

China's National Interest in Vaccine Development Cooperation with Indonesia in Handling the Covid-19 Pandemic: Normative and Material

Anisa Risanti Suhita, Filasafia Marsya Ma'rifat,
Trisni Salsa Ramadina

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Department of International Relations, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia
Department of International Relations, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel, Indonesia;
Department of International Relations, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia
anisarisanti96@mail.ugm.ac.id

The scarcity of medical equipment has been inevitable since the Covid-19 pandemic emerged in 2020. Developing countries, part of the Global South, might have unfortunate conditions due to their lack of medical equipment. As part of the Global South, China has been providing assistance, having Indonesia as one of its main recipients. This study focuses on China's assistance and vaccine cooperation with Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the earlier outbreak, China has provided Indonesia with multiple assistance, such as PCR test kits, medical and N95 masks, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and then engaging on vaccine development. The study recognizes two types of interests, the normative and material ones, shaping China's motives. By analysing both interests, it is found that the cooperation between China and Indonesia shows that China has allowed Indonesia to be actively involved in dealing with the impact of the global pandemic. In addition to solidarity (normative interest), China's assistance is also a form of its effort to pursue economic expansion (material interest).

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic; Indonesia; China; assistance; interest

Introduction

As the COVID-19 pandemic is the major disaster that the world is currently facing, it creates such a massive significance in any aspect of human life. The virus is spreading quickly and continues to increase because of the people's mobility. There were many Chinese travelling abroad plus the mobility of residents to various regions of the world, including China itself, causing the transmission to happen faster. As of July 2021, there had been approximately 185 million Covid confirmed cases of Covid-19 globally with

an estimated 4 million deaths (Worldometer, 2021).

As the Covid-19 virus spreads fast in Indonesia, the Indonesian government is quite overwhelmed. Medical facilities and health workers had not been sufficient. The scarcity of medical equipment is inevitable. The community were panicked that they hunted for medical equipment, resulting in medical workers having difficulties getting them. Besides, the emergence of panic buying has been increased since they were fighting for food supplies and daily necessities.

The Covid-19 pandemic forced the Indonesian government to implement many policies such as PSBB (*Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar*, Large-Scale Social Restrictions) to minimise the spread of the virus. As a developing country, the economic impact of the virus is perhaps the biggest threat that Indonesia faces now. One of the consequences is the increase in unemployment due to the number of employees forced to be laid off. According to Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS; Central Statistics Agency) data, the unemployment rate in Indonesia, jumped sharply to 7%, or around 9.7 million people (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2021).

Like other countries, Indonesia is also threatened by an economic recession. The pandemic has forced many entrepreneurs to go out of business because export activities have been hampered by restrictions imposed by several countries. In this case, the Indonesian government has made various efforts to restore the country's economy, such as enacting a New Normal policy where people can carry out activities as usual by complying with applicable health protocols. Sadly, in practice, the policy is not that easy to implement and causes the number of cases to increase from day to day.

Because of the spike in cases in Indonesia, the government encourages a few countries and international organisations to deliver assistance and loans for Indonesia to handle this difficult situation. Not only developed countries, like the United States and Australia, other countries such as South Korea and Singapore are also participating as a form of solidarity. The assistance pro-

vided by these countries includes grants and loans, alongside medical equipment such as a ventilator, oxygen concentrator, PCR test, x-ray machine, and APD (personal protective equipment) (Aida, 2020).

In this case, the authors understand how unfortunate the condition is for many countries, especially for the Global South. In fact, in world politics the Global South refers to a term of spaces less advantaged socio-economically than the centre of world economy (Haug et al., 2021). China has been one of those Global South countries that assist Indonesia during the pandemic. The assistance was delivered when the Covid-19 virus entered Indonesia's territory. On 23 March 2020, as Covid-19 has been detected in the country, the Indonesian government represented by Minister of Defense Prabowo Subianto confirmed that it had received assistance of 8 tons of medical equipment in the form of N-95 masks, virus test kits, and others (Yeremia, 2020). This is interesting considering that China itself was still experiencing difficulties due to the surge in cases and the economic impact of the pandemic.

Considering the impact of the pandemic, the authors realise the importance of harnessing South-South cooperation. It was evident that the pandemic proved many countries are unprepared for such catastrophe, let alone upending their economic gains. Indonesia and China are no exception. Although both struggles to manage the increase of the cases, they are quite different in response to the outbreak. In China's case, its government quickly took non-medical measures such as lockdown and flight restrictions and medical

measures (Yu & Li, 2020). In Indonesia, both measures were taken slower as Indonesia did not issue any restrictions as early as possible (Djalante, et al., 2020). Regardless of the differences, both countries should be mutually beneficial in managing the pandemic.

In this study, the authors agree that China is significant in providing medical assistance to Indonesia. Not only that, assisting Indonesia by providing medical equipment would be a strategic partnership between the two to revitalise their economies. The assistance is relevant with SSC (South-South Cooperation) which both Indonesia and China are part of. As Adel Abdellatif, Director of the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation, said, the cooperation among South-South countries allows developing or least developed ones to obtain the required facility (UNGA, 2021). This study will explain the motives and reason behind China's assistance to Indonesia by emphasising two points. First, normative interests, seeing assistance provided by China as a form of solidarity. Essentially, solidarity appears as responsibility and sympathy towards a group where certain actors promote mutual support (Wilde, 2007). China is known as a global donor for humanitarian assistance. Specifically, China's Ambassador for Indonesia Xiao Qian stated in *China Daily* that both countries are "good brothers" in fighting against the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the good partners in promoting economic recovery (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Indonesia, 2020). This led the authors to consider the partnership an example of mutually benefi-

cial cooperation between countries. Second, material interests, in this case they are related to the development of China's 'signature' vaccine, Sinovac, which has been distributed to Indonesia. Such assistance could be directly related to China's economic interest in Indonesia. This study will compare which interests are more dominant to help recover the Indonesian economy. By comparing, the authors hope this research would demonstrate how humanitarian assistance carries motives, both in explicit or implicit ways.

Methodology

Descriptive-qualitative method

This paper is descriptive research that aims to understand the phenomenon by clearly describing the situation in the field. In this study, the authors use literature study, including books, journal articles, media reports, and articles from Internet sources. The research is not intended to create new theories or challenge existing theories, but to use the concepts and theory in describing the phenomenon.

Global Health Governance

Although the Covid-19 pandemic emerged in early 2020, it does not imply that countries are not discussing global health preparedness. Before this, we have witnessed how several regions responded to epidemics, such as swine flu, Ebola, and others. Still, Global Health Governance (GHG) emerged as the transition of International Health Governance (IHG). GHG comprises new actors, some are not traditionally related to the health sector, making them as more com-

plex than IHG. According to the Council on Foreign Relations, GHG refers to formal or institutions, rules, and processes by states, intergovernmental organisations, and non-state actors in dealing with health issues that require collective action to address them effectively (Fidler, 2010).

South-South Cooperation

According to the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (n.d), South-South Cooperation is a broad framework of collaboration among countries of the South in the political, economic, social, cultural, environmental, and technical fields. The birth of the South-South Cooperation was initiated by the Asian-African Conference, which was held in Bandung in 1955. In its principle, South-South cooperation is a common endeavour of peoples and countries of the South. It must be pursued as an expression of South-South solidarity and a strategy for economic independence and self-reliance of the South based on their common objectives and solidarity (South Centre, 2009).

In the other words, South-South Cooperation must be based on equality, mutual respect, mutual benefit, and broad-based partnership—as written in the principles of South-South Cooperation. Cooperation within the framework of South-South Cooperation can take the forms of bilateral, regional, or intraregional cooperation. Developing countries share their knowledge, skills, expertise, and resources to meet their development goals through concerted efforts (United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation, n.d). In addition, the SSC also

emphasises the goal of developing countries to destabilise and denaturalise the existence of the hegemony of developed countries in the international system (Muhr, 2016). Following geographical migrations of manufacturing and production activity from the North to the Global South and diplomatic action by various states, this collaboration has become a popular political and economic notion (Acharya, 2016).

Normative Interests

Brian Barry defines interests as a policy, law, or institution that is in someone's interest if it increases his opportunity to get what he wants (Swanton, 1980). In this research, the authors recognize two types of interests, the normative and material ones. According to Stan Husi (2015), normative interests involve a considerable degree of subtleness. Using illustration given by David Owens, Husi provides an example of friendship in which when certain subjects become friends, a range of normative interest becomes engaged. More broadly, a normative interest could be interpreted as an interest in the existence of certain normative landscapes through which actors navigate in virtue of their choice and in some instances to exert an element of control over it (Husi, 2015). The normative interests refer to one of the purposes of the South-South Cooperation, which is about how Southern countries build solidarity together to rise and become a new force to minimise the hegemony of Western influence. Apart from adhering to solidarity, South-South Cooperation also emphasises the mutual benefits obtained by

the parties involved. China has been assisting developing countries, including Indonesia, in handling the spread of Covid-19. In other words, based on the normative interests, we could underline that the assistance provided by China to southern countries is a form of solidarity (Winanti and Alvian, 2019). Even though China has become a new economic power that is becoming a serious rival to developed countries, such as the United States, China still places itself as part of the southern countries. China feels that it also has the same fate as the countries of the South: victims of the colonisation by developed countries.

Material Interests

In contrast to normative interests, which are based on solidarity as part of the southern states, material interests have different basic reasons. This type of interest nudges actors to stick to certain preferences more in line with their economic conditions (Cavaille & Neundorf, 2016). Indeed, in this regard, material interests refer to aspects of economic interests. In addition to providing mutual benefits for the parties involved, South-South Cooperation also emphasises how a country can reap the maximum benefit from the cooperation. The problems in the Indonesian economy have also affected the Chinese economy, as this is related to export-import activities which are also affected by the pandemic. This is a major material interest for China in assisting Indonesia as a form of recovery for its own economy.

The Covid-19 Pandemic

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared Coronavirus disease (Covid-19) as a group of viruses that infect both animals and humans that was first discovered in December 2019, in Wuhan, China (WHO). It is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Many people infected might experience mild to moderate respiratory illness, requiring special treatment to recover.

Unlike the previous flu, such as swine flu or bird flu, this Covid-19 is considered a pandemic for certain reasons. The WHO Director-General stated that it is characterised as a pandemic by assessing the outbreak and concerned by the alarming levels of spread and severity and the alarming levels of inaction (WHO, 2020). Consequently, nearly all aspects of human life have been still affected by the pandemic, including the global economy. This happens because of reduced productivity, loss of life, business closures, trade disruption, and decimation of the tourism industry (Pak et al., 2020).

Result and Discussions

Literature Review

The authors seek to analyse two forms of interest that underlie the provision of assistance by China to Indonesia during the Covid-19 pandemic. Regarding this, the first literature tells us how the pandemic could define the future economic impact on any country. The authors assume its impact is unequal among countries. The variety of responses to the pandemic shows the gaps between them. Based on the United Nations

Office for South-South Cooperation report on 2021, countries may arrange which scenarios would suit them the most to recover from a pandemic (United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation, 2021). This report is significant, considering it was a result from the forum to promote and facilitate South-South Cooperation. China had launched a considerable effort of humanitarian action to over 160 countries and international organisations. It also assists developing countries with a large number of public health facilities. On the other hand, the Indonesian government encouraged building preparedness to health systems to accelerate economic recovery. Such acts and principles show that strengthening solidarity is the norm for facing global challenges.

Generally, there is a simple logic in which a country needs to form cooperation, particularly in these difficult times. In one of our literature, Bump and colleagues (Bump, 2021) argue that it is obvious a country could not single-handedly manage the pandemic. Countries should collaborate in bilateral meetings or multilateral forums to do that. We may assume that for the sake of people, being rational is the simplest action yet the most essential step, considering no single state leader in this century has been experiencing such a pandemic before. This article is interesting because it provides us a deep insight that a country that simply denied any suggestions or warnings could have poor performance in managing Covid-19. However, this article does not give a detailed explanation of which country has been acting contrary to WHO's guidelines.

The second literature gives the authors brief insight into how important collaboration is for any country. Not every country has had such experience of high-damaged health issues such as MERS or Ebola outbreaks, including Indonesia. Therefore, the current pandemic is everyone's first experience. Some countries did learn how an epidemic could change the pattern of life, but a pandemic is something we should learn altogether, as everyone can see now. The article written by Morgan et al. (2021) taught us that the Covid-19 virus could be seen as a challenge since it threatens nearly every aspect of our lives, including the economy. There are countries whose global spread of Covid-19 disrupted supply chains, a few countries having their stock markets fall, others triggered by a recession and experiencing a decline in annual growth. We are also concerned by one question: how effective policymakers will be in mitigating the damage of pandemic. We may agree with what the writers said that cooperation is the main key to containing the pandemic, especially for developing countries. The reason is quite simple, with or without the pandemic, they are already financially struggling by debt worsened by tepid economic growth. Even so, the article seems to have lost its focus because it puts concern on sustainability issues and economic threats, yet it somehow lacks relevance between them. Also, it does not explain how previous epidemics were mitigated, suggesting that past recession left economic scars profoundly and persistently.

Last but not least, this pandemic certainly shows us that there are too many coun-

tries left unprepared and fragile, especially in terms of health facilities and equipment. Although we may believe that pandemic preparedness does not only consist of health infrastructure, this virus requires huge effort to prevent further spreading. Therefore, the authors assume that it is important to recognise how much the damage affects countries, so maintaining collaboration is still necessary.

China, the ground-zero of the pandemic, has become one of the countries that has been swift in assisting Indonesia shortly after the Covid-19 virus infected the country. The Chinese government submitted its offer to Minister Prabowo for providing assistance to Indonesia in handling Covid-19 in mid-March 2020. It was reported that Prabowo established a personal and closer working relationship with his counterpart, General Wei Fenghe, the Chinese National Defense Minister. This sustaining relationship might occur since Prabowo's visit to Beijing in early December 2019, weeks before the first case of the virus was even discovered. At the time, Prabowo met General Wei and Deputy Chairman of the Central Military Commission, General Xu Qiliang (Yeremia, 2020). In this meeting, Prabowo provided several lists requested by China regarding what assistance needed to be given to Indonesia. On Monday, 22 March 2020, Indonesia received 8 tons of medical supplies in ventilators, oxygen concentrators, PCR tests, x-ray machines, and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) (Yeremia, 2020). Those aid was flown in from Shanghai using a Xiamen Airlines aircraft and landed at the Halim Perdanakusuma International Airport, East Jakarta

(Sutrisno, 2020).

After initial assistance in March 2020, China added more assistance to Indonesia in early June 2020. Not stopping here, China continued to distribute medical equipment supply to Indonesia on the principle of solidarity and responsibility. On Friday, 4 June 2020, Xiao Qian, the Chinese Ambassador to Indonesia, handed over several aids in the form of medical devices to the BNPB (Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana, the National Agency for Disaster Management), 100,090 PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction) test kits, 70,000 PPE (Personal Protective Equipment), 70,000 N-95 masks, and 1.3 million medical masks.

After China's aid for medical devices has gradually flowed to Indonesia, China has again offered to Indonesia and several other countries related to vaccine development. China has been aggressively developing Covid-19 vaccines since the beginning of the virus spreading. China has succeeded in developing several vaccines, which are Sinovac, developed by Sinovac Biotech Ltd., and Sinopharm, developed by the Beijing Institute of Biological Products. Indonesia purchases those two vaccines to deal with the Covid 19 pandemic. Not only that, Indonesia is also one of the countries that is used for the Phase III trial of the Sinovac vaccine. In this regard, China collaborates with Indonesia through Bio Farma to develop the Sinovac vaccine. Bio Farma imported raw materials to manufacture Sinovac, which will be formulated in Indonesia (CNN,2020). This shows that China has given Indonesia the confidence to be actively involved in efforts

to deal with the impact of the global pandemic.

The Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia website reported that until September 2021 Indonesia had received more than 243 million doses of Sinovac, both in the form of raw material and ready to use vaccine (Office of Assistant to Deputy Cabinet Secretary for State Documents & Translation, 2021). Besides Sinovac, Indonesia also imported Sinopharm, which Bio Farma also owns. What distinguishes it from Sinovac is that up until now Bio Farma is still getting Sinopharm in the form of a finished vaccine and still making efforts to get it in the form of raw materials like Sinovac. It is projected that Indonesia will continue to increase the import quota of vaccine raw materials to launch a national-wide vaccination program. That makes cooperation on vaccine imports very important for Indonesia and China, considering the urgency and significant funds in vaccine development cooperation.

China's Normative Interests in Providing Assistance to Indonesia in Handling the Covid-19

As discussed earlier, the normative interest generally relates to the solidarity aspect among countries in the Global South. China is part of the Global South and it has experienced rapid growth. China considers the assistance as part of the Global South solidarity, which reflects mutual benefit and non-intervention in domestic affairs. The assistance provided by China to Indonesia is seen as a form of solidarity and concern

for fellow southern countries (Antara News, 2021a).

With regard to solidarity, each subject needs to understand that they are "esteemed" by all citizens to the same degree. In a more significant way, solidarity could only be achieved if people learn more about unfamiliar subjects and become sensitive to their suffering (Wilde 2007). China has been consistently providing health assistance to answer humanitarian issues. None of this is new, considering that global public health is one of China's foreign policy elements. Since the pandemic hits, the inequality shows the inability of many countries, especially the least developed ones, to afford medical equipment. These countries, particularly in Africa, have weak public health systems. Therefore, any humanitarian aid could bring significant help for those in need.

Despite the competition between China and other major actors in the economic sector, it is important to put Covid-19 as a common enemy. Obviously, the pandemic exposes weaknesses and deficiencies for health security; it has been this way since several epidemics have hit many countries before. Solidarity could lead the international community to understand that mutual support would be more helpful than managing the pandemic single-handedly.

It should be noted that long before the assistance provided by China to Indonesia during this pandemic, the two sides had had good relations for a long time. In the context of the assistance and considering its position as part of the Global South, China also considers its longstanding relations with

Indonesia. Indonesia has cooperated for 70 years with China in various fields such as economy, education, and culture, and recently focused on health diplomacy in vaccine development. China-Indonesia cooperation related to vaccine development is also a form of China's involvement as part of the Global Health Governance actor.

China embraced Indonesia in cooperation in Sinovac and Sinopharm vaccine development. In this case, Indonesia through Bio Farma has also gained the trust to obtain raw materials from the Sinovac vaccine to facilitate the vaccination program that the Indonesian government is intensively carrying out. In addition, the vaccine quota given by China to Indonesia had been quite large compared to the number of vaccines from other countries, such as Moderna from the U.S. and AstraZeneca from the U.K. Normatively, the assistance provided by China to Indonesia reflects a sense of solidarity, so that the cooperation is horizontal and produces mutual benefits between them.

China's Material Interests in Providing Assistance to Indonesia in Handling the Covid-19

Material interests have a different point of view from normative interests. While normative interests focus on solidarity as the basis of cooperation, material interests demonstrate that cooperation is carried out by considering the existence of material values to be obtained. Regarding this, material interests emphasise economic interests as the main basis for cooperation between countries. Cooperation is the main consideration in conducting bilateral and multilateral co-

operation. Cooperation is seen to maximise profits—and this became one of the main reasons for China's assistance to Indonesia. This part of research would further explain how China and Indonesia built strong partnerships during the pandemic, from collaboration on providing Covid-19 vaccine for the public to expanding economic cooperation.

Vaccine Development. Material interests emphasise economic interests as the main basis for cooperation between countries; they consider the existence of material value. Material interests could manifest by obtaining China's vaccine as Indonesia has been hunting for the vaccines. In this regard, Indonesia welcomes the cooperation and any options that should mutually benefit. At the same time, China has actively worked to generate vaccines for Covid-19 virus since the beginning of the pandemic. Now, many Covid-19 vaccines have been given to the public. But, considering the strong relations between them, there seems to be a massive demand for China's vaccine to be delivered for Indonesian citizens. There are five vaccines that China developed: Sinopharm, CoronaVac, Sinopharm, Convidecia, and Anhui Zhifei (Mallapaty, 2021). The first two vaccines are the most reliable among them all. Now, China is considered as one of the lead actors in Covid-19 vaccine development.

The rapidity of the Covid-19 virus to spread is unpredictable, that is why the faster a vaccine is developed, the faster pandemic could be managed. Unfortunately, developing Covid-19 vaccine could take months, as other vaccine developments could. Hence, it

poses an unprecedented challenge for developers, regulators, and political constituencies (Excler et al., 2021). Not only speed, clinical development of vaccines also requires the safety and surveillance of virus variants – the latter is one of the current challenges the world is facing on now, not to mention the manufacturing and distribution mechanism.

Despite the maximum effort to develop vaccines, some researchers argue that a lack of transparency could lead the public to doubt vaccination. Moreover, mask wearing has been controversial for many at the beginning of the pandemic. We conclude this is what many experts would expect because not only physically, the pandemic also affects people in emotional and social ways. Since the pandemic is arguably everyone's first experience, the public might absorb information from anywhere, which determines how they would act in dealing with it, or whether they should be vaccinated. In this way, perhaps there is a need for any policy regulator to assure the public the importance of vaccines. Many experts estimate that to achieve herd immunity, a country needs to vaccinate 70-90% of its population (Wen et al., 2021). In conclusion, the vaccination rate could determine the vaccine's effectiveness.

Unfortunately, to manage pandemics, economic and security needs to be highly considered by each country and Indonesia. In its simplest form, bilateral efforts have been undertaken with pharmaceutical companies (Prakoso et al., 2020). Not only in a bilateral way, President Xi Jinping also urged countries to build cooperation to combat the pandemic through vaccines (Wang, 2021).

This is relevant to China's commitment to ensuring the Covid-19 vaccine is a global public good (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2021).

China-Indonesia Vaccine Cooperation.

Any foreign or domestic policies a country makes should meet its national interest. As the Covid-19 virus is spreading worldwide, there is one diplomatic priority of Indonesia as Minister of Foreign Affairs Retno Marsudi stated, which are specifically related to managing pandemics: building national self-reliance and resilience in health care (Wangke, 2021). The authors understand the importance of cooperation, since providing health security is one of the keys to a secure society.

In the case of the pandemic, achieving self-reliance and resilience lies in the proper strategy to prevent the worsening situation. Since the Indonesian government has been actively seeking partners on vaccines, they were finally in joint production of China's vaccine. It should be noted that cooperation in vaccine development is one of the material benefits for China. The collaboration was made since the Indonesian Embassy contacted Sinovac Biotech in March 2020 (Yeremia & Raditio, 2021). Since then, Sinovac cooperates with PT Bio Farma to conduct clinical trials and vaccine manufacturing. The cooperation sees that Bio Farma would carry out mass vaccine production. Plus, Indonesia would continue to require for additional quotas for Sinovac raw materials and seek Sinopharm to facilitate cooperation of vaccinations. This is important considering that

Western countries are also embracing Indonesia in the issue of vaccines, such as the United States with Moderna and the U.K. with AstraZeneca (Merdell, 2020).

In December 2020, 1.2 million doses of Covid-19 landed in Jakarta. Indonesian President Joko Widodo said that Indonesia is considered a success in receiving vaccines, considering a hundred other countries have not secured access for it yet. China gave a price for the vaccines of \$13.3 or around Rp192.000 per dose (with the exchange rate of Rp14,436 per US dollar). However, imports of Sinovac vaccines in raw materials cost \$10.9 or around Rp157.000. In other words, buying bulk vaccines is cheaper at around \$3 per dose (Bestari, 2021). The Indonesian government then considered making more efforts to produce its own vaccine. Besides being more efficient, Indonesia is also expected to get technology transfer if it produces its own vaccine (Bestari, 2021).

As of March 2021, China's Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi affirmed his country to prepare Indonesia as a hub for vaccine production for Southeast Asia. At that time, Indonesia had the highest Covid-19 infection in the region. Not only the strategic cooperation to expand partnership, in an interview conducted by Global Times, Indonesian Ambassador to China Djauhari Oratmangun told that it is trust and confidence which brings Sinovac to deliver its vaccine to Indonesia. We conclude the deepened political mutual trust has successfully strengthened both countries as comprehensive strategic partners. Moreover, President Widodo was the first person to re-

ceive Sinovac in Indonesia (Yuwei, 2021).

As the Indonesian government strongly encourages citizens to get vaccinated, many individuals or groups decide to get vaccinated independently. The Indonesian government is not the only one relying on the vaccine development cooperation with Sinovac as a part of Covax Facility multilateral cooperation with China (Office of Assistant to Deputy Cabinet Secretary for State Documents & Translation, 2021). The private sector, mainly business, is also helping the government to accelerate the inoculation by creating "Vaksinasi Gotong Royong" (VGR) (Bio Farma, 2021). According to Minister of Health Regulation No. 10 of 2021, those who can get the VGR include employees, families, and individuals related to the family of a legal or business entity, communities around the location of activities of the legal or business entity, and foreign citizens who are employees of the legal or business entity. However, this program uses a different vaccine from that used in government programs. While the government uses Sinovac and AstraZeneca, the VGR program uses a vaccine from Sinopharm. Sinopharm is one of Chinese vaccines which was declared safe by the Food and Drug Supervisory Agency (Badan Pengawasan Obat dan Makanan), alongside its halal certificate from the Indonesian Ulema Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia). Like Sinovac, Sinopharm is a part of the supply contract between Kimia Farma and Sinopharm in which they will provide 15 million doses as part of the VGR program. As of July 2021, there had been 7.5 million doses of Sinopharm vaccine re-

ceived by Indonesia (Antara News, 2021b).

China-Indonesia Cooperation during Pandemic. It should be noted that China and Indonesia have established diplomatic relations for more than 70 years. The two countries are now strategic partners. This strong partnership resulted in cooperation in trade and investment, resulting in Indonesia as China's main market among the Southeast Asia countries. Despite the difficulties both countries face due to the pandemic, it seems the Covid-19 vaccine is not the only public goods they are still concerned about. In addition to imports and exports, both countries also have other cooperation, such as the high-speed rail project, which is currently under construction and cooperation related to foreign investment. This assistance could be determined as an effort to sustain China's economy amid the huge role the Western countries, the United States in particular, play, which similarly strengthens their investment in Indonesia. In terms of economy, the rising competition between China and the United States often resulted in developing countries to 'pick a side' or finding themselves caught in the middle. Regardless, this assistance can be regarded as an attempt to maintain Indonesia as its major partner for profit-oriented cooperation. Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS) stated that in March 2022 Indonesia reached its record of imports, worth \$21.97 billion. Of this amount, \$15.79 billion came from China as the exporter of non-oil commodities and gas. This shows that China targeted Indonesia as a major partner to gain economic

profit. (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2022).

This is also what is considered as China's motivation in assisting Indonesia during this tough situation. Despite these falling circumstances, as the pandemic started in 2020, Indonesia's exports increased in that year, compared to its value of exports in 2019. As reported by the Chinese Customs, Indonesia's trade with China accounted for \$78.5 billion (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2021). For Indonesia, China ranks as the second largest foreign investor with its investment reaching \$4.8 billion in 2021.

Realistically, any country would face both opportunity and challenges that need to be overcome due to the pandemic, so are Indonesia and China. In this way, Ambassador Oratmangun said that Indonesia-China cooperation, especially in 2021, would focus on many commitments after signed agreements, such as Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) (Yuwei, 2021).

Despite the pandemic complicating countries in many aspects, Sino-Indonesian relations had seen the inaugural meeting of the high-level dialogue cooperation mechanism on 5 June 2021 (Xinhua, 2021). Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan represented Indonesia as President's special envoy and Indonesia's coordinator for cooperation with China. Wang Yi, the Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister, represented the Chinese side. Both sides decide to develop long-term goals focusing on political security, trade and investment, people-to-people and cultural exchanges, maritime cooperation, anti-epidemic, and public health cooperation. From

this meeting, we can argue that both parties have realised the importance of the partnership to increase and expand ties between them. Investment is still growing, with China becoming the second largest investor in Indonesia (Rakhmat & Pashya, 2020). There are so many agreements both countries have achieved, such as using both yuan and rupiah in investment and trade transactions between them (Rakhmat, 2020). The agreement would minimise both China and Indonesia's dependence on the American dollar as the current world's main currency.

Furthermore, President Xi also conveyed economic interests directly to President Widodo regarding various matters, namely economic cooperation, which must still be maintained during the pandemic and planning for long-term diplomatic cooperation between the two countries (Pinandita, 2020). According to Rakhmat (2021), Indonesia's total bilateral trade with China already reached \$53.5 billion in the first half of 2021, a 50.3 percent increase over the same period last year. Indonesia's exports to China were recorded at \$26.2 billion, a 51.4 percent increase, while imports from China were recorded at \$27.3 billion, a 49.3 percent increase. In addition, the two countries agreed to expand infrastructure and maritime projects, with a particular emphasis on Indonesia's less developed eastern islands. Jakarta stated that its relations with Beijing are guided by a commitment and a joint effort to improve all sectors post-pandemic (Rakhmat, 2021).

Conclusion

The assistance provided by China to Indonesia in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic has two interests, namely normative interests and material interests. Even though normative interests are still frequently mentioned, material interests are the most apparent reason China maintains its relations with Indonesia. Although China has maintained the aid as solidarity among southern countries, it also has material interests in conducting vaccine development and economic cooperation. The assistance provided by China to Indonesia and other countries is also a form of China's efforts to improve its image due to various stigmas and conspiracies related to Covid-19. In other words, the authors underlie that the major reason for China assisting Indonesia in handling the pandemic is the material interests. Although China continues to voice normative reasons regarding its actions, economic interests remain the main motive.

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