

**ORIGINAL ARTICLE**



# Evaluating China's Vaccine Diplomacy in ASEAN

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## Abstract

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, vaccine diplomacy has emerged as a pivotal strategy for nations to advance their diplomatic agendas and address global health challenges. Current discussions on the topic of vaccine diplomacy in the field of international relations tend to focus on analyses related to geopolitics, credibility concerns and strategic economic interests. This study evaluates the efficacy of China's vaccine diplomacy within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in promoting China's international image and strengthening bilateral relations. Research shows that there is an overall positive correlation between China's vaccine supply and the increase in ASEAN countries' favorability towards China. However, this correlation is not always consistent across all bilateral relationships. While China's vaccine diplomacy has improved relations with some ASEAN countries, its overall effectiveness has been uneven and limited by contextual factors. Therefore, China's vaccine diplomacy in the context of ASEAN can only be regarded as a partial success. This study contributes to a broader understanding of international cooperation and health diplomacy by demonstrating that vaccine diplomacy is a multifaceted tool that has different impacts on country image-building and diplomatic relations.

**Keywords:** Vaccine diplomacy, China, ASEAN, National image

## Introduction

Due to the outbreak of the epidemic, vaccine diplomacy has gained prominence and has attracted attention from all walks of life. Hotez defines vaccine diplomacy as “roughly referring to simultaneous scientific and diplomatic opportunities between nations, with an overriding objective to jointly develop and test vaccines as a means to promote health” (Hotez, 2014). As nations grapple with these impacts, vaccine diplomacy has been heralded as a conduit for fostering international solidarity, enhancing public health resilience, and engendering peaceful cooperation in crisis response (Kobierecka, 2022; Liu et al., 2022; Srinivas, 2021). The ramifications of this pandemic have eclipsed those of antecedent economic downturns, exerting far-reaching and deleterious effects on a global scale (Cassidy, 2020; Karabag, 2020). The unforeseen public health crises have posed substantial challenges to economic stability, governance, societal health, and the broader geopolitical fabric (Moon, 2020). Therefore, the efficacy of vaccine

diplomacy in mending bilateral relations and bolstering the international standing of the donor nation is a matter of ongoing debate and scholarly contemplation.

Across the globe, numerous nations are engaging in vaccine diplomacy, leveraging the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines to forge and strengthen international relations. Russia's provision of vaccines to Italy exemplifies this diplomatic strategy, bolstering Russia's international image as a pivotal player in global health (Giusti & Ambrosetti, 2023). Despite these efforts, it is contended that such diplomatic overtures by Russia have not fundamentally alleviated the vaccine scarcity in the recipient countries (Kier & Stronski, 2021). Concurrently, India, with its reputation as a significant vaccine manufacturing hub, has proactively contributed substantial vaccine supplies to the international community, reflecting its commitment to vaccine diplomacy (Bharti & Bharti, 2021; Sharun & Dhama, 2021). This prompts the question: Has China, identified

as the origin of the COVID-19 outbreak, initiated its own brand of vaccine diplomacy, and if so, how has it been operationalized?

A declaration from the Chinese government's official portal asserts that President Xi Jinping is dedicated to disseminating China's accumulated knowledge in epidemic response and fervently seeks to enhance vaccine collaboration. By the year 2021, it became evident that developing nations were predominantly reliant on vaccines sourced from China (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). The pandemic's ramifications on China's global influence and prestige necessitated a recalibration of its foreign policy, thereby catalyzing the adoption of vaccine diplomacy as a pivotal instrument to restore its international standing (Kobierecka, 2022). In Lee's analysis of China's vaccine diplomacy, the primary objective is delineated as utilizing vaccine outreach to enhance China's worldwide image (Lee, 2021), while Huang points China is exploiting the global health crisis to carve out additional political leverage (Huang, 2021). Nevertheless, there are indications that China's vaccine diplomacy has not uniformly bolstered its image, as exemplified by its less successful attempts in Turkey (Üngör, 2023). Some scholars maintain that despite China's vaccine diplomacy marking a notable advance, it does not fundamentally contest the prevailing international order (Suzuki & Yang, 2022).

Why did we choose to study the vaccine diplomacy issue between China and ASEAN countries? The inquiry into vaccine diplomacy between China and ASEAN nations is prompted by the significance of Southeast Asia's demographic expanse, home to 623 million individuals, and its centrality to global health strategies. The region is pivotal not only within the ambit of China's Belt and Road Initiative but also stands as a critical component in the United States' Indo-Pacific strategy (Bitas, 2020; Li, 2020; Zongyi, 2019). These geopolitical dynamics have spurred vigorous debate within academic spheres regarding China's vaccine diplomacy in Southeast Asia. It is noteworthy that the preponderance of Chinese vaccines globally is commercialized rather than altruistically provided (Hutt, 2021). This commercial approach, whether manifested through sales or donations, serves as an implicit barometer of the proximity and

warmth underlying bilateral relations.

China stands as the inaugural nation to accede to the Southeast Asia Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, establishing the first strategic partnership with ASEAN and playing a pivotal role as the primary major economy to forge a free trade area with the association (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2023). The Sino-ASEAN dialogue relationship was established in 1991, and cooperation in the health sector commenced during the ASEAN-China Special Leaders' Meeting on SARS in 2003. Subsequently, long-term health collaboration has transpired since the inaugural ASEAN-China Health Ministers' Meeting in 2006 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2011). By the year 2020, ASEAN had ascended to become China's largest trading partner (China Daily Global, 2023). The year 2021 marked the 30th anniversary of the establishment of dialogue relations between China and ASEAN. In light of the three-decade milestone, China is poised to capitalize on this juncture to systematically fortify and enhance political mutual trust with ASEAN (Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2021b). This necessitates the sustained deepening of pragmatic cooperation across various domains, including public health, economic and trade endeavors, social and humanities initiatives, as well as non-traditional security realms.

Mentioned in the joint statement of the China-ASEAN Summit commemorating the 30th anniversary of the establishment of dialogue relations that is the overarching objective is to expedite post-pandemic economic recovery and cultivate a trajectory of sustainable and resilient development (Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2021c). The immediate priority lies in nurturing an elevated China-ASEAN strategic partnership, culminating in the construction of a more tightly knit community of shared destiny. These endeavors are geared towards optimizing the interests of nations and their populations within the broader regional context. On August 3, 2021, State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi, while attending the China-ASEAN (10+1) Foreign Ministers' Meeting, declared that China regards ASEAN as its primary partner in pandemic response cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs

of the People's Republic of China, 2023). Consequently, vaccine diplomacy with the Southeast Asian region holds paramount importance for China.

Academic discourse has observed China's commitment to bolstering vaccine accessibility in Southeast Asia, exemplified by its promises of vaccine donations to nations such as Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar, with Laos depending exclusively on these donations. Conversely, Cambodia and Indonesia's vaccine acquisition strategy shows a significant dependency on China, predominantly through procurement rather than philanthropy. In the geopolitical quandary, despite unresolved tensions over the South China Sea, Malaysia has maintained a favorable stance towards China post-receipt of vaccine aid, signaling a nuanced interplay between diplomatic goodwill and contentious regional politics (Chang, 2021; Lancaster & Rubin, 2020). Analyses by some experts suggest Vietnam remains largely unaffected by China's assertive dispensation of vaccines (Luong, 2021), while other scholars argue that China's vaccine diplomacy has failed to translate into soft power gains in Vietnam and the Philippines (van Dijk & Lo, 2023). The Philippines predominantly procures vaccines from Western entities, specifically the United States and the United Kingdom (Benyera, 2021), and vaccine skepticism has prompted nations like Indonesia and Thailand to pivot towards alternative vaccine sources, underscoring a strategic shift in public health policy driven by concerns over vaccine credibility.

The prevailing scholarly inquiry into vaccine diplomacy predominantly examines the strategic intentions and geopolitical ramifications as conceived by the vaccine-providing nations.

Consequently, academic examinations scrutinizing the efficacy of vaccine diplomacy through the lens of the recipient countries remain scarce. Quantitative analyses on this subject are particularly rare. Against this backdrop, this study posits a critical research question:

*Does China's vaccine diplomacy effectively enhance its national image within the Southeast Asian context? More precisely, has China's vaccine diplomacy fostered improved bilateral relations with ASEAN member states?*

This study addresses the research questions previously delineated through an integrative approach that melds quantitative with qualitative methodologies. First, we use vaccine supply to measure the level of China's vaccine diplomacy with ASEAN countries. Concurrently, an examination of China's vaccine policy vis-à-vis ASEAN countries facilitates an assessment of whether there is a discernible strategic orientation in its vaccine diplomacy. To evaluate the impact of such diplomacy on China's national image, we reference survey results from a reputable agency, which serve as an indicator of the evolving bilateral relations between ASEAN countries and China. The empirical data for this inquiry is derived from the "The State of Southeast Asia Survey Report" conducted by the Yusof Ishak Institute (ISEAS) over the years 2019 to 2023. Our initial hypothesis posits that China's vaccine diplomacy could potentially enhance its international standing. However, subsequent analysis reveals that, while a linear correlation exists between the volume of vaccine aid and the recipient country's favorability towards China when assessing the ASEAN bloc as a collective entity, this correlation does not uniformly extend to each bilateral engagement.

Upon examining the ten ASEAN nations collectively, our research unveiled a linear correlation between the volume of vaccine aid and the recipient countries' favorability towards China. However, a closer inspection of each bilateral relationship reveals inconsistencies with the overarching assumption; the effectiveness of vaccine diplomacy appears to be partial at best in enhancing China's ties with ASEAN countries. In certain instances, the reception of Chinese vaccines has even led to a decrease in favorability towards China. Consequently, it would be an overstatement to assert that China's vaccine assistance uniformly ameliorates its image within the ASEAN bloc. This study aims to contribute to the body of knowledge on international cooperation, state aid, and the nuances of bilateral relationships, offering a foundational reference for subsequent scholarly inquiries.

### **China's Vaccine Diplomacy to ASEAN Health Silk Road**

The "Health Silk Road" constitutes a diplomatic extension of China's Belt and Road Initiative, first

proposed by Xi Jinping in 2013, with health cooperation becoming a vital component to propel global collaboration in health affairs (Yuan, 2023). During the Ebola outbreak from 2014 to 2016, China had already implemented the "Health Silk Road" strategy, showcasing active engagement in global health matters (Yuan, 2023). In 2016, Xi Jinping reiterated the emphasis on deepening medical and health cooperation during his speech at the legislative chamber of the highest assembly in Uzbekistan, underscoring the collective forging of the "Health Silk Road" (Xinhuanet, 2016). Subsequently, in 2020, during a conversation with Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, Xi Jinping once again highlighted the collaborative efforts through international pandemic cooperation and the construction of the "Health Silk Road" to jointly combat the epidemic (Guangming Daily, 2020). Research indicates geographical alignment between the Silk Road Economic Belt and China's official foreign aid development, primarily concentrated in Africa and Asia (Tang et al., 2017). As part of official development aid, China's overseas medical assistance predominantly flows to developing countries (Zoubir & Tran, 2022). This series of initiatives plays a crucial role in shaping the global health governance framework, highlighting China's leadership position in advancing international health cooperation.

### Health Cooperation

In the China-ASEAN Memorandum of Understanding on Health Cooperation, measures such as alleviating the pressure on urgently needed medical supplies and promoting the research and development of therapeutic drugs and vaccines are outlined. It also underscores the importance of resuming and strengthening exchanges and cooperation following the progress of epidemic prevention and control (ASEAN, 2012). Through the conduct of clinical trials for vaccines, China and Indonesia aim to serve as a model for regional cooperation, thereby fostering substantial advancements in bilateral relations post-pandemic (Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2021a). Publicly available information from the Chinese Ministry

of Foreign Affairs emphasizes the deepening of practical cooperation in public health and non-traditional security domains between China and ASEAN (Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2020). This collaborative effort is expected to contribute to post-pandemic economic recovery and long-term resilient development. China aspires to cultivate an elevated China-ASEAN strategic partnership, fostering a closer-knit community of shared destiny with ASEAN (ASEAN, 2021).

ASEAN - China Joint Statement on Cooperation in Support of the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework proposes to enhance China-ASEAN public health cooperation and strengthen regional and global medical supplies and equipment supply chains; further expand vaccine cooperation and accelerate the production and distribution of safe, effective, high-quality and Affordable vaccines, promote equitable access to vaccines for all, and promote China-ASEAN strategic partnership to new heights (ASEAN, 2021). The second article, "Partnership for Security," in the "ANNEX to the ASEAN-China Plan of Action 2021-2025: Advancing ASEAN-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" articulates the imperative for China and ASEAN to enhance cooperation on COVID-19 response and recovery (ASEAN, 2022). This involves "Enhance ASEAN-China cooperation on COVID-19 response and recovery, including through China's donation of 150 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines to ASEAN countries; supporting the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund; stepping up vaccine joint production and technology transfer on voluntary and mutually agreed terms, and collaboration on research and development of essential medicines and vaccines; support ASEAN in strengthening primary public health systems and promoting capacity building of human resources; and note the health shield" initiative proposed by China and look forward with appreciation to further information." This delineation underscores the collaboration in the field of public health and vaccine diplomacy as drivers for the advancement of bilateral relations between China and ASEAN.

**Table1 Delivery status of Chinese vaccines in Southeast Asia**

	Manufacturer	Total	Purchased	Donated	Donation
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		delivered (millions)	(millions)	(millions)	proportion (delivered)
Brunei	Sinopharm	0.152	None	0.152 out of 0.152 million delivered	100.00%
Cambodia	Sinopharm, Sinovac	42.103	28.5 out of 34.5 million delivered	13.603 out of 36.603 million delivered	32.31%
Indonesia	Sinopharm, Sinovac	268.279	265.279 out of 272.579 million delivered	3 out of 3 million delivered	1.12%
Laos	Sinopharm	9.102	None	9.102 out of 9.102 million delivered	100.00 %
Malaysia	CanSino, Sinopharm, Sinovac	28.4	25.9 out of 25.9 million delivered	2.5 out of 2.5 million delivered	8.80%
Myanmar	Sinopharm, Sinovac, Undisclosed	56.34	33.7 out of 34.7 million delivered	22.64 out of 23.9 million delivered	40.18%
Philippines	Sinopharm, Sinovac	60.025	55 out of 55.05 million delivered	5.025 out of 5 million delivered	8.37%
Singapore	Sinopharm, Sinovac	0.3326	0.3326 out of 0.5326 million delivered	None	0.00%
Thailand	Sinopharm, Sinovac, Undisclosed	29.9	26.5 out of 45.6 million delivered	3.4 out of 3.4 million delivered	11.37%
Vietnam	Sinopharm, Sinovac	41.5	36.2 out of 36.2 million delivered	5.3 out of 10.8 million delivered	12.77%

(Data Source: <https://bridgebeijing.com/our-publications/our-publications-1/china-covid-19-vaccines-tracker/>, access date 2023.11.25)

The Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines to a selection of Southeast Asian countries, illustrating the bifurcation between procured and philanthropic doses. It details the dissemination of vaccines facilitated by China to ten Southeast Asian states. The information enumerated includes the provenance of the vaccines, the total count of doses administered, the quantity acquired through purchase, the amount bequeathed, and the proportion of donated vaccines relative to the total cache of vaccines received. The data indicate a reliance on a variety of vaccine manufacturers, predominantly Sinopharm and Sinovac. It is particularly noteworthy that the vaccine allocations for Brunei and Laos are exclusively

derived from Chinese donations. In a similar vein, Cambodia and Myanmar have received a substantial influx of vaccines through Chinese beneficence, accounting for 32.31% and 40.18% of their total vaccine intake, respectively. In contrast, Singapore's vaccine receipt is the minimal, mirroring its diminutive populace, whereas Thailand and Vietnam have amassed significant quantities via both acquisitions and donations. The dataset reflects a tactical modus operandi in vaccine acquisition and allocation, underscoring a reliance on benevolent contributions for certain nations. This trend may signal disparate levels of vaccine accessibility and potentially reflects a spectrum of engagement in vaccine diplomacy within the region.

**Table 2 The proportion of ASEAN countries receiving Chinese vaccines**

Region	Deliveries (in millions)		Sales(in millions)		Donations (in millions)	
	Global	ASEAN	Global	ASEAN	Global	ASEAN
Number of vaccines	1,419.22	536.13	1,592.75	505.0616	315.27	94.457
ASEAN's proportion	37.78%		31.71%		29.96%	

(Data Source: <https://bridgebeijing.com/our-publications/our-publications-1/china-covid-19-vaccines-tracker/>, access date 2023.11.25)

The table delineates China's global vaccine supply and its allocation to the ASEAN across three distinct facets of vaccine distribution: "deliveries," "sales," and "donations." Within the realm of "deliveries," ASEAN's procurement of vaccines constitutes 37.38% of the worldwide aggregate. Regarding the "sales" category, ASEAN's acquisition of vaccines constitutes 31.71% of the global total. Furthermore, within the domain of "donations," ASEAN's vaccine acquisition represents 29.96% of the global total. The tabulated data accentuates the substantial proportion of China's vaccine provision directed towards ASEAN nations, underscoring the region's noteworthy share of both purchased and donated vaccine doses.

### The response of ASEAN countries

To investigate the relationship between vaccine aid and country preferences, we constructed Table 3, utilizing data extracted from the State of Southeast Asia Survey, a series of annual surveys conducted by the ASEAN Studies Centre at the Yusof Ishak Institute (ISEAS) over five years (2019-2023). This comprehensive table amalgamates responses from ten ASEAN member states—Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, and Brunei. The survey, which

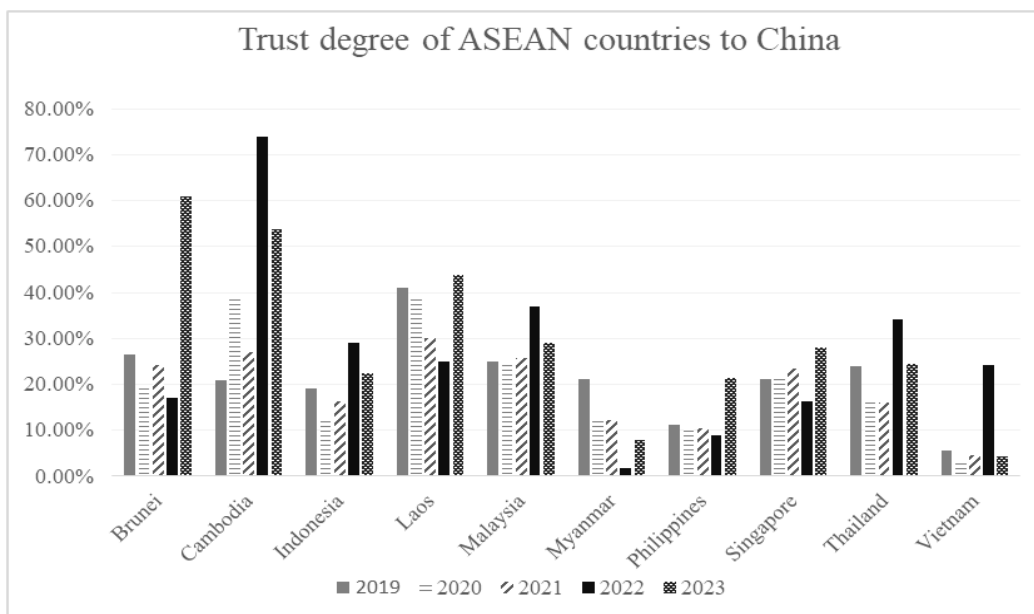
consistently posed the question, "How confident are you that China will 'do the right thing' in its contributions to global peace, security, prosperity, and governance?" over the years, offered participants five confidence levels as responses. The "Confident Score" in Table 3 signifies the combined percentage of "Confident" and "Very confident" responses for each year. For more intuitive statistics, the "Trust" value in the table comes from the sum of "Confident" and "Very Confident" each year. For example, in the 2019 report, Brunei's "confident" to China was 22.2%, while "Very Confident" was 4.4%. Therefore, the three expressions in the table are 26.6%.

The 2019 survey, conducted online between 18 November and 5 December 2018, targeted 1,008 regional experts and stakeholders through purposive sampling. Subsequent surveys in 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023 expanded in scale, involving 1,308, 1,032, 1,677, and 1,308 respondents, respectively. The 2021 survey introduced language options, and the 2022 and 2023 editions expanded linguistic accessibility to five and seven languages, respectively. The surveys, conducted over the years, serve to present a snapshot of prevailing attitudes among influential figures in the region, without claiming to be representative of the broader population.

**Table 3. Trust degree of ASEAN countries to China**

Nation	Trust degree of ASEAN countries to China				
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Brunei	26.60%	19.60%	24.20%	17.00%	60.90%
Cambodia	20.90%	38.50%	26.90%	74.00%	53.70%
Indonesia	19%	12.20%	16%	29%	22.30%
Laos	41%	39.10%	30%	25.00%	43.90%
Malaysia	25.00%	24.60%	25.60%	37%	29.00%
Myanmar	21.20%	12.70%	12.10%	1.70%	7.90%
Philippines	11.20%	10.20%	10.50%	8.80%	21.30%
Singapore	21.10%	21.60%	23.40%	16.30%	27.90%
Thailand	24%	16.70%	16%	34.20%	24.40%
Vietnam	5.60%	3.30%	4.60%	24.30%	4.40%

ASEAN	19.60%	16.10%	19.00%	26.80%	29.50%
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**Figure 1 Trust degree of ASEAN countries to China**

Table 3, entitled "Trust Degree of ASEAN Countries to China," encapsulates the dynamism in the ASEAN member states' trust toward China from 2019 through 2023. To provide a clear visual representation of these temporal and inter-nation variations, a corresponding bar chart, Figure 1, has been constructed. Brunei's trust in China markedly rebound to 60.09% by 2023, showcasing a pronounced recovery. In stark contrast, Cambodia's trust trajectory resembles a roller coaster, with a sharp escalation to 74.00% in 2022, followed by a descent to 53.70% in the subsequent year. Commencing from a relatively high trust level in 2019, Laos demonstrates a declining trend, albeit reaching the pinnacle of trust at 43.9% in 2023. Malaysia's trust levels exhibit variability throughout the observed period, culminating in a downturn to 29.00% in 2023. Myanmar experienced a precipitous drop to 1.70% in 2022, with a slight resurgence thereafter. The Philippines has been on a subtle downward trajectory over the five years yet displays an uptick in 2023. Singapore's trust in China hit its lowest in 2022. Thailand's trust levels see

oscillation, cresting at 34.20% in 2022 before tapering off in 2023. Vietnam commences with the lowest trust level in 2019, improves in 2022, but then diminishes again. Collectively, the ASEAN bloc's trust in China waned from 2019 to 2020, then entered a phase of gradual increase from 2021, extending into 2023. This dataset is indicative of a multifaceted and evolving network of diplomatic relationships and sentiments.

**Test hypothesis**

Certain media outlets interpret China's vaccine aid as a strategic initiative aimed at augmenting its geopolitical clout, thereby prompting a reevaluation of the tangible impact of vaccine diplomacy. To interrogate this notion, our research embraced a quantitative framework. We assessed the confidence of ASEAN nations in vaccines originating from China (Trust in Vaccine); the quota of Chinese-manufactured vaccines within the regional context (Vaccine Ratio in Region); and the scope of Chinese vaccine dissemination across the region (Total Doses Delivered), with the data presented in Table 4.

**Table 4 Trust in vaccines, Vaccine ratio and Total doses delivered (millions)**

	Trust in vaccines	Vaccine ratio (in region)	Total doses delivered (millions)
Brunei	1.90%	64.20%	0.15
Cambodia	67.90%	91.40%	42.10
Indonesia	35.10%	68.70%	268.28
Laos	18.20%	77.30%	9.10
Malaysia	23.70%	64.40%	28.40

Myanmar	5.10%	40.00%	56.34
Philippines	9.00%	46.50%	60.03
Singapore	4.50%	45.50%	0.33
Thailand	17.10%	64.10%	29.90
Vietnam	4.20%	16.00%	41.50
ASEAN	18.70%	57.80%	536.13

We chose the three years of 2021, 2022, and 2023 for testing (see Table 3 for specific data) because our goal is to carefully analyze the following key issues: 1. In the early stage of obtaining the vaccine in 2021, has ASEAN countries' favorability towards China affected it? The proportion of the country's vaccine assistance received from China; 2. When the vaccine is obtained in 2022, is there a correlation between

vaccine aid and ASEAN countries' favorability towards China? 3. After receiving the vaccine in 2023, whether ASEAN countries increase their favorability towards China?

After correlation testing, we found that there is a correlation between the trust level of ASEAN countries in China and the Vaccine Ratio in 2021, 2022, and 2023. The specific test results are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5**

Correlation test results			
	2021	2022	2023
Vaccine trust	0.46	0.900*	0.39
Vaccine ratio (in region)	0.802**	0.657*	0.775**
Total doses delivered	-0.285	0.36	-0.289

Note: \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

We acknowledge that there are some research limitations in the quantitative analysis portion of our study. The data derived from this analysis primarily comes from a survey conducted by ISEAS. The demographics of the survey respondents are quite specific, with the largest group comprising individuals from academia, think tanks, or research institutions, making up 45.4% of the total in 2021. They are followed by government representatives, who constitute 30.7% of the respondents in the same year. Additionally, 9.3% of the respondents are from civil society organizations, non-government organizations, or the media, while the private sector, encompassing business or finance, is represented by 9.2%. The least represented group comes from regional or international organizations, accounting for 5.3% of the respondents in 2021. Given this specific distribution of respondents, the survey lacks a

completely random sample, which, to a certain extent, affects the analytical outcomes of this study.

Secondly, The findings from this data correlation analysis merely establish a positive correlation between China's vaccine supply to ASEAN countries and a favorable disposition towards China among these countries. They do not ascertain a causal relationship. Notably, China initiated large-scale vaccine supply to ASEAN countries only in 2022, as reflected in the 2023 report. Nonetheless, the reports from 2022 and 2021 exhibit a positive correlation with the ratio of China's vaccine supply. Given these observations, we hypothesize that there may be potential related effects, warranting further investigation to elucidate the nature of this correlation.

**Table 6 The stage of bilateral relations between China and ASEAN countries**

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Brunei	Strategic partnership				

Cambodia	Action Plan to Build a China-Cambodia Community with a Shared Future"(2019-2023)		"Action Plan to Build a China-Cambodia Community with a Shared Future in the New Era (2024-2028)"
Indonesia	Comprehensive strategic partnership	High-level dialogue, cooperation mechanism	Reaching consensus on jointly building a community with a shared future
Laos	Action plan to build a community with a shared future		
Malaysia	Comprehensive strategic partnership		Building a community with a shared future
Myanmar	Comprehensive strategic partnership	Building a community with a shared future	
Philippines	Comprehensive strategic partnership		
Singapore	Comprehensive partnership		Comprehensive, high-quality, forward-looking partnership
Thailand	Comprehensive strategic partnership	"Joint Statement between the People's Republic of China and the Kingdom of Thailand on Building a More Stable, More Prosperous, and More Sustainable Community with a Shared Future"	
Vietnam	Comprehensive strategic partnership		Strengthen and deepen comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership

(Source: [https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/gjhdq\\_676201/](https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/) accessed date:2023-11-27)

Table 6 records the evolution of the stages of diplomatic relations between China and ASEAN countries from 2019 to 2023. The structure of the table shows the progress of bilateral relations, with each row representing a different ASEAN country and each column corresponding to a year from 2019 to 2023. Bilateral relations are described using different stages or labels, implying a progression or development in diplomacy. For example, terms such as "comprehensive strategic partnership", "high-level dialogue and high-quality cooperation" are used to define the nature of the relationship between the two countries. Brunei's relationship with China has been at the stage of "strategic partnership" for five years. Cambodia-China relations have developed from the Action Plan to Build a China-Cambodia Community with a Shared Future (2019-2023) to the Action Plan to Build a China-Cambodia Community for a New Era (2024-2028), marking the long-term and stable development of China-Cambodia relations. Both Indonesia and Laos have demonstrated their

development process from comprehensive strategic partnership to a community with a shared future. Over the years, Malaysia and the Philippines have been described as a "comprehensive strategic partnership." Singapore's relationship has always been a "comprehensive partnership", while Thailand's relationship includes joint statements and a desire for stability and sustainable development. The Vietnamese delegation showed that the Vietnam-China comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership has been continuously strengthened and deepened over time. Each description represents a formal agreement, joint statement or defined stage of cooperation agreed between China and ASEAN countries, reflecting the depth and focus areas of bilateral relations. These descriptions indicate that the relationship between China and ASEAN countries is both continuous and evolving.

### Conclusion

The relationship between China's vaccine supply and ASEAN countries' favorability toward China

is clear, although there are differences. China's vaccine diplomacy towards ASEAN countries was intrinsically linked to its own strategic interests. The strategic objectives behind China's vaccine diplomacy in ASEAN countries included the following factors: 1. To promote China's image as a responsible global power and a reliable partner in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. 2. To expand China's influence in the region and strengthen its bilateral relations with ASEAN countries. 3. To secure political support and foster economic cooperation in the region, as the Southeast Asian region holds significant importance in China's Belt and Road Initiative. The study used SPSS analysis to analyze the data, revealing a strong correlation between the vaccine supply rate of ASEAN countries and their favorable feelings towards China. While China's vaccine assistance was expected to increase favorability ratings in China, research showed this was not universally the case.

The study suggests that vaccine diplomacy has only partially improved relations between China and ASEAN countries, with some countries experiencing decreased favorability ratings. Therefore, it cannot be concluded that China's vaccine assistance is universally effective in improving its image among ASEAN countries. The development and distribution of vaccines requires international cooperation. Sharing scientific knowledge, research results, and resources among countries contributes to the timely development and deployment of safe and effective vaccines. If the international community had more effective and reliable experience in dealing with international health emergencies, it might reduce the difference in aid effectiveness dominated by political intentions. This study does not analyze why ASEAN countries have such large differences in China's vaccine trust, which will involve each country's national governance structure, decision-making, and public services. This article will provide references for future international cooperation or national assistance and bilateral relations research.

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