

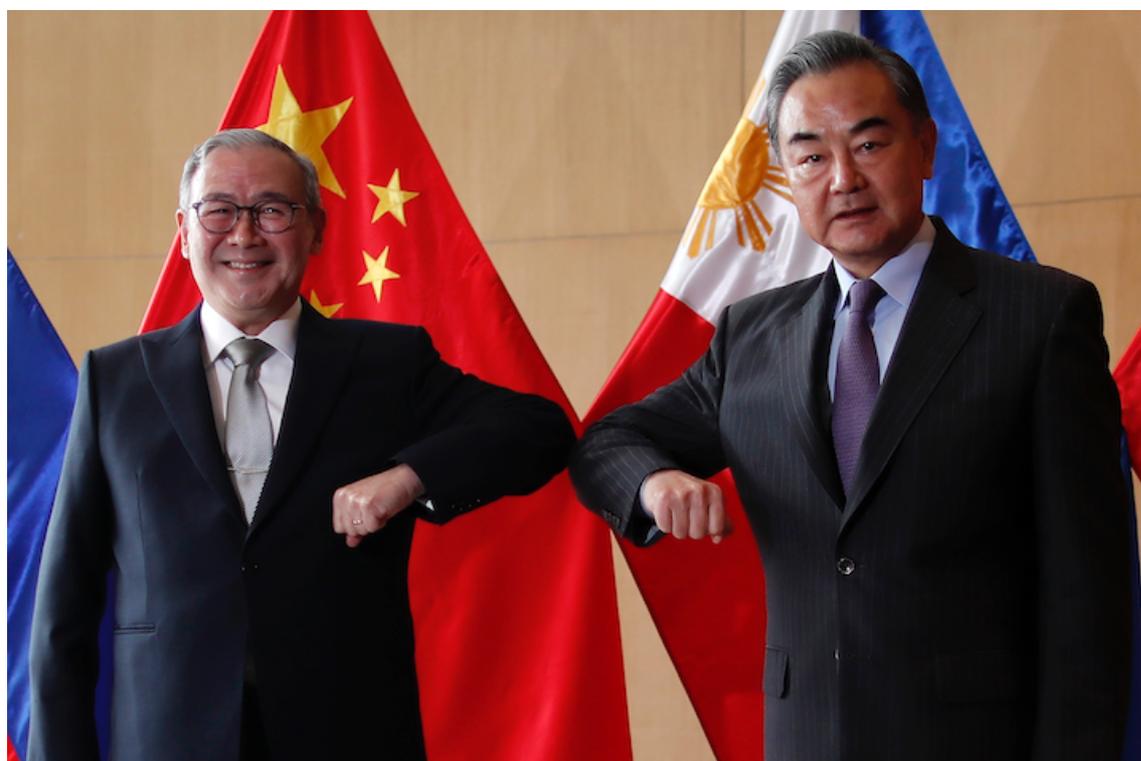
PERSPECTIVE

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Wang Yi's Southeast Asia Tour: Significance and Challenges

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Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi (right) and Philippine Foreign Affairs secretary Teodoro Locsin (left) attend a meeting in Manila on January 16, 2021. 2021 began with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's January visit to Brunei, Indonesia, Myanmar and The Philippines. Photo: Francis R. Malagsig (AFP).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- China kicked off 2021 by according importance to Southeast Asia and ASEAN with Foreign Minister Wang Yi's January visit to Brunei, Indonesia, Myanmar and The Philippines.
- In 2020, Chinese leaders, including President Xi Jinping, Politburo Member Yang Jiechi, Defense Minister Wei Fenghe and Wang Yi visited nine ASEAN countries in pursuit of its objective of wooing Southeast Asia.
- Myanmar will be the country coordinator for China-ASEAN relations this year and is the current co-chair of the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation, a China-led initiative. Brunei is the chair of ASEAN this year.
- China regards Indonesia as the most important and influential country in ASEAN, and has expressed support for Indonesia to become a regional vaccine production hub so as to raise its profile in developing and Muslim countries.
- There are a number of thrusts in China's relations with Southeast Asia, including collaboration for economic recovery, pushing ahead with key projects under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and providing access to Chinese vaccines.
- At the same time, Beijing's passage of the coastguard law has undermined Wang Yi's outreach efforts to Southeast Asia. China also needs to address issues related to its vaccine diplomacy.

INTRODUCTION

Although China has stuck to its more than three-decade long tradition of having its foreign minister visit Africa in his first foreign trip of the year, Southeast Asia has especially in recent years featured prominently in China's foreign policy. Last year, soon after State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited the African countries of Burundi, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea and Zimbabwe on 7-13 January 2020, he accompanied Chinese President Xi Jinping on a state visit to Myanmar the following week, on 17-18 January.¹

This year, Southeast Asia has featured prominently as well where such high-level visits from Beijing are concerned. Very soon after his five-nation African tour of Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Seychelles and Tanzania on 4-9 January 2021, Wang Yi embarked on his Southeast Asian visit to Brunei, Indonesia, Myanmar and The Philippines lasting from 11 to 16 January 2021.²

CHINA'S FOCUS ON SOUTHEAST ASIA

Wang Yi's January 2021 Southeast Asia visit is part of the continuous efforts China has been making to engage the region. This engagement seems to have assumed more importance in the past two years, beginning with Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Myanmar in early 2020. Xi's visit was significant for a number of reasons. First, this was Xi's first overseas visit in 2020 which indicated China's intention that year to focus on strengthening its ties with Southeast Asia in general and with Myanmar in particular. In the event, due to the Covid-19 outbreak, Xi's Myanmar visit turned out to be the only foreign trip he took in 2020. Second, it was the first state visit to Myanmar by a Chinese president in 19 years.³ Third, the trip was a single-country visit, which departed from the usual Chinese practice of combining a few countries in one trip (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: List of Visits by Chinese Leader/Ministers to Southeast Asia (2020-2021)

<u>Date</u>	<u>Chinese Leader/Ministers</u>	<u>Southeast Asian Countries Visited</u> (arranged in order of the countries visited)	<u>Remarks</u>
17-18 January 2020	Xi Jinping (Chinese President)	Myanmar	Single-country state visit
19-20 August	Yang Jiechi (Politburo member)	Singapore	After Singapore, Yang Jiechi visited Busan, South Korea, on 21-22 August
1-4 September 2020	Yang Jiechi (Politburo member)	Myanmar	Apart from Myanmar, Yang also travelled to Spain and Greece
7-11 September 2020	Wei Fenghe (State Councilor and Defense Minister)	Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei and the Philippines	Wei's visit coincided with remarks by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo for Southeast Asia to take action against China's bullying in the South China Sea
11-15 October 2020	Wang Yi (State Councilor and Foreign Minister)	Cambodia, Malaysia, Laos and Thailand	Wang Yi's trip included a transit stop in Singapore on 13 October 2020 where he met Singapore's Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan at Changi Airport
11-16 January 2021	Wang Yi (State Councilor and Foreign Minister)	Myanmar, Indonesia, Brunei and the Philippines	Wang Yi embarks on his Southeast Asian tour a day after his return from Africa

Myanmar has continued to receive much attention from China throughout 2020 and 2021, and was the country most visited by Chinese dignitaries. In September 2020, Politburo member and former Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi visited Myanmar. This was Yang's second visit to Myanmar; he had accompanied Chinese President Xi Jinping to Naypyitaw in January 2020. In 2021, State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi again accorded importance to Myanmar when he made the country his first stop in his first trip to Southeast Asia. Chinese media highlighted that Wang Yi was the first foreign minister to visit Myanmar since national elections were held there in November 2020.⁴

There are a number of reasons behind China's focus on Myanmar. One is that Myanmar will be the country coordinator for China-ASEAN relations in July 2021 for a three-year term. Another reason is that Myanmar is the current co-chair of the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation, an initiative of China involving five other ASEAN riparian member states.⁵ A longer standing reason is that China continues to lend its support to the NLD-led government and especially Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been criticized by the West and Malaysia over her handling of the Rohingya issue.⁶

Wang Yi's January visit should also be viewed in conjunction with earlier visits by himself and other Chinese dignitaries to Southeast Asia. Taken together, they have covered nine out of the 10 ASEAN member states.⁷ The ninth country, Singapore, was covered twice in 2020, once as a transit stop in October while the other was during Yang Jiechi's visit in August for the 30th anniversary of China-Singapore relations.

That leaves Vietnam as the only country ostensibly left out in previous visits. However, this does not mean that Hanoi is any less important to China. There is a view that Vietnam was not included in Wang Yi's January visit as Hanoi was preoccupied with preparations for its all-important 13th National Congress.⁸ If so, we can expect senior level exchanges to resume after the conclusion of the congress.

Furthermore, although there were no senior level visits from China to Vietnam in 2020, high-level interactions between the two countries have continued unabated. Chinese President Xi Jinping spoke on the phone with his Vietnamese counterpart Nguyen Phu Trong in September 2020;⁹ following on a conversation they had had in January 2020.¹⁰ Chinese Premier Li Keqiang spoke with his Vietnamese counterpart Nguyen Xuan Phuc in April 2020 and they met online for the 3rd Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Leaders' Meeting in August 2020. Wang Yi and his Vietnamese counterpart Pham Binh Minh met physically in Vientiane, Laos in February 2020¹¹ and again in Dongxing, Guangxi in August 2020.¹²

China has accorded more attention to Brunei since 2020 to lay the groundwork for better ties, given Brunei's role as chair of ASEAN in 2021. 2021 also marks the 30th anniversary of China-ASEAN dialogue relations and the 30th anniversary of China-Brunei diplomatic relations. Furthermore, Brunei is a Southeast Asian claimant state in the South China Sea, and China would like it to maintain a low profile on the issue especially when the United States is urging Southeast Asian claimant states to stand up to China's bullying in this area.¹³

During China's Defense Minister Wei Fenghe visit to Brunei in September 2020, he called on Brunei and China to continue to "strengthen bilateral communication and consultation, and promote maritime cooperation so as to jointly maintain peace and tranquility in the South China Sea".¹⁴ China's preference is for differences on the South China Sea issue to be addressed bilaterally between Beijing and the relevant Southeast Asian claimant states, including Brunei. Wang Yi included Brunei in his January 2021 Southeast Asian tour, in another signal that China would like to work with Brunei to strengthen bilateral ties and promote China-ASEAN relations.

As for Indonesia, China regards the country as the most important Southeast Asian state given its size and its weight in the Muslim world. President Xi Jinping spoke three times with his Indonesian counterpart in 2020, on a noticeably more frequent basis than with any other

Southeast Asian leader in that year.¹⁵ Chinese Defence Minister Wei Fenghe and Foreign Minister Wang Yi also included Indonesia in their Southeast Asian tours in September 2020 and January 2021 respectively. Indonesia can be expected to continue featuring prominently in China's relations with Southeast Asia.

KEY THRUSTS

There are a number of key thrusts in Wang Yi's latest visit to Southeast Asia. Foremost among them is to show that there is much potential for China and Southeast Asia to work together to promote economic recovery amid the Covid-19 pandemic. Before Wang Yi's visit, Chinese media highlighted that "history was made" when ASEAN became China's largest trading partner in 2020.¹⁶ Echoing this message, Premier Li Keqiang told his ASEAN counterparts at the ASEAN-China Summit in November 2020 that China-ASEAN trade had bucked the global trend of shrinking world trade, economic recession and constraints on people-to-people exchanges. Based on Chinese statistics, China-ASEAN trade reached \$481.8 billion, up 5 percent year-on-year in the first three quarters of 2020, making ASEAN China's largest trading partner.¹⁷

Economic cooperation for recovery and growth was a key theme during Wang Yi's visit to Southeast Asia. For instance, his first stop in Indonesia was Lake Toba in North Sumatra, where he was welcomed by the Indonesian Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs and Investment, Luhut Pandjaitan. Apart from being Indonesia's point man on promoting economic cooperation with China, the Lake Toba itinerary underscored the message that Indonesia welcomes Chinese tourists as well as investments from China.¹⁸

During Wang Yi's visit to Brunei, Myanmar and The Philippines, it was announced that China and these countries have agreed to establish some form of "fast track" arrangement for the flow of people and "green lanes" for the flow of goods to promote economic recovery.¹⁹ In addition, while Wang Yi was in The Philippines, it was announced that The Bank of China Manila would be the RMB Clearing Bank in The Philippines to support the growing local RMB market.²⁰

Another thrust, related to economic cooperation, is China's continued emphasis on pushing ahead with its signature Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Southeast Asia. This is evident in the instances listed below:

- In Myanmar, Wang Yi reiterated during his call on Aung San Suu Kyi that the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor is a flagship project under the BRI.²¹
- In Indonesia, Wang Yi indicated to President Jokowi during their meeting that China was willing to work with Indonesia to promote "high quality" BRI cooperation including speeding up the Jakarta-Bandung High Speed Rail project.²²
- In Brunei, Wang Yi made a call for both sides to speed up the Hengyi petrochemical²³ as well as the Guangxi-Brunei Economic Corridor projects during his meeting with Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah.²⁴

- When Wang Yi was in The Philippines, it was announced that the two countries had signed a commercial contract to build a railway connecting Subic Bay to Clark Air Base. This is apparently the highest-funded government-to-government project between the two countries, valued around US\$940 million, and is a flagship project under President Duterte's "Build, Build, Build" programme.²⁵

Yet another thrust of Wang Yi's visit is China's effort to position itself as a key provider of Covid vaccines to Southeast Asia. Going beyond earlier professions of making China's Covid vaccines a global public good, Wang Yi pledged to donate 300,000 doses of coronavirus vaccines to Myanmar²⁶ and 500,000 similar doses to the Philippines.²⁷ In Brunei, the response to China's vaccines was considerably muted with Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah reportedly expressing a general interest on Brunei's part to cooperate with China in the field of vaccines when he met Wang Yi for talks.²⁸

In contrast, the most high-profile attention and vote of confidence accorded to China's vaccines was in Indonesia. Most notably, during Wang Yi's visit to Indonesia, President Jokowi launched Indonesia's vaccination drive by going live on national television to receive Sinovac's CoronaVac at the presidential palace in Jakarta on 13 January 2021.²⁹ Jokowi had explained in an earlier social media post that he would be first in line for the jab to show that the vaccine was safe and halal.³⁰

Indonesia appeared to have pulled out all the stops to launch CoronaVac for use during Wang Yi's visit. A day before Wang Yi's arrival in Indonesia, i.e., on 11 January 2021, the Indonesian Food and Drug Monitoring Agency (BPOM) approved CoronaVac for emergency use, citing interim data showing a 65.3 percent efficacy rate, above the World Health Organisation threshold of 50 per cent.³¹ In doing so, Indonesia became the first country outside China to green light the use of the vaccine.³²

Among the Southeast Asian countries, Indonesia is the most engaged in terms of Covid-19 collaboration with China. Since August 2020, Sinovac and its local Indonesian partner, Bio Farma, launched Phase 3 clinical trials in Bandung. In addition, Indonesia has inked a deal to procure at least 125 million doses of Sinovac vaccine to be produced jointly with Bio Farma.³³ Under this arrangement, Sinovac will supply not only the bulk of vaccines but also extend the technology licensing to enable Bio Farma to produce the vaccine locally. While in Indonesia, Wang Yi reaffirmed China's commitment to continue vaccine production cooperation with Indonesia and support the latter to become a regional vaccine production hub.³⁴ The idea of making Indonesia a vaccine production hub was apparently first mentioned during Luhut's visit to China in October 2020.³⁵

A final thrust of Wang Yi's visit was to downplay China's differences with Southeast Asia especially on the South China Sea issue. In particular, while commenting on his Philippine visit at the end of his Southeast tour, Wang Yi said that the South China Sea issue is only partial to the entirety of China-Philippine relations, and that the two countries should not allow their one percent difference on this issue affect the 99 percent of their overall relations.³⁶ He reiterated the call for China and The Philippines to push ahead with oil and gas exploration, as a means of exploring a breakthrough to this problem left over from history. Separately, during Wang Yi's Brunei visit, China and Brunei agreed to set up a working group on energy cooperation and work towards establishing a working group on maritime cooperation.³⁷

CHALLENGES AHEAD

Through Wang Yi's latest Southeast Asia tour, one may note that China is trying to set its relations with the region on a correct footing that it hopes will last through the year. At one level, China seeks to strengthen its ties with individual Southeast Asian countries as well as with ASEAN as a whole. At another level, China's efforts to reach out to Southeast Asia is driven by the dynamics of the US-China relationship. By visiting Southeast Asia before Joe Biden's presidential inauguration, China is seeking to either draw Southeast Asia closer to Beijing or cajole Southeast Asian countries to remain neutral in its ongoing competition with the United States. Beijing is concerned that the United States will work closer with its allies and partners, some of which are in Southeast Asia, to counteract a more assertive China.

However, as had happened before, Beijing's positive moves in one particular area is sometimes undermined by its own actions in other areas. For example, barely a week after Wang Yi's Southeast Asia tour, China adopted a law that empowers its coastguard to take necessary action including firing on foreign vessels to safeguard China's sovereignty at sea.³⁸ Although the state media positioned the passage of the law as directed at upholding China's sovereignty over the Diaoyu Islands (or Senkaku Islands in Japanese),³⁹ the same law does not preclude its coastguard from enforcing China's claims in the South China Sea. This law is likely to raise concern among Southeast Asian claimant states over how China intends to enforce its claims in the South China Sea, and complicate efforts by China and ASEAN to conclude the Code of Conduct (CoC) by end 2021.⁴⁰ Discussions on the CoC had already been put on the backburner last year due to Covid-19.

China may further need to tread carefully in terms of its signature initiatives in Southeast Asia. In reviving their economies from the negative impact of Covid-19, Southeast Asian countries are likely to scrutinize more closely projects under the BRI, especially in terms of their commercial viability. Likewise, on China's part, Covid-19 presents an opportunity for Beijing to re-assess its BRI projects to emphasize quality and the sharing of benefits with recipient countries. The mere fact that Wang Yi has to make a call for such projects to be speeded up is already telling. A few successful projects will likely be more effective in projecting a positive image of China than the unsuccessful ones that are the subject of constant media attention.

China's provision of Covid vaccines will likely be welcomed in Southeast Asia especially when vaccines from other suppliers are in short supply. However, Beijing can do more to ensure the transparency of its vaccine data. In addition, it may need to accord more consideration on how it intends to roll out its vaccines in Southeast Asia. Its promise to make Indonesia a regional vaccine production hub may backfire if other Southeast Asian countries regard this as implying that they are less important in gaining access to vaccines from China. Beijing will also need to be mindful of domestic political and ethnic sensitivities if Jakarta is seen as being over-reliant on Chinese vaccines. Furthermore, it may be prudent for Beijing not to over-commit in terms of how much vaccine it can deliver and over its efficacy so as not to raise undue expectations.⁴¹

China has the opportunity to draw useful experiences from the backlash against the BRI and apply them in the rolling out of its vaccines in Southeast Asia. A more transparent and science-based approach based on data is likely to receive a more receptive response from recipient countries than a resort to chest-thumping nationalism over how Chinese vaccines are as good if not better than those produced by other suppliers.⁴²

- ¹ Xi Jinping Returns to China after a State Visit to Myanmar, China's foreign ministry, 18 January 2020, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/xjpdmdgfw/t1825014.shtml.
- ² There was only a one-day interval between Wang Yi's return from his African trip and his trip to Southeast Asia.
- ³ The last state visit to Myanmar was by Chinese President Jiang Zemin in 2001.
- ⁴ 2021 nian 1 yue 13 ri wajiao bu fayan ren Zhao Lijian zhuchi lixing jizhe hui (2021 January 13 Foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian chairs a regular press briefing, China's foreign ministry, 13 January 2021, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/fyrbt_673021/jzhsl_673025/t1846158.shtml.
- ⁵ Myanmar took over from Laos as co-chair of the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation in August 2020.
- ⁶ "Chinese Ambassador Says Beijing Stands with Myanmar on Rohingya Issue", The Irrawaddy, 22 August 2019, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/chinese-ambassador-says-beijing-stands-myanmar-rohingya-issue.html#>.
- ⁷ Apart from the four countries of Myanmar, Indonesia, Brunei and The Philippines covered in the January visit, Wang Yi had visited four other Southeast Asian countries in October 2020, namely Cambodia, Malaysia, Laos and Thailand.
- ⁸ Vietnam's 13th National Congress took place from 25 January to 2 February 2021.
- ⁹ "Xi Jinping Has a Phone Call with General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) and President Nguyen Phu Trong", China's foreign ministry, 29 September 2020, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1820610.shtml.
- ¹⁰ "Chinese, Vietnamese leaders agree to further promote bilateral ties", Xinhuanet, 16 January 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-01/16/c_138710637.htm.
- ¹¹ Wang Yi and Pham Binh Minh met on the sidelines of the special China-ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Vientiane, Laos in February 2020.
- ¹² Wang Yi and Pham Binh Minh met again to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the delimitation of the China-Vietnam land boundary and the 10th anniversary of the erection of pillars to demarcate the land border between the two countries. The meeting took place in Dongxing, Guangxi Autonomous Region of China in August 2020.
- ¹³ Apart from extending Covid-19 assistance to Brunei through governmental and enterprise channels, the Chinese People's Liberation Army also got into the act with donations of medical masks, goggles, protective clothing and waterproof isolation suits. See "Brunei receives anti-COVID-19 medical donations from Chinese military", Xinhuanet, 15 May 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-05/15/c_139058401.htm.
- ¹⁴ "Brunei's Sultan meets Chinese defense minister on ties, cooperation", Xinhuanet, 9 September 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-09/09/c_139356298.htm.
- ¹⁵ On 12 February 2020, Xi thanked President Widodo for a phone call and expressed confidence that China will win fight against Covid-19. On 2 April 2020, Xi expressed China's readiness to provide support and assistance to Indonesia to fight Covid-19. On 1 September 2020, Xi and Jokowi spoke about Covid-19 cooperation, and the Jakarta-Bandung High Speed Rail.
- ¹⁶ Chuangzao lishi! Dong meng chengwei Zhong guo di yi da maoyi huoban (History is created! ASEAN becomes China's largest trading partner), Xinhuanet, 27 September 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/fortune/2020-09/27/c_1126548246.htm.
- ¹⁷ "Premier Li: ASEAN now China's largest trading partner", CGTN, 13 November 2020, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-11-12/Premier-Li-ASEAN-becomes-China-s-largest-trading-partner--VmpM9aYZgc/index.html#:~:text=According%20to%20Li%2C%20in%20the,ASEAN%20China's%20largest%20trading%20partner.&text=By%20the%20end%20of%202019,year%2C%20only%20after%20the%20EU>.
- ¹⁸ "Luhut welcomes China's Wang Yi for investment talks", The Jakarta Post, 13 January 2021.
- ¹⁹ While visiting Myanmar earlier, it was also announced that China and Myanmar agreed to establish the "fast lane" for personnel movement and the "green channel" for goods. China's announcement of fast track arrangements with Myanmar and the Philippines are not the first China has with Southeast

Asia. The first of such fast-lane arrangements was with Singapore, established in June 2020. See “China confirms launch of fast lane arrangement with Singapore to facilitate travel”, Xinhuanet, 10 June 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-06/10/c_139127134.htm.

²⁰ “RMB clearing bank launched in the Philippines”, CGTN, 17 January 2021, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2021-01-17/RMB-clearing-bank-launched-in-the-Philippines-X7qjlqEZE/index.html>.

²¹ Wang yi tong miandian guowu zizheng jian waizhang ang shan su ji juxing huitan (Wang Yi holds talks with Myanmar’s State Counsellor and Foreign Minister Aung San Suu Kyi), China’s foreign ministry, 11 January 2021, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/wjbzhd/t1845673.shtml>. Under the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor, there are key projects like the Kyaukphyu Deep Water Port, the China-Myanmar Economic Cooperation Zone and the New Yangon City Project.

²² Yinni zongtong zuo ke huijian wang yi (Indonesian President Joko Widodo meets with Wang Yi), Xinhuanet, 13 January 2021, http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2021-01/13/c_1126979769.htm.

²³ The Hengyi Industries Sdn Bhd is a joint venture between China’s Zhejiang Hengyi Group (70%) and Damai Holdings (30%), a wholly owned subsidiary of the Brunei government’s Strategic Development Capital Fund. The JV aims to build an integrated refining and petrochemical complex on Pulau Muara Besar island in Brunei. There are two phases to the project with the first put into operation in November 2019. See “Hengyi Industries lets contract for new alkylation unit at Brunei refinery”, Oil and Gas Journal, 25 August 2020, <https://www.ogi.com/refining-processing/refining/construction/article/14182301/hengyi-industries-lets-contract-for-new-alkylation-unit-at-brunei-refinery>.

²⁴ In 2014, Guangxi and Brunei signed a memorandum to build an economic corridor. Under this corridor, the two countries envisioned a number of projects that included the co-development of Brunei’s Muara port. See “Economic corridor with Guangxi expected to spur growth in Brunei”, CGTN, 19 November 2018, https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d514e78417a4e30457a6333566d54/share_p.html; and Wen lai sudan ha sang na r huijian wang yi (Brunei Sultan Hassanal meets with Wang Yi), China’s foreign ministry, 14 January 2021, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/wjbzhd/t1846434.shtml>.

²⁵ Chinese Ambassador to The Philippines Huang Xilian’s Facebook post, 16 January 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/AmbHuangXilian/posts/118154730161040>. According to the Chinese ambassador, the 71-km single-track railway will be located in south-central Luzon, connecting Subic Bay Freeport Zone and Clark International Airport and linking to the Philippine Department of Transport’s North Railway Project. The construction period is estimated to last 42 months. Once completed, the railway will promote connectivity between commercial zones along the Subic-Clark corridor.

²⁶ China pledged to provide 300,000 doses of Covid-19 vaccine and three million yuan worth of Covid-19 medical assistance to Myanmar. See “China to provide COVID-19 aid to Myanmar”, Myanmar Times, 12 January 2021, <https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/china-provide-covid-19-aid-myanmar.html>.

²⁷ Chinese Ambassador to The Philippines Huang Xilian’s Facebook post, 19 January 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/AmbHuangXilian/photos/a.106650864644760/119970053312841/?type=3&theater>.

²⁸ “China, Brunei vow to push bilateral cooperation to new high”, Xinhuanet, 15 January 2021, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-01/15/c_139668533.htm.

²⁹ “Indonesian President receives Chinese vaccine as rollout begins”, CGTN, 13 January 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sf-yLxNbanw>.

³⁰ “Indonesia green-lights emergency use of Chinese vaccine”, AP, 11 January 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/international-news-indonesia-coronavirus-pandemic-joko-widodo-china-02ef76d07280abe393c876407d224adb>.

- ³¹ “BPOM approves Sinovac COVID-19 vaccine for emergency use: Chairwoman”, antaranews, 11 January 2021, <https://en.antaranews.com/news/165512/bpom-approves-sinovac-covid-19-vaccine-for-emergency-use-chairwoman>.
- ³² “Indonesia green lights China’s Sinovac COVID-19 vaccine”, Biopharma, 11 January 2021, <https://www.biopharma-reporter.com/Article/2021/01/11/Indonesia-green-lights-China-s-Sinovac-COVID-19-vaccine>.
- ³³ As of 12 January 2021, 18 million doses of the bulk vaccines from Sinovac have been delivered. See “Indonesia Receives 15 Million Doses of Half-Finished Sinovac Vaccine”, Jakarta Globe, 12 January 2021, <https://jakartaglobe.id/news/indonesia-receives-15-million-doses-of-halffinished-sinovac-vaccine>.
- ³⁴ “Wang yi tan zhongguo tong yinni dacheng de wu dian gongshi” (Wang Yi talks about the five-point consensus reached between China and Indonesia), Xinhuanet, 14 January 2021, http://www.xinhuanet.com/2021-01/14/c_1126979826.htm; and, “China pledges to make Indonesia a regional Covid-19 vaccine production hub”, The Straits Times, 13 January 2021, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/china-pledges-to-make-indonesia-a-regional-vaccine-production-hub-says-closer-ties-will>.
- ³⁵ The idea of making Indonesia a regional vaccine production hub was mentioned in Indonesian papers. See “Indonesia can be manufacturing hub for COVID-19 vaccine, says Chinese foreign minister”, The Jakarta Post, 13 October 2020, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/10/12/indonesia-can-be-manufacturing-hub-for-covid-19-vaccine-says-chinese-foreign-minister.html>. At that time, the Chinese media was more circumspect and did not use the term “hub”, merely quoting Wang Yi as saying that China is “willing to work with Indonesia to comprehensively promote the research and development, production and use of the vaccine, and jointly contribute to the availability and affordability of vaccines in the region and the world”. See “China, Indonesia to enhance COVID-19 vaccine cooperation”, CGTN, 10 October 2020, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-10-10/China-Indonesia-to-enhance-COVID-19-vaccine-cooperation--Ut0xAmXLSE/index.html>
- ³⁶ Wang yi: Nanhai wenti shi zhong fei zhijian rao bukai de yiti, dan jue bushi jie bu kai de sijie (Wang Yi: The South China Sea is an issue that cannot be skirted around by China and The Philippines, but it is by no means a knot that cannot be untied), Chinanews, 18 January 2021, <https://www.chinanews.com/gn/2021/01-18/9390038.shtml>.
- ³⁷ Details on these working groups are scanty at the moment. What is clear is that these working groups will fall under the framework of the Joint Steering Committee (JSC) that oversees cooperation between the two countries. The second meeting of the JSC was held during Wang Yi’s visit to Brunei and was co-chaired by Wang Yi and Brunei’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Dato Seri Setia Haji Erywan bin Pehin Haji Mohammad Yusof. See “JOINT PRESS RELEASE ON THE SECOND MEETING OF THE JOINT STEERING COMMITTEE BETWEEN THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA AND BRUNEI DARUSSALAM”, China’s foreign ministry, 16 January 2021, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1846764.shtml.
- ³⁸ The coastguard law was adopted by the Standing Committee of China’s National People’s Congress on 22 January 2021, almost a week after Wang Yi’s Southeast Asian tour concluded on 16 January 2021.
- ³⁹ “China adopts coastguard law, safeguarding sovereignty in Diaoyu Islands”, Global Times, 23 January 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202101/1213649.shtml>. The Global Times article suggests that China’s adoption of the coastguard law is a direct response to US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan’s re-affirmation that Washington’s defense treaty with Tokyo applies to the Senkaku Islands in a phone call he had with his Japanese counterpart Shigeru Kitamura.
- ⁴⁰ China’s Premier Li Keqiang made a call for a CoC to be concluded in three years’ time when he visited Singapore in November 2018.

⁴¹ “China Wanted to Show Off Its Vaccines. It’s Backfiring”, New York Times, 25 January 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/25/business/china-covid-19-vaccine-backlash.html>.

⁴² “Hard to beat COVID-19 without China’s vaccine: Global Times editorial”, Global Times, 24 December 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1210863.shtml>; and, “Chinese media criticise Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine, tout local shots”, Reuters, 20 January 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-vaccine-china/chinese-media-criticise-pfizer-covid-19-vaccine-tout-local-shots-idUSKBN29P1HT>.

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