

China's Covid-19 White Paper

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Background

The PR China publishes white papers on topics relevant to global politics every year. A white paper on the Covid-19 pandemic was published in early June 2020. Although this document was addressed to the international community, it has largely gone unnoticed in western latitudes and is dismissed as a propaganda product. In the said white paper "Fighting Covid-19, China in Action", however, strategically relevant content can be identified.

Key Points

- An essential part of the White Paper aims to be apologetic. A chronology starting in December 2019 is meant to show that the People's Republic of China has "openly, transparently and timely" forwarded current information about the epidemic abroad. Contacts with US institutions are particularly detailed.
- The document also includes a manifesto that has a clear commitment to building an efficient global public health system. This message is unmistakably aimed at the Southern World and includes China's self-imposed commitment to deliver a future Covid-19 vaccine to developing countries, particularly African countries, free of charge.
- The doctrine of the "Community of a shared future of mankind", which has been propagated for some time, is now being refined programmatically and further developed with the sub-concept of a "Global Community of Health for All".
- The normative framework of the manifesto is in reference to a moral realignment of international politics. This corresponds to Yan Xuetong's "Moral Leadership" theory, which is much discussed in China.
- De-globalization policies and the withdrawal from international organizations are portrayed as a lack of solidarity with the global South. This newly aligns the already traditional strategic line of presenting itself as a mouthpiece for all developing countries.
- In the epilogue to the document, the CCP leadership sends the international community a hardly surprising, clear message about the resilience potential of the Chinese state system: "After weathering the epidemic, the Chinese people have keenly realized that the CPC leadership is the most reliable shelter against storms. Their trust in and support for the Party have increased, along with their confidence in China's political system."

Counterpoint

It is doubtful that the PRC can independently finance its highly ambitious soft-power projection of a global public health system. Beijing is already struggling, in the current "Covid-19 Diplomacy" framework, to meet the expectations of countries in the Southern World.