

# The Shifting Characteristics of Chinese Foreign Aid in COVID-19 Pandemic 2020–2021

Aswin A. Azis and Jeffaya A. Basen

## ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has significant effects on China's foreign aid practice. In response to the pandemic, China seeks to diversify their foreign aid approach by including vaccines into their foreign aid package. China also seeks to improve their national image among other countries, which has been tarnished by the COVID-19 pandemic. The addition of vaccines and medical equipment to China's foreign aid repertoire and the changes present in the third foreign aid white paper may indicate possible shifts in China's foreign aid characteristics. This may present a significant departure from previous practices of China's foreign aid that focused on building economic capacity of recipient states and being more 'business-oriented' than their western counterpart. Thus, this study aims to explain through qualitative means the shifting characteristics that occur within China's aid in response to the present global challenges caused by COVID-19.

**Keywords:** China, COVID-19, foreign aid.

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**A. A. Azis\***

Department of International Relations,  
Universitas Brawijaya, Indonesia  
(e-mail: a.azis@ub.ac.id)

**J. A. Basen**

Department of International Relations,  
Universitas Brawijaya, Indonesia  
(e-mail: bidibasen@gmail.com)

\*Corresponding Author

## I. INTRODUCTION

China's foreign aid is always characterized by its pragmatic approach to recipient countries and independence from multilateral framework. It's also defined differently from conventional or "western" definition on foreign aid as provided by the OECD, being more business and result-oriented than western donors. A commonly cited example of Chinese foreign aid and its perceived success was the case of Zimbabwe, where they were successful in stabilizing the state economy and provided the means of recovery through controlled provision of economic aid (Carter, 2017, pp. 1–15).

A notable trait in Chinese foreign aid is that grants are not the primary tool as in western donors. Instead, Chinese aid prioritizes infrastructure and education in the recipient state, as proven by their heavy investment in infrastructure and large provision of technical teams (Carter, 2017, p 7). Loans are also provided, which may or may not conform to OECD's aid criteria. China rarely utilizes multilateral aid framework such as the World Bank and the IMF, instead opting for a more practical bilateral aid (Copper, 2016, pp. 14–16). These were the defining traits of China's aid before the pandemic.

The failure to contain COVID-19 in China and its global spread has made foreign aid more important to China. China's national image was tarnished, and the majority of the world blamed China for failing to contain the outbreak (Silver, *et al.*, 2021). The United States, in particular, was outspokenly critical of China's failure. Other than the national image being at stake, the pandemic also threatened developing states which had insufficient health facilities to contain the outbreak. These conditions have made foreign aid especially important to restore the national image and fight the global pandemic.

China began sending pandemic related aid in March 2020 following Xi Jinping's declaration to help nations fight the new virus in January 2020 (Budi, 2020). These were delivered in quantity to countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe. A major breakthrough was noted in late 2020 with the roll-out of Sinovac, the world's first moderately effective vaccine to be produced in quantity (Global Times, 2021). Due to this, developing states in Asia, Africa, and Latin America began inching closer to receive China's aid, especially its COVID vaccines.

By 2021, it's clear to the decision makers in Beijing that their previous foreign aid white paper in 2014 was insufficient to deal with the new global challenge. A new 2021 revised version was written with an emphasis on humanitarian aid to deal with the pandemic. Additional focus was added to improve China's global image and contribution to the global efforts in preventing COVID-19 (CIDCA, 2021). All these imply a shift in China's aid characteristics which will be explored extensively in this study.

## II. THEORY

The first step into this study is to determine the definition of ‘foreign aid’. Foreign aid is defined by OECD as “government aid that promotes and specifically targets the economic development and welfare of developing states” (OCED, 2022). However, this definition sets aside aid that is sent to developed countries and limits the classification of aid into both economic and humanitarian aid, which may not suffice to analyze China’s ‘corporate-like’ aid programs. Instead, for this study, the author decides that the definition as set by Carol Lancaster in *Foreign Aid: Diplomacy, Development, and Domestic Politics* to be used as the primary reference to what can be classified as aid.

Lancaster defines aid as a “transfer of resources from state to recipient states”. This transfer of resources can only be classified as aid based on the criteria below (Lancaster, 2008, p. 9):

- 1) Aid must be in the form of public resources (in the forms of financial aid, concessional loans, material aid, and debt relief measures).
- 2) Such transfer of resources must be composed of at least 25% grants.
- 3) The purpose of aid must be to better societal conditions in recipient countries.

The author uses Lancaster’s Aid Theory to provide explanation on the characteristics of Chinese aid and the changes that may occur due to China’s pivotal role in COVID-19 pandemic. Lancaster’s Aid Theory focuses on the traits of a state’s aid and changes that occur following a shift of interest, either foreign or domestic. Lancaster’s Aid Theory is comprised of several aspects.

- 1) Ideas.
- 2) Institution.
- 3) Interest.
- 4) Organization.

The ideas aspect refers to the state and society’s perspective on aid. Lancaster provides an example of shifting ideas on foreign aid in the Nordic countries, where business-oriented aid shifts to humanitarian and generous economic aid they provide today. This shift stems from the Nordics’ economic growth in the late 70s and 80s which turns them into developed states. Still, there’s limitation on the idea interpretation particularly on the ‘shifts’, as Lancaster only elaborated the general idea shift from “commercial” to a genuine humanitarian-based aid in the Nordic states. Due to this, Therien’s foreign aid theory on the split of aid thought between the Left (non-commercial aid) and the Right (more diverse/commercial forms of aid) is used to help highlight the shifts that may occur (Thérien, 2022, pp. 449–466).

Institution aspect explains the state’s domestic politics and how it affects foreign aid to other states (Lancaster, 2008, p. 19). Lancaster provides an example in the United States; how different Republican and Democrat governance manages USAID. However, as China is the subject of this study, domestic politics may not have the same ‘pull’ as in the US due to China being a one-party state. Institution also explores further China’s involvement in multilateral aid both international and domestic led.

Interest is the state’s interest in providing aid to recipient states. Interest can be national and domestic, taking into account the participation of private sectors in foreign aid Lancaster, 2008, p. 17). Lancaster had explained about Japan’s foreign aid and how private sectors participate. When there’s no prospect of profit, private sectors will shift away from taking part in the state’s foreign aid unless under government contract as happened in Japan. In China, private sectors are involved in foreign aid, the extent of which will be explored in the study.

Organization refers to how the state organizes their foreign aid Lancaster, 2008, p. 22). If there’s any specific national aid organization that handles the state’s foreign aid, and if there’s any involvement of non-state organization in sending aid abroad. For example, CIDCA or (China International Development Cooperation Agency) is the premier Chinese aid organization that handles bilateral aid between China and recipient states (Leah Lynch, et al., 2020, pp. 1–16).

The use of Lancaster’s Aid Theory will complement this study on identifying shifting characteristics of Chinese aid in the COVID-19 pandemic.

## III. METHOD

The method of this study is based on Lancaster’s analysis of a state’s foreign aid characteristics and the changes that occurred throughout a certain time period. An example of which is a shift of interest that was shown within Lancaster’s book in an analysis on Japan’s interests within their foreign aid program. Pre-1980s, Japan had private ventures’ involved in their foreign aid program, which was represented by METI, a powerful ministry on economy, trade, and industry (Lancaster. 2008, p. 133). However, post-1980 years saw a decline of Japan’s private ventures involvement in their foreign aid program due to a perceived lack of opportunity to win contracts related to their aid programs overseas.

Thus, the research method of this study is qualitative-descriptive method. Qualitative research refers to the use of China’s government data to provide qualitative analysis on China’s aid characteristics (Creswell

& Creswell, 2018, pp. 24–29). This study also uses descriptive research since it is set on providing changes or shifts to China's aid characteristics from 2020 to 2021. While primary data sources rely on China's official government data, which if found to be lacking, will be replaced by reliable estimate by scholars and other government or international agencies.

#### IV. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The study will devolve into exploration of four main characteristics of Chinese aid per Lancaster's Aid Theory: ideas, institution, interest, and organization. The primary objective is to describe the shifts that occur following the pandemic and the third edition of Chinese aid white paper.

##### A. Ideas

China's idea on foreign aid has been through various changes since their formation in 1949. Starting from a communist and generous outlook on aid as Mao Zedong had envisioned, to investment-like, business-oriented aid they have become today. Chinese aid in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has evolved to focus on the recipient state's infrastructure and education through loans and technical missions. The general idea adopted by the Central Committee towards recipient state is to *'teach a man how to fish'*, providing the basic means for an independent economy to become a trade partner of China (China's Foreign Aid 2014, pp. 1–14). This is shown through their Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), where China builds countless ports, highways, and other infrastructure in other states to help facilitate more intensive trade relationship.

Though this idea has attracted criticism from western observers as it deviates from the standard OECD definition of aid (particularly on the part where aid has to be free from any business orientation), China's aid has one trait which makes it especially attractive to developing states. This trait is the Chinese policy of non-domestic interference, which is indicated in the following:

*"Imposing no political conditions – China upholds the five principles of peaceful co-existence, respects recipient countries' right to independently select their own path and model for development and believes that every country should explore a development path suitable to its actual conditions. China never uses foreign aid as a means to interfere in recipient countries' internal affairs or seek political privileges for itself"* (Chinese aid white paper, 2014, pp. 1–14).

These are all the pinnacles of Chinese aid idea in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, conforming to the rising status of China to an economic superpower. However, China still describes itself as a developing state, and the aid that China gives is 'south to south aid framework', where China gives aid to fellow developing states (China's Foreign Aid 2014, p. 6). In essence, China views aid as a tool to build trade relationship with recipient states, where infrastructure plays a key part in ensuring a smooth trade route with China.

The COVID pandemic brings new challenges to China, especially as China needs to improve their national image, tarnished by their failure to contain the virus. Moreover, the pandemic presents a threat to the global society, which makes it vulnerable to recession that impedes China's trade goals. Decision makers in Beijing turn into aid as one tool that may 'kill two birds with one stone' by improving China's national image and demonstrate Chinese goodwill in fighting the pandemic.

While medical aid is of one of the most important for developing states to build adequate medical infrastructure against the pandemic, the desperate need for vaccines makes vaccines the most important aid available. The PRC was successful in creating the world's first effective vaccine to be mass produced, indicated by their production and use in December 2020. From then, vaccines became an integral part of Chinese aid to other struggling states, as seen in the following Table I.

China's 2021 white paper has a clause which specifies the importance of humanitarian age in a new age.

*"Doing all we can to support developing countries in the fight against Covid-19. China will continue to offer medical supplies to all parties concerned, engage in cooperation on medical technologies, and dispatch medical expert teams. We will give US\$2 billion of international aid over two years to countries hard hit by Covid-19, especially developing countries, in supporting their fight against the virus and their efforts to resume economic and social development. China will continue to share without reserve information and experiences with the WHO and the international community and engage in international cooperation on the research and development of testing methods, clinical treatments, drugs and vaccines to stem the global spread of the virus as soon as possible and safeguard global public health"* (The State Council of People's Republic of China, 2021, pp. 1–49).

TABLE I: 2020–2021 DATA ON CHINA’S VACCINE AID\*

States	Vaccines Aid	Medical Aid	Notes
Indonesia	2.2 million doses (PRC Embassy in Indonesia) +	120 ventilators, 400 + oxygen generators, and “others” relevant medical supplies (PRC Embassy in Indonesia)	Sinovac, Sinopharm vaccine types.
Zimbabwe	2 million initial vaccine doses 12 million doses (pledged by PRC’s MOFA)	12 medical experts and volunteers (sent in 2020) “various” amounts of ventilators, blood oxygen saturation monitors, electrocardiographs, oxygen machines, and “others” relevant supplies (Huaxia, 2020)	40% are Sinovac, while the rest is Sinopharm.
Angola	200.000 initial doses of Sinovac vaccines (as per March 2021) 3.5 million doses (Bridge Consulting, 2022), (per November 2021)	10 medical experts arrived in October 2020 (Covid-19: Chinese Experts Depart for Zimbabwe). More than two tons of medical equipment, including 10+ ventilators, 3.700 biosafety suits, and 100.000 medical masks (Angola: Covid-19 - Angola Receives Two Tons of Medical Supplies from China).	Additional details include the pledge of more medical experts, vaccines donation, and equipment to be sent to Angola.
Cuba	250.000 initial doses of vaccines.	“shipment” of respirators in August 2021, 24 tons of medical supplies, including oxygen machines, antigen tests, masks, ventilators, and monitors. 30 pulmonary ventilators and 150 oxygen concentrators. More than 102.000 syringes (Malmierca, 2021)	Cuba doesn’t rely on Chinese vaccine due availability of homegrown vaccines; medical supplies and various other medical assistances are delivered.
Africa	54 million doses plus 2.4 million doses as pledges	4 million tons of medical supplies donated globally (CIDCA, 2021).	All figures count from both bilateral and multilateral aid frameworks devised by the PRC
Asia	90 million doses donated		

\*All figures within this table strictly adhere to the definition of foreign aid used in this study. Hence, vaccines acquired through means of trade other than direct foreign aid are not included.

These vaccines are a crucial part to the shift of Chinese ideas on foreign aid. As noted in previous Chinese aid, most of aid sent by China to other states was in form of infrastructure, loans, and debt forgiveness. This was in line with China’s aid idea to build recipient state’s economic infrastructure to make them capable trade partners. Yet this was affected by the pandemic, which transposed the need for infrastructure to a more immediate measure against the virus, vaccines.

The inclusion of extensive material aid (vaccines, medical supplies) is new in Chinese aid history until the current pandemic. Usually, material aid was set aside in favor of more ‘profitable’ aid like infrastructure and loans to the recipient states and China, consistent to the Right proposition of aid (per Therien’s theory) (Thérien, 2002, pp. 449–466). The mass use of material aid (in this case, vaccines, and medical equipment) in China’s aid presents a shift to the more ‘generous’ Left aid proposition (Thérien, 2002, p. 12). This apparent shift is supported by Chinese white paper which states the importance of humanitarian aid ‘in facing new global challenges.

Chinese media is also active in presenting these vaccines as ‘aid’, contrary to the usual ‘investment’ term when addressing the domestic public. The term ‘investment’ was used to designate aid in order to avoid connotation of ‘wasting money on foreign countries’ among the domestic press (Copper, 2016, p. 21). This shift of narrative further explains how the Chinese public (and CCP) see China’s expanding role in global affairs, where their aid currently plays an important part to resist the pandemic.

### B. Institution

Government institution refers to state government entities that help China in completing their foreign aid policies. As stated earlier, China’s approach on aid differs from Western aid providers due to China’s preference for technical assistance and loans. In doing so, China utilizes a vast array of government institutions such as MOFCOM, CIDCA, and the MFA along with other ministers.

Managing China’s aid is complicated as these ministers’ compliment and accommodate each other in

providing aid to recipient states. To start, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were originally tasked with overseeing China’s aid since Mao Zedong’s rule (Kilby, 2017, pp. 11–14). In doing so, the MFA utilized aid as another diplomatic means in solidifying China’s relations with the recipient state and reflect the general thought of aid in that period as a means to strengthen China’s image and relations with the ‘Global South’, regardless of how dire the domestic situation was. Figure I below is the drawn illustration on the complexities of China’s bureaucracy in handling the pandemic.

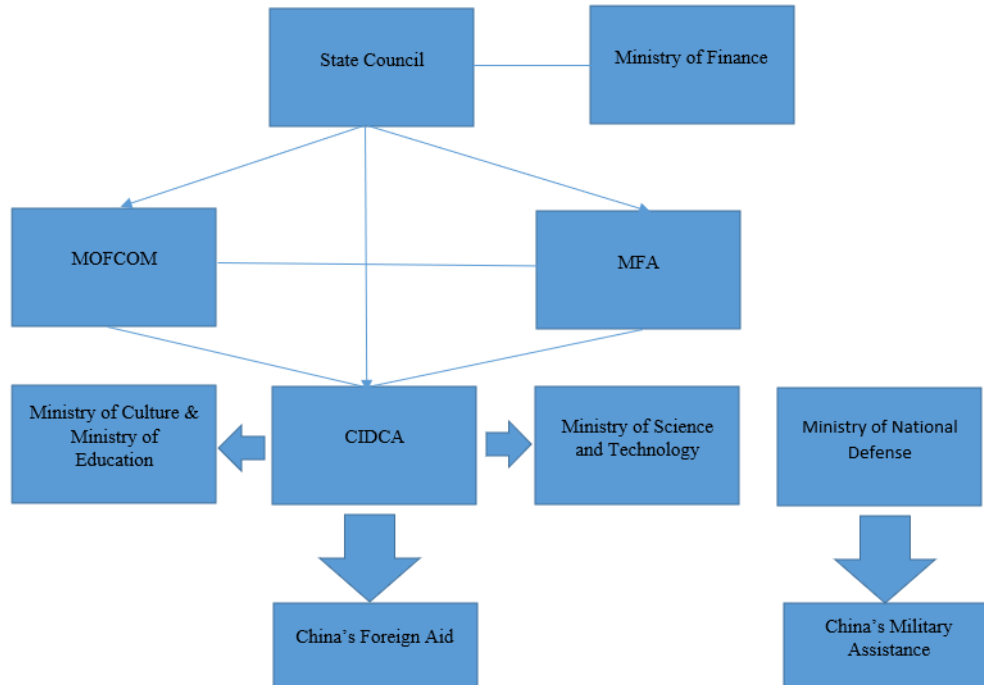


Fig. 1. Illustrated aid institutions-China.

\*Lines represent influence and coordination between various ministries in administering China’s aid.

As noted in Fig. 1, China’s aid institutions have experienced shifts and creation of new ministries which complicate bureaucratic process.

China’s one-party politics and complete state control over domestic affairs have also caused minimal changes to the state’s aid institution. CIDCA, China’s sole aid agency, has seen an expansion of responsibilities in 2021 in response to China’s renewed policies on humanitarian aid. The indicator of which is seen through an apparent increase of administrative budget allocated to CIDCA as shown in Table II below.

TABLE II: CHINESE GENERAL PUBLIC BUDGET FOR CIDCA 2020–2021

2020	RMB 102,402,300 million
2021	RMB 121,534,800 million

Source: 国家国际发展合作署2021 年部门预算 (2021 Sectoral Budget of the National International Development Cooperation Agency).

While previous years saw MOFCOM’s heavy influence on CIDCA’s policies (as MOFCOM was responsible for Chinese aid before CIDCA), the placement of Wang Yi (replacing Zhong Shan, minister of MOFCOM) as CIDCA’s supervisory figure means that CIDCA is now heavily influenced by China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is also under the control of Councilor Yi. As a result, CIDCA’s activities in 2021 is coordinated with the MFA in delivering aid and supplies to other states. CIDCA activities becomes more in line with MFA than MOFCOM as Chinese aid, particularly vaccine and medical-related aid, becomes increasingly an integral part of China’s diplomacy on recipient states and other developing states.

On the matter of multilateral aid, China doesn’t see multilateral aid as important as bilateral aid. According to their perspective, multilateral aid championed by OECD and IFAD has failed in many poor countries since they’re simply not controlled, which left aid money vulnerable to corruption. For example, in Central African Republic, aid money funneled there by the IMF and OECD states did not create stability nor development but plunged the nation deep into corruption. Even in 2020-2021, Chinese contribution to

the World Bank is three times smaller than the US (at 5 percent voting share). Added to this is the fact that Chinese contribution (financial) to international development groups is at 7 percent per year since 2015.

On the contrary, China also has their own development bank which provides development aid in a multilateral framework to developing states, namely the Asian Investment Infrastructure Bank (AIIB). Most of their multilateral aid are funneled through AIIB, which provides a degree of control to China. This remains the same throughout 2021.

Another interesting note, despite China's rather minuscule involvement in financial multilateral aid, the pandemic has expanded China's role in providing vaccines to multilateral aid organizations. This is shown in COVAX data below in Table III.

TABLE III: COVAX VACCINES CONTRIBUTION BY STATE

State	Quantity
United States	318.8 million doses
China	93.12 million Doses
Germany	85.36 million Doses
France	46.56 million Doses
Total Vaccines (per COVAX)	776 million Doses

Source: Globalization and Health.

Chinese contribution to COVAX is second only to the United States, whereas traditionally they avoid contributing much to multilateral aid. Adding to this is their pledge to contribute at least 2 million USD to the WHO to help fight against the pandemic, which signals a willingness of Chinese decision makers to openly participate in multilateral aid efforts, in contrast to previous years.

### C. Interest

The pandemic had a significant effect in eroding China's national reputation worldwide. The perceived failure to contain the Pandemic led to a decrease in international confidence on Beijing in Europe, Asia, and America, especially among China's major trade partners. In addition, China's 'wolf warrior diplomacy' failed to gain any support from Europe and the United States, serving to only increase anti-China rhetoric and perception. As indicated by a Pew Research article on October 2020, the majority of European states holds ~70% unfavorable perception on China.

Adapting to these challenges, China sought to improve their global image through direct means to combat the pandemic. Vaccines and medical supplies are sent as aid to countries affected by the pandemic in Asia, Africa, America, and Europe. Especially in Africa, China's medical aid was met with favorable reactions as the countries there were not prioritized by Europe and the United States.

With vaccines, China's aid became a powerful tool. As United States and Europe struggled to produce and develop vaccines by December 2020, China's vaccines were effective enough to be used and this attracted many states to receive China's promised vaccine aid. This vaccine aid also significantly improved China's relations with states in Asia, Oceania, Latin America, and Africa. By the end of 2021, China has sent over 200 million doses as aid to mainly developing states globally, an action that is in line with China's need to improve their national image.

China's vaccine aid was also significant enough to influence the cross-strait diplomatic rivalry between China and Republic of China (Taiwan). China's interest on this rivalry is to diplomatically isolate Taiwan and pressure their terms of national unification (per PRC's One China Policy). Aid for both China and Taiwan were used to coerce and shift diplomatic recognition from the Pacific and Latin American states. Taiwan recently forwarded their 'New Southbound Policy', aiming to nullify the quantity advantage of China by focusing on education, culture, and shared technology with Southern Asian and American states.

The pandemic and global need for vaccines is a game changer for China-Taiwan diplomatic rivalry. States that recognize Taiwan (Honduras, Nicaragua, Belize, and Guatemala) are facing domestic pressure to obtain vaccines for their population, while American and Pacific Island states enjoy relative ease in obtaining vaccines from China's stocks. This pressure was levied on Taiwan, since they're unable to produce vaccines and only have limited stocks given by the US. As a result, Nicaragua renounced their recognition of Taiwan in December 2021 in favor of China, which represents a major success to China's One China Policy.

Aside from national interests, domestic interests are also a factor among corporations involved in China's aid. Contracting companies involved in Chinese foreign aid such as China Communications Construction Group (CCCC), China Railway Construction Company, China Railway Group, and China Energy Engineering Corporations, were involved the most in infrastructure projects and technical missions, especially in the fields of construction and energy on China's aid recipient states. The interests of participating companies in China's aid are purely business and profit driven.

Still, participating companies must be contracted by MOFCOM (Ministry of Commerce), which supervises CIDCA's operational budget. This presents a prime opportunity when the pandemic hit and

there's a high demand of medical equipment and vaccines worldwide. China's biotech industry, which couldn't compete directly with the West due to their relatively 'unproven' product quality, began to show their capacity.

Their involvement in China's medical and vaccine aid significantly affects their profit, which is seen through the Table IV below.

TABLE IV: REVENUE OF CHINESE BIOTECH COMPANIES 2019–2021

Chinese Biotech Industry Clean Revenue	2019	2020	2021
Sinopharm	67 billion USD	72.7 billion USD	77.2 billion USD
Sinovac Biotech Ltd.	246 million USD	510 million USD	10.2 billion USD
Walvax Biotech Co.	17.6 million USD	45.98 million USD	54.6 million USD
CanSino Biologics	970 thousand USD	Not available	26.6 million USD

Source: WSJ report and Sinovac annual financial report.

Additionally, Table V below showcases the reported increase of exported materials following exposure to the international market after their heavy involvement in China's aid.

TABLE V: CHINA'S MEDICAL MATERIALS EXPORT 2020–2021

Products	Primary Manufacturers	Exported Quantity	
		2020	2021
COVID-19 vaccines	Sinopharm/Sinovac Biotech	400 million doses	1.76 billion doses
Pharmacy Products	Sinopharm/Walvax/ CanSino/Sinovac	2.5 billion USD (Approx Value)	5.1 billion USD (Approx Value)
Medical and surgical masks	Walvax/Sinopharm and various others	224+ Billion units	(not specified)
PPE	Sinopharm and various others	779 million units	(Not specified)

Note: Pharmacy products are other medical products besides COVID-19 vaccines that have been exported during the time period.  
Source: to be written.

For China's biotech industry, exposure is the most important gain from their involvement in China's aid to other states. Exposure leads to more product credibility, which could open markets in other states. Another advantage is that Chinese biotech products are relatively cheaper than their western counterparts, which with some exposure and product credibility could compete with western biotech industry. Thus, it's the interest of China's biotech industry to participate in China's aid following China's hard shift to vaccine and medical based aid.

#### D. Organization

Organization within Lancaster's foreign aid theory comprises of the agencies that are responsible for foreign aid of a state. Organization examines the nature of CIDCA, its relations with both the MFA and MOFCOM, its expanding role as China's sole aid agency, and the involvement of other organizations, most notably China's domestic non-government organization, in China's foreign aid.

The creation of CIDCA in early 2018 had been said to be the prime notion of a new era of China's aid policy. Prior to this, foreign aid was coordinated by both MOFCOM and the MFA. CIDCA, on the day of its formation, was intended to be an independent aid agency whose responsibility is to the Communist Party and the State Council. However, as seen in the institution factor, there have been back and forth cycle of influence over CIDCA in the few years since its creation.

Other than influence, CIDCA's responsibility as China's sole foreign aid organization has expanded in recent years. CIDCA's operational capacity, although more influenced by the MFA than MOFCOM due to China's vaccine aid, has allowed it to act independently from both MFA and MOFCOM. In spite of being independent operationally, they're still dependent on MFA on executing their foreign aid program and MOFCOM on their budgeting allocation.

Superficially, there's no change of characteristics of the organization factor, as in the formation of new agencies, from 2020 to 2021 in China's aid organization, aside from their expanding responsibilities as noted in the institution factor. Despite such, there's a steady increase of local NGO participation in China's aid recipient states following China's focus on humanitarian aid after the pandemic in 2021. Before the pandemic, local NGO did participate at a lower priority as higher priority was put on contracting companies due to China's prior aid focus on recipient state's infrastructure.

These NGOs comprise of hospitals, unions, and students which participate in technical missions as part of China's foreign aid. Additional emphasis on NGO participation and partnership with CIDCA was also put on the 2021 white paper, which indicates China's growing commitment to include NGOs in their foreign aid. An example of which is the new finance mechanism within the South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund (SSCAF), whose 3+ billion dollars commitment is devolved to include SMEs (Small to Medium enterprises) and domestic social organizations including domestic NGOs.

In particular, NGOs that specialize in humanitarian assistance have increased their participation. Due to China's diverse terrain and high number of natural disasters per year, China has a large number of domestic humanitarian NGOs already operational when the pandemic hit. Hence, these NGOs expanded their operations through partnership with CIDCA to recipient states in curb the pandemic. Several of these NGOs are listed as follows; China Charity Federation (or CCF), China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation (CFPA), and China Medical Board (CMB). The exemplary list for the current participating NGOs in China's foreign aid program abroad in 2021 can be seen in Table VI below.

TABLE VI: STATUS OF CHINESE NGO OPERATIONS IN FOREIGN AID PROGRAMS

China's NGOs in foreign aid	Specialization	Operations
China Charity Federation	Donations/Humanitarian	Active
China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation	Development	Active
China Medical Board	Medical/Humanitarian	Active
Free Lunch International	Food/Humanitarian	Active
Dream of Building Service Organization	Humanitarian	Active
Peaceland Foundation	Humanitarian	Active
Red Cross Society of China	Medical/Humanitarian	Active
The Global Environment Institute	Environment Preservation	Active
Total NGOs	130 active; 51 specializing in medical humanitarian assistance, 34 in infrastructure building, 22 in specialized medical care, and the rest were volunteer and other technical training endeavours.	-

The effect of the third white paper on NGOs' participation in Chinese foreign aid program can be seen in the list above, which saw an increase of humanitarian and medical based NGOs to take part in China's foreign aid abroad—to the extent that they form the majority of Chinese NGOs in recipient states. Previously, most participating NGOs were just an extension of the Chinese government's authority through China NGO Network for International Exchanges, which also coordinates China's NGOs practice with other international NGOs. Additionally, all Chinese NGOs were required to be licensed by China's Ministry of Civil Affairs to be considered operational by the government.

Still, NGOs in China's foreign aid face considerable difficulty in their activities abroad. Despite the more open and supportive stance the State Council has taken on domestic NGOs' participation in their foreign aid, the white paper is yet to address the budgeting and incentive problems that plague Chinese NGOs, which in effect limit their outreach compared to western backed NGOs in accomplishing their goals. Most NGOs struggle to pay for their operating upkeep as the funds designated were often not enough in facing the difficulties on the ground. As a result, although participation has skyrocketed compared to previous years especially among humanitarian NGOs, their influence is considerably more limited in recipient states vis-à-vis western NGOs of the same caliber.

These conclude the changes within the organization factor. Although superficial changes did not happen before and after the pandemic (relating to the structure of CIDCA), there have been several noteworthy shifts, most notably the pledge to increase of NGO participation in China's foreign aid. It's likely that after the end of the pandemic NGO participation in China's aid to other countries may continue to increase as affirmed in the 2021 third white paper of China's foreign aid.

## V. CONCLUSION

From all the aspects of Lancaster's foreign aid characteristics theory, China's foreign aid has experienced shifts in its characteristics following the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, the scale of shifts, as seen in previous elaboration, differs among factors as some may be affected more than the others. In particular, ideas and interest experience greater shifts compared to institutions and organizations. Institution and organization did experience changes in terms of power shift and influence, wherein MFA begins to influence CIDCA more after the pandemic and China being more inclined to get involved in multilateral aid efforts, while organization sees the increase of state supported participation of China's domestic NGOs in China's aid.

Ideas aspect sees greater participation of material aid within China's foreign aid program, especially vaccine and medical aid to fight the pandemic, as signs of shift to the more 'left' in Therien's aid spectrum. Additional input also includes the new chapter provision of humanitarian aid and commitment to international cause in their 2021 white paper, which strengthens the argument of ideas shift in China's foreign aid.

In the interest aspect, there are state and corporate interests in supporting China's recent endeavor in humanitarian aid. State interest refers to the need for China to recover their image due to their failure to contain the virus. Vaccine aid highlights their willingness to help other states fighting against the pandemic.



While the interest of China's domestic biotech industry to expand which, prior to the pandemic, struggled against their western counterparts. Material aid, primarily vaccine and medical aid, helped the industry to gain international exposure for their vaccines, efficacy, and high technology at a lower cost. China's biotech industry has much to gain from China's shift to humanitarian aid during the pandemic.

Concluding this study, China's aid characteristics see shifts after the pandemic. As indicated in the other aid donors' shift, in particular the Nordics, these changes may be permanent as affirmed in the 2021 white paper. However, additional research must be conducted on the characteristics of China's aid beyond the pandemic in order to fully understand whether recent shifts are permanent or were made in response to a global crisis and the need to recover China's national image.

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#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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