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Capitalizing on a Global Health Crisis - A study of China and COVID-19

MASTER THESIS

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Abstract

This thesis aims to analyze why China's crisis management was the foundation for its ability to capitalize the global health crisis. It will do so by analyzing China's capitalization from two perspectives –an internal and an external – as well as two aspects –material gain and ideational gain. It will apply Securitization theory to analyze what elements within the Chinese system allowed it to effectively manage the crisis through hard power policies and uncover what China gained from it. Additionally, the thesis will apply Constructivism to investigate how China utilized its internal gain to carry out soft power strategies such as health diplomacy in Serbia and France in order to capitalize externally.

China's centralized authoritarian system allows it to effectively implement policies to fight the spread of COVID-19. Its policy making is marked by a hard power approach and its policy implementation is effective as a result of top-down decision-making and efficient command-chain; a civil society with a high degree of self-restraint; strong mobilization capacity; and technology. This allows China to quickly stabilize and regain its economic momentum as people are able to return to work. China is able to gain the material advantage of production which allows it to COVID-19 related products for export purposes. Additionally, it gains the ideational advantage of an increase in state legitimacy as citizens became more trusting of their government after the crisis management of COVID-19. This allowed China to carry out soft power strategies in Serbia and France by utilizing its material gain of production to support its 'mask diplomacy' and 'vaccine diplomacy' strategies. These strategies are received differently. In Serbia, there is a massive support for the Chinese model of crisis management and through health diplomacy strategies China is able to shape its own narrative as a 'savior of Serbia' in a time of crisis. In France, the government and people remained skeptic towards China's soft power strategies. A negative narrative begins to form, yet, import of Chinese products to France reaches its highest in three years. The thesis find that, internally, China crisis management was a foundation for its ability to capitalize because it quickly created stability upon which China capitalized both economic activity and production as well as state legitimacy. Externally, it was a foundation because it allowed China achieve stability internally, thereby, gain advantages which it could then use to achieve capitalization externally by incorporating them into health diplomacy strategies.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On December 27, 2019, the first case of COVID-19 was reported in Wuhan, China, and with it came a ripple-effect that shook the entire world (SCIO 2020). Within the first couple of months, the virus spread worldwide, causing entire cities and countries to go into lockdown, including China. As the first major epicenter for COVID-19, China was often criticized for how it handled the containment and spread of the virus by other parts of the international community, especially the Western world (hereafter referred to as “the West”). Various controversies have been portrayed relating to transparency and China’s early response to the virus (Radio France Internationale 2020: Davidson and Rourke 2020: Lau and Wong 2020). However, despite criticism, China managed to contain the health crisis rather swiftly with the critical decision of placing Wuhan under lockdown from the 22nd of January 2020 (SCIO 2020).

After Wuhan was placed under lockdown, China promptly went into emergency mode to fight the virus, with local governments adopting numerous extraordinary measures which were unprecedented in the scope and magnitude of social control (Jingwei, Shi and Liu 2020, 243). Additionally, the country poured enormous amounts of resources into a nationwide anti-epidemic campaign. On the 31st of March 2020, the Chinese government announced that the lockdown of Wuhan would ease on the 8th of April 2020 as the large-scale domestic transmission of COVID-19 had stopped. China’s effective crisis response resulted in significant outcomes in the containment of the virus, allowing the country to return to a more normal state much sooner than a majority of countries globally (Jingwei, Shi and Liu 2020, 243). But how was China able to contain the virus so successfully? Some argue that it was due to the absolute power of party-state rule and rigid social control that this large authoritarian state was able to manage the virus so effectively. However, this may only be partly true as this system often mask other more fundamental aspects of crisis governance. Regardless, China succeeded in more than one way in terms of conquering the virus.

China and its economy managed to recover less than a year from the first COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan, becoming the only G20 country to produce economic growth in 2020. Now, more than a year after the first lockdowns occurred, we see a world that is still far from recovered. COVID-19 is still a very real threat in many countries, with consequences such as recession, erosion of growth prospects and a setback in key development goals possibly lurking in the future (World Bank Report 2021, 3).

For centuries, the West has viewed itself as the leading example in governance, development, production and so on. However, this position has been tremendously challenged over the last decade as China has moved toward a new stage of development. China has made incredible advances, especially within the field of technology, and quietly passed the West, creating dominance within this field (Fitch and Woo 2020). China has managed to become leading developers in various areas e.g., 5G network, Artificial Intelligence (AI), digital currency, space science and E-commerce, thus, challenging the West's dominance globally. Places such as the US and Europe – which traditionally dominated many of the fields mentioned before – find themselves threatened by China's development and the possible challenge China may pose to the world order (Fitch and Woo 2020). In 2020, the West once again found itself lacking compared to China and struggled to contain the spread of COVID-19, causing several countries to experience a shortage of medical equipment as a result of e.g., decreased production and stockpiling (European Commission n.d.: FDA 2021). But while the West struggled to regain its footing, China managed to overtake by quickly stabilizing after the initial COVID-19 outbreak. China began to regain back its status as a 'world factory' during the pandemic as its development begun to extend to and influence the West. A title that China had lost due to e.g., relocations of factories during the 2018-19 trade war with the US, a drop in cost advantage amongst others (Hancock and Curran 2021). China's extremely efficient supply chain and adaptability allowed the country to supply medical equipment both domestically and abroad. Where most countries are still struggling to produce economic activity and rise in employment, 'Made in China' has found its way back to fame during COVID-19 (Görlach 2021).

As mentioned above, the country received much criticism across the world for allegedly 'starting the pandemic'. Critique may also have been amplified due to fear as Chinese dominance increased over the course of the pandemic. But despite initial hate and criticism, especially from Western states, China's crisis-handling model slowly became a source of inspiration for many countries, even in the West, causing them to seek help from the East rather than from the West as per usual (Hancock and Curran 2021). This allowed China's economy to soar with a 60% increase in export and a 22.2% increase in import within the first months of 2021 (Cheng 2021). In the end, China was able to turn possible downfall into profit and, eventually, capitalize on the crisis.

In order to understand how it became possible for China to capitalize, it is necessary to dive deeper into the topic the China's crisis governance and how it enabled China to capitalize on a global health crisis, despite the country being ground-zero to an unknown and highly contagious virus

as well as initial buck-passing and criticism from the Western world. This thesis, therefore, seeks to investigate the following research question:

1.2 Research Question:

Why was Chinese crisis management a foundation for its ability to capitalize on the global health crisis?

1.1 Objective

The objective of this thesis is to explain how China's crisis management was a foundation for its ability to capitalize on COVID-19 from two perspectives. First, from an internal perspective of China's crisis management and how this was able to generate advantages upon which China could capitalize. Second, from an external perspective of how China was able to utilize these internally gained advantages to create external capitalization.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 Concepts and Concept Discussions

The following section will provide definitions of the concepts included in this thesis and discuss the context of their presence in relation to China's capitalization of COIVD-19. I have chosen to define and discuss the concepts of *capitalization*, *hard power* and *soft power* as they play an underlying yet central role in this project. These concepts are a part of my contextualization of this study and help me create the framework by influencing the choice of theories. I will begin by presenting the concept of capitalization and what it entails in relation to this thesis. Thereafter, hard and soft power.

2.1.1 Definition and discussion of capitalization

To *capitalize on* something means to gain an advantage from something (Lexico n.d.). The reason that capitalization is so important is because it creates the advantages necessary for, e.g., a state to position itself in a way that would allow for more capitalization. I.e., capitalization can create more capitalization. Capitalization in relation to this thesis refers to the advantages which China was able to gain from its crisis management of COVID-19. As I am investigating why China's crisis management was the foundation for its ability to capitalize, it is necessary to provide an explanation as to what the concept of capitalization covers. First, capitalization will within this study be viewed from two perspectives. The first perspective focuses on the advantages China was able to gain internally through their crisis management of COVID-19. Investigating this perspective first is crucial as these advantages determined China's ability to capitalize externally, which is the second perspective.

Additionally, the advantages China gained will be divided into two aspects are divided into two perspectives in order to systematically identify them. The first aspect of China's capitalization is the material aspect. This aspect covers the tangible element of China's capitalization and refers to the economic advantages China was able to gain as a part of its capitalization during COVID-19. The second aspect is the ideational aspect. This aspect covers the intangible elements of China's capitalization and refers to the more abstract advantages China was able to gain, such as trust.

In summary, the concept of capitalization in my thesis refers to two perspectives, internal and external, and two aspects, the material and the ideational aspect. What is important to understand in

relation to capitalization within this study is the focus on how China's internal capitalization affected its ability to capitalize externally. Thus, the two aspects of material and ideational gain are interrelated that may create each other as a spill-over effect. As I will be investigating how China was able to utilize internally gained advantages as tools for their external capitalization, I have chosen to include to concepts of *hard power* and *soft power* to explain how capitalization of one aspect can create a spill-over effect, intentionally or unintentionally, into the other aspect and how they may be used to do so.

2.1.2 Hard Power and Soft Power

Power is a topic that has interested social scientists for many decades, centuries even, if one goes back to the writings of Aristotle, Plato, and Machiavelli. However, social scientists still notably debate over the definition of power and what it entails. One of the most influential and recognized definitions belongs to the German sociologist Max Weber. Weber defined power as the ability to achieve one's goals or aims despite others attempting to prevent it from happening and the ability to exercise one's will over others. (Weber 1947, 152). This definition has become the foundation for several International Relations (IR) theories after it was published. Yet, as the discipline of IR has evolved, so has the interpretation and definition of power. This thesis will apply an adaptation of thoughts and writings by political scientist Joseph Nye to define the two aspects.

Nye argues that power in general, compared to earlier perceptions, is "(...) less transferable, less coercive, and less tangible." (Nye 1990, 167) Modern trends and changes in political issues had influenced the nature of power as well as the resources that produce it. The definition of power in its pure form needed to be revised; thus, Nye introduced the terms *hard power* and *soft power*. These two aspects contain tools and resources which states can utilize to achieve their goals and aims.

Nye defined hard power as "(...) the ability to use the carrots and sticks of economic and military might to make others follow your will." (Nye 2003) The 'carrots' refers to inducements such as the reduction of trade barriers or the promise of military protection, whereas the 'sticks' refers to threats such as military intervention or the implementation of economic sanctions. I.e., hard power is the ability to reach one's goals through coercive actions or threats. Hard power has often been the route states chose when attempting to achieve goals and aims. The German invasion of Poland in 1939 and the UN economic sanctions against Iraq in 1991 following the first Gulf War are examples of the use of hard power. Historically, hard power relies on tangible power resources such as size in

population, territory, geography, natural resources, military force, and economic strength, which would be viewed as sources of strength for states in times of war. According to Nye, “In traditional views of international diplomacy, war was the ultimate game in which the cards of international politics were played.” (Nye 2013, 3). However, Nye mentions that war is no longer the ultimate arbiter in the 21st century and admits that the times have changed since he first defined hard and soft power (Nye 2013, 3). Especially because certain areas such as media, trade, healthcare, and economy, have evolved drastically due to the technological innovation of computers and the internet that have occurred over the course of the last two decades (Hillyer 2020). The technological evolution has introduced elements such as digital currency, E-commerce, AI, and much more into today’s societies, and have massively impacted and changed how sources of strength are viewed today. They are, therefore, crucial to include in order to understand and analyze how technological advances globally and, especially China’s own technological advances, aided China in capitalizing on COVID-19.

As mentioned above, Nye argued that one can affect the behavior of others through inducements and payments (‘carrots’) and threats of coercion (‘sticks’). Additional to these two, Nye also argued that it is possible to affect the behavior of others through *attraction* which makes others want what you want (Nye 2008, 94). In relation to this, he wrote, “A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries want to follow it, admiring its values, emulating its example, and/or aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness.” (Nye 2008, 94). This introduces us to the element of soft power, a power that co-opts others to want the same outcome as you want rather than coerces them through hard power.

Soft power rests on the ability to shape the goals, aims or preferences of others without using force, coercion or violence. Rather than using the traditional hard power resources such as military force, soft power relies on intangible resources such as culture, political values, information, ideologies, and policies (Nye 2008, 95). Soft power relies heavily on one’s ability to attract or persuade others, thereby influencing their decisions and actions. According to Nye, a state’s soft power rests primarily on three resources: culture (in places where it is attractive to others), political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority) (Nye 2008, 96). Thus, one may view soft power as *pull* because the soft power approaches are positive attraction and persuasion, compared to the fiercer approaches of hard power which are often viewed as *push*.

Though it may appear based upon the two definitions of hard and soft power provided above that there is a clear differentiation between hard and soft power, the relationship between these two is rather lucid. Nye states that this is due to their interconnectivity.

“Intangible resources like patriotism, morale, and legitimacy strongly affect the capacity to fight and win. And threats to use force are intangible, but a dimension of hard power. Many of the terms that we use daily such as ‘military power’ and ‘economic power’ are hybrids that combine both resources and behaviors.” (Nye 2013, 6)

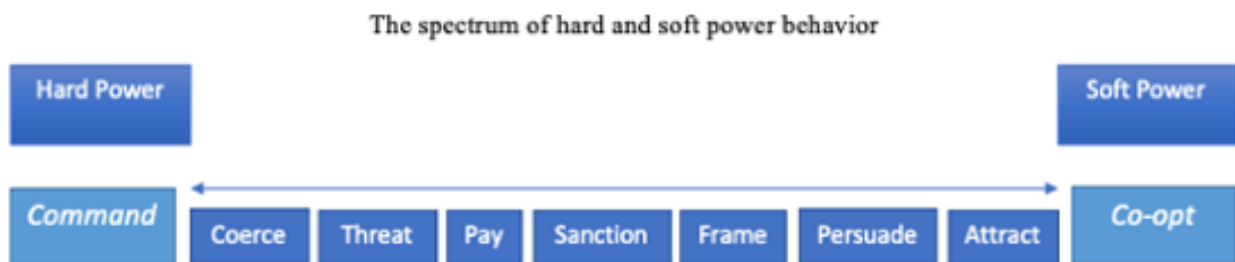


Figure 1 (Author's own chart)

Nye argues that it is important to remember that a distinction between power *resources* and power *behavior* exists when investigating hard and soft power (Nye 2013, 6). I.e., resources that are often associated with hard power behavior can produce soft power behavior depending on the utilization and context. This, of course, also applies vice versa. This can be seen in figure 1, which illustrates the spectrum of power described by Nye. It is a representation of not only the interconnectivity between hard and soft power but also of how they reflect each other and cannot be perceived completely separate.

In summary, hard power and soft power are concepts that allow for categorization of tangible and intangible resources and behaviors, and links to the concept of capitalization, which included the tangible material aspect and the intangible ideational aspect. Through the inclusion of the concepts of hard power and soft power, I am able to conceptualize the idea of using capitalized advantages as resources that can be utilized to create more capitalization. Because, as shown in figure 2, the concepts of hard power and soft power exists within capitalization in this study. The inclusion of the aspects will allow me to identify, categorize and measure certain actions, discourses and resources utilized to capitalize throughout the pandemic by China in relation to their crisis management as well as efforts abroad.

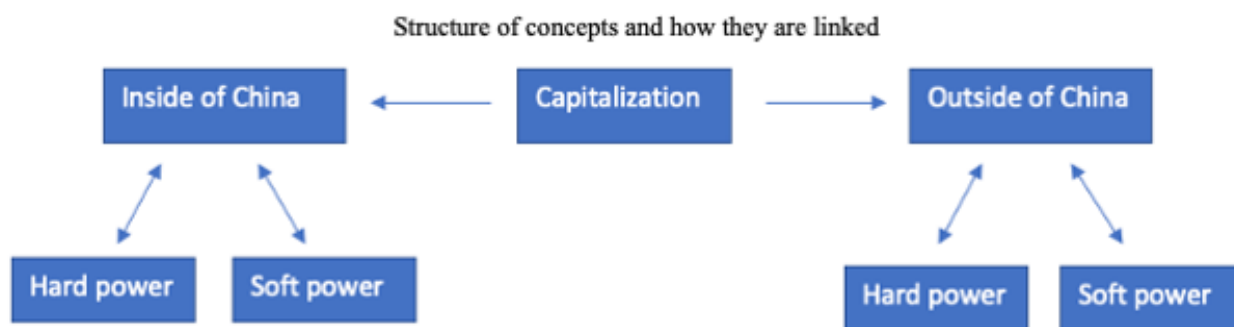


Figure 2 (Author's own chart)

2.2 Choice of Theories

As this thesis aims at studying China's crisis management and assess why it was a foundation for its ability to capitalize on COVID-19 from an internal and external perspective by applying the concepts of hard power and soft power, two theories have been chosen: securitization theory and constructivism. The following section will provide explanations as to why these theories were chosen and how they will help me answer the research question.

Different to the traditional thought of why a phenomenon is an issue of security, the Copenhagen School's securitization theory argues that there are no natural phenomena that are security threats and others that are not (Buzan, Wæver and Wilde 1998, 21-22). Rather it states that as a society, we, politically, chooses to deal with certain phenomena in a particular way. We decide to elevate certain things above others and name them 'issues of security' or 'security issue', which changes the way we interact with the issue. In short, the theory revolves around an actor's ability to quickly create a consensus by appealing to the relevant audience, thereby elevating an issue to a security issue.

Securitization theory states that a securitizing actor uses speech acts to conceptualize a securitization and thereby create a reality in which dealing with an issue is a high priority. The theory uncovers multiple aspects of dealing with a threat, from identifying it and implementing policies to fight it to the point of desecuritization of the issue occurs. This will allow me to study how China's system and, through a hard power approach, created a foundation that allowed China to stabilize, thus enabling it to allocate energy and resources towards capitalizing abroad.

However, the theory does not allow me to investigate how China was able to incorporate its internally gained advantages into strategies used to capitalize abroad. Throughout the pandemic, China utilized various soft power strategies abroad, such as ‘mask diplomacy’. Thus, in order to investigate how these strategies allowed China to capitalize externally, it became clear that a deeper understanding of what soft power entails and how it was able to influence China’s ability to capitalize was necessary. Thus, in order to fully investigate the soft power aspect, the theory of constructivism was chosen.

Constructivism revolves around how people’s perception of reality and norms can be influenced and changed due to various factors, e.g., how an actor frames a narrative and how it resonates with the recipients. For constructivists, a certain set of ideas and understandings of reality have to be shared amongst states or groups of individuals in order for something to exist and become a reality. This reality, however, is not static but may, in fact, change, such as with the perception of China and how it was affected by its internal crisis management and foreign strategies. Thus, I have chosen to use constructivism as it allows me to study how China’s was able to utilize internally gained advantages, such as regained production as a result of a stabilized situation, to implement soft power strategies abroad. This will allow me to investigate how China was able to create norm diffusion and influence other states’ perception of China and, thereby, their willingness to engage with China. This will allow me to determine how China capitalized externally. This is important as understanding how China was able to frame itself – especially via soft power – and, thereby, influence its narrative abroad are key elements in understanding China’s external capitalization.

It is important to note that this thesis works from the idea that politics are shaped by society. So, where securitization theory will allow me to focus on the more tangible aspects, constructivism allows me to investigate the intangible aspects. Therefore, to fully present a comprehensive analysis of the research question, constructivism seemed to provide the last link to my analytical framework. Combining the analysis of how effective crisis management created advantages with what this meant for the perception of China allows for a comprehensive investigation of both the hard power aspect as well as the soft power and how they spill over into each other.

2.3 Choice of Empirical Analysis

As I wish to investigate how China's was able to create norm diffusion and influence other states' perception of China, I have selected a set of countries to conduct my analysis upon. I will elaborate on which countries have been chosen and the basis for their selection below.

I chose to narrow down the study of norm diffusion by focusing on Europe. I have chosen this area as it consists of multiple states which either share similarities or differentiate in varying degrees in terms of norms, values, and/or ideologies. This will allow me to investigate how Chinese norm diffusion manifest in different settings. Additionally, several states in Europe have criticized China in relation to the management of COVID-19, yet, during COVID-19 several of these European states received aid or imported medical equipment from China (Brattberg and Le Corre 2020). This creates an interesting paradox on how norm diffusion affected the perception of China and its ability to capitalize.

When discussing the affairs of Europe, Eastern and Western Europe¹ are often viewed as two regions on opposing ends and thus, often compared. States within Eastern Europe often share many similarities, from political ideologies to societal norms. As do states within Western Europe. However, these shared similarities within Western and Eastern Europe are also what differentiates the two regions. Within this study, what is interesting about these two regions is how they are positioned in relation to Chinese norms, values, and ideologies.

Though almost all Eastern European states have democracies as in Western Europe, a study shows that their political norms, values, ideologies, and thereby their systems, have been shaped by history (Wike et al. 2019). Especially, the Soviet Union had an influence on large parts of Eastern Europe. This has created a divide between the two regions. Thus, investigating cases from the two regions will allow for a broader understanding of which factors influenced Chinese norm diffusion.

I have chosen to narrow down the scope of my study by choosing one state residing in Eastern Europe and one state residing in Western Europe to represent each region. Additionally, these countries represent two different traditions. One is old European democracy, and the other has historically experienced different political systems under the old communist bloc. The Eastern European state chosen is Serbia, and the Western European state chosen is France. Both case studies

¹ When I refer to Western Europe, I refer to the regions of northern Europe, southern Europe, Central Europe, and the British Isles. Whereas Eastern Europe is everything east of Germany, Austria, and Italy.

have been chosen based upon a shared set of criteria. First, that COVID-19 had been identified within state borders, and the state, therefore, had to engage in crisis management domestically. Second, that the government had commented publicly on China's crisis management. Third, that the state had received aid or imported medical equipment in relation to fighting COVID-19 from China over the course of the pandemic. Through the analysis of these countries, I will investigate if norm diffusion influenced the consciousness of these two countries differently and, thereby, China's ability to capitalize.

I will elaborate further on how I intend to analyze the perception of China changed over the course of the pandemic in section 3.3.

2.4 Choice of Data and Data Collection

In order to investigate why China's crisis management became a foundation for its ability to capitalize on COVID-19, a mix of quantitative and qualitative data have been chosen for the analysis. The data collection has focused on empirical data describing crisis management in China, Serbia, and France and the chosen states' perception of China from the beginning of the pandemic and forward. I have collected second-hand data with political, economic and societal implications through various sites online. The data used throughout this study will be exclusively secondary data. Rather than conducting interviews, surveys and observations, it is more beneficial and manageable for me to use readily available data, as it still allows insight into my field of study. By choosing secondary readily available data, this thesis will be able to include a larger amount of data which is essential when looking at a complex concept with several perspectives. I will below elaborate further upon what data have been chosen, what their purposes are and how they are linked with the theories.

2.4.1 *Quantitative data*

The quantitative data in this project will employ statistics on economic and medical data from public and reliable institutions. The statistical data utilized in this project stem from sources such as World Bank, WHO, OEC, Pew Research Center, The State Council of The People's Republic of China, among others. These institutions have provided government-funded official, and publicly available data, which be used to will verify the results of China's effective crisis management. The quantitative data will, in relation to securitization theory, be used to support the arguments of why China was able to effectively securitize. E.g., when conducting the analysis of securitization, statistics on recorded

cases of COVID-19 and production of medical equipment will be used to support arguments and showcase the results of China's effective securitization process. In relation to constructivism, the quantitative data will be used to investigate Serbia and France's perceptions of China in order to uncover if they had changed over the course of the pandemic.

2.4.2 Qualitative data

In relation to qualitative data, data will be collected in the form of primarily three types: academic journals, official papers and government statements; and mass media, which are all publicly available. This data will be utilized in relation to both analyses. Thus, explanations of utilization in regard to both analyses will be provided as the data is presented.

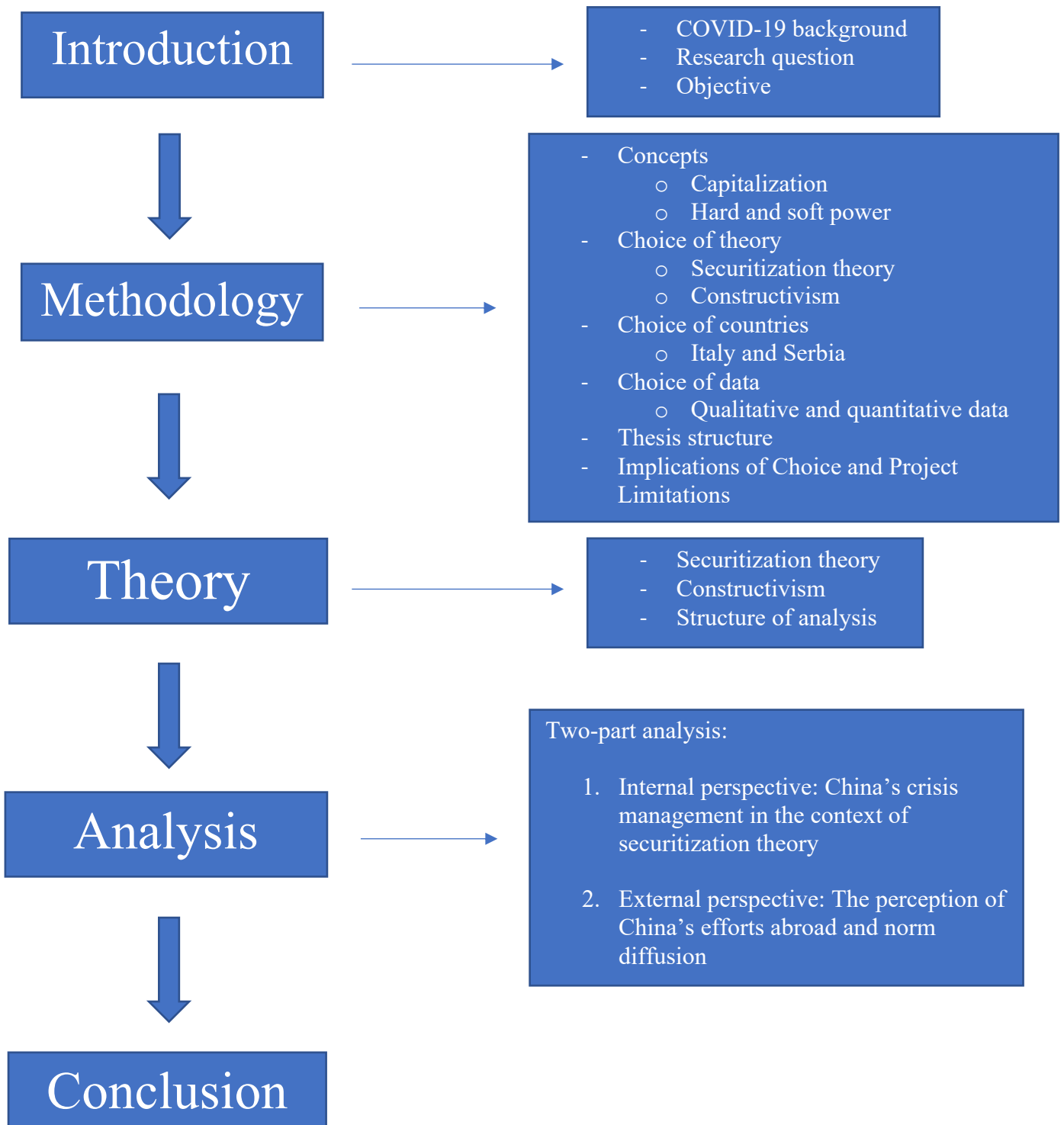
Academic journals and papers have been collected from search sites and research engines such as: Academia; ResearchGate; Google Scholar; Google; SAGE Journals; and JSTOR. The purpose of including academic journals is to gain insight into the Chinese system as well as its political system in order to understand how the Chinese system was able to effectively securitize the issue of COVID-19 as well as to gain insight into China's crisis management strategies. Additionally, it will also be utilized in the analysis of norm diffusion to provide insight into Serbia and France's reaction to China's soft power diplomacy. This will allow for an understanding of why norm diffusion regarding China may have differentiated in Eastern and Western European states.

Official papers and government statements have been collected from official state sites and publications. Chinese official papers will primarily be used for the securitization analysis as they provide insight into China's actions in relation to its crisis management. This data will allow me to identify which hard power strategies China chose to implement to manage the crisis. Serbian and French official papers and statements will be used in the constructivist analysis. This data will provide insight into my selected countries' perception of China and allow me to identify changes in relation to norm diffusion. I have derived data from websites such as The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, French Ministry of Foreign European and Foreign Affairs, among others.

Lastly, I have derived data from mass media reports from various news outlet, both authoritative and non-authoritative, in order to gain insight into how different perceptions were framed. The sources from which this data is collected comes from a variety of news outlets such as South China Morning Post, Xinhua, France24, Danas, among others. This data will primarily be used in the analysis of norm diffusion as it will allow me to investigate the chosen countries' perception

of Chinese crisis management in the early stages of the pandemic and determine how norm diffusion may have affected the perception of China by studying reports from the beginning of the pandemic and later on. This data will be utilized to help me illustrate the link between China's hard material gain and how it was utilized in soft power strategies to capitalize.

2.5 Thesis Structure



2.6 Delimitations and Limitations

This section will outline the delimitations and limitations of this thesis as certain decisions have been made to provide an in-depth analysis of the study within the given scope. Thus, this thesis will only investigate certain aspects of why China's crisis management was a foundation for its ability to capitalize from an internal and external perspective, whereas other aspects have been excluded. Nonetheless, this does not mean that these aspects of China's crisis management and capitalization are unimportant or less relevant.

2.6.1 Delimitations

In relation to the analyses, this study will work with the three preliminary understandings. The first preliminary understanding is that China has done better in managing the health crisis compared to the West. This understanding is based upon several factors, such as China being the only G20 country to produce economic growth, as well as several statements made by intergovernmental organizations such as WHO, praising China's response to the crisis (Bostock 2020). Second, the Chinese political system is a given. As the aim of the analysis of China's crisis management in the context of securitization is to investigate different elements of the Chinese system which allowed it to capitalize, certain aspects within the Chinese system will be highlighted. However, the thesis will not provide an extensive explanation of China's political system or its values, norms, and ideologies but draw on a preliminary understanding of these. I recognize that the Chinese political system is unique and understood that China's successful securitization strategy is to an extent based upon its political system and can only be realized in such a political system. Third, it is recognized that the Chinese political system differs from the rest of the world. Thus, in relation to conducting the analysis of China's effective crisis management, I will not be conducting a comparative analysis of China and other states' crisis management as it is this thesis works from the assumption that it is self-evident that the Chinese approach differs from states such as Serbia and France because of its unique system. Thus, securitization strategies and, thereby, outcomes have differed as well. Thus, I will only be taking into consideration whether the Chinese success in capitalization of material gain internally has any ideational, soft power impact on Serbia and France. And if so, how did this allow China to further capitalize.

It should be noted that as a researcher, I am not deliberately trying to portray one system more positively than others. I neither support nor oppose any of the political systems, policies or others

presented in this thesis; rather I value the importance of understanding the differentiation. The purpose of this thesis is not to determine which political system is best at managing crises but rather how an effective managing of COVID-19 allowed one state, in this case, China, to capitalize.

2.6.2 Limitations

Any study faces a number of limitations, and this thesis is no exception. The primary limitations concerning this study lie within the choice of data which faces a number of restraints. As mentioned in the introduction, the perception of China in general, as well as its management of COVID-19, have divided the international world. I am, therefore, aware that biases and different opinions influence the portrayal of China's actions and are critical towards my selected data depending on its purpose at the given time. This is especially in regard to my qualitative data, which is particularly susceptible as it is often written from a subjective point of view. Moreover, is the element of a language barrier that prevents me from reading data that is not written in English or Danish. Forcing me to use a majority of data written by Western authors, thus, my Chinese perspective may be influenced as I am unable to include empirical data written in Mandarin. Lastly, a limitation of my data is that I am only able to analyze the side of cases which have been made public. Meaning that I can only conduct my study from data that are available to me via public records such as government websites or news outlets. Thus, the risk that my data has been framed to fit a certain discourse that may not portray the 'true' reality.

Lastly, as COVID-19 is a relatively recent case and an ongoing crisis, future and further research on this topic may portray different findings, which may be viewed as a limitation. As the crisis is ongoing, I will only be able to investigate this topic up until the time of this thesis. However, I argue that the fact that the crisis is still ongoing may play a role in my findings compared to if I had conducted my study later on. Despite many authors and researchers' efforts to remain objective when portraying history, literature will often be influenced by the norms and understandings of reality at the given time. Thus, by conducting my study while the crisis is a recent, ongoing case, I am able to acquire data that portrays the crisis at its given time.

Chapter 3: Theory

In this chapter, an introduction to the theories securitization theory and constructivism will be provided. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the two theories separately and outline their assumptions. Additionally, I will support my statements from section 2.2 by linking the theories with the topic of this thesis and showcase their relevance. Before beginning the analysis, I will finish this chapter by explaining the structure of my analysis and how the chosen theories will be applied.

3.1 Copenhagen School's Securitization theory

The term *securitization* was originally identified with the Copenhagen School in the 1990s by international relations scholars such as Ole Wæver, Barry Buzan, and Jaap de Wilde (Kilroy 2018, 4). Securitization refers to the process by which a state determines threats to national security and acts to fight them. The determination is based upon subjective assessments of perceived danger rather than objective. According to the theory, a state will 'securitize' when dealing with threats that are perceived as threats to national security, e.g., a global pandemic such as COVID-19. A state will securitize by taking the necessary measures needed to enhance and ensure its security (Kilroy 2018, 1).

In their pioneering works, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (1998) and *Regions and Power* (2003) Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde theorized the concepts of securitization, which we know today. In their works, they stated that securitization occurs across five sectors – political sector, economic sector, societal sector, environmental sector, and military sector. They argued that securitization may occur in any of the five sectors, leading states to perceive that a threat to national security exists within a given sector (Kilroy 2018, 1). However, over the years, more security sectors have been added by other scholars, including cybersecurity and health security (Hart et al. 2014, 2864-2866; Kelle 2007, 219). The 'widening' the use of the term *security* through the division of the sectors allows for a security analysis that focuses on core manageable portions. By 'sectorializing' security, it is understood that existential threats are not objective. Rather they relate to the different characteristics of each *referent object*, which is the thing or sector that is threatened and in need of protection. When discussing security threats, it is important to understand that it does not necessarily imply complete physical destruction of a referent object. Rather it implies that a change or serious

altering of the essence of the referent object has taken place, which is still in a way an existential threat (Buzan, Wæver and Wilde 1998, 21-22).

To Buzan, Wæver and Wilde, security was something that needed to be defined not solely by a state's actions but also by what a state said and did to ensure security in other sectors (Kilroy 2018, 4). According to the theory, a threat is only constituted as something to urgently be dealt with when a 'securitizing actor' has labelled the threat or issue as 'dangerous', 'menacing', 'threatening' and so on. However, the securitizing actor has to be an individual with enough social and institutional power to move the issue 'beyond politics. To move the issue beyond politics, the securitizing actor has to articulate the security issue as a problem or threat to national security (Eroukhmanoff 2018, 104). E.g., when a securitizing actor labels the outbreak of an unknown virus a 'threat to national security', the virus outbreak may go from a low priority political concern to a high priority issue that requires immediate action as with the case of COVID-19. Additional to the securitizing actor, Buzan, Wæver and Wilde also introduce an element which they define as a 'functional actor'. A functional actor does not execute securitization but identifies security issues that are in need of being securitized due to the threat posed to a sector or state-survival. Though a functional actors speak of security, their intention is not to initiate their *own* securitization. Rather they are requesting it from a securitizing actor by convincing the actor to securitize the issue (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998, 26). Thus, the process of securitization may be initiated because a functional actor encouraged a securitizing actor to do so.

Securitization theory tells us that a national security policy is not a natural given but instead carefully constructed by state leaders and decision-makers to enhance national security. I.e., an issue is not necessarily a threat in itself; rather, it is by referring to or labelling an issue as a 'security issue' they become 'real' problems of security. Thus, Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde also viewed the idea of securitization as a speech act process (Kilroy 2018, 4).

Central to securitization theory is the emphasis on the speech act process, which takes place when a decision-maker frames an issue in an attempt to convince an audience that the issue at hand should be lifted above politics (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 26). Meaning that the issue should be dealt with immediately. By conceptualizing a primary part of securitization as a speech act, Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde showcased that reality can be described but also formed and depending on how it is constituted, it will trigger certain responses. In relation to the theory, this is also why

securitizing actors often exaggerate the urgency or level of the issue they are addressing in order to convince their audience to take measures. By doing this, a securitizing actor may be able to lift an issue beyond politics and turn certain actions into something more comprehensible than others, enabling a regime of truth about the nature of the said threat (Eroukhmanoff 2018, 106). However, the issue is not securitized before the audience collectively agrees that the nature of the issue is a threat to national security and support the idea of taking extraordinary measures. If this is achieved, some measures taken may appear, e.g., undemocratic in a normal situation; however, they will often be legitimized under the language of “urgency” and ‘existential threats’ (Eroukhmanoff 2018, 106). The aspect of using measures that stray away from the normal politics and sometimes even the principles of the political system is the reason why securitization has previously been perceived as a problematic occurrence. It meant that securitization could be used as a power-grabbing tool for politicians and elites in order to bend the rules and principles they were meant to uphold. This element in the Copenhagen School’s version has been widely discussed and sometimes criticized by other securitization scholars. They challenge the validity of the assumptions regarding extraordinary measures by arguing that many securitization processes do not utilize extraordinary measures or that some securitization processes may be accompanied by measures that appear new but actually are rather routine practices in other sectors (Bourbeau 2014; Leonard 2010).

If a securitizing actor fails to convince the audience, his or her actions will only represent a securitizing move, and the securitization will count as failed. According to Wæver, the element of having to convince an audience is very important to securitization theory. He argues that it protects politics against the disproportionate power of the state by moving success and failure out of the hands of the securitizing actor and into the hands of the audience (Wæver 2000, 253-254).

When dealing with a public health issue, scientific actors are the first link in the process of health issue securitization as they hold the necessary knowledge and expertise on the topic to determine and confirm the existence of a health issue. Scientific actors often function as functional actors that encourage political actors to securitize an issue. The political actors are individuals that hold sufficient political influence and power legitimacy in the political sector and/or in society to securitize an issue. Which in the case of China, would have been the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and local authorities. The political actors’ hold the power to initiate the securitization process and their role and agenda when securitizing an issue are policymaking and policy-implementation. Additionally, they also hold the power to authorize the use of exceptional

measures. However, if the political actors do not have the support of the public or have the ability to coerce their policy upon the public, the securitization may fail. Thus, the public is defined as the last link in the health issue securitization.

In summary, securitization theory is a reminder that securitization is not a neutral act but rather a political one manufactured and influenced by securitization actors and audiences. As the outbreak of COVID-19 started to take form, securitizing actors inside China began regarding the outbreak of the highly infectious virus as an existential threat to, e.g., the survival of citizens, economic activity and, thereby, the state. The issue became a threat to public health; thus, China began elevating the issue of the pandemic above politics, transforming it into a securitized issue that demanded immediate attention and specialized emergency measures to be taken. As a part of the securitization process, states begin to strengthen their power and authority to tackle public health issues. In China, a rather aggressive approach was chosen to deal with the virus outbreak. The Chinese government followed a rather typical approach to securitization, where the issue was elevated to the highest level of national security, which in turn allowed them to desecuritize the issue of COVID-19 rather quickly. Thus, a state's ability to securitize an issue and, thereby, produce, execute and maintain policies related to the issue, is also included in the definition of hard power. This is particularly due to the fact that implementing a policy demands that a state is able to mobilize various tangible resources. E.g., when mobilizing resources in the form of health care equipment.

This theory adds a perspective from where I am able to understand the hard power measures China decided to take when faced COVID-19.

3.2 Constructivism and Norm Diffusion

Constructivism's arrival is often linked with the end of the Cold War, as it was an event that traditional IR theories such as realism and liberalism were unable to predict and account for. The core principles of these theories – that the international world is anarchic, states are rational actors that priorities self-help in a competition for power against other states and that power distribution between states are unequal, defining the power balance between them – are often linked with their failure to account for the event (Wendt 1992, 391-392; Theys 2018, 36). Though realism claims that states compete due to the anarchical nature of the international world causes them to become enemies or rivals, and liberalism claims that states have a tendency to cooperate due to anarchy as it is the only way for them to survive, both theories argue that state behavior is a result of the anarchical system. In these

theories, the emphasized focus on the anarchical nature of the international system being the major drive of state behavior meant that there was very little space to observe the agency of individuals (Wendt 1992, 391-394). This provided American political scientist Alexander Wendt with the incentive to define a theoretical framework that goes against some of realism and liberalism's core assumptions. This theory is constructivist theory, also known as constructivism.

In his article "Anarchy is What States Make of It" (1992), Wendt suggested that that anarchy, in fact, is not the supreme determinant of why states behave the way they do rather "(...) anarchy plays only a permissive role." (Wendt 1992, 936) According to Wendt, states-behavior is not a result of the anarchical system. Instead, states decide the way they choose to behave in the anarchical system because anarchy is an environment produced by states rather than being forced on them. It is the distribution of ideas and knowledge which shapes behavior rather than the distribution of power. Wendt states that "Anarchy is what states make of it." (Wendt 1992, 395) Anarchy may be interpreted in different ways depending on the meaning an actor assigns to it. Thus, states will act differently towards enemies than towards friends. Constructivism views the world and what we are able to know of it as socially constructed. Wendt offers an example that illustrates the social construction of reality in his article, where he explains that 500 British nuclear weapons are perceived as less of a threat to the U.S. than 5 Soviet missiles (Wendt 1992, 397). He explains that these perceptions of threat are not caused by the nuclear weapons but rather by *the meaning* which states apply to the material structure. I.e., nuclear weapons do not by themselves possess meaning unless social context is applied (Theys 2018, 36). According to Wendt, some states prefer to cooperate and others to compete when presented with the same situation because their perception of reality is different. States' perception of reality shapes their interests and, thereby, their actions in a given situation (Wendt 1992, 396-398). This entails that reality is a social construct that is always open to the prospect of change as meanings are not fixed but rather able to change over time depending on states' ideas, values and beliefs.

Another central principle of constructivism is identities and interests. According to Wendt, states may be assigned multiple identities, e.g., enemy, friend or rival, which are socially constructed through their interaction with other states (Wendt 1992, 398). These identities are representations of a state's understanding of itself and determine its interests. This in turn determines a state's behavior towards other states, including its decision-making when conducting foreign policies in order to survive a global pandemic. Wendt argued that "Most decisions are and should be made on the basis of

probabilities, and these are produced by interactions, by what actors *do*.” (Wendt 1992, 404) E.g., if a state is perceived as an enemy, the interest of the other state would be to destroy the enemy-state causing them to enter a war, however, should this state be perceived as a friend, the other state would attempt to form an alliance. Additionally, this suggests that states’ identities and their interest may transform through interactions.

In relation to the structure of identities and interest, the idea of norms and their importance in the shaping of identity is also introduced. Wendt argues that norms have ‘constitutive’ functions (Wendt 1999, 88). This means that they create categories of actors and actions and determine the identities and interests of said actors. Norms create meaning through the creation of collectively held understandings of who and what things are. However, value is added subjectively based on the values of a society (Wendt 1999, 111-112). A state that conforms to a certain identity will act accordingly to the norms which are connected with that identity. Consequently, an expectation forms in relation to what kinds of behavior and actions are perceived to be more acceptable compared to others. State A will, therefore, judge State B’s actions based upon its own structure of rules and norms and whether or not the actions of State B align with its own behavioral expectations. Just as with the case of COVID-19, where China was judged based on its rather aggressive crisis management by many states in the West because its approach went against many traditional Western democratic beliefs.

Norms are often thought of as standards of appropriate behavior. It is most important to understand that norms should be perceived as both stable and flexible, which introduces the idea of *norm diffusion*. Norm diffusion implies that norms travel, meaning that they are taken out of their original context and applied to a new. Through the process of norm diffusion, states will variously interact with norms as they (stable) are or change them (flexible), either intentionally or unintentionally (Winston 2018, 642). If a norm is allowed to stay in its stable form, it is considered a *norm continuity*, but if it is changed, the process of *norm change* occurs. Norms may occur single or in a group, and when faced with this, a state will decide based on its identity and interest which norms will remain stable and which will be changed or rejected. When norms appear in a group, a state may not necessarily agree with all of the norms presented. However, it may choose to accept the general goals of the larger norm set rather than reject the entire set (Winston 2018, 644). E.g., in a crisis situation, where a state may normally perceive the norms within another state negatively but over the course of the crisis changes its perception of certain norms as a result of the other state’s successful crisis management. Thus, resulting in a higher degree of willingness to engage.

It is often thought that constructivism simply states the obvious – that reality is shaped by actions, interactions, and perceptions. However, constructivism offers alternative explanations and addresses concepts occurring in the social world which classical theories do not consider. In regard to the case of COVID-19, this theory shows that it is not only the distribution of hard power resources such as materials and wealth which explains state behavior when managing a health crisis. It is worth mentioning that adopting the constructivist approach does not mean that the material lethality of the virus is denied or in any way believed to be diminished. Instead, concepts such as identity, norms, and ideas are introduced and included in the analysis of Serbia and France’s perceptions of China. Through this, I may establish states’ initial perceptions towards China’s crisis management and how they may have been affected by norm diffusion over the course of the pandemic. This will help better understand the two states’ behavior towards China and how this allowed room for China to capitalize.

3.3 Analytical structure

In the following section, I will be providing an overview of my analysis in terms of how I intend to conduct my analysis step-for-step. I will also provide reasonings as to how and why I have come to structure my analysis as such and how this structure will allow me to answer the research question:

Why was Chinese crisis management a foundation for its ability to capitalize on the global health crisis?

The analysis below seeks to answer the research question by investigating China's crisis management and capitalization from two perspectives – an internal perspective and an external perspective. As there are two perspectives, the analysis will also consist of two parts.

The first part will analyze the internal perspective of China's crisis management by applying securitization theory. Though it has already been clarified that China's crisis management was more effective and essentially "better" at dealing with the spread of COVID-19 than other states, it is important to dive deeper into China's crisis management, from a securitization point, to identify what allowed it to achieve such positive results. This will, in turn, also allow me to uncover China's material and ideational capitalization. My aim is to showcase how some elements within the Chinese system created the foundation for an effective securitization process upon which China could produce capitalization internally. The findings from this analysis will be utilized in the second analysis regarding how China used its material gain to carry out soft power strategies abroad.

The second part of the analysis will use constructivism to analyze the external perspective of norm diffusion. In this analysis, I will analyze how the advantages gained from China's crisis management enabled it to influence the consciousness of France and Serbia through soft power strategies by creating norm diffusion. The analysis will focus on the narrative which surrounded China at the beginning of the pandemic and how China was able to affect this by utilizing material resources as a part of soft power behaviors to generate a norm diffusion that they were able to benefit from. I will, in this analysis, draw upon the findings in the first analysis and use media reports and government statements to showcase perceptions and change in them. This part of the analysis aims to uncover if China's combination of hard material gain and soft power strategies became a component in its ability to capitalize. Thus, this analysis will focus solely on China's use of soft

power strategies which it utilized the internal material gain, such as ‘mask diplomacy’, to investigate if these strategies had an effect and not investigate if China implemented other strategies.

Based upon this framework, I will seek to answer why China’s crisis management became a foundation for its capitalization, both internally and externally. However, before conducting the analyses of Serbia and France, I will provide a short historical context of their relations with China prior to COVID-19 to give an understanding of how they changed.

Chapter 4: Analysis

4.1 Analysis Part One: China's process of securitizing COVID-19

Security issues such as COVID-19 was, on a national level, essentially a challenge to China's system and its crisis management. The following analysis will dive deeper into what elements within the Chinese system allowed it to effectively securitize the issue of COVID-19.

In regard to a public health crisis, the functional actors of securitization can be defined as the scientific actors who engaged in the scientific research of COVID-19. In China, these functional actors had the agenda of confirming, assessing, and relaying information regarding the virus to the central leadership as well as the public. This scientific agenda formed the preliminary understanding of the virus and began to shape the responses of the political agenda. The main task of the political agenda was to establish security threats based on information from the functional scientific actors and determine how to securitize them through speech acts.

When studying the case of securitization of COVID-19 in China, it becomes clear that even prior to initiating the securitization process publicly, that the Chinese political system is defined by a structure that would allow it to implement its COVID-19 strategies effectively. As the Leninist rule of political command demands unconditional obedience towards party decisions, divergences in political interests between local agents and central principals is much less prominent, which places a great deal of power in the hands of the central leadership who was the initial and primary securitizing actor in China in relation to COVID-19. This would have meant that securitizing the issue of COVID-19 would have been met with no resistance, thus allowing for a swift securitization once the decision was made. Additionally, China's authoritarian system is known to use hard power or 'sticks' in order to steer its bureaucracy, which was also employed extensively throughout the crisis management of COVID-19. Disciplinary penalties such as demotion, public reprimand, and dismissal were used to align cadres, e.g., by the beginning of May 2020, more than 3000 cadres had been referred for disciplinary action (Jingwei, Shi and Liu 2020, 248). China's exceptionally stringent discipline was also accompanied by strengthened accountability, which put further pressure on local governments to meet the mandate of the pandemic containment as failure to meet requirements could lead to disciplinary action. This tight political control over local governments allowed the central leadership to enforce a top-down method when managing a crisis such as COVID-19 thereby, steering the

behavior of the local governments. This would have allowed efficient policy implementation throughout the entire political structure, which would have supported the securitization process.

The central leadership was able to effectively implement security measures all the way through the organizational structure after the confirmation of human-to-human transmission on January 19, 2020 (SCIO 2020). After the NHC team had concluded that human-to-human transmission of the novel coronavirus was indeed a reality, the central leadership began the process of securitizing the issue of COVID-19 by implementing various hard power measures.

First, it was decided that the virus would be classified as a Class B infectious disease but that measures of prevention and control should be those of a Class A (SCIO 2020). This allowed hospitals to, in accordance with the Law, put COVID-19 patients, suspected carriers, and people in close contact with the infected patient under mandatory isolation or quarantine and treatment (Zhang 2020). A strategy that allowed them to enforce their COVID-19 policy upon civil society.

Second, was the major securitization policy implemented to stem the spread of COVID-19 on January 22, 2020. At this time, the number of cases recorded had risen to more than 2,000 in less than a month from the first recorded case, a curve that was rising exponentially (WHO 2021). Thus, the central leadership decided to place a lockdown on Wuhan and Hubei Province, which included closing down the airport and railway stations and suspending public transport (SCIO 2020). However, this announcement resulted in public panic, causing people to rush to hospitals for testing and treatment, causing the CPC to initiate its largest mobilization of various health resources and manpower for a public health crisis in its history, which I will return to later (Caballero-Anthony and Gong 2020, 161). A measure which, traditionally, would have broken the political conventions.

Thus, it becomes clear that one of the Chinese system's strengths was its effective command chain and top-down decision making, which allowed efficient policy-implementation throughout the country.

On the January 23, 2020, the Chinese central authorities further securitized the issue of COVID-19 by declaring that all provinces of the country would launch the first-level emergency response to major public health emergencies, meaning that all movement of people among provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions would be restricted. Additionally, it established the Central Leading Group for COVID-19 Prevention and Control (CLG), which became the top decision-making-body in response to the pandemic (SCIO). Additional groups such as the Central Steering Group (CSG) and the State Council Joint mechanism for COVID-19 Prevention and Control was

launched in January 2020. This created a central command structure that was later duplicated to all local governments which in turn set up local command headquarters for COVID-19 prevention and control (Jingwei, Shi and Liu 2020, 246). CPC party secretaries and administrative chiefs assumed full responsibility for decision-making and task execution in their respective jurisdictions, serving as leaders of local commands. This showed an institutional structure that formed a rather strict and clear command chain which is crucial when steering a large country during a crisis. By distributing the role of securitizing actors across multiple individuals, China was able to ensure that securitization would be implemented and upheld throughout the country. Additional to effective command chains and decision-making, China steered its bureaucracy in a direction that ensures that it was able to align its government personnel toward the securitization of COVID-19 and crisis management.

Another point to make in relation to implementing policies effectively is that it is clear the Chinese government possess a strong coercive capacity which allows it to force citizens to strictly comply with crisis management measures. Placing even more power into the hands of the central leadership. E.g., in the case of the mandatory Wuhan lockdown, where the state was able to rely on coercive organizations such as the police to enforce its policies through hard power. According to the Ministry of Public Security, public security departments had handled about 22,000 epidemic-related criminal cases and detained 4260 people for hindering epidemic control as of February 24, 2020, (Cui 2020).

The Chinese state's effective top-down decision implementation was further supported by its relationship to civil society. The combination of robust social control, a high level of state legitimacy² and the collectivist societal culture in China has created a social environment that is beneficial to the implementation of coercive measures.

On January 25, 2020, President Xi Jinping further supported the process of securitization by issuing his first public statement on the virus. At this time, an additional +10,000 people had tested positive for COVID-19 in a week, illustrating how quickly the virus was spreading (WHO 2021). He spoke of the 'battle to contain the virus', which created the idea of an ongoing war against an invisible opponent in the minds of his audience. Additionally, Xi stated that "Life is of paramount importance. When an epidemic breaks out, a command is issued. It is our responsibility to prevent and control it." (Xinhua 2020a) Collective values strengthened by communist ideologies,

² A study from 2019 conducted by Edelman showed that 79 percent of the general public had trust in its government compared to the global average of 53 percent (Edelman 2020).

demands that citizens exercise a large degree of self-restraint if and when individual interests conflict with the collective (Jingwei, Shi and Liu 2020, 251). In relation to implementing security policies, the central state often deployed scientific actors such as the NHC to support the political actors reasoning of securitization and crisis management strategies, which would have helped validate the state's decision-making and implementation of policies to its audience.

Though some may argue that China's rigid social control could have been enough to coerce its COVID-19 policies, convincing the public that securitizing the issue of COVID-19 was the right decision played an important role in civil society's perception of China's crisis management. During COVID-19, trust in the national government rose significantly, with a survey showing that almost 50 percent of respondents had become more trusting in their government since the outbreak (Wu et al. 2021, 11).

In the context of securitization, the Chinese central leadership had implemented multiple measures which demanded a high level of resource mobilization in order to allocate it. The Chinese state showed a particularly impressive mobilization capacity in relation to both crisis management and post-crisis reconstruction.

As mentioned above, the lockdown of Wuhan had created mass panic in the Chinese public, which led to a severe shortage of manpower, beds and medical supplies due to a rise in infections (Fifield 2020). Thus, in order to support the lockdown-policy, the Chinese state had to mobilize resources and fast. It managed the CPC to rally a total of over 43,000 health workers to Wuhan and Hubei, fill the huge gap in hospital beds in Wuhan, built two temporary hospitals and established 16 temporary treatment centers (Xinhua 2020b). By February 11, 2020, the state had managed to supply Hubei with medical suits which exceeded its needs (SCIO 2020). The strict central authoritarian rule meant that the Chinese government was able to mobilize vast resources from subordinates, often in non-negotiable terms due to the political obligations of state subordinates. It also allowed the state to create a one-to-one paired assistance program in which 19 provinces were 'matched' with 16 prefectural cities in Hubei in order to provide assistance such as medical teams, equipment, and other necessary supplies in Hubei (SCIO 2020). Thus, allowing it to mobilize a vast amount of resources needed in just over a week.

Unlike some other countries, the Chinese state struggled much less with a shortage of material resources throughout the pandemic. This is particularly due to the huge state-owned enterprise (SOE) sector, which provided a good production basis for material mobilization. These

enterprises produced various medical supplies such as medical masks and were able to increase the daily output from 130,000 to 5.85 million by early February 2020 and to 200 million by the end of April 2020 (SCIO 2020). For SOEs in China, fulfilling orders made by the state is no less important than their market performance. As SOEs in China tend to dominate strategic industries, they are able to organize massive supplies towards crisis management regardless of cost, which would have supported China's policy implementations tremendously and allowed them to effectively securitize the issue of COVID-19.

Not only was China able to draw upon its factories to support its strategy implementation, but also its technological position. AI and big data were used as a part of epidemic control (SCIO 2020). A database was set up to provide data services that could be utilized in virus risk control, identification of groups at risk, identify high-risk areas, among other, enabling the Chinese government to quickly regulate restrictions when needed. It also allowed the Chinese government to quickly create an "epidemic map" to which the public had access. This displayed specific names and locations of cases reported, making it easier for the public to avoid infection (SCIO 2020). Additionally, health QR codes and digital travel records became an implemented part of the Chinese people's lives as they functioned as permits for e.g., making trips, accessing certain public venues, and more. Not only did this enable the public to navigate around the virus, but it also enabled the Chinese state to amplify its mass surveillance which would have supported its securitization process as it allowed it to ensure all citizens in populated areas followed the COVID-19 restrictions.

At its highest, according to numbers from WHO, China recorded 15,152 cases on February 13, 2020. However, the results of China's efforts at securitizing the issue of COVID-19 began to show after mid-February as the contamination curve began to drop. China managed to go from having approx. 4,600 confirmed cases a day to 330 by the end of February, based on a 7-day average and by mid-March, numbers had dropped to single digits (Ritchie et al. 2021: SCIO 2020). But it was not only the spread of COVID-19 China had managed to stabilize through its securitization of COVID-19. According to numbers from Chinese white papers, 99 percent of companies with a revenue of more than RMB20 million per annum had resumed operations by the end of April 2020. So had 88.4 percent of micro, small and medium enterprises (SCIO 2020). Which only demonstrates how effective China had been at managing the health crisis.

Through the analysis above China's crisis management, it has become clear that the Chinese system contains elements that created a solid foundation to effectively securitize the issue of COVID-19. First, securitizing actors in China possesses a great deal of power which would have allowed for a swift initiation of securitization as decision-making is not spread out across multiple parties. Additionally, the state's power status allowed it to significantly influence its audience, the public, which allowed for a successful implementation of securitization. Second, the Chinese political system is characterized by its effective-command chain, top-down decision-making, and top-up accountability, which enabled the central leadership to align government personnel toward crisis management and ensure policy implementation met requirements. Third, the relationship between state and society is characterized by a high-level of state legitimacy and collectivist societal culture, which ensures that citizens exercise a large degree of self-restraint. The combination of strong coercive capacity and its state-society relationship allowed the Chinese state to implement extraordinary policies efficiently as they are not challenged to the same degree as in a democratic state. Fourth, its ability to effectively mobilize a vast amount of resources in a short time. This was a result of a strong cooperation capacity which allowed it to quickly reduce shortages of medical equipment; a coercive capacity, which allowed it to mobilize and allocate manpower and implement policies such as one-to-one paired assistance; and its technology which allowed to track infection. These four elements were major factors in China's ability to implement strong quarantine policies, which in turn allowed for a rapid reduction of spread, which in turn allowed the country to stabilize and return to somewhat normal conditions.

Within just three months, China had been able to deal with the health crisis internally. On April 8, 2020, the Chinese state lifted the lockdown and less two weeks later, the last COVID-19 patient in Wuhan was discharged without ever experiencing a second wave (SCIO 2020). Through its crisis management, China had been able to capitalize in form the ideational gain of increased state legitimacy. Additionally, as the Chinese state was able to desecuritize the issue of COVID-19, it allowed it to allocate production of several COVID-19 resources towards export purposes. According to numbers from OEC, China's exports increased 10.5 percent from October 2019 to October 2020, despite the global health crisis (OEC 2021). China's exceptional ability to mobilize resources allowed it to stabilize its situation and regain its production, thereby gaining a material advantage as this meant it was able to export to COVID-19 related products as its own demands had lowered considerably. The stabilization of its internal situation meant that China could focus on utilizing the material advantages as a part of its soft power strategies. The analysis below will investigate how China's

internal crisis management and the material advantages it gained from it created a foundation upon which China could capitalize by analyzing norm diffusion in France and Serbia.

4.2 Analysis Part Two: Norm Diffusion in Serbia and France

According to the theory of constructivism, states will act differently towards enemies than towards friends. In the analysis below, an investigation of how China was able to create norm diffusion as a result of their internal material gain of regained production capacity and through the external use of soft power strategies in Serbia and France – two countries with differing norms, values, and ideologies – will be conducted. As mentioned above, I will begin each analysis with a short historical context of the relations between the state and China.

4.2.1 *China-Serbia Relations Pre-COVID-19*

For the past decade, China has established itself as a valuable ally to Serbia. Since the formal establishment of diplomatic relations between the two states in 1955, their relations have been warm (Triandafillidis 2021). Serbia and China's relations have only grown stronger under the presidency of Aleksandar Vučić and Xi Jinping. Especially at an economic level. Serbia has, over the past 9 years, received more than 10bn dollars through Chinese investments, which has rapidly changed the economic profile of one of Europe's poorest countries (Triandafillidis 2021). Additionally, Serbia has in recent years become a part of China's Belt and Road Initiative, and China has poured resources into bettering Serbia's infrastructure and energy sector. Thereby, solidifying China's status as an important trade partner to Serbia.

4.2.2 *Norm Diffusion in Serbia*

On March 15, 2020, Serbian President Vučić declared a state of emergency (SoE), while emphasizing the importance of 'accepting that measures are taken in order to prevent the threat of COVID-19' (Vankovska 2020, 76). The SoE included a night curfew as well as the deployment of the military to protect Serbian hospitals and borders, among others, which imitated a very hard power approach to crisis management, similar to what China had implemented at the beginning of February 2020.

Additional to announcing the SoE, President Vučić also made appeals for international assistance in combating the virus as the EU had placed an export ban for certain medical protective equipment on March 15, 2020, in an attempt to meet the needs for supplies to its members (Li 2020). As a state lying within the borders of Europe, with ongoing negotiations to enter the European Union

(EU), it would only have been presumed natural if Serbia had worked closely with the EU during its outbreak of COVID-19. However, it was China that heeded the Serbian call for help. As discovered in the analysis above, China had managed to almost completely stabilize by mid-March 2020, which provided China with the possibility to exercise its soft power by engaging in health diplomacy. On March 17, 2020, it was reported that Serbia had received its first batch of medical aid from China, to which the Serbian government stated in a press release, “We are convinced that the help of our Chinese friends, with their expertise and experience, we will be able to successfully cope with the COVID-19 and that Serbia will emerge from this battle as a winner” (Xinhua 2020c). Four days later, further medical assistance from China arrived as a team of Chinese doctors with COVID-19 experience landed in Belgrade along with ventilators, medical masks, test kits, and other medical supplies among 16 tons of donations (Li 2020). With their arrival, President Vučić announced that Serbia’s would revise its response to COVID-19 to follow what could be described as a “Chinese model” (Albert 2020). This meant Serbia would implement mass testing and delegate positive cases depending on its severity to makeshift clinics, hospitals and intensive care units. Additionally, it was announced that failure to abide by COVID-19 guidelines would be punishable by three to twelve years in jail, following in China’s hard power footsteps (Albert 2020). This supports the preliminary idea that China’s crisis management not only allowed for capitalization internally but created external ideational advantages in the form of norm diffusion as Serbia adopted the Chinese crisis model as a standard for appropriate behavior for managing the outbreak COVID-19. It also supports the constructivist assumption that states will adjust their actions according to their perceptions. As President Vučić presented China as a ‘friend’ from the beginning, it becomes the diffusion of norms and acceptance of behavior would have had a strong starting point.

Furthermore, the diffusion of ‘Chinese norms’ is identifiable through the Serbian media’s portrayal of the EU, in which Serbia began to distance itself from its future alliance. As mentioned above, it would have been presumed natural if Serbia had received aid from the EU; however, in the early days of the outbreak, the Serbian state felt like the EU had abandoned it in a time of crisis and portrayed this understanding of reality heavily in its media. From the beginning of the outbreak, Serbian media reports and government statements regarding the EU were marked by a negative discourse. Headlines such as “the death of European solidarity” and “EU is a fairy-tale only on paper” marked the narratives on Serbia’s neighbor, EU, in mid-March 2020 (Burazer 2020, 24: Ruge 2020). The theory claims that a state will attempt to form alliances with other states if it perceives them as a friend.

Though it would be too drastic to claim Serbia began viewing the EU as an enemy, it is evident that China's internal crisis management had generated soft power in the form of norm diffusion, which had an impact on Serbia's preexisting norms and understanding of reality (prior to COVID-19). Through the diffusion of norms, China had begun influencing how Serbia perceived the EU in terms of being a desirable alliance negatively. An indication of this can be seen on March 25, 2020, as the EU announced a 93-million-euro package – including 15 million euros for the purchase and transport of medical supplies and equipment – as well as 78 million euros for economic recovery for Serbia, which received considerably fewer positive media reports, or general media attention at all, than any Chinese aid (Albert 2020).

Through China's soft power strategies and framing, it had been able to shape reality in which China was seen as the main benefactor by the Serbian public, and not only in relation to COVID-19 relief. A poll conducted in March 2020 showed that 40 percent of people in Serbia believed that China was Serbia's biggest donor, while only 17,6 percent believed it was the EU (Conley et al. 2020, 4). However, the EU had been Serbia's biggest foreign aid donor during the global health crisis. China did not even qualify for the top four biggest donors. Indicating just how much Chinese soft power strategies had influenced and shaped the Serbians perception of reality. What is even more interesting is that China had been able to shape this perception despite neither China or Serbia ever enclosing how much of the medical equipment received was donated and how much was paid for by the Serbian state (Velebit 2020). A reality that had been shaped not only by Chinese propaganda and soft power but also by the Serbian government. While Serbia-EU relation was suffering due to the Serbian government's harsh critique, China was constantly praised by Serbian authorities. Words such as "steel friendship", "Serbian-Chinese brotherhood" and "fraternal relations" was used to describe the relationship between China and Serbia by President Vučić in the beginning of the outbreak. Additionally, the narratives praising Chinese help (and criticizing the EU's passiveness) were further reinforced online. A study discovered 30,000 posts from Serbian accounts on the social media site Twitter from March 9 – April 9, 2020, with the keywords "Kina" (China) and Srbija (Serbia). However, an estimated 71.9 percent of these posts were created by "bot" accounts aimed at posting praise regarding the Chinese aid and Serbia-China friendship, amplifying the visibility of their tweets by retweeting each other (DFC 2020). Further framing a positive narrative of China and the Chinese health diplomacy.

China continued to deploy medical aid to Serbia as a part of its health diplomacy in an attempt to further solidify its position as the ‘savior of Serbia’ through 2020 (Burazer 2020, 25). But it was not only masks, tests and manpower Serbia received from China but also knowledge and technology. In April 2020, Serbia opened up its first Fire Eye testing lab³ and a second in July 2020. Through China’s soft power strategies, it had not only been able to affect its own narrative positively, but it had also resulted in an increase in Serbian import of Chinese products which had risen from 873.700 USD in April 2020 to 3,290.100 USD in December 2020 (See figure 3)⁴. Despite import dropping drastically, China still remained in January 2021 (SORS 2021).

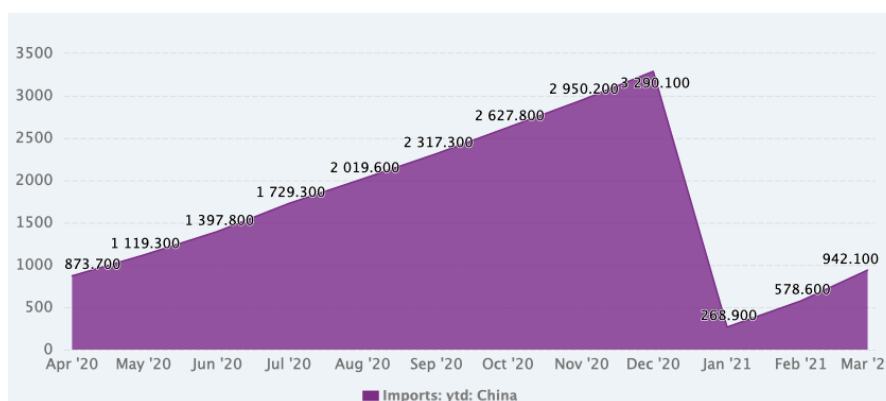


Figure 3 (CEIC 2021)

For Serbia, another moment of divisiveness between East and West, or the EU and China, came when the world would begin to enter the first phase of mass immunization. The EU had promised Serbia it would be a part of the Covax system, which is a global effort to distribute vaccines to poorer countries (Vladiasavljev 2021). However, before the system had managed to produce its first results, mass vaccination had already initiated in Serbia.

At the end of 2020 and beginning of January 2021, Serbia received slightly more than 10,000 Pfizer vaccines from German/American manufacturers. However, according to reports, this was due to the efforts of Serbian officials and not the Covax system (Vladiasavljev 2021). As a country with a population of almost 7 million, this raised the question of how the Serbian state would be able to provide mass immunization to its public.

³ Fire Eye are inflatable nucleic acid testing labs

⁴ According to CEIC data, Serbian import of Chinese products reached its all-time high in December 2020 in the last 17 years (CEIC 2020)

As a result of China's regained production and technological resources, it had developed several vaccines with which China had begun domestic emergency vaccination already in November 2020 (Vladiasavljev 2021). As Serbia struggled to provide vaccines for mass immunization, the Chinese government yet again provided an answer and in mid-January. A million Chinese vaccines arrived in Serbia as a part of what has become known as China's "vaccine diplomacy". China's immense production capacity had meant it was able to provide Serbia with vaccines before Serbia had received any vaccines through the Covax system despite Serbia paying upfront for the inclusion in the program (Danas 2021). China's actions further solidified its position in the minds of the Serbian public as a savior when the EU fails. Despite discussions that receivers of the Chinese vaccines would perhaps not be able to travel freely to EU, more than 200,000 Serbians decided to receive that vaccine within a week of the first administration. By March 7, 2021, Serbia had received its third shipment of COVID-19 vaccines from China, and at the beginning of April 2021, President Vučić received his first injection of the Chinese Sinopharm vaccine (Xinhua 2021). An action which reflected the Serbian government's perception of China as one build upon trust.

As mentioned in the historical context, China-Serbia relations were warm prior to COVID-19, providing an understanding of why Serbia was so easily willing to engage with China. Thus, when studying the media reports from Serbia in regard to the beginning of the Serbian COVID-19 outbreak, it is not surprising that the narrative surrounding China was positive. It is evident through Serbia's quick adoption of 'Chinese model' that it wants to follow and emulate China's example. Additionally, the analysis shows how China's framing of its narrative easily resonated with the Serbian audience and how quick Serbia was to echo this narrative in its own media and government statements.

4.2.3 China-France Relations Pre-COVID-19

The relationship between China and France has been marked by multiple clashes, often centering around issues of human rights, China's 'One China Policy', and in recent times the passing of a national security legislation for Hong Kong (France24 2020). The relationship has under the presidency of Emmanuel Macron and Xi Jinping developed into one of economic importance, and in 2019, China was France's fourth-biggest trading partner (OEC 2021). However, despite a relationship between the two states that had been warming, a poll conducted by Pew Research (2020) Center showed that 62 percent of French respondents were unfavorable towards China in 2019.

4.2.4 Norm Diffusion in France

As the outbreak in China had begun to decline in late-February, French politicians and commentators praised China for its ability to impose such a ‘draconian lockdown’, leading to swift management and de-escalation of the COVID-19 crisis (IFRI 2020: Armanini et al. 2020, 21). What the French government did not know at this time was that it would confirm its first cases of COVID-19 days after on February 25, 2020. As numbers of cases and death began to increase drastically, the French government decided that a strong policy response was needed to fight the spread of the virus, thus, initiating a four-phase plan which ultimately led to a nation-wide lockdown on March 17, 2020 (Armanini et al. 2020, 22). Though the French government has not claimed it followed the Chinese model, it is evident that its lockdown measures, much like the two cases discussed above, included various hard power measures such as the need for a requirement for a written justification to go out and a demand for compliance by enforcing fines up to 450 euro. If an individual was fined more than four times, it would lead to 6 months in prison. Arguably, drawing similarities to the hard approach which China implemented to fight the virus, though not equally as aggressive. However, as France’s main interest would unarguably have been to increase its chances of survival by effectively managing the outbreak, it is not unreasonable to believe it would have followed in some of China’s footsteps as its crisis management had shown effective results. This could have shaped or influenced how other states such as France viewed the norms of crisis management.

Just days after declaring the lockdown, France received its first ‘solidarity freight’ from China, consisting of masks, protection suits, and one million face masks, which had been a massive shortage in France as the increase of COVID-19 cases rose drastically (France Diploma 2020). According to a French government statement, French Minister of Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian spoke with his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, shortly after the arrival to thank him for the “gesture of solidarity (...) in response to the solidarity shown by France with China (...)” (France Diplomacy 2020). China’s ability to quickly provide aid as a result of its own stability meant that it was able to quickly frame itself as a ‘provider of help’ in the health crisis, which also led the French government to import heavily from China, starting March 30, 2020, where 100 tons of medical equipment arrived in France from China (Hansrod 2020). This led France to order close to two billion masks from China in early April 2020, according to the French Health Ministry (Armanini et al. 2020, 22).

However, it is important to note that where France frames the shipments as a response to the solidarity shown by France, several Chinese news outlets, such as Xinhua and China Global Television Network (CGTN), frames the story differently. E.g., the pro-government CGTN wrote, ”(...) Le Drian said

France sincerely thanks China for providing medical aid to help fight COVID-19, adding that France is willing to learn from China's epidemic prevention and control experience.” (CGTN 2020) despite there being no reports of France wishing to “learn from China” in their own government statements, on the contrary.

Despite having received positive media coverage and government reactions in the first two months, the positive Chinese narrative began to change in France in late March – early April 2020. Providing a clear indication that despite having attempted to use ‘mask diplomacy’, China had not achieved in diffusing the norms to a point where they were accepted by the French. On April 16, 2020, during an interview President Macron said, “Let’s not be so naïve as to say it’s [China] been much better at handling this. There are clearly things that have happened that we don’t know about,” when asked about whether or not he believed that people would begin to believe that the authoritarian system was better in a time of existential crisis (Mallet and Khalaf 2020). Providing an indication that rather than accepting the norm diffusion, France was working against it, not willing to shape its reality around the narrative that China had done better. It was not only the French government who began critically viewing its alliance with China, but also its media. On April 23, 2020, one of France’s biggest newspapers published an article in which it stated that China’s mask diplomacy had “flopped” and that it had not changed the image of China (Frachon 2020). Further supporting the argument that China had not achieved norm diffusion through its soft power strategies, rather it created an even more negative narrative surrounding itself as its actions were met with a negative perception by its audience, the French government and the public.

Despite France’s skeptical views on China and a relationship that appeared to have been challenged during this time, one thing is clear. China had managed to shape a French perception of China which truly solidified its role as the ‘provider of supplies’ during the time of crisis as France imported Chinese products for approx. 5,379 million euro (approx. 6,552 million dollars) in May 2020, its largest import in one month in the last three years (see figure 4). With the numbers generally averaging higher in 2020 than prior, despite the controversies.

France’s import of Chinese products from January 2018 – December 2020

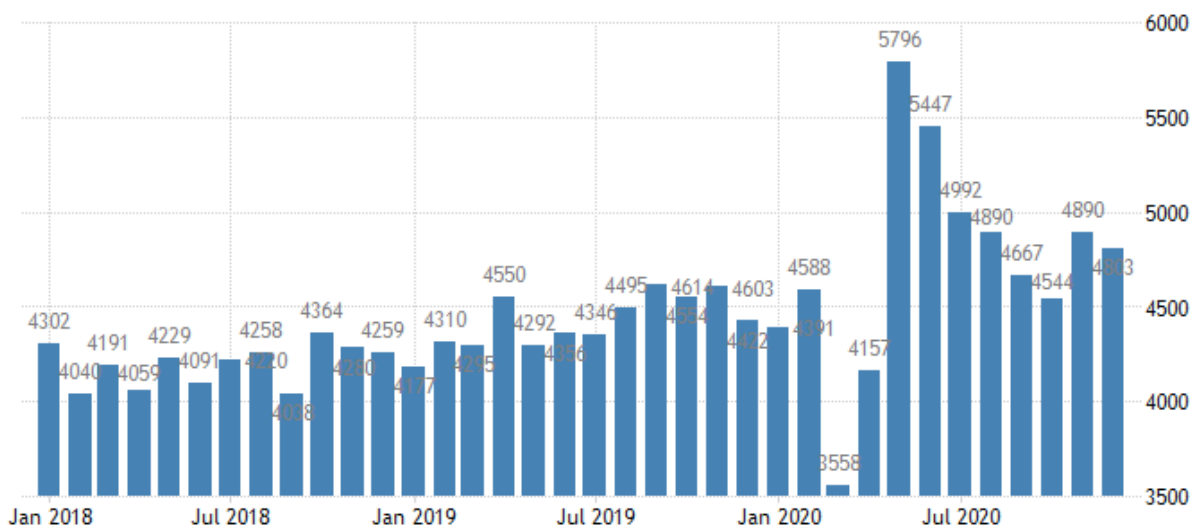


Figure 4 – (Trading Economics 2021)

However, despite a rise in trade, it appeared that the perception of China was worsening. A survey conducted by the European Council on Foreign Relations in Spring 2020 showed the impacts of China’s not so well-received soft power strategies. In the survey, 62 percent of French respondents reported that their view of China had ‘worsened’ during the crisis (Krastev and Leonard 2020). Yet, the Chinese efforts to shape its narrative as well as influence the French perception continued. Several Chinese news wrote articles from June 2020 were marked with a clear message: France and China needed to work together to fight the health crisis (E.g., Xinhua 2020d). These articles stated that Xi Jinping had suggested that France and China should work together to distribute China’s vaccine once it was ready (E.g., Lu 2020). However, it appeared that this message also did not resonate well with the French public. A survey from September 2020 further confirmed this, as 52.6 percent of French respondent answered that their view of China had worsened over the last three years (Julienne et al. 2020).

Though the Chinese soft power strategies appeared to fail in diffusing norms among the French public, it still seemed that China’s efforts had impacted the French government. In February 2021, President Macron stated that the EU should not gang up with the US on China, “A situation to join all together against China, this is a scenario of the highest possible conflictuality. This one, for me, is counterproductive,” (Momtaz 2021). Though it should not be assumed that this equals complete diffusion of Chinese norms as France still continuous to view China through a skeptical lens, it is an indication of how a state such as France is willing to accept the general goal of the larger norm set, than completely reject it.

As mentioned in the historical context, the relations between China and France were prior to COVID-19, heavily marked by being one of economic importance. A characteristic that was also very prominent during the pandemic. Despite Chinese efforts to frame a positive narrative through soft power strategies, it has become evident through the analysis above that these efforts did not resonate well with its French recipients. Throughout the pandemic, public opinion of China worsened in several areas, indicating the gap between French and Chinese norms. Though France accepted a rather hard power approach to crisis management, the state still attempted to distance itself from the Chinese model by expressing skepticism in regard to how the Chinese model was supposedly portrayed by China and what truly happened. In terms of diffusing norms, it appeared that France worked against this diffusion throughout the pandemic. However, it also appears that the French government is willing to accept the larger goal of norm diffusion and maintain a diplomatic relationship with China as a result of China's economic importance.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have sought to answer the question, *Why was Chinese crisis management a foundation for its ability to capitalize on the global health crisis?* by investigating China's crisis management and capitalization from two perspectives – an internal perspective and an external perspective.

In the first analysis, I sought to identify elements within the Chinese system that allowed it to effectively securitize the issue of COVID-19 in order to determine how these elements allowed China to gain internal capitalization. Additionally, I was interested in identifying which advantages China had been able to gain through its crisis management. Through the analysis, I have identified four elements that helped China effectively securitize.

First, securitizing actors in China possesses a great deal of influence and power, which allows it to effectively initiate the process of securitization as decision-making is centralized rather than spread out across multiple parties. Second, China's authoritarian political system provided it with an effective command-chain, top-down decision-making, and top-up accountability. This ensured the central leadership that the implementation of policies would meet requirements. Third, policy implementation was further supported by China's state-society relationship, which is heavily characterized by its collectivist societal culture and a high-level of state legitimacy. Combined with the social control and the Chinese state's coercive capacity, they allowed the Chinese state to implement policies that are targeted towards effective crisis management as government decisions are less challenged by civil society. Fourth, China possesses a strong ability to mobilize resources in a short period of time.

These four elements played a role in China's ability to swiftly and effectively manage the health crisis. Through the analysis, I found that this not only allowed the state to regain much of its economic activity and production in a time where almost all other states were immobilized by that pandemic but that it also allowed the Chinese government to gain more trust from its people. Thus, from an internal perspective, China's crisis management was the foundation for its ability to capitalize because it quickly created stability upon which China capitalized both economic activity and production as well as state legitimacy.

As mentioned earlier, China's stability also allowed it to focus its energy else and look beyond its borders. Thus, it began to allocate production of, especially, COVID-19 related goods, such as masks or COVID-19 tests, towards export. Through my analyses, it became clear that China not only exported its products for trade but used them as a part of its health diplomacy efforts throughout COVID-19. In the analysis of Serbia and France, I sought to investigate how China had utilized its internal capitalization to create external capitalization. From my analysis, I found that China was able to increase its export during COVID-19, allowing it to capitalize externally in the form of an increase in trade. However, where Serbia and France differed was in their perception of China.

In the analysis of Serbia, it quickly became evident that the narrative surrounding China was positive from the beginning, perhaps largely due to the fact that the relations between China and Serbia were warm even prior to COVID-19. However, my analysis showed how Serbia's perception of China had gone from good to almost better. Throughout the pandemic, China had succeeded in framing itself as the savior of Serbia in a time of need. As the pandemic first spread to Serbia, the Eastern European state had looked towards the EU in search of help. However, it was China that acted first. This allowed China to shape a reality in which it appeared to be the main provider of aid, despite this being untrue as the biggest provider of aid had been the EU. Additionally, I found that China's soft power strategies had succeeded in diffusing norms. Serbia quickly adopted the Chinese model of crisis management after China's first shipment of aid. Furthermore, I found that the Serbian media narrative became more pro-China than pro-EU, despite the fact that Serbia is in the process of becoming an EU member. The Serbian critique of the EU and praise for China was an amplifier for Beijing's global propaganda, working as an echo for the Chinese state and its propaganda in Europe. Through this analysis, it became clear that China had been able to diffuse norms easily in a Eastern European country, which values and norms were similar in some ways.

In the analysis of France, a different side was portrayed. Despite an initial positive narrative surrounding China at the beginning of the pandemic, it became increasingly negative as time went on. Additionally, where many Chinese attempts at health diplomacy had been viewed positively in Serbia, they were viewed skeptically by the French media and the French public. Through this analysis, it became clear that China's attempts at health diplomacy in a Western European state often failed due to the French preliminary negative perception of China, which meant that all China's actions were viewed through a skeptical lens and questioned. Yet, despite this, the analysis also

showed that China still managed to increase its exports to France considerably in 2020, with its largest export in three years being in May 2020. This has provided insight into how a state may choose to accept certain norms within a norm set for the purpose of the larger goal while still work against the majority of the norms being diffused.

Thus, from an external perspective, China's crisis management was a foundation for its ability to capitalize because it allowed China to achieve stability internally, thereby, gain advantages which it could then use to achieve capitalization externally by incorporating them into health diplomacy strategies.

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