



## Manifestations of Chinese Development Aid and Its Hidden Meanings

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## Manifestations of Chinese Development Aid and Its Hidden Meanings

**Abstract:** The People's Republic of China is one of the states focusing intensively on building its soft power and shaping its international image. However, China's image is still negative and primarily based on stereotypes. In recent years, this country is willing to change such perceptions and present itself as an efficient, intensively developing, capable country that is much more than just a global production plant. The article aims to review China's different manifestations of development aid regarding changing this type of public diplomacy and its meaning to the Chinese government. Is it only motivated by good intentions, or maybe its goal is to only provide an advantage to China? It is evident that owing to significant development, China needs to expand its economic contacts. However, the tested hypothesis states that behind Chinese development aid, political motivation is hidden as well. The research is based on content analysis of official documents and Foreign Ministry's statements referring to development aid.

**Keywords:** *development aid, China, People's Republic of China, soft power, public diplomacy*

### Introduction

The People's Republic of China is one of the fastest developing countries in the world. Because of its long isolation, it had to hasten the gap between other, already better-developed countries. One of the means of contributing to its international position is building soft power and shaping the international image. Beijing's many activities within this area emerged as a "charm offensive" – China is trying to charm the World and present its potential and power on many different levels. Back in the 1990s, PRC engaged itself in so-called peripheral diplomacy in Southeast and East Asia. It enabled PRC to develop economically and build new, peaceful relations with other countries in this part of the World (Hirono, 2011). At the

same time, it was aimed at improving its image in this region. Later on, Beijing decided on following many other similar initiatives. However, its international perceptions are still not very enthusiastic. Due to its massive and quick development, China remains a significant rival on an international level and many countries, not only the neighboring ones, feel worried about Beijing's rising power.

The general perception of China remains unsatisfactory. According to Future Brand Country Index 2019, China is reaching 29<sup>th</sup> position out of all 75 countries included in the research (Country Brand Index, 2019). In the Reputation Ranking, China reached 47<sup>th</sup> position out of 55 countries (Country RepTrak, 2017). In the 2018 edition of Soft Power 30, China is in 27<sup>th</sup> position out of 30 (Soft Power 30, 2018). Previously, it reached 25<sup>th</sup> position in 2017, 28<sup>th</sup> in 2016, and 30<sup>th</sup> in 2015 (Soft Power 30, 2018). Considering the variety of undertakings within public diplomacy, those scores cannot be perceived as satisfying.

In *Branding the nation: What is being branded?* Ying Fan noticed that China has a significant potential for soft power resources that can be harvested to shape the desired image of this country. Those are: numerous population, panda bears, the Great Wall, 'made in China' aspect, and massive production potential (Fan, 2006). All those elements are indeed used in China's public diplomacy and branding efforts to some extent. However, some of them can be perceived as a burden for China's image at the same time. It refers to the stereotype recognizing China as global manufacture for more developed countries or as a producer of poor-quality goods. Although China used to exploit those aspects as their advantage and it helped China to develop at such a quick pace in recent years, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it is willing to change such perceptions and present itself as an efficient, intensively developing, capable country that is much more than just a global production plant. One way China is trying to communicate this message is the development aid which is supposed to exhibit China's general high performance.

This article aims to review China's development aid regarding changing patterns of this type of public diplomacy. The goal is to determine what messages are sent via development aid and what are the motivations behind conducting development aid. Do the good intentions of Beijing dictate it? Or maybe it is about contributing to Chinese economic development? Since development aid is included in the spectrum of public diplomacy and is one of the tools serving strengthening soft power, we can assume that there are more arguments than just goodwill or simply economic reasons in conducting development aid. Therefore, the proposed hypothesis refers to both nonpolitical and political motives behind Chinese development aid. The research is based on content analysis of official documents and Foreign Ministry's statements referring to development aid, which should indicate declared goals of Chinese development aid. The analysis is based on deductive reasoning, where the fundament is soft power, which is strongly related to public diplomacy. The second step of the analysis is the review of official documents and statements referring to the Chinese development aid and, in the end, analyzing the actual undertakings implemented by Beijing.

## Theoretical Considerations

### *Public Diplomacy and Development Aid*

Soft power is a concept that should be a starting point for this analysis since resources that are components of the state's soft power are a common ground for public diplomacy. Moreover, public diplomacy is embedded in this concept, and one of its intentions is to strengthen soft power. The second core area of analysis in the following research, which is development aid, will be explained and discussed mainly from the perspective of being a tool used within a spectrum of development aid.

The concept of soft power, created by Joseph Nye, is about the possibility of influencing other states and non-state actors and persuading them to follow its lead (Nye, 2008). Currently, countries notice the necessity of building their soft power, managing it and shaping its international image, and spreading positive perceptions. All this can contribute to the states' political, economic, and cultural interests (Kaneva, 2011; Melissen, 2005; Dinnie, 2016). The basic assumption made by Joseph Nye about soft power is its international character and meaning – it is supposed to contribute to the way a state is perceived by the foreign public and how influential it can be. However, the Chinese perspective on soft power is more specific. In China, soft power has a significant internal meaning as well. Implementing specific image measures (e.g., staging mega-events) is supposed to shape not only international perceptions of this country but also the internal self-image of Chinese society. Zue Xuejin from the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences stated that for a country like China, soft power has a crucial meaning for its internal development and wealth (Barr, 2011). Such a perspective on soft power can derive from two different aspects. Firstly, the People's Republic of China is an ethnically diverse country with more than 50 minorities. Caring for China's image and soft power contributes to shaping a unified national identity and feeling of belonging. Secondly, a country with an authoritarian rule can build loyalty and legitimize the ruling party by strengthening soft power. China's soft power and desired image still have their international image as well. In terms of external goals of soft power and public diplomacy efforts, exhibiting China as a significant and peaceful international player, a spokesman of other developing countries, capable and peacefully developing, can be listed. Therefore, foreign policy concentrates on seeking strategic partners, new areas of influence, and promoting the idea of peaceful rising (McCormick, 2008). Development aid is one of the means to succeed in all those areas.

Since the following research is about a specific example of promoting desirable perceptions of a state through development aid that can be placed within public diplomacy, it is necessary to explain all essential terms related to this area. According to Peter van Ham (2001), a situation in which a country has a bad reputation or none can be seen as a severe disadvantage for a state that wishes to play a significant international role. Therefore, image and reputation became a significant element of the state's strategies. Image is often built based on clichés or stereotypes that shape opinions and influence a decision-making process

to a much extent (Anholt, 2007). It is the case of China, which is often negatively perceived as a global plant and producer of poor-quality goods. Those are only some of the challenges China has to face when shaping its international perceptions.

The main methods of image management, strengthening soft power, and contributing to amicable relations with other states and their nations are related to public diplomacy. Public diplomacy is aimed at foreign publics and foreign perceptions as a fundament for their actions. At first, public diplomacy was perceived as a tool for hostile states to influence foreign society and then, through some grassroots pressure, influence the foreign government (Gilboa, 2008). Georgyi Szondi (2008) outlines the main goals of public diplomacy as changing behavior and political attitudes, and promoting economic interests. Although public diplomacy encompasses mainly initiatives in a long perspective, some efforts can be perceived as *ad hoc* tools for responding to potential challenges or threats, especially when states have to face unexpected circumstances.

Development aid is included in the spectrum of different manifestations of public diplomacy. James Pamment outlines development aid as an example of politics shaping the state's image and positive perceptions (Pamment, Wilkins, 2018). Generally, aid is perceived as a transfer from rich countries to poorer countries. Such aid is a broad category encompassing, e.g., administrative overheads of development agencies or debt forgiveness (Kharas, 2007). Countries within Development Assistance Committee agreed on a definition of official development assistance (ODA), stating that it encompasses funding given to developing countries, more specifically to those which have a per capita income below a regularly adjusted threshold as well as multilateral institutions with the aim of promoting wealth and economic development (Brautigam, 1998). Grants, soft loans, and technical assistance are listed in the catalog of development aid proposed by the OECD. Financial support like loans or credits for military purposes is excluded from accepted forms of development aid. The OECD also provides a list of countries and territories that can be subject to development aid, which is updated constantly and currently includes more than 150 countries (OECD). Development aid itself is assessed differently by different scholars – some say it has a positive impact on economic growth, some say the impact can occur only under certain circumstances. Others say there is no impact whatsoever. What is evident is that donors may have different motivations for offering such aid – those can be responding to current challenges such as health crisis, economic crisis, poverty, and hunger (Dreher, 2017). However, often development aid is based on win-win rules, where donor countries can achieve goals other than those related to economic, social, or human development by providing such assistance. Such non-developmental goals can be, for example, strengthening soft power, shaping desired image, or international positioning.

### ***Declared Goals of Chinese Development Aid***

Due to rapid economic and financial developments in China, this country became more interested in overseas expansion. Many criticisms occur in terms of Chinese foreign aid and its engagement in developing countries. Negative perceptions that occur among others in media refer to commercial purposes behind such aid. Chinese development aid is perceived as a tool of securing Chinese egoistic interests like access to natural resources or providing good opportunities for foreign investments for Chinese companies (Oh, 2019). It might be the case; however, the Chinese government declares different motives for their generous aid.

Engagement of the People's Republic of China in many various developments worldwide suggests that Beijing is trying to secure its development and redefine its international perceptions. Since PRC is still perceived as one of the most significant manufacturing facilities, mostly due to low labor and production costs and large population, Beijing is trying to break up with such stereotypes. Economic expansion, providing development aid, and increasing Chinese presence globally in terms of the economy mean that China is something more than just a global plant for wealthier and better-developed countries. It is also a way of exhibiting PRC as a rich and capable country that, despite being a developing country itself, is able to assist other countries. Although Chinese development aid is not a new phenomenon, most complete official documents referring to this form of international activity presented by Beijing are from 2011, 2014, and 2020. In those framework documents, the Chinese government outlines the main issues related to development aid and its motivations.

White Paper on Foreign Aid published in 2011 outlines several core goals and principles of Chinese aid. What should be highlighted first is the often-repeated aspect of mutual benefits deriving from Chinese foreign aid for both China and recipient countries – e.g., we can read about “*mutually-beneficial cooperation*” or “*Over the years, while focusing on its development, China has been providing aid (...)*” and “*China's foreign aid (...) is mutual help between developing countries*” (China's Foreign Aid, 2011). Those expressions are evidence for pursuing development aid to support own economic goals and provide favorable conditions for further Chinese development.

Another aspect of Chinese motivation behind providing a wide range of development aid is presenting PRC as a responsible and significant international player – following expression also from the White Paper can be evidence for this: “*As an important member of the international community, China will continue to promote South-South cooperation (...)*” (China's Foreign Aid, 2011). Such motivation is visible within the next China's Foreign Aid White Paper from 2014 as well. Many highlights in this text relate to reducing poverty, improving livelihood in developing countries, and Chinese engagement in building international development and cooperation (China's Foreign Aid, 2014).

An interesting aspect visible in China's Foreign Aid 2014 is showcasing the PRC's general capacity. For many decades China has been perceived as a production facility for

the developed world. While combating this stereotype, China focuses on development aid as a potential channel of communicating Beijing's changed image. One of the areas of current Chinese development aid is promoting economic and social development in line with the Chinese wisdom that *"teaching one to fish rather than giving one fish"* is a better strategy. Therefore, China *"(...) shares its experience and technology with other developing countries through human resources and technical cooperation (...)"* (China's Foreign Aid, 2014). Technical support has been provided in agriculture, clean energy, or handicrafts, and more than 2 000 experts were sent to over 50 countries (China's Foreign Aid, 2014). Changing the image of China as a giant factory is not only a recent goal of Beijing's efforts. In 2009, a series of advertising movies called *"Made in China, made with the World"* was launched on CNN (Ministry denies funding..., 2009). The campaign concentrated on negative stereotypes relating to Chinese products as of poor quality and was supposed to counteract such negative opinions. The main focus was on intensive cooperation of Chinese entrepreneurship with international producers and highlighting that Chinese products are therefore of high quality and reliable. The spot ended with the main message saying: *"When it says 'Made in China', it really means 'Made in China, made with the world'"* (Barr, 2011). This campaign was one of China's first international branding attempts, however not very successful (Zhengfu). This campaign was a reaction to a turmoil in the European Union caused by information relating to many deficiencies within the Chinese production process of Fisher-Price toys. In 2007, Chinese toothpaste was withdrawn from Italy and Spain because of dangerous substances they included. In general, in 2006, half of the products withdrawn in the European Union because of safety reasons came from China (Kruczkowska, 2007). Such bad press could have a negative influence on China's image and interests. Both the *"Made in China"* campaign and providing development aid, especially sharing Chinese experience and technology with other developing countries, are the means to achieve specific image objectives and showcase the PRC as a capable and intensively developing country able to assist other, less wealthy countries.

Another example of communicating China's capacity is its participation in international cooperation. Beijing is noticing the significant role of international organizations like the United Nations in providing development aid and contributing to global development. Since China is prominently and continuously increasing its potential, Beijing as a reliable international player is willing to engage itself in such cooperation: *"With the enhanced ability to participate in global affairs, China has within its capacity rendered support to the assistance programs initiated by multilateral development organizations (...)"* (China's Foreign Aid, 2014).

The most current document has been announced early in 2021. The white paper titled *"China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era"* presents similar motivations of Chinese engagement in international development cooperation. Such aspects as *"spirit of internationalism and humanitarianism"*, *"supporting other developing countries"*, *in support of their fight for national independence and liberation* and *"effort to promote*

economic and social development, which laid a solid foundation for long-term friendship and cooperation”, “resolving global development issues”, and “implementing the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” are listed already in the preface to the document (China’s International Development..., 2021). Those mentioned issues correspond with presenting China as a responsible international actor and mutual benefits deriving from such cooperation. It is even listed as one of the fundamental notions being a driving force for Chinese development aid. Therefore, China is presented as having a “sense of responsibility as a major country” (China’s International Development..., 2021). Also, the idea of China as a capable country is visible in the newest white paper – statement that “China is willing to share its successful experience (...)” (China’s International Development..., 2021) suggests that this country is developing fast and efficiently achieving great success in many fields, which now can be transferred to other developing countries.

Since Chinese intensive development can be perceived as a threat to many countries, Beijing decided to pursue its public diplomacy to showcase China as a peaceful country and, therefore, follow the so-called strategy of “peaceful rising” (Buzan, 2010). Development aid is supposed to strengthen those aspects of Chinese “peaceful rise”. Following citation from China’s Foreign Aid 2014, this country is an excellent example of how conducting development aid can be related to the aspects of peaceful development: “*China will follow the trend of the times, which is peace, development, cooperation and win-win result, keep to the righteous viewpoint on justice and interests, respect and support developing countries*” (China’s Foreign Aid, 2014). Moreover, in the newest strategy on development cooperation, it is even highlighted that all countries, regardless of its size or wealth is an equal member of the international community (China’s International Development..., 2021).

### ***Manifestations of Chinese Development Aid***

The People’s Republic of China is intensely engaged in public diplomacy activities. Among many other efforts, it focuses on development aid. Development aid provided by PRC is not a new phenomenon. In the 1950s, it has concentrated mostly on other socialist bloc countries in Asia. Later on, in the era of Deng Xiaoping, this aid has been widened instead of focusing on several chosen countries only. Development aid in the 1970s encompassed many developing countries, e.g., Kenya or Senegal in Africa or the region of Oceania (Xue et al., 2019). The assistance focused back then mostly on so-called stadium diplomacy, which provided construction of new sports infrastructure and often its maintenance in the following years. Stadium diplomacy was politically motivated – PRC was not able to compete in most of the sports events or participate in international sports committees since “its place” was occupied by Taiwan supported by the US. Therefore, such development aid allowed to support other countries in staging alternative forms of international sports competition, such as Games of the Newly Emerging Forces (GANEFO). PRC decided on donating a stadium for Indonesia when it was chosen to stage the first GANEFO games (Xue et al., 2019). In the



1970s and 1980s, Chinese development aid had a worldwide range, focusing on developing and socialist countries. Elliot Ross described the Chinese presence in Africa very accurately, saying that “*If you want to see the heart of China’s soft-power push into Africa, you will find it in the continent’s new soccer stadia*” (Ross, 2014).

Stadium diplomacy, however, was not the only way of engaging Beijing in building international relations with developing and socialist countries. PRC was involved in Sudan by providing Khartoum with political, economic, and security support, among others providing arms used in the Darfur conflict. Similar support has been provided for the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia (Hirono, 2011). Such engagement and close relations with widely criticized regimes did harm the Chinese image. In order to meet these challenges, the PRC decided on joining United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia mission in 1992, which was supposed to warm up Beijing’s image. A conducted research among Cambodian respondents showed that 47,8% of them indicated altruism as a motive for Chinese involvement in the mission, 28,3% as a form of apology for previous support for the regime, and 45,7% indicated economic inroads a primary motive (Hirono, 2011). The last aspect is significant, especially considering the newest PRC’s undertakings and projects.

According to internal changes within the Chinese market in the 1990s, Beijing decided to reshape its foreign aid mechanisms. In 1993, a Foreign Aid Fund was established by the government. Its primary focus were interest-free loans for developing countries. Since 1995 Export-Import Bank of China implemented medium- and long-term low-interest loans to other developing countries. In 2000 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation has been established (China’s Foreign Aid, 2011). Those structural changes allowed further institutionalization of Chinese foreign aid and allowed to implement new, more efficient (in the eyes of the government) mechanisms of international cooperation.

In recent years, PRC engaged itself in more varied development aid, though stadium diplomacy is still in use. The intensive economic development of Beijing resulted in intensified cooperation with African countries based on different forms of development aid. Angola, Gabon, and Equatorial Guinea have new stadiums built by the Chinese for the African Cup of Nations’ sake. Since all those countries have significant off-shore oil reserves and are not ruled democratically, it implies that PRC provides them with assistance, expecting to gain certain benefits, such as access to natural resources, support in United Nations, and isolation of Taiwan (Ross, 2014). The biggest increase in trade between China and Africa can be observed at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The boom started in 2002-2003, but the most intensive growth of exports from Africa to China started after 2006, while imports of Chinese products to Africa grew systematically from 2001 to 2015 (Crisafulli, 2018).

In 2006, a high profile ‘Africa Policy’ has been adopted, which serves as a political fundament for various forms of Chinese engagement on this continent (McCormick, 2008). In recent decades, the increase in development aid could have been observed. Currently, PRC is providing aid for many countries in the world. In 2014, the top ten recipients of Chinese development aid encompassed Cuba (6,7 mln \$), Cote d’Ivoire (\$4.0 billion), Ethiopia (\$3.7

billion), Zimbabwe (\$3.6 billion), Cameroon (\$3.4 billion), Nigeria (\$3.1 billion), Tanzania (\$3.0 billion), Cambodia (\$3.0 billion), Sri Lanka (\$2.8 billion) and Ghana (\$2.5 billion). The main focus of all commitments (both official development aid and other official flows) is energy generation and supply encompassing \$134,1 billion in 2000-2014. Industry, mining, and construction reached more than \$30 million in the same period. The most significant increase in offered development aid could be observed in 2009. Comparing to the US, in 2000-2014, PRC offered more than \$350 billion while the US almost \$400 billion (AidData). Those numbers suggest that PRC is one of the most generous donors in the world.

The means of providing aid nowadays varies significantly. However, it is mainly concentrated on grants and loans for infrastructure, scholarships for academic training, technical assistance, or debt relief, to name just a few. For example, China offered Angola a \$2 billion US credit for rebuilding infrastructure, Ghana a debt relief in 2003, or grants for railway projects in Nigeria, Ghana, and Tanzania (McCormick, 2008). Grants and zero-interest loans are some of the first instruments within Chinese official development aid. According to the report on foreign aid provided by Beijing, in 2011, around 40% of aid encompassed grants (Brautigam, 1998). Some critique over Chinese development aid and its effectiveness could concentrate on the fact that Chinese companies and Chinese workers conduct most of the infrastructural investments offered within such aid. In such circumstances, no local companies or potential labor force can benefit from such investments. Therefore, only new infrastructure is the local community's benefit. The level of employment or development of the economy through increased activity of the local private sector stays unchanged. One potential reason for this may be the limitation within concessional loans offered by Beijing – large projects can obtain Beijing's assistance, however only when they use Chinese products or services (Brautigam, 1998). Other types of aid focus on technical assistance – at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, more than 600 Chinese teachers and more than 15 000 Chinese doctors have worked in sub-Saharan Africa (McCormick, 2008).

The sub-Saharan imports from China grew significantly from less than 2% in 1990 to more than 12% in 2004. An increase can be observed as well in terms of sub-Saharan exports to China. In 1990 it was less than 1% while in 2004 it grew to nearly 9% (Kaplinsky, McCormick, Morris, 2006) – this can suggest that development aid offered to this region of Africa provides mutual benefits – sub-Sahara gained money, technical assistance, or new infrastructure while for PRC it meant finding new outlets for Chinese products and new sources of energy resources (oil constitutes nearly 70% of exports to China) (Kaplinsky, McCormick, Morris, 2006). What is more, Chinese energy companies are becoming the most active investors in Africa. The Chinese National Petroleum Corporation has a 40% share in Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company (Kaplinsky, McCormick, Morris, 2006) operating in Sudan where China was previously engaged and provided political and security support, among others, provided Sudan with arms. Angola also benefits from cooperation with China – in return for concessions and oil contracts, Beijing has offered Angola with \$2 billion credit line. Angola, being destroyed after decades of war, needed such assistance

in reconstructing the country (Zafar, 2007). It can again indicate that PRC is engaging itself in any kind of development aid in places where it sees benefits (mostly economic) for itself. Strengthening its soft power and contributing to its international image is only one reason for development aid. The other side of the coin is the economic development of the PRC.

Between 2000 and 2014, the US offered \$396 billion while China only \$81 billion (Oh, 2019). However, the size of Chinese aid is still growing. In 2013-2018, Beijing allocated RMB 270,2 billion for foreign assistance, encompassing three main categories: concessional loans, grants, and interest-free loans. Among the recipients of this aid, the least developed African countries constituted almost 50%. Within the South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund, development cooperation projects were also launched, reaching 423 complete projects in 2013-2018. Other forms of cooperation in this period encompassed goods and materials and technical cooperation as well. China offered aid to more than 20 000 Chinese language volunteer teachers in more than 80 countries and provided humanitarian aid to more than 60 countries (China's International Development..., 2021).

What can be perceived as negative aspects of Chinese development aid are the general rules or conditions of such assistance to other countries. First of all, its aid recipients must recognize one China – PRC as one China encompassing both mainland and the Island of Taiwan. Countries that recognize Taiwan cannot count on PRC's development aid whatsoever. Moreover, in contrast to the Western donors, the PRC does not impose any political conditions on potential recipients – the shape of the governments, democratic rule, or even human rights record are not the factors that can influence PRC's decision on admitting development aid or not (McCormick, 2008). It is a statement made by former Sierra Leone ambassador to Beijing cited by Zafar (2007):

*“We like Chinese investment because we have one meeting, we discuss what they want to do, and then they just do it... There are no bench-marks or preconditions...”*

One of the basic guidelines for China's foreign aid is imposing no political conditions, which stays in line with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. Beijing declares that it is unwilling to use development aid as an excuse for interfering in recipients' internal affairs (China's Foreign Aid, 2011; China's International Development..., 2021). In conjunction with such policy, no attention paid to such aspects as human rights and democracy can delay necessary changes and reforms in Africa (Zafar, 2007). Western aid is dependent on implementing such improvements in African countries. Therefore, such aid can be perceived as a catalyst for positive change.

The most recent example of Chinese foreign aid is so-called “coronavirus diplomacy”, based on providing medical assistance to countries plunged into COVID-19 pandemics. Beijing is providing medical supplies and professional support to European countries. One of the motivations may be about bettering China's image, which has been blamed

for the outbreak of pandemic and securing future political and economic relations with the European Union when the pandemic is over (Strzałkowski, 2020). It is an unusual example of development aid, and Beijing itself calls it assistance rather than development or foreign aid. The assistance provided by China is offered to both developed (primarily European) and developing countries, which is one of the reasons why it cannot be perceived as a pure development aid, which according to its definitions, is based on support provided by developed countries to those less developed. However, the assistance provided by China to European countries is aimed at counteracting epidemics in an as short time as possible, which in effect should decrease the potential crisis and contribute to better development of those countries and their economic condition after COVID-19.

Beijing's specific type of aid provided in the time of pandemic is already called in international media 'coronavirus diplomacy' (Walker, 2020). Beginning from March 2020, after seizing control over epidemics of COVID-19 in China, Beijing initiated massive aid to other countries. Already in May 2020, President Xi announced an assistance fund of US\$ 2 billion within two following years as support to international cooperation against COVID-19 (China's International Development..., 2021). The assistance included sending abroad products that were the most necessary in fighting the outbreak of COVID-19, such as testing kits, ventilators, medical masks, and medical staff to particular countries. There were many aid recipients, and their number is snowballing. On March 23, Geng Shuang, Foreign Ministry spokesperson, spoke about 82 countries to which China assisted (Ministry of Foreign Affairs..., 2020ab). On March 31, such assistance reached 120 countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs..., 2020). The goals behind 'coronavirus diplomacy' are manifold. Mostly, they correspond with the goals discussed concerning the more traditional development aid.

One of the motivations behind 'coronavirus diplomacy' is showing Chinese gratitude for the help received when China was struggling with the highest numbers of infections. Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed about 79 countries and ten international organizations that have provided aid for China (Ministry of Foreign Affairs..., 2020c). Later on, already after controlling the epidemics in China, Foreign Ministry's spokesperson on his press conference highlighted that: "*For countries that have assisted China in its fight against the epidemic, we will reciprocate their kindness without any hesitation if they need it*" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs..., 2020d).

The second narrative highlighted in official statements made by Chinese officials is presenting China as a responsible and reliable international player. Hua Chunying, Foreign Ministry spokesperson, related to the US as the best-developed country globally, which to the Chinese mind should offer more aid to developing countries. Later on, she made a comparison between the US and China, stating that: "*China, as the biggest developing country, has all along been providing aid to other developing countries with no political strings attached under the South-South cooperation framework*" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs..., 2020e). It was supposed to present China as engaged in global issues and aim to ensure global safety during the pandemic. Also, statements made by already mentioned

Geng Shuang could indicate the meaning of ‘coronavirus diplomacy’ in presenting Beijing as a responsible and engaged international player. He highlighted the success of seizing epidemics internally and shifting the efforts towards assisting other countries in need. He also voiced his hope for “*pooling consensus and taking actions to strengthen solidarity, work together to counter the pandemic and stabilize the economy*” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs..., 2020f). Here is another aspect of “coronavirus diplomacy” that is safeguarding the future economic interests of China and boosting economic cooperation in the future.

## Concluding Remarks

Development aid already since the 1950s found its place in Chinese image management efforts. Being one of the biggest recipient countries, it became one of the most generous donors in development aid. Based on available data, China is the seventh-largest donor after the US, Germany, United Kingdom, France, Turkey, and Japan (Chao, Yuxuan, 2021). Chinese development aid has been increasing consistently since 2001. However, some projections suggested that in 2020 the total amount of development aid may decrease (Kitano, Miyabayashi, 2020).

Chinese development aid has changed within years. However, it is still an effective tool of reshaping PRC’s international perceptions, especially those based on stereotypes relating to China as a global plant or producer of poor-quality goods. However, the main declared narratives behind China’s development aid, alluding to social justice, solidarity, responsibility for building a better world, are related to non-developmental issues. China has political and economic interests that are supposed to be reached with the assistance of conducted development aid. Political and non-developmental narratives mentioned in the cited White Papers concentrate mainly on presenting China as a global, significant, and reliable player who is responsibly engaged in world politics and solving the most urgent challenges of the contemporary world. Some narratives also refer to showcasing growing Chinese capacity to engage in international politics and cooperation – this is why China highlights its involvement in many intergovernmental and international initiatives. Presenting Chinese capacity refers to the growing potential of this country, especially in terms of the growing economy and research and development progress. China, still being a developing country, is able to assist other countries. Another aspect visible in official Chinese documents referring to development aid is presenting China as a peaceful player, responsible, and willing to contribute to the development of a better world. This narrative corresponds strongly with the general mistrust among many countries concerning China’s rapid and intensive development, both in terms of economic and military development. Engagement in development aid can be a tool of softening the image of a predatory country, focused on its development and expansion. The last motivation of Chinese development aid can be perceived as selfish since Beijing often highlights the mutual character of development aid. In simple terms,

China offers assistance to those countries that can offer something in return. It explains extensive engagement in Africa, where China finds new outlets for its goods and services and can secure supplies in raw materials. The analysis of official, governmental documents referring to development aid suggests that China, through development aid, is trying to reach its political, not only economic interests.

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