



HAL
open science

Understanding China's "intermestic" online vaccination-themed narrative strategy

Zhao Alexandre Huang, Rudong Zhang

► **To cite this version:**

Zhao Alexandre Huang, Rudong Zhang. Understanding China's "intermestic" online vaccination-themed narrative strategy. COVID-19, Communication and Culture, Routledge, pp.52-75, 2022, 9781003276517. 10.4324/9781003276517-6 . hal-03740097

HAL Id: hal-03740097

<https://hal.science/hal-03740097v1>

Submitted on 28 Jul 2022

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Doi : 10.4324/9781003276517-6

For citation:

Huang, Z. A., & Zhang, R. (2022). Understanding China's "intermestic" online vaccination-themed narrative strategy. In F. Rossette-Crake & E. Buckwalter, *COVID-19, Communication and Culture* (1st ed., pp. 52–75). London: Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003276517-6>

Covid-19, Culture, and Communication: Beyond the Global Workplace

Book Chapter

**Understanding China's "Intermestic" Online Vaccination-Themed Narrative Strategy:
Towards a Global Community of Health for All?**

Authors:

Zhao Alexandre HUANG (Corresponding author)

UFR Langues et cultures étrangères (LCE), Université Paris Nanterre, Paris, France

Dr. Zhao Alexandre Huang is an Associate Professor of Communication at the *Université Paris Nanterre*. He works at the DICEN-IDF laboratory. He studies institutional practices, political and public communication strategies, and the formation of strategic narratives in the practice of public diplomacy. His research interests include public diplomacy, strategic communication, public relations, social media, and China's propaganda and international communication.

Rudong ZHANG

Vanke School of Public Health, Tsinghua University, Beijing, China

Doi : 10.4324/9781003276517-6

Dr. Rudong Zhang is a Postdoctoral fellow of Health Communication at Tsinghua University. He works at the Vanke School of Public Health. His research interests include global health communication, public health campaigns, and social media engagement.

Contacts: zhao.huang@parisnanterre.fr; ORCID: 0000-0002-1284-0862

zhangrudong@mail.tsinghua.edu.cn

**Understanding China’s “Intermestic” Online Vaccination-Themed Narrative Strategy:
Towards a Global Community of Health for All?**

Abstract

The aim of this chapter is to analyse China’s vaccination-themed narratives published by its state-owned media on both domestic and international social media platforms (Weibo and Twitter). Analysis has been carried out on Beijing’s intermestic online communication strategy to promote its domestic vaccines, motivate global vaccination, and increase public confidence in the quality and efficiency of domestic vaccines. As part of China’s vaccine diplomacy and public diplomacy during the pandemic, Beijing’s intermestic vaccination-themed narratives addressed domestic and foreign communities and displayed the government’s international responsibilities through visual content, subtly legitimising China’s political initiative for a *global community of health for all*.

Keywords: public diplomacy, COVID-19, communication strategy, intermestic, vaccination-themed narratives

Introduction

The global health crisis surrounding COVID-19, which has spread since the Northern-hemisphere spring of 2020, has redefined the meaning of public diplomacy. Border closures, repeated lockdowns, and a series of social distancing measures have brought international politics and the economy to a state of uncertainty. The only certainty is the determination and the effort of national governments to fight the SARS-CoV-2 virus and to seize the current crisis as an opportunity to mobilise public diplomacy instruments, reach new political outcomes, and strengthen international reputations.

As the country in which the COVID-19 outbreak began, and because it concealed information related to the epidemic, China has had to deal with a severely-damaged international image (Chen et al. 2021). To change unfavourable perceptions held by the international community, the Beijing government immediately engaged in a series of communication activities to strengthen internal and external public relations (Xinhua 2020). The aim was to rescue China's image and reputation from international criticism, manage both domestic and international public opinion to restore Beijing's legitimacy in the eyes of the international community, and tell "the story of China's fight against the epidemic" (Xinhua, 2020, para. 2). In July 2020, Beijing began providing vaccine assistance to developing countries through international cooperation (Huang 2021). As of September 2021, China had provided its own vaccines to 106 countries and four international organisations (Global Times 2021).

Vaccination is currently one of the most effective ways to control the pandemic, and mass vaccination is the most crucial step in ending this global health crisis (WHO, 2021). Nevertheless, multiple challenges have caused the global vaccination growth rate to slow. On the one hand, unequal distribution of vaccines (Mathieu et al. 2021) reflects the emergence of "vaccine nationalism" among leading powers (Bollyky and Bown 2020: 96) and the historical

imbalances in power and resources between developed and developing countries (Alaran et al. 2021); on the other hand, the dilemma of global vaccination efficiency has cast doubt on the effectiveness and safety of COVID-19 vaccines, which have emerged with unprecedented speed. “Vaccine hesitancy” (Omer et al. 2009; 1981) reflects public concerns about vaccine safety and has the potential to gain high public attention, often leading to vaccination refusal (Dubé et al. 2013). During the COVID-19 pandemic, vaccine hesitancy has compromised the fight against the virus and delayed the reconstruction of global public health (Dror et al. 2020).

The above challenges provided Beijing with “strategic opportunities” to construct international discourse power (Zhang 2021: para. 3), leading the government to update its public diplomacy communication strategy for wielding soft power, legitimise its political advocacy for “building a global community of health for all” (Zhang 2021: para. 5), and gain international endorsement of its domestic vaccines. The Chinese government defined its domestically produced COVID-19 vaccines as a “global public good,” asserting its adherence to “fairness and equity [...to] strive to close the immunization gap” (Xi 2021a: para.7). Moreover, according to China’s public health departments and scholars (cf. Health Commission of Hebei Province 2021; Shi and Li 2021), effectively countering domestic and international hesitation to pursue COVID-19 vaccination relies not only on carrying out relevant education and intervention but also on promoting positive online exchange and interaction between the public and authorities to ensure vaccination policy implementation. Thus, Beijing has actively mobilised social media platforms to strengthen its international and domestic communication about domestic vaccines and enhance online interaction and engagement with target audiences. The aim has been to eliminate vaccine hesitancy while improving the credibility and reputation of its domestic vaccines (Luo et al. 2021; Shi and Li 2021).

The aim of this study is to analyse Beijing's intermestic vaccination-themed narratives released on its domestic and international social media platforms (Weibo and Twitter). The findings illustrate China's vaccine-related propaganda and public diplomacy efforts, describe Beijing's domestic and international communication strategy for digital public diplomacy, and demonstrate its attempt to reduce distrust in the COVID-19 vaccines produced by China and promote and demonstrate Beijing's international image as a responsible world power.

Public Diplomacy, Soft Power, and Social Media

Scholars conventionally use public diplomacy to conceptualize a series of strategic national communication actions taken by a government (Pamment 2012) in order to influence, in subtle ways, the political participation of target audiences through long-term, day-to-day, and durable communication practices (Huang and Arifon 2018). As a vital instrument for wielding soft power, public diplomacy mobilises communication methods and strategies, along with the nation-state's "soft power resources" (Nye 2004: 68), to make target audiences accept the value orientations and positions promoted by a government. Soft power resources encompass all attractive elements of a country, namely national culture, political ideology, and public and foreign policy. These elements, once mediatized, contribute to "agenda-setting, positive attraction, and persuasion" in the international community (Nye 2021: 202).

For Nye (2019: 13), "soft power means getting others to want the same outcomes you want". Within this framework, public diplomacy has three dimensions: (a) daily communication to explain and analyse policy decisions; (b) media and political campaigns to achieve prefixed strategies and goals; (c) long-term and continual interaction with target audiences. Earlier public diplomacy activities pursued a decisive and functionalist goal using a one-way broadcasting campaign to harvest foreign public support. However, rapid growth in social media technology has redefined public diplomacy and challenged the conventional

model of international communication. In contrast to a one-way vertical flow of information, newer forms of public diplomacy (e.g. digitalization) embrace the interaction and dynamics of various actors to achieve mutual understanding and engage target audiences as stakeholders (Manor 2019). This open, direct, and equal interaction model (Bjola and Jiang 2015) is a relational shift in the effective deployment of soft power (Zaharna 2007). According to Dolea (2018) and Pisarska (2016), when the government uses social media for public diplomacy, attraction and persuasion result in two-way, horizontal, people-to-people communication and organization-public interaction.

Indeed, public diplomacy on social media depends on an “institutionalized network structure” (Huang and Wang 2019a: 2987) similar to interpersonal relationships. First, the relationship-building technology of social media is “user-centric” (Wehbe and Bouabdallah 2012: 680) and connectionist (Chan-Olmsted and Wolter 2017). Mutual attention and interaction reflect a shift from one-way communication to reciprocal exchange (Miike 2006). Second, information sharing on social media sites reflects a “dynamic perspective” of information production (Henneberg 2002: 95) as user generated (Ingenhoff, Calamai and Sevin 2021): “in a given series of communication exchanges, any third (or later) transmission (or message) is related to the degree to which previous exchanges referred to even earlier transmissions” (Rafaeli 1988: 14). Third, social media communication and interaction follow the “holistic communication engagement” model (Zaharna 2018: 320). Any online click is a copy of face-to-face interaction. However, in the social network age, this kind of social link transcends the binary relationship of sender and recipient; the clicks to like, repost, or share elevate online interactivity, shifting the focus from individuals to global networks that involve multiple interactions across various levels of participation (Chewning 2018; Huang and Hardy 2019). Therefore, public diplomacy actors have progressively adopted a long-term social constructive perspective (cf. Manor 2019; Dolea 2018; Arsenault 2014; Saffer, Taylor and

Yang 2013) known as “relations-as-communication” (Zaharna 2018: 321) to practice a public diplomacy 2.0 that provides more dynamic and personalized forms of narrative to seduce and engage target publics.

Engagement and Narratives in the Age of Public Diplomacy 2.0

Synonymous with interpersonal connection, interaction, and involvement, engagement refers to an individual’s commitment and connection to a dynamic relationship with various organized communication activities (Abdul-Ghani, Hyde and Marshall 2011). From the perspective of social psychology, engagement is “a dynamic multi-dimensional relational concept [...] designed to achieve or elicit an outcome at the individual, organization, or social levels” (Johnston and Taylor 2018: 18).

As a mode of two-way communication, engagement is a form of dialogue (Taylor and Kent 2014) through which the “social construction” of meaning and the “identity formation” of interacting parties occur (Wu and Wang 2018: 245). From the perspective of digital public diplomacy, engagement can lead to interaction between stakeholders and target publics and strengthen the persuasiveness of a country’s soft power via emotional incentive (Huang and Wang 2020; Khan et al. 2021). In this process, emotion is a “social product” (Bernard 2015: para. 13) that not only permits participation in social conventions (Goffman 1955) but also gives rise to powerful narratives (Ng and Kidder 2010) that “organize the experience of creating and shaping cultural meaning” (Huang and Wang 2019b: 72). Therefore, scholars also view engagement as an element of “narrative transportation” (Kim, Lloyd, and Cervellon 2016: 305), the process through which communication actors use “emotional labour” in narrative formulation (Alloing and Pierre 2020) and recipients experience convergence, “where all mental systems and capacities become focused on events occurring in the narrative” (Green and Brock 2000: 701).

Strategic narrative is a vital strategic vector in digital public diplomacy (Roselle, Miskimmon and O’Loughlin 2014), allowing actors to “maintain a decisive competitive advantage during the communication” (D’Almeida 2012: 32). Postmodernists interpret communication as a process of narrative formulation to establish and configure collective action (Lyotard 1984; Bakhtin 1981). In this process, persuasiveness depends on the subtle design of the message so that it does not arouse negative cognitive responses from target publics but elicits solid affective resonance (Kang, Hong and Hubbard 2020). In the realm of public diplomacy, narrative can mediatize national policy for an international stage, allowing others to understand the territorial characteristics, unique attractions, technological and social advancements, history, and civilization of a country (Huang 2020). Indeed, narratives that a state-actor formulates are likely to align with the “dominant ideology on the global role of a government within that same entity” (Boucheron 2017: 16), potentially creating a sense of unity, cohesion, and solidarity.

China’s Public Diplomacy 2.0 Model and Its Vaccination-Themed Online Engagement

Strategy

The credo *tell China’s stories well* has become the most crucial guideline in China’s public diplomacy, the aim of which has been to “strengthen China’s capacity in international communication” (Xi 2021b: para. 1). According to Chinese scholars and politicians (cf. X. Chen 2015; Tan 2019; Q. Zhao 2019), *tell China’s stories well* has the goal of enhancing the capacity of Chinese media and institutions to formulate external propaganda that generates narrative transportation as Beijing competes for “discourse power” in the international community (Tan 2016: 2). In the context of China’s political communication, “discourse power” is the persuasive capacity of the Chinese government to rationalise and legitimise its political initiatives and foreign policies on the global stage (Jin and Liu 2020). If discourse is

a social practice that helps construct reality, especially the deployment of power relations (Foucault 2006), then the discourse power of the Chinese centralised regime results from narratives framed by state actors (Tan 2016): “the capacity of a sovereign state to present and make heard its voice and therefore its cultural traits, its political and ideological values and ideas in the international community so that foreign audiences hear them, then accept and recognize them as such” (X. Wang 2010: 59).

For Chinese President Xi Jinping (2021b), to enhance international discourse power is “to straighten out Beijing’s internal and external propaganda (in Chinese: *neixuan* & *waixuan*) system and create a media cluster with international influence” (para. 3). On the one hand, this statement implies the special meaning of *propaganda* in the Chinese political context. Indeed, the term *propaganda* (in Chinese: *xuanchuan*) is synonymous with media communication, publicity, and public relations in China (Wang 2008). It is part of the progressive ideology represented by the Communist Party of China (CPC), which has promoted the independence of the Chinese nation and the modernization of the country (Lu 2015; Liu 2013). Hence, Chinese scholars and politicians used *external propaganda* (*waixuan*) as a regular expression of public diplomacy. External propaganda refers to the continuation of the internal propaganda led by the CPC to achieve self-promotion and self-advocacy on the global stage (Zhou 2018; Zhao 2015). On the other hand, President Xi’s proposal also reflects the intermestic characteristics of China’s public diplomacy. Indeed, the large-scale use of social media has blurred the existing geographical boundaries of international exchange. The term “intermestic”, within the framework of international politics, refers to the way “international and domestic affairs in the globalization age progressively merge and encroach reciprocally” (Szondi 2009: 304). Furthermore, the open access of social media has blurred the boundaries between domestic and international publics and communication channels. Therefore, the term intermestic also underlines and coordinates

the domestic (gaining support) and international (engaging foreign publics) considerations of public diplomacy.

According to previous findings about China's digitalization of public diplomacy (Huang and Wang 2019a, 2021; Madrid-Morales 2017), Beijing's social media public diplomacy is an intermestic intertextual network of "highly centralized and politicized international communication practices" (Huang and Wang 2021, 1912). On the one hand, the domestic Internet blockade restricts access to international social media. Moreover, the central government's absolute control over domestic social media ensures that all messages of China's internal propaganda follow the desired political direction and promote the desired value orientation (Shambaugh 2007; Arsène 2011). On the other hand, the CPC has enrolled China's state-owned media, which mobilise international social media platforms to produce and spread strategic narratives. Such an intermestic practice is a collaborative strategy that allows Chinese public diplomacy actors to disseminate differentiated content at home and abroad and to interact with target audiences (Zhao 2019).

With the advancement of clinical trials for China's domestic COVID-19 vaccines in June 2020, Beijing's release of Chinese-made vaccines as a means for international assistance constituted a significant effort to restore its damaged reputation. For Lee (2021) and Wu and Gelineau (2021), vaccine diplomacy is a new instrument for rebuilding Beijing's international standing. First, as a kind of aid diplomacy, it demonstrates that Beijing is engaging in humanitarian assistance by donating materials overseas (Chattu and Knight 2019). Second, it is a subtle mediated political communication strategy that promotes Chinese-made vaccines and frames China's image as a peaceful-loving benefactor through different narratives (Staden and Wu 2021). Third, at the 2021 Global Health Summit, Xi Jinping (2021a) defined China's COVID-19 vaccines as "global public goods" (para. 7). To this end, China's vaccine diplomacy has also acquired the function of "public communication for general interest"

(Bessières and Huang 2021, 202), aiming for “the exchange and sharing of public utility information” and “the maintenance of the social link with a mission of defending collective interest” (207). For Chinese scholars and politicians (cf. C. Zhang 2021; Bi 2021; Bai 2021), such vaccine diplomacy will help Beijing strengthen its interaction with other countries and their citizens through cooperative COVID-19 vaccine research and development, vaccine aid, and vaccine export, and improve China’s reputation in the global health crisis. It will also promote China’s soft power by demonstrating its international responsibility, subtly legitimising and advocating a Beijing-centred post-COVID-19 international order and cooperative framework related to the “global community of health for all” (Xi 2021a, para. 6).

Moreover, Chinese scholars and politicians have regarded social media as a “public health position” that facilitates the promotion of China’s domestic vaccines and vaccination (Shi and Li 2021, 91). The aim is, “through visual representations” and dynamic narratives (Wu 2020, para. 2), to “promote the global expression, regional expression, and decentralized expression of China stories and China voices and enhance the affinity and effectiveness of international communication” (Xi 2021b, para. 7).

Therefore, we analysed China’s vaccination-themed narratives published by state-owned media outlets on both domestic and international social media platforms (Weibo and Twitter). The aim was to examine Beijing’s intermestic online communication strategy for promoting its domestic vaccines, motivating global mass vaccination, and increasing confidence in the safety, quality, and efficiency of its domestic vaccines. Two research questions guided the analysis:

RQ1: What are the narrative strategies of Chinese state-owned media outlets regarding vaccine diplomacy on two social media platforms: Weibo (domestic) and Twitter (international)?

RQ2: Addressing audiences at home and abroad, how does Beijing coordinate and intertextualise narratives on Weibo and Twitter?

Method

We observed the intermestic strategy used by Chinese state-owned media outlets to communicate about domestic vaccines on social media one month after Xi Jinping's speech at the 2021 Global Health Summit (May 21–June 20, 2021). Chinese scholars have read this speech as Beijing's commitment to show the world its COVID-19 prevention results and to participate in international health assistance. As the research questions indicate, we selected two social media platforms to collect data: Weibo and Twitter. Due to the Internet blockage system of the central government, most Chinese netizens cannot access international social media platforms (e.g., Twitter and Facebook). Weibo has become the mainstream Chinese microblogging service that Beijing uses to distribute domestic public diplomacy and propaganda platforms. At the same time, Beijing considers Twitter a vital international communication channel in order to expand its digital public diplomacy (Huang and Wang 2021).

In order to retrieve and download all Chinese vaccine-related posts in English and Chinese on Twitter and Weibo, we set three Twitter and four Weibo account monitors to observe three Chinese state-owned media outlets that publish on both international and domestic social media platforms: People's Daily (@PDChina on Twitter, @人民日报 on Weibo), Xinhua News Agency (@Xhnews on Twitter, @新华社 on Weibo), and China Global Television Network¹ (@CGTNOfficial on Twitter, @CGTN and @央视新闻 on Weibo). First, we downloaded all tweets posted by these three institutions from 21 May 2021

¹ *China Global Television Network* is an overseas communication network dominated by China Central Television. Therefore, in the information collection of Weibo, we also captured the content released by China Central Television (@央视新闻) to complete the research corpus.

to 20 June 2021. Next, we used the IF, ISNUMBER, and SEARCH functions in Microsoft Excel to check whether part of any post matched the string “vaccine”; this method yielded 919 tweets and 171 Weibo posts containing strings such as “ChineseVaccine,” “SinoVac²,” “SinoPharm²,” “COVID-19Vaccines,” and “COVID-19Vaccination.”

The aim of this study was to identify and classify different online engagement strategies and narratives related to China’s vaccine diplomacy. First, we adopted a semio-discursive perspective to analyse the textual information and visual content (e.g. stable image and video) in vaccine diplomacy-themed posts (Alexis et al. 2016; Magdi Fawzy 2019). Indeed, the interactivity and intertextuality of social media have produced a new online news writing style in which the mixture of textual and visual context enable the transmission of online messages through dynamic “multimodal interaction” 28/07/2022 21:29:00. This rhetorical condition can also “increase [the communicator’s] control over communication” (Ledin and Machin 2019, 168). In other words, the coordination between textual messages and visual content in online information design (e.g. using images or videos to supplement or develop ideas in textual information) is likely to make communication content more dynamic and attractive. This coordination can also make the attitudes of target audiences more favourable, promoting online communication engagement (Johnston and Taylor 2018). Second, we used a method of multilingual discourse and rhetorical analysis developed by Huang and Wang (2021) and Huang and Hardy (2021) to explore how Chinese state-owned media integrate online storytelling strategies in order to deliver narratives to domestic and international publics and engage intermestic communities in cross-cultural exchange.

We read each tweet and Weibo post carefully, coding them according to text modality and vaccination-themed content type. Combining emergent thematic coding and grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 2009), we coded 119 tweets and 171 Weibo posts³ to build detailed

² “SinoVac” and “SinoPharm” are two main Chinese domestic COVID-19 vaccine brands.

³ Due to the small number of Weibo posts, we completed the coding process for these data during this first step.

categories, checking and improving the codebook along the way. We each then coded 200 tweets to verify intercoder reliability using ReCal2 (Freelon 2010). Krippendor's Alpha for the two variables were .97 (text modality) and .82 (vaccination-themed content type). Then we each coded 300 tweets separately.

Chinese media's online engagement strategies

When promoting domestic vaccines to both domestic and international audiences, Chinese state-owned media tended to use "text + static images" and "text + video clips" to visualize their arguments about and descriptions of vaccine development and vaccination-related issues. On Weibo (see Table 1) and on Twitter (see Table 2), more than 90% of all posts included static images or video. All messages published by Chinese state-owned media outlets on Weibo contained visualized communication media (image, video or live video), while tweets containing only text were the least common ($n = 83, 9\%$).

Table 1. Text modality of vaccination-themed Weibo posts

[Table 1 here]

Table 2. Text modality of vaccination-themed tweets

[Table 2 here]

This result also shows Beijing's investment in managing impressions through online public diplomacy activities (Huang and Wang 2020). As argued by Chinese communication scholars Wang et al. (2019: 5), visual expressions can help Chinese public diplomacy actors organise online communication and "interactions with strangers and partners and reduce ambiguity presented in short textual messages". Indeed, images and videos can expand the expressive capacity of short messages on social media (e.g., tweets). Visual elements also

improve the accuracy, efficiency, fun, and sociality of digital diplomatic communication (Lane et al. 2019; Chen and Siu 2017). Moreover, using visual expressions in digital journalism promotes interaction between news publishers and receivers, thereby establishing and maintaining social relations through social media functions and devices, creating a space for social support, enhancing mutual understanding, and facilitating the co-construction of meaning (Alloing and Pierre 2020; Lecheler 2020).

Chinese media's online storytelling strategies

After reading social media posts about China's vaccines and vaccination, we identified the various types of content presented by China's state-owned media outlets (see Table 3). The "common types" are content themes and events shared by Chinese media outlets in preparing intermestic public diplomacy narratives. Among these common types, the specific content types account for different proportions on Weibo and Twitter. On Weibo, the Chinese media focused on and exaggerated the achievements of domestic vaccination ($n = 35, 40,6\%$) and aimed to motivate more people to join the Beijing-led COVID-19 immunity campaign. On Twitter, the Chinese media defended Beijing's geopolitical interests ($n = 383, 41,7\%$) and tried to restore its international image ($n = 208, 22,6\%$). Chinese journalists also continued to report on the rapid progress of domestic vaccination ($n = 118, 12,8\%$) to dispel foreign public concerns about the safety of China's domestic vaccines.

Table 3. China's vaccination-themed content types on intermestic social media platforms

[Table 3 here]

However, due to the differences between the domestic and international audiences, Beijing appears to have adopted a specific narrative strategy for communicating with the

domestic public on Weibo. As a social networking platform in China, Weibo is subject to strict Internet information censorship by the central government because the increasing democratization of the Internet threatens the authority of the CPC (Arsène 2011). As a supplement to public opinion review, China has also strengthened the ability of state-owned media outlets to use Weibo to spread favourable reports and control domestic public opinion (Creemers 2015). Therefore, as Table 3 shows, Beijing's particular narrative types on Weibo focus on global COVID-19 news updates and revolve around advocacy that aims to increase the willingness of the domestic community to administer and receive Chinese domestic vaccines.

Furthermore, by comparing the intermestic social media posts published by Chinese media outlets in the “common types” section of Table 3, we identified the “central kitchen model” of China's public diplomatic information production (Huang and Wang 2021, 1924) to uniformly produce, review and distribute vaccination-themed online narratives. Because of the government's control over and censorship of Weibo information production, the messages published on Weibo often reflect the instruction of official decision makers. Therefore, messages published on Weibo reflect the careful preparation and strict revision of authoritative discourse. For Huang and Arifon (2018), this type of authoritative discourse implies a narrative bottom line set by the CPC regarding para-diplomatic and international communication content. Above this bottom line, Chinese journalists have certain degree of freedom and use “meta-discourse and semi-official discourse” (Oger and Ollivier-Yaniv 2006, 63) on Twitter to express the authoritative voices of Beijing in fragmented and subtle ways in order to create a “polyphonic illusion” (Huang and Wang 2021, 1928). The core purpose is to modify and camouflage Beijing's authoritative discourse through various narrative and rhetorical tools in order to “erase heterogeneity, mismatch, and political sense” (Oger and Ollivier-Yaniv 2006, 63) in China's official declarations.

One event, two perspectives

In our dataset, Chinese media outlets used various tactics to distinguish domestic propaganda from international communication reporting the same information. First, Chinese journalists used nuanced expressions to describe sensitive political topics to intermestic publics. For instance, as Figure 1 shows, Chinese reporters used different expressions on Weibo and Twitter to imply different actors in Chinese domestic vaccine donation to Taiwan. On Weibo, the subject of the narrative was the Chinese mainland, emphasising the Chinese government, implying the geopolitical affiliation between China and Taiwan, and expressing the positive and open attitude of Beijing in donating vaccines to Taipei. The purpose of such a narrative was to convey to the Chinese domestic public Beijing's determination to defend the *one-China policy* and the proactive position that Beijing has taken in its relations with Taipei. However, on Twitter, the Chinese media shifted the narrative from "Chinese mainland" to "two mainland entities," softening Beijing's attitude toward Taiwan on the international stage. The notion of "two mainland entities" represents China's civil society. This rhetorical approach emphasized that the wishes of the Chinese people, not the leadership of Beijing, motivated donation of Chinese domestic vaccines. The implication is that the relationship between China and Taiwan is a matter of *human* relations; although the two sides have different political systems, the people in Taiwan and the mainland belong to the Chinese nation and share a common history, culture, and value system. From this point of view, donating vaccines to Taiwan is a way of promoting civil society among compatriots.

Figure 1. Using nuanced expressions for intermestic narratives

[Figure 1 here]

Second, as shown in Figure 2, at the domestic level, Chinese media outlets used cases of vaccine nationalism in Western countries to underscore Beijing's international image of selflessness and nobility. At the international level, Chinese reporters quoted third-party arguments and information (like sources from WHO, foreign public health institutions) to endorse Beijing's international initiatives and construct China's image as benefactor. As Figure 2 shows, on Weibo, Chinese media narratives criticized Western vaccine companies, especially in the United States, for reluctance to share vaccine patents. These narratives implied that these Western countries were not fulfilling their commitment towards the well-being of the international community. Accompanying video clips portrayed China as a country that honours its promises to implement the international cooperation initiative known as *global community of health for all*. On Twitter, Beijing produced richer narratives on the same topic (see Figure 2). It described the commitment of Chinese politicians to distribute vaccines internationally and highlighted forms of aid to foreign countries to show that Beijing was fulfilling its promises. In addition, Beijing released reports that developing and underdeveloped countries had received China's public health assistance, in order to promote Beijing's humanitarian actions and political engagement in the fair distribution of vaccines.

Figure 2. China's international responsibility-related posts

[Figure 2 here]

An intermestic mutual argumentation tactic

To address widespread vaccination hesitancy, Chinese state-owned media outlets used an intermestic mutual argumentation tactic in their narrative formulations. On Weibo, Chinese journalists reported to domestic audiences that different countries and international organizations had recognized China's domestic vaccines. The aim of such releases was to

enhance the confidence of Chinese people in participating in local vaccination campaigns. And with the increase in China's large-scale domestic vaccination, Beijing cited daily record sizes of Chinese mass vaccination in various Twitter narratives in order to continually demonstrate to the global community the safety and reliability of Chinese-made vaccines.

Figure 3. Intermestic mutual argumentation tactic

[Figure 3 here]

These intermestic arguments circulated in Beijing's social media narratives for both domestic and international audiences. Repeated statistics, arguments, and testimonies gave the intermestic intertextual network constructed by Chinese media an enumerative value, producing a cumulative rhetorical effect that strengthened public certainty about the safety of Chinese-made vaccines.

Conclusion

The global pandemic of COVID-19 pushed the Chinese government to strengthen the control and censorship of the media's public diplomacy information release, especially online narratives related to the vaccination and Chinese-made vaccines. In this exploratory study, we reviewed and categorized the vaccination-themed narratives of Chinese state-owned media outlets on intermestic social media platforms (Weibo and Twitter). Such practices have been an essential part of Beijing's digital public diplomacy campaign during the pandemic. They display the government's sense of international responsibility through visual narratives, and subtly legitimise China's political initiative to promote a global community of health for all.

By analysing online intermestic vaccination-themed narratives posted by Chinese state-owned media outlets one month after the 2021 Global Health Summit, we confirm

Beijing's use of the "central kitchen model" to produce messages for global communication. Based on this model, Chinese journalists used various narrative techniques and rhetorical devices to implement the central government's intermestic communication directives and frame China's political advocacies in a fragmented and subtle manner online. The core purpose is to create the illusion of polyphony, a way for Chinese institutions to conduct international communication within a system of information censorship. The aim is to promote and recognize specific political events through various perspectives, opinions, and arguments without crossing the red line of censorship. Although all of the social media posts we studied came from Chinese media outlets, they incorporated multiple voices and various visual forms, crossed domestic and international social networks, and followed Beijing's blueprint, framework, and objectives for "promoting the global expression, regional expression, and decentralized expression of China stories and China voices" during the COVID-19 pandemic (Xi 2021b, para. 7).

In future studies, it will be pertinent for scholars to consider using an expanded dataset of vaccination-themed para-diplomatic social media posts released by Chinese para-diplomatic actors on Weibo and Twitter. By combining manual coding with computer learning (e.g. semantic analysis and network analysis), we may provide answers to the following questions: (a) What are the network dynamics of China's online promotion of vaccine diplomacy? (b) By using social media communication, how do Chinese para-diplomatic actors generate a network synergy with other domestic non-state actors, foreign counterparts, and partners to endorse Beijing's vaccine diplomacy? (c) How can Chinese para-diplomatic actors build interactive relationships with domestic and foreign audiences on social media to frame Chinese-made vaccine-themed messages better?

References

- Abdul-Ghani, Eathar, Kenneth F. Hyde, and Roger Marshall. 2011. 'Emic and Etic Interpretations of Engagement with a Consumer-to-Consumer Online Auction Site'. *Journal of Business Research* 64 (10): 1060–66. Doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2010.10.009.
- Alaran, Aishat Jumoke, Yusuff Adebayo Adebisi, Abubakar Badmos, Fahd Khalid-Salako, Sa'id Khalid Gaya, Esther Bosede Ilesanmi, Damilola Quazeem Olaoye, Adeola Bamisaiye, and Don Eliseo Lucero-Prisno. 2021. 'Uneven Power Dynamics Must Be Levelled in COVID-19 Vaccines Access and Distribution'. *Public Health in Practice* 2 : 100096. Doi :10.1016/j.puhip.2021.100096.
- Alexis, Lucie, Christine Chevret-Castellani, Sarah Labelle, and Eleni Mouratidou. 2016. 'Vers le partage du savoir-écrire la loi ? Analyse sémio-discursive du dispositif republique-numerique.fr'. *Semen. Revue de sémio-linguistique des textes et discours*, no. 42. Doi :10.4000/semen.10624.
- Alloing, Camille, and Julien Pierre. 2020. 'Le tournant affectif des recherches en communication numérique. Présentation'. *Communiquer. Revue de communication sociale et publique*, no. 28 : 1–17.
- Arsenault, Amelia. 2014. 'Networks: The Technological and the Social'. In *Routledge International Handbook of Contemporary Social and Political Theory*, edited by Gerard Delanty and Stephen P. Turner, 259–69. London : Routledge.
- Arsène, Séverine. 2011. *Internet et Politique En Chine : Les Contours Normatifs de La Contestation*. Paris, France: Éditions Karthala.
- Bai, Shujie. 2021. 'China's Vaccine Helps the World Fight the COVID-19 Pandemic'. *Guoji Shangbao [International Business Press]*, August, 2. Doi:10.28270/n.cnki.ngjsb.2021.003700.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhailovich. 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin : University of Texas Press.
- Bernard, Julien. 2015. 'Les voies d'approche des émotions. Enjeu de définition et catégorisations'. *Terrains/Théories*, no. 2. Presses universitaires de Paris Nanterre. Doi :10.4000/teth.196.
- Bessières, Dominique, and Zhao Alexandre Huang. 2021. 'La communication publique et d'intérêt général [Public Communication and Public Interest]'. In *Les fondamentaux de la communication : Pratiques et métiers en évolution*, edited by Céline Guillot and Sarah Benmoyal, 201–20. Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgique: De Boeck.
- Bi, Jiuchuan. 2021. 'Research on China's Emergency Health Diplomacy in the 21st Century'. Ph.D., Beijing: China Foreign Affairs University.
- Bjola, Corneliu, and Lu Jiang. 2015. 'Social Media and Public Diplomacy: A Comparative Analysis of the Digital Diplomatic Strategies of the EU, US and Japan in China'. In *Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*, edited by Corneliu Bjola and Marcus Holmes, 71–88. New York: Routledge.
- Bollyky, Thomas J., and Chad P. Bown. 2020. 'The Tragedy of Vaccine Nationalism: Only Cooperation Can End the Pandemic'. *Foreign Affairs* 99 : 96–108.
- Boucheron, Patrick. 2017. *Histoire mondiale de la France*. Paris: Le Seuil.
- Chan-Olmsted, Sylvia, and Lisa-Charlotte Wolter. 2017. 'Toward a Multidimensional Framework of Media Engagement: Conceptualizing Consumer Experience and Connection with Media Content in a Digital Environment'. In *Emma Conference 2017*. <https://www.media-management.eu/ocs/index.php/emma/emma2017/paper/view/585>.
- Chattu, Vijay Kumar, and W. Andy Knight. 2019. 'Global Health Diplomacy as a Tool of Peace'. *Peace Review* 31 (2): 148–57. doi:10.1080/10402659.2019.1667563.

- Chen, Huimin, Zeyu Zhu, Fanchao Qi, Yining Ye, Zhiyuan Liu, Maosong Sun, and Jianbin Jin. 2021. 'Country Image in COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case Study of China'. *IEEE Transactions on Big Data* 7 (1): 81–92. doi:10.1109/TBDATA.2020.3023459.
- Chen, Xin, and Kin Wai Michael Siu. 2017. 'Exploring User Behaviour of Emoticon Use among Chinese Youth'. *Behaviour & Information Technology* 36 (6): 637–49. doi:10.1080/0144929X.2016.1269199.
- Chen, Xuefei. 2015. 'Tell Good Chinese Stories : Public Diplomacy of Foreign Affairs Departments'. In *Blue Book of Public Diplomacy: Annual Report of China's Public Diplomacy Development (2015)*, 25–35. Beijing: Social sciences academic press (China).
- Chewning, Lisa V. 2018. 'Virtual Engagement : A Theoretical Framework of Affordances, Networks, and Communication'. In *The Handbook of Communication Engagement*, edited by Kim Amanda Johnston and Maureen Taylor, 439–51. Medford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Creemers, Rogier. 2015. 'Le pivot de la cybergouvernance chinoise - Intégrer le contrôle d'Internet dans la Chine de Xi Jinping'. *Perspectives chinoises*, no. 2015/4: 5–14.
- D'Almeida, Nicole. 2012. *Les promesses de la communication*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Dolea, Alina. 2018. 'Public Diplomacy as Co-Constructed Discourses of Engagement'. In *The Handbook of Communication Engagement*, edited by Kim Amanda Johnston and Maureen Taylor, 331–46. Medford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Dror, Amiel A., Netanel Eisenbach, Shahar Taiber, Nicole G. Morozov, Matti Mizrahi, Asaf Zigran, Samer Srouji, and Eyal Sela. 2020. 'Vaccine Hesitancy: The next Challenge in the Fight against COVID-19'. *European Journal of Epidemiology* 35 (8): 775–79. doi:10.1007/s10654-020-00671-y.
- Dubé, Eve, Caroline Laberge, Maryse Guay, Paul Bramadat, Réal Roy, and Julie A. Bettinger. 2013. 'Vaccine Hesitancy: An Overview'. *Human Vaccines & Immunotherapeutics* 9 (8): 1763–73. doi:10.4161/hv.24657.
- Foucault, Michel. 2006. *The Will to Knowledge*. London: Penguin Books.
- Freelon, Deen G. 2010. 'ReCal: Intercoder Reliability Calculation as a Web Service'. *International Journal of Internet Science* 5 (1): 20–33.
- Glaser, Barney G., and Anselm L. Strauss. 2009. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. 4. New Brunswick: Aldine.
- Global Times. 2021. 'China Has Provided Vaccines to 106 Countries and 4 International Organizations'. *Global Times*. [September 18](https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1711228258208488604&wfr=spider&for=pc). <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1711228258208488604&wfr=spider&for=pc>.
- Goffman, Erving. 1955. 'On Face-Work: An Analysis of Ritual Elements in Social Interaction'. *Psychiatry* 18 (3): 213–31.
- Green, Melanie C., and Timothy C. Brock. 2000. 'The Role of Transportation in the Persuasiveness of Public Narratives.' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 79 (5): 701–21. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.79.5.701.
- Health Commission of Hebei Province. 2021. 'Immunization Planification and Achievement Propaganda: Scientific guidance to effectively respond to vaccine hesitancy'. *Health Commission of Hebei Province*. [May 21](http://wsjkw.hebei.gov.cn/html/zwyw/20210521/379154.html). <http://wsjkw.hebei.gov.cn/html/zwyw/20210521/379154.html>.
- Henneberg, Stephan C. M. 2002. 'Understanding Political Marketing'. In *The Idea of Political Marketing*, edited by Nicolas O'Shaughnessy, Nicolas J. O'Shaughnessy, Stephan C. M. Henneberg, and Charlotte Henry, 280. Westport: Greenwood Publishing.
- Huang, Yanzhong. 2021. 'Vaccine Diplomacy is Paying Off for China'. *Foreign Affairs*, [July](#)

- [26. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-03-11/vaccine-diplomacy-paying-china](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-03-11/vaccine-diplomacy-paying-china).
- Huang, Zhao Alexandre. 2020. 'Serving Soft Power and Public Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics: A Communication Analysis of the Confucius Institute at the University of Nairobi'. Paris: COMUE Université Paris-Est.
- Huang, Zhao Alexandre, and Olivier Arifon. 2018. 'La diplomatie publique chinoise sur Twitter : la fabrique d'une polyphonie harmonieuse'. *Hermès, La Revue*, no. 81 : 45–53. doi:10.3917/herm.081.0045.
- Huang, Zhao Alexandre, and Mylène Hardy. 2019. '#Guanxi @C hineAfrique : la mobilisation des relations interpersonnelles dans la diplomatie publique chinoise à l'heure de numérique'. *MEI.Médiation et Information*, no.48: 75–86.
- . 2021. 'Vers une diplomatie publique française des musées en Chine ? : La sinisation des stratégies communicationnelles du Louvre à l'ère numérique'. *Les Enjeux de l'Information et de la Communication*, no. 22/3A: 71–87.
- Huang, Zhao Alexandre, and Rui Wang. 2019a. 'Building a Network to "Tell China Stories Well": Chinese Diplomatic Communication Strategies on Twitter'. *International Journal of Communication* 13 (June): 2984–3007.
- . 2019b. 'The New "Cat" of the Internet: China's Panda Diplomacy on Twitter'. In *BIG IDEAS in Public Relations Research and Practice*, edited by Finn Frandsen, Winni Johansen, Ralph Tench, and Stefania Romenti, 4:69–85. Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited.
- . 2020. "'Panda Engagement" in China's Digital Public Diplomacy'. *Asian Journal of Communication* 30 (2): 118–40. doi:10.1080/01292986.2020.1725075.
- . 2021. 'Exploring China's Digitalization of Public Diplomacy on Weibo and Twitter: A Case Study of the U.S.-China Trade War'. *International Journal of Communication* 15 (2021): 1912–39.
- Ingenhoff, Diana, Giada Calamai, and Efe Sevin. 2021. 'Key Influencers in Public Diplomacy 2.0: A Country-Based Social Network Analysis'. *Social Media + Society* 7 (1): 205630512098105. doi:10.1177/2056305120981053.
- Jin, Wei, and Pan Liu. 2020. 'Enhancing the Discourse Power in Telling the Story of China's Fight Against the Epidem-c'. *Theory - Guangming*. [April 11. https://theory.gmw.cn/2020-04/11/content_33732591.htm](https://theory.gmw.cn/2020-04/11/content_33732591.htm).
- Johnston, Kim Amanda, and Maureen Taylor, eds. 2018. *The Handbook of Communication Engagement*. Medford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Kang, Jin-Ae, Sookyeong Hong, and Glenn T. Hubbard. 2020. 'The Role of Storytelling in Advertising: Consumer Emotion, Narrative Engagement Level, and Word-of-mouth Intention'. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 19 (1): 47–56. doi:10.1002/cb.1793.
- Khan, M Laeeq, Muhammad Ittefaq, Yadira Ixchel Martínez Pantoja, Muhammad Mustafa Raziq, and Aqdas Malik. 2021. 'Public Engagement Model to Analyze Digital Diplomacy on Twitter: A Social Media Analytics Framework'. *International Journal of Communication* 15 (2021): 1741–69.
- Kim, Jae-Eun, Stephen Lloyd, and Marie-Cécile Cervellon. 2016. 'Narrative-Transportation Storylines in Luxury Brand Advertising: Motivating Consumer Engagement'. *Journal of Business Research* 69 (1): 304–13. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2015.08.002.
- Lane, Daniel S, Slgi S Lee, Fan Liang, Dam Hee Kim, Liwei Shen, Brian E Weeks, and Nojin Kwak. 2019. 'Social Media Expression and the Political Self'. *Journal of Communication* 69 (1): 49–72. doi:10.1093/joc/jqy064.
- Lecheler, Sophie. 2020. 'The Emotional Turn in Journalism Needs to Be About Audience Perceptions:—Commentary - Virtual Special Issue on the Emotional Turn'. *Digital Journalism* 8 (2): 287–91. doi:10.1080/21670811.2019.1708766.

- Ledin, Per, and David Machin. 2019. 'Forty Years of IKEA Kitchens and the Rise of a Neoliberal Control of Domestic Space'. *Visual Communication* 18 (2): 165–87. doi:10.1177/1470357218762601.
- Lee, Seow Ting. 2021. 'Vaccine Diplomacy: Nation Branding and China's COVID-19 Soft Power Play'. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, July:1-15. doi:10.1057/s41254-021-00224-4.
- Liu, Hailong. 2013. *Propaganda: Concept, discourse and its legitimation*. Beijing: Encyclopedia of China Publishing House.
- Lu, Jiayi. 2015. 'Propaganda: Concept, Discourse and Its Legitimation, by Hailong Liu'. *Chinese Journal of Communication* 8 (3): 326–31. doi:10.1080/17544750.2015.1050807.
- Luo, Chen, Anfan Chen, Botao Cui, and Wang Liao. 2021. 'Exploring Public Perceptions of the COVID-19 Vaccine Online from a Cultural Perspective: Semantic Network Analysis of Two Social Media Platforms in the United States and China'. *Telematics and Informatics* 65 (December): 101712. doi:10.1016/j.tele.2021.101712.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. 1984. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Madrid-Morales, Dani. 2017. 'China's Digital Public Diplomacy towards Africa: Actors, Messages and Audience'. In *China-Africa Relations: Building Images Through Cultural Co-Operation, Media Representation, and Communication*, edited by Kathryn Batchelor and Xiaoling Zhang, 129–46. New York: Routledge.
- Magdi Fawzy, Rania. 2019. 'Neoliberalizing News Discourse: A Semio-Discursive Reading of News Gamification'. *Discourse & Communication* 13 (5): 497–515. doi:10.1177/1750481319856202.
- Manor, Ilan. 2019. *The Digitalization of Public Diplomacy*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mathieu, Edouard, Hannah Ritchie, Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, Max Roser, Joe Hasell, Cameron Appel, Charlie Giattino, and Lucas Rodés-Guirao. 2021. 'A Global Database of COVID-19 Vaccinations'. *Nature Human Behaviour* 5 (7): 947–53. doi:10.1038/s41562-021-01122-8.
- Miike, Yoshitaka. 2006. 'Non-Western Theory in Western Research? An Asiatic Agenda for Asian Communication Studies'. *Review of Communication* 6 (1–2): 4–31. doi:10.1080/15358590600763243.
- Ng, Kwai Hang, and Jeffrey L. Kidder. 2010. 'Toward a Theory of Emotive Performance: With Lessons from How Politicians Do Anger'. *Sociological Theory* 28 (2): 193–214. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9558.2010.01373.x.
- Nye, Joseph S. 2004. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Nye, Joseph S. 2019. 'Soft Power and Public Diplomacy Revisited'. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 14 (1–2): 7–20.
- Nye, Joseph S. 2021. 'Soft Power: The Evolution of a Concept'. *Journal of Political Power* 14 (1): 196–208. doi:10.1080/2158379X.2021.1879572.
- Oger, Claire, and Caroline Ollivier-Yaniv. 2006. 'Conjurer Le Désordre Discursif. Les Procédés de « lissage » Dans La Fabrication du Discours Institutionnel'. *Mots*, no. 81 : 63–77. doi:10.4000/mots.675.
- Omer, Saad B., Daniel A. Salmon, Walter A. Orenstein, 24hong24ricia deHart, and Neal Halsey. 2009. 'Vaccine Refusal, Mandatory Immunization, and the Risks of Vaccine-Preventable Diseases'. *New England Journal of Medicine* 360 (19): 1981–88. doi:10.1056/NEJMsa0806477.
- Pamment, James. 2012. *New Public Diplomacy in the 21st Century: A Comparative Study of Policy and Practice*. New York: Routledge.

- Pisarska, Katarzyna. 2016. *The Domestic Dimension of Public Diplomacy*. London: Palgrave. doi:10.1057/978-1-137-54679-1.
- Rafaeli, Sheizaf. 1988. 'Interactivity: From New Media to Communication'. In *Advancing Communication Science: Merging Mass and Interpersonal Processes*, edited by Robert P. Hawkins, John M. Wiemann, and Suzanne Pingree, 110–34. Calif: SAGE.
- Roselle, Laura, Alister Miskimmon, and Ben O'Loughlin. 2014. 'Strategic Narrative: A New Means to Understand Soft Power'. *Media, War & Conflict* 7 (1): 70–84. doi:10.1177/1750635213516696.
- Saffer, Adam J., Maureen Taylor, and Aimei Yang. 2013. 'Political Public Relations in Advocacy: Building Online Influence and Social Capital'. *Public Relations Journal* 7 (4).
- Shambaugh, David. 2007. 'China's Propaganda System: Institutions, Processes and Efficacy'. *The China Journal* 57: 25–58. doi:10.1086/tcj.57.20066240.
- Shi, Anbin, and Yuhan Li. 2021. "'yi25hongyouyu" zhong de meiti juece: pingtai zhili yu xushi chonggou [The role of media in "vaccine hesitancy": platform governance and narrative reconstruction]'. *Youth Journalist*, no. 09: 90–93. doi:10.15997/j.cnki.qnjz.2021.09.036.
- Staden, Cobus van, and Yu-Shan Wu. 2021. 'Vaccine Diplomacy and Beyond: New Trends in Chinese Image-Building in Africa'. Johannesburg: South African Institute of International Affairs.
- Szondi, György. 2009. 'Central and Eastern European Public Diplomacy: A Transitional Perspective on National Reputation Management'. In *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, edited by Nancy Snow and Philip M. Taylor, 292–313. New York: Routledge.
- Tan, Youzhi. 2016. *Construction strategy for Chinese public diplomacy from the perspective of international discourse power*. Beijing: China social sciences press.
- . 2019. 'The Construction of China's Public Diplomacy from the Perspective of Soft Power Strategy'. In *The Changing World and the Capacity Building of Public Diplomacy in the New Era*, edited by Xuefei Chen, Wei Xiong, and Ya Ou, 9–22. Beijing: Current Affairs Press.
- Taylor, Maureen, and Michael L. Kent. 2014. 'Dialogic Engagement: Clarifying Foundational Concepts'. *Journal of Public Relations Research* 26 (5): 384–98. doi:10.1080/1062726X.2014.956106.
- Wang, Xiao. 2010. 'The Construction of China's International Discourse Power and Image'. *Journal of University of International Relations*, no. 6: 58–65.
- Wang, Yiwei. 2008. 'Public Diplomacy and the Rise of Chinese Soft Power'. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616 (1): 257–73.
- Wang, Yuan, Yukun Li, Xinning Gui, Yubo Kou, and Fenglian Liu. 2019. 'Culturally-Embedded Visual Literacy: A Study of Impression Management via Emoticon, Emoji, Sticker, and Meme on Social Media in China'. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction* 3 (CsCW): 1–24. doi:10.1145/3359170.
- Wehbe, Houssein, and Ahmed Bouabdallah. 2012. 'A User-Centric Communication Model for Mobile Web'. *Procedia Computer Science* 10: 680–87. doi:10.1016/j.procs.2012.06.087.
- WHO. 2021. COVID-19 vaccine tracker and landscape. WHO. September 14. <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/draft-landscape-of-covid-19-candidate-vaccines>.
- Wu, Di, and Jian Jay Wang. 2018. 'Country Image in Public Diplomacy: From Messages to Relationships'. In *Bridging Disciplinary Perspectives of Country Image Reputation, Brand, and Identity*, edited by Diana Ingenhoff, Candace White, Alexander Buhmann,

- and Spiro Kioussis, 244–62. New York: Routledge.
- Wu, Huizhong, and Kristen Gelineau. 2021. ‘Chinese Vaccines Sweep Much of the World, despite Concerns’. *AP NEWS*. April 28. <https://apnews.com/article/china-vaccines-worldwide-0382aefa52c75b834fbaf6d869808f51>.
- Wu, Ling. 2020. ‘Working Hard to Tell the Stories of China’s Fight Against the Epidemic’. *People’s Daily*. December 14. <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2020/1214/c1001-31965069.html>.
- Xi, Jinping. 2021a. ‘Working Together to Build a Global Community of Health for All’. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China*. May 21. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1877666.shtml.
- . 2021b. ‘During the 30th Collective Study Session of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, Xi Jinping Emphasized Strengthening and Improving International Communication Work, Showing a Real, Three-Dimensional and Comprehensive China’. *Xinhua*. June 1. http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2021-06/01/c_1127517461.htm.
- Xinhua. 2020. ‘In-Depth Study and Implementation of the Spirit of General Secretary Xi Jinping’s Important Speech on the Prevention and Control of the COVID-19 Epidemic’. *Xinhua*. February 11. http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020-02/11/c_1125559786.htm.
- Zaharna. 2007. ‘The Soft Power Differential: Network Communication and Mass Communication in Public Diplomacy’. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 2 (3): 213–28. doi:10.1163/187119007X240505.
- Zaharna, R.S. 2018. ‘Global Engagement : Culture and Communication Insights From Public Diplomacy’. In *The Handbook of Communication Engagement*, edited by Kim Amanda Johnston and Maureen Taylor, 313–30. OR: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Zhang, Chunxia. 2021. ‘Those days when the COVID-19 vaccine was stored and shipped’. *China Today*, no. 3: 56–58.
- Zhang, Xudong. 2021. ‘Looking Forward to the “14th Five-Year Plan” China’s New Diplomatic Journey’. *China Today*. April 7. http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/zw2018/zgysj/202104/t20210407_800242834.html.
- Zhao, Kejin. 2015. ‘The Motivation Behind China’s Public Diplomacy’. *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 8 (2): 167–96. doi:10.1093/cjip/pov005.
- . 2019. ‘The China Model of Public Diplomacy and Its Future’. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 14 (1–2): 169–81. doi:10.1163/1871191X-14101033.
- Zhao, Qizheng. 2019. ‘Public Diplomacy Requires Multi-Part Collaboration’. In *The Changing World and the Capacity Building of Public Diplomacy in the New Era*, edited by Xuefei Chen, Wei Xiong, and Ya Ou, 3–8. Beijing: Current Affairs Press.
- Zhou, Qingan. 2018. *Beyond Visible Border: public diplomacy in global communication*. Beijing: Communication University of China press.

Tables and Figures

Table 1. Text modality of vaccination-themed Weibo posts

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Text + Static image	106	62,4	62,4
Text + Video clip	54	31,8	94,1
Text + Live video	10	5,9	100
Total	170	100	

Table 2. Text modality of vaccination-themed tweets

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
Text only	83	9	9
Text + static image	688	74,9	83,9
Text + video clip	144	15,7	99,6
Text + live video	3	0,3	99,9
Other	1	0,1	100
Total	919	100	

Table 3. China's vaccination-themed content types on intermestic social media platforms

	Weibo				Twitter		Vaccination-themed content type		
	Vaccination-themed content type	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent	Percent	Frequency			
Common types	Market China's domestic vaccines	6	3,5	3,5	4,2	4,2	39	Market China's domestic vaccines	Common types
	Promote others' endorsement of China's vaccines	16	9,4	12,9	13,5	9,2	85	Promote others' endorsement of China's vaccines	
	Demonstrate China's international responsibility and vaccine diplomacy	12	7,1	20,0	36,1	22,6	208	Demonstrate China's international responsibility and vaccine diplomacy	
	Display China's achievements in domestic mass vaccination	35	20,6	40,6	49,0	12,8	118	Display China's achievements in domestic mass vaccination	
	Declare China's geopolitics and foreign policy by using vaccines/vaccination-related content	5	3,0	43,6	90,6	41,7	383	Declare China's geopolitics and foreign policy by using vaccines/vaccination-related content	
Weibo content types	<i>Encourage domestic vaccination</i>	9	5,3	45,4	99,2	8,6	79	<i>Cover other countries' vaccination-related news</i>	Twitter content types
	<i>Update domestic COVID-19 news</i>	29	17,1	65,9	100,0	0,8	7	<i>Show foreign governments' gratitude for Beijing's vaccine diplomacy</i>	
	<i>Update foreign COVID-19 news</i>	31	18,2	84,2					
	<i>Present Beijing's responsibility for overseas Chinese and its compatriots</i>	3	1,8	85,9					
	<i>Educate the population about COVID-19 and its vaccines</i>	4	2,4	88,3					
	<i>Highlight the advantages of domestic vaccines</i>	16	9,4	97,7					
	<i>Other</i>	4	2,4	100,0					
Total	170	100,0			100,0	919	Total		

Weibo

CGTN
5-24 17:20 来自 微博 weibo.com

【国台办：愿意迅速作出安排 让大陆同胞有大陆疫苗可用】台湾近日疫情日趋严重。今天（24日），有记者向国台办提问，大陆方面能够提供哪些具体的帮助？国台办发言人朱凤莲表示：生命至上，抗疫优先。我们的态度非常明确，愿意迅速作出安排，让大陆同胞尽快有大陆疫苗可用。如果有需要，我们也愿意积极考虑向台湾派出疫情防控专家，与台湾医疗卫生人士分享抗疫经验，提供防疫咨询。The Chinese mainland on Monday expressed willingness to make speedy arrangements to provide COVID-19 vaccines to Taiwan compatriots. "We will consider sending experts to share experiences and provide consultations on the fight against the virus if needed," said Zhu Fenglian, a spokesperson for the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council. [收起](#)



Twitter

China Xinhua News
@XHNews
China state-affiliated media

Two mainland entities have expressed their willingness to donate COVID-19 vaccines to Taiwan to help the island cope with a spike in local infections: [spokesperson xhtxs.cn/fuv](https://xhtxs.cn/fuv)



Figure 1. Using nuanced expressions for *intermestic* narratives

Weibo

CGTN
5-27 01:00 来自 微博视频号

【China24特别评论节目总编詹姆斯·史密斯：疫苗专利豁免，功在当代，利在千秋？】美国政府放弃新冠疫苗专利呼吁，遭遇了代表公正利益群体组织的强烈反对。他们希望专利豁免能带来长期利益，不过中国却不这么认为。功在当代，利在千秋。举国上下是一体的。暂时的专利豁免，可以赢得青山，利在千秋。At the WTO, calls for vaccine intellectual property waivers are growing. Who do you think these pharmaceutical companies are? Charles? Long term versus short term, money versus lives, which will take the lead? [CGTN的微博视频号 收起](#)



CGTN
5-28 01:00 来自 微博视频号

詹姆斯·史密斯：【提醒：各方应恪守承诺，帮助非洲抗疫】非洲是国际公共卫生中薄弱环节，世界卫生组织屡次强调，非洲国家“医疗匮乏是一个残酷的现实”，需要密切关注新冠疫苗的发展情况。作为发达国家，西方必须放弃疫苗民族主义，放弃本国优先，助力非洲渡过“劫”。本期《指点财经》，CGTN特邀Charles为您解读。The WHO has repeatedly stressed that the lack of medical treatment in African countries is a cruel reality, and special attention has to be paid to the dynamics of COVID-19 in the continent. The developed countries need to keep their promises in providing vaccines so as to help Africa survive the disaster. In this episode of BizBeat, CGTN's Xia Cheng talks about this. [CGTN的微博视频号 收起](#)



Twitter

CGTN
@CGTNOfficial
China state-affiliated media

China's President Xi Jinping pledged \$3 billion in aid over the next three years to help developing countries recover from the coronavirus pandemic. Xi proposed an international forum on vaccine cooperation Friday at the G20 Global Health Summit.

[#cgtnamerica](#)

CGTN
@CGTNOfficial
China state-affiliated media

- China will stay committed to supporting WTO and other institutions in making an early decision on waiving rights on [#COVID19](#) vaccines
- China to propose setting up an international forum on vaccine cooperation to seek equitable distribution of vaccines around the world (2/2)

CGTN
@CGTNOfficial - 21 min
China state-affiliated media
Takeaways from Chinese President Xi Jinping's address at Global Health Summit: (1/2)

- China to provide additional \$3 billion in aid over next three years to other developing countries.
- China to offer further vaccines in addition to 300 million doses already supplied twitter.com/CGTNOFFICIAL...

People's Daily, China
@PDCN
China state-affiliated media

[#Mongolia](#) on Wednesday received the 4th batch of supplies donated by Chinese government to fight the COVID-19 pandemic at an online handover ceremony. (file pic)

CGTN
@CGTNOfficial
China state-affiliated media

Nambian Vice President Nangolo Mbumba on Friday received his first dose of China's [#Sinopharm](#) COVID-19 vaccine. bit.ly/3H9Xt54




Figure 2. China's international responsibility-related posts



Figure 3. *Intermestic* mutual argumentation tactic