed the US economy, not only demonstrates the superiority of socialism, as a peculiar modernized version of Oriental despotism, over capitalism, but dialectically affirms the validity of the Chinese civilization, the cultural DNA of which makes it more predisposed to totalitarian government than other countries' civilizations. And the full integration of Marxism in the Chinese civilization's matrix actually reinforces this totalitarian streak, provides it with modern affirmation. And this might well make China the future leader of the global community.

Note

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