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*The impact of Covid-19 in the field  
of EU-Asia Relations, higher  
education & AI*

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IN THE FIELD OF EU-ASIA RELATIONS, HIGHER  
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THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 IN THE FIELD OF EU-ASIA RELATIONS, HIGHER EDUCATION & AI

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## *INTRODUCTION*

"Europe and Asia have been and remain inter-dependent of each other's economic success. Europe is the biggest investor and development assistance provider for most Asian partners, and one of its most important trading partners. Asia is equally important for Europe as the second largest destination for EU exports; the fastest growing middle class; a technology hotspot; and home to four out of the top ten EU trading partners."

HR/VP Josep Borrell at the High-Level Policy Dialogue of the Asia-Europe Meeting 22nd June 2021

The pandemic has highlighted the high degree of interdependence linking Asia and Europe. Unfortunately, this acquired sensitivity had not immediately turned into a strengthened cooperation. When the coronavirus hit China and then spread around the globe, nationalistic reactions prevailed, with shut down of borders and bans of exports of medical equipment (Lay, 2020). This was true also for the European Union (EU), where the Single Market and the Free Movement of people's principles collapsed as EU member states closed their borders and airspaces. In Asia, given the lower level of regional integration, the fact that the countries approached the challenge individually, not opting for a concerted response, came less as a surprise.

In this light, the topic of this year's 13th Summit of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in Cambodia emphasized the high degree of interconnection between Europe and Asia, as it was centred on "Strengthening Multilateralism for Shared Growth", aiming at the recover of European and Asian economies. From the former's perspective, the Asian continent remains central not only for its economic future but also for its geopolitical relevance.

Against this backdrop, the increased interest in Europe-Asia relations has been brought to light with the gradual importance acquired by the so-called Indo-Pacific

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region in the last years. If, on the one hand, this came out as a response to the rise of China as a dominant player in trade, military power, and technology, on the other hand, this high level of attention was made necessary by the recent developments in the East-Asian region.

Given that Asia is home to the world's largest population and fastest-growing economies, the centrality of the economic dimension in Europe-Asia relations becomes evident – as reminded by Borrell in the quote opening this introduction. Before Covid-19 hit the world, Asia accounted for 28 % of the EU's goods exports (€619.2 billion) and 40% of its imports (€801.4 billion), with two major hubs – Germany and China – standing out (D'Ambrogio, 2021). Nevertheless, the mutual efforts directed towards strengthening of political relations are also worth mentioning. In this framework, the European action concerning/fostering mutual connectivity between people, businesses, and institutions, has become a top priority, especially in view of the need for a (sustainable) post-pandemic recovery. A higher level of connectivity, however, also entails the urgency for concerted efforts on issues such as climate change, terrorism and migration, as well as geostrategic cooperation related to the Indo-Pacific region, including the security of its sea lanes (D'Ambrogio, 2021). Finally, when it comes to the research and innovation field, relations between Europe and Asia are getting closer. A recent study showed that three out of four (76%) international research collaborations in ASEM countries involve partners from at least another ASEM country (Becker et al., 2018). The same applies for international co-patents, something that proves essential during a pandemic era (Becker et al., 2018). Overall, as the Asian continent is becoming one of the most pivotal centres of global power relations, the European Union aims to foster an ever-higher degree of interdependence with it.

It is considering the relevance of such relationship that the “EU-Asia Politics and Markets Studies Platform” was born as a joint project involving the University of Bologna (UNIBO) together with Aoyama Gakuin University (AGU), Korea University (KU) and Toyo University (TU). Designed to reach out to the institutions, the teaching staff and the students, this innovative and collaborative platform was officially launched in April 2019. It was opened to EU and Asian teaching staff, researchers and Ph.D. students willing to promote the project's activities, collect all the materials, develop, and gather articles on EU and Asia politics and market

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studies that could support students' learning and research activities. The objectives of the project touched upon three dimensions. The first was the improvement of the academic interdisciplinary knowledge exchange on "EU-Asia Politics and Markets Studies". This platform, in fact, was designed to integrate and strengthen existing programs related to the abovementioned topics both in Asia and Europe. Besides, it aimed to create ad hoc teaching and learning multidisciplinary activities, while also allowing students to understand the complex dynamics involving EU and Asia international politics and economics. The second dimension concerned the enhancement of teaching staff skills in using different methodological tools to disseminate their knowledge on a specific topic. To combine multidisciplinary know-hows from different geographical areas, this project organized international mobility opportunities, such as the invitation to the University of Bologna of one faculty member from Korea University for a two-weeks series of lectures; a Winter School (the first one organised in February 2020 in the University of Bologna, Forlì Campus) and the online Student Conference. These activities were interlinked through the online platform. Finally, the third dimension was centred on the development of students' ability to analyze the political and economic relations between EU and Asia critically.

Thanks to this project, UNIBO students had the opportunity to interact with Korean and Japanese students and teaching staff, while also deepening their critical and analytical skills. At the same time, the project gave Korean and Japanese students the chance to study EU politics and markets from an EU perspective. Moreover, by allowing BA and MA Students to give a presentation in an international conference, this project sought to enhance their skills in term of independent research and academic writing.

The online Student Conference, jointly organized by the University of Bologna, Toyo University and Aoyama Gakuin University, was a pivotal part of this project. The idea of such an event was to turn the Covid-19 pandemic into an opportunity to raise debate among the students of the three universities on two main topics: 1) the future of EU-Asia relationships after the pandemic and 2) the impact of this world-changing event on universities and students' lives in Europe and Asian countries. In this sense, the aim of the Conference was to benefit from the diverse experiences of students from the two parts of the world, by comparing the strategies pursued by their countries in the higher education sector and the effect they had on

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students' lives. Moreover, the Conference aimed to serve as a platform for students to put into practice their knowledge of international relations by offering different perspectives on the future of EU-Asia relations.

The Conference relied first and foremost on student agency: the speakers were divided into different presentation teams, with members from the three different universities in each group, to ensure a high level of diversity and cooperation during the discussion. In doing so, the participants were not only given the chance to share their opinions and deliver presentations to their fellow students but also to create solid academic and interpersonal networks.

Following the Conference, as part of the EU-Asia Politics and Markets Studies project and coherently with its platform, this volume aims to bring into focus the viewpoint and the knowledge of the students who attended the Conference and decided to publish their work. The following papers tackle the challenges posed by the pandemic in the field of EU-Asia relations, with a particular focus on China, and investigate potential ways to turn the Covid-19 crisis into an opportunity for mutual learning in the field of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

In particular, the first paper analyses the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and of the Chinese discursive practice and soft-power strategies on the relations between the EU and the People's Republic of China (PRC). The analysis is centred on the Italian context, by investigating its changing discourse on China during the different phases of the emergency. The second paper focuses on the adaptation of the higher education system to anti-Covid measures and the social impact those had – and are still having – on students' academic and social lives. While analysing relevant data, the authors reflect upon the possible ways in which universities could benefit from crises and mitigate the most negative consequences in the future. Finally, the third essay discusses the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) during the pandemic, exploring the differences in its understanding, development, and applications both in China and in the EU. The authors argue that while the former adopts a tech-surveillance approach, the latter, instead, opts for a human-centred approach. This essential difference in the AI culture allows researchers to predict the direction of tech development in the two areas. As stated in the article, while China is more likely to

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prioritize state control, national safety, and global leadership in competition with the US and the EU, the latter will probably emphasise the promotion of individual rights and freedom, seeking international cooperation rather than competition.

To conclude, the pandemic has accelerated the need to further developing Europe-Asia relations in the economic, political, cultural and research fields, as Covid-19 made the increasing level of interdependence between the two continents much more evident, but also proved that the current level of cooperation is not sufficient to tackle the issues that both will face in the future. Against this backdrop, the “EU-Asia Politics and Markets Studies Platform” came out with the intention to provide students, teaching staff as well as institutions with adequate tools to critically assess the evolution of this ever-changing relationship. In this vein, the Student Conference served as a moment of multi-perspective reflection on the implications of the pandemic on this crucial dynamic in international relations, as the papers included in this volume aim to showcase.

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# COVID-19 AND MASK DIPLOMACY: INSIGHTS INTO THE PERCEPTION OF THE PANDEMIC FROM THE ITALIAN DISCURSIVE FRAMEWORK

*Laura Salvemini*

## **Abstract**

Immediately after the outbreak of the virus, the PRC had to face recurrent global accusations. When the virus started spreading all over the world, Beijing reacted by sending shipments of medical equipment and personnel accompanied by an intense public diplomacy campaign, the so-called “mask diplomacy”. This paper aims to analyze the effects of the latter on the EU-China relations, with a particular focus on the Italian case, where the Chinese community suffered several repercussions at the beginning of 2020. The communication changed, however, after China started sending aids to the country.

## **Introduction**

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent restrictions have had consequences worldwide, resulting in serious repercussions on every sphere, from the sanitary one to the socio-political one.

This essay enquires into the effects that the Covid-19 spread and the “mask diplomacy”, operated in a second moment by the People’s Republic of China (PRC), had on its relations with the European Union (EU) and in particular with Italy. Finally, the changing Italian discursive framework during different phases of the emergency will be analyzed through an assessment of news outlets, newspaper articles and public interventions from that time. The aim of the research is to understand the role played by the “mask diplomacy” strategy in the changing Italian discursive framework during the emergency.

The paper, divided in 3 sections, first briefly analyzes the effects of the Covid-19

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outbreak on the relations between China and EU at large, to then focus on the Italian-Chinese relationship. Secondly, the diplomacy operated by China during the emergency is assessed, analyzing its goals and mechanisms. The third section focuses on the changing Italian discursive framework obtained from newspapers, public interventions of political figures and media outlets before and during the emergency.

### **Covid-19: effects on PRC relations with the EU and with Italy**

After the establishment of formal diplomatic relationships between the PRC and the European Community (EC) in May 1975, their economic relation experienced a stagnating moment in the 1980s before undergoing a rapid development in the 1990s. Indeed, the total trade between the two has increased over 30-fold since Deng Xiaoping's reforms in 1978, and nowadays the EU is China's largest trading partner and the PRC is one of the two EU's top markets together with the U.S. (Scott, 2007; Zhang, Yu, 2013).

2003 marked the beginning of a "strategic partnership" between the two, and in the EU-China Summit of the same year further progress was made with the adoption of two policy papers, the EU's "A Maturing Partnership: Shared Interests and Challenges in EU-China Relations" and the PRC's "China's EU Policy Paper" (Scott, 2007).

In 2013, the EU-China Strategic 2020 Agenda for Cooperation was launched, establishing a framework to guide the relationship until 2020. The Agenda's framework entailed three pillars: a High-Level Strategic Dialogue, a High-level Economic and Trade Dialogue and a biannual People-To-People Dialogue. As of 2019, the EU and China had over 60 high-level and senior-level dialogues, working groups and committees - numbers that demonstrate the wide scope of their relationships - ranging from tourism, energy, economics, high-tech innovation and environment. From the economic point of view, their bilateral trade represents 3.3 percent of the EU's GDP and almost 6 percent of China's (Morelli, 2019).

Today's relation between the two entities puts at the center reciprocity and fair competition in the political and economic realms. These focuses are also at the base

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of some criticism mutually moved regarding topics such as investments, industrial practices and interference in domestic affairs. Indeed, European leaders started voicing concern over the growing Chinese economic presence in Europe and their potential political influence on EU policy making. Among the most pressing concerns, some researchers have highlighted the lack of a unified policy approach towards the PRC and how it affects the negotiations that the country has on a bilateral basis with EU member countries (Morelli, 2019).

The criticism found its peak in 2019, when the relation took a shift after the EU labelled China as an “economic competitor and a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance” in the “EU-China Strategic Outlook” (European Commission, 2019). 2020 was set to be an important year for EU-China relations, with their regular summit supposed to be held in March followed by the annual 17+1 meeting in April and the new EU27-China leaders’ meeting in September (Wang, Miao, 2020). However, the outbreak of Covid-19 not only cancelled scheduled meetings and awaited events worldwide, but also influenced the relations between countries and entities, in certain cases deepening the already present differences.

Amid the crisis, there were also demonstrations of deep ties. Among them, the reciprocal support provided from both the EU and the PRC, first in January when the crisis hit China, and in a second moment towards the EU, as the hotspot of the pandemic shifted towards the West.

Observing the trade relationship among the two during that time, the effects of the sanitary emergency appear clear. As remarked by Gruebler (2021), international trade was affected from the beginning of the crisis, when the spread of Covid-19 was still thought to be limited to East Asia.

Indeed, the travel bans implemented by EU member states in an effort to limit the spread of the virus resulted in labour shortages that restricted the production of factories that could still operate. In this way, both Chinese and foreign companies operating in China were negatively affected, including European ones. The consequences of these restrictions and shortages were evident already in February 2020, when the Purchasing Managers’ Index for the manufacturing sector in China dropped by almost 50 percent, corresponding to a reduction in annual exports of 2 percent (Gruebler, 2021).

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Looking at Eurostat collected data from that time, it is possible to observe that exports reached their minimum of €15.0 billion in March 2020 (Eurostat, 2020).

However, once the pandemic hit the European continent as well, certain governments realized the negative domino effect on global production and supply chain and lifted the previously adopted export restrictions (Gruebler, 2021). As a result, by December 2020 exports had recovered to € 19.2 billion, 13 percent above their level in December 201 (Eurostat, 2020).

When it comes to the relation between Italy and China, there had been important steps in their cooperation shortly before the pandemic outbreak. On March 23, 2019 the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) had been signed between the two on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), an important addition to China's international infrastructural project (Sciorati, 2020). With its participation in the Belt and Road Initiative, Italy became the first G7 member to support the project, making the participation of the country an even more valuable extension (Cuscito, 2020).

Still, when Covid-19 virus first hit the city of Wuhan, China had to witness public opinion shutter worldwide, jeopardizing its international standing and all the progress thus far accomplished in its foreign engagement (Sciorati, 2020). In the next section, the strategy operated by China during the European - and in particular Italian - emergency known as the "Mask diplomacy" will be further analyzed.

### **Mask diplomacy**

When the destroying effects of the virus first became noticeable in its outbreak in Wuhan, the PRC was faced with global repercussions and accusations as concern started to spread worldwide. Once the situation was stabilized inside the country, the government started planning a strategic effort to shift the global narrative and to restore its image worldwide, damaged by the virus outbreak. In mid-March 2020, the official number of coronavirus infections worldwide exceeded those in China, and this shift was communicated by the People's Daily - press organ of the PRC - with the phrase "The tide is turned", further signalling the beginning of their strategic efforts (Kowalski, 2021).

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As soon as the virus began hitting other territories such as Europe, Africa and the Middle East, Beijing started sending shipments of medical equipment and personnel accompanied by an intense public diplomacy campaign. The donations came from private companies, state-owned enterprises and charitable entities as well, like the Jack Ma and Alibaba foundations (Fraile del Alamo, Lim, 2020). These efforts are behind the concept of “mask diplomacy”, also named by the Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO) the “Politics of generosity” (Sciorati, 2020).

Not only was global reputation - one of China’s top priorities - at risk, but the disrupted image due to the Covid-19 diffusion risked impacting the country’s presentation as a “responsible stakeholder” as well. This concept of China as a responsible great power (rendered in Chinese as: 负责任大国, Fù zérèn dàguó) existed prior to the Covid-19 diffusion and has been often deployed by the country in its political discourse and its foreign engagement (Sciorati, 2020).

Therefore, the attempts to direct the international narrative during Covid-19 have been read by scholars as an effort to build a new, positive image of the country and restore trust in China’s ability to operate as the main power in the international system.

Verma (2020) described the actions included in the so called “mask diplomacy” as attempts to change the Covid-19 narrative and dissociate itself from the virus, especially after the initial news reporting that the infection appeared to have spread from a “wet market” in Wuhan. However, the author underlines how this form of diplomacy is not new for China, as already in 2009 it was used by the country in Mexico during the H1N1 flu with the same goal of portraying itself as a benevolent and responsible nation (Verma, 2020).

These considerations were echoed by many researchers. Among them, Cuscito (2020) noted how the Chinese aid towards Italy had two main political goals. The first one was detaching itself from the image of China being the epicentre of the pandemic; the second was reviving the relationship with Italy one year after the signing of the MoU (Cuscito, 2020).

The Italy-China relation makes an interesting case to observe the “mask diplomacy”

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deployment, not only as two of the worst hit countries in the beginning of the crisis, but also given the recent revival of their bilateral relations shortly before the pandemic spread, as mentioned in the second paragraph.

When European exports of medical equipment to Italy froze, China seized the opportunity to ship masks, respirators and doctors to the country, accompanied by publicized messages of solidarity, friendship and multilateral cooperation.

Indeed, at the time the EU had declined the Italian request for help under the Civil Protection Mechanism, and countries such as Germany, France and Czech Republic had imposed a ban on the export of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), further deepening the feeling of abandonment felt by many Italians (Verma, 2020).

These data are useful when addressing the question posed by Chen (2020), investigating why while other EU member states' media portrayed China's Covid-19 aid negatively, the Italian case stands out with news reports of March-April 2020 sharing the PRC's actions in a positive light (Chen, 2021).

Chen (2020) further remarks how the lack of initial support from the EU was underlined by the Italian Permanent Representative to the EU Maurizio Massari, who stated that "only China responded bilaterally" when the Italian request for the Civil Protection Mechanism was denied.

Additionally, in an interview with the Italian public television channel TG2, the Italian Foreign Minister Di Maio stated that Italy's role as a bridge between East and West - a reference to the previously signed MoU - was the reason behind the solidarity received from countries around the world, and that investing in the friendship with China through the BRI "allowed us to save lives in Italy" (Chen, 2021).

After the initial lack of aid, the EU supported Italy with €50 million provided by the European Commission (EC) for medical equipment and offered an apology for the former behavior. Additionally, France, Germany and Austria sent PPE to Italy. Ursula Von Der Leyen - president of the EC - underlined how China did not communicate directly with the EU, but with individual member countries, highlighting a concern already present before the spread of Covid-19 (Verma, 2020).

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Despite its subsequent change of attitude, some researchers have highlighted how the initial behavior of the EU and its lack of coordination and mechanisms of immediate solidarity and aid has contributed in creating political divisions within Europe, allowing China to increase its visibility and to further promote its soft power across European member states (Chen, 2021).

### **Italian discursive framework before and during the emergency**

When Italy started registering its first cases of Covid-19 in February 2020, the relations between the two powers became tense, as the country suspended all air traffic to and from China, the first and sole European country to implement such a strict measure. The tense situation did not improve but worsened due to events such as the difficult repatriation of Italian citizens from China (Sciorati, 2020).

To describe how Italy has framed the COVID-19 emergency in relation to China, this analysis has taken into consideration different stages as emerged from newspapers, media outlets and politicians' public interventions, which narratives seemed to change according to how the virus expanded geographically.

In the beginning of 2020, when China was still the main hotspot of the Covid-19 crisis, the Chinese community in Italy was among the worst-hit segments of the population, both economically and socially. Indeed, according to the "Italian Chinese Business Association" Chinese restaurateurs in Milan suffered losses of about 50-60 percent due to generalized fear among Italian consumers (Sciorati, 2020).

Episodes of xenophobia and racism became more and more frequent towards the Chinese community, not just among the population but also in the media and among public figures as well. In January, an Italian girl with Chinese origins reported to have been insulted on a regional train in Mestre, an episode that did not remain isolated as additional news outlets echoed similar expressions of xenophobia happening across the country (Tamiello, 2020; Giuffrida, 2021).

Racist and xenophobic episodes were not relegated to the social sphere but were also visible on national and regional television and news outlets. Indeed, the already

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present tension further escalated when discriminatory phrases were broadcasted on a regional TV pronounced by the president of the Veneto region, Luca Zaia, on February 27 (Rai News, 2020). The controversial statements - regarding Chinese food culture - echoed beyond the national borders and led to a letter of apologies after the Veneto president was called out by the Chinese embassy for the controversial statements (Floris, 2020).

The increasing discrimination was further echoed by Italian newspapers, which often titled the viral news related to the pandemic referring to Covid-19 as the “Wuhan Virus”, defining it geographically in clear and discriminatory terms (Il Messaggero, 2020). An additional instance of newspaper racist behavior was underlined by Floris (2020), who included among the examples of discrimination towards the Chinese community the article of “Liberio” - a newspaper known for its closeness to right wing political parties- titled “In Beijing they eat snakes and then pig out” (Floris, 2020).

Around the same time, a viral photo circulated in Italian newspapers and social media pages of a sign held in front of a bar in Rome, inviting Chinese visitors not to access the place due to “International safety measures” (Il Messaggero, 2020).

These episodes are just some examples out of a long list of xenophobic and racist expressions that increased in intensity and frequency as the first cases of Covid-19 infections were reported in Italy (Floris, 2020). These events and their repercussions on the Chinese community in Italy rose until the intervention of China’s ambassador in Italy (Li Junhua) was required, who appeared many times on national television during those months (Sciorati, 2020).

It is interesting to observe how the discursive framework changed once Italy became one of the first countries to be hit by Covid-19 in Europe, in March. China, through the policy previously described, sent aid to Italy, with medical supplies and medical teams arriving to provide help to the country during one of its worst moments in the pandemic. Xi Jinping himself expressed support to Italy in a message to the Italian President Sergio Mattarella in mid-March, when the country started being heavily hit by the virus (Sciorati, 2020).

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Italian newspapers were no longer reporting news concerning the virus in discriminatory terms but started spreading news about the aid received from China in the fight against the pandemic (ANSA, 2020). On March 12, 2020, a China Eastern humanitarian plane landed in Rome with a team of medical experts and ventilators, face masks and additional medical supplies. The Italian Foreign Minister Di Maio commented on the arrival during a live streaming on his Facebook page, stating: "This is what we call solidarity, and I am sure there will be more. We are not alone, there are people in the world who want to help Italy" (Chen, 2021). Not only this statement underlines Italian resentment at the political level towards the initial refusal of help from the EU and its member states, but it further supports the division operated by this analysis of the Italian discursive framework before and during the Italian emergency.

## Conclusions

Before the spread of Covid-19 in Italy, and during the initial contagion phase when few cases were reported in the country, the main news outlets, newspapers and statements made on national tv channels seemed to adopt a narrative that blamed China and the Chinese population - both in China and abroad - for the spread of the virus. This narrative expressed itself loudly in discriminatory episodes witnessed towards the Chinese community in Italy in the form of isolation and verbal and physical aggression.

However, once the situation in Italy began deteriorating, the same news outlets started focusing on China's new image as a benefactor and donor, reporting the aid coming from the country in the form of medical equipment, face masks, ventilators and doctor teams.

As hypothesized by many researchers (Chen 2020; Cuscito 2020; Kowalski 2021; Sciorati 2020), it is possible - and it is necessary - to read this changing discursive framework through the lenses of the mask diplomacy operated by Beijing, recognizing in this way its effectiveness in the Italian case.

However, the Italian case stands as an exception when compared to other European countries and their respective discursive frameworks, which did not praise China for the received aid but highlighted the strategic process at act (Chen, 2021).

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After the outbreak of the Covid-19 virus delayed all the efforts towards integration and cooperation between EU and China in what was known as the “year of Europe”, it is evident that the future of this relationship will be shaped by the cooperation exercised during the pandemic and its aftermath (Pietropaolo, 2020).

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## THE COVID-19 CRISIS: HOW CAN INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC RESEARCH PROVIDE INSTRUMENTS AGAINST CRISES IN THE FUTURE?

*Edoardo Maio, Dayana Vinueza Calderón*

### **Abstract**

2020 and 2021 have been marked by the spreading of Covid-19 pandemic, but how much has this pandemic influenced the education system? Surely the digitalization of teaching and learning processes was boosted by the pandemic and this transition is still in progress. This essay focuses on the effects of higher education's situation during school closures and the social impact that this measure had and is still having on students' academic and social lives. The debate also investigates the data and statistics about the effects, if these are positive or negative, and reflects upon the possible ways in which universities can benefit from crises and prevent being affected by similar events in the future.

### **Introduction**

Why is it so important to talk about the effects that Covid-19 had on education? Surely, the pandemic slowed down and put in trouble almost every kind of activity, exception made for those that were already relying mostly on the usage of technological devices and on the so-called "remote working".

So, why is it so important to discuss the outcomes that this health crisis had, and is still having, on education? The answer is much simpler than we can imagine. Education is the central element of our societies, it gives governments and individuals the opportunity to build human capital, labour force and to shape the minds of the adults of the future (Shmis et al. 2020).

Moreover, a good education system is an investment for obtaining positive effects

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on every other sector of society, in particular on economics and politics. Of course, this cause-effect principle is not one-sided: education influences many aspects of a country's life, but, on the other hand, it is conditioned by changes in society, and this has been clearly evident in the context of the pandemic (Arnhold et al. 2020).

Due to Covid-19, the world's human capital is at risk: those sections of the population that were in economic difficulty find themselves in even worse conditions and the economic repercussions of this crisis will last for many years to come.

These are the reasons why education is not to be considered less important than other issues; thanks to education, it is possible to kick-start the economic recovery, to protect the most vulnerable categories of the society, not to mention the psychological and social effects that this crisis has had on younger generations, which can be mitigated thanks to good choices in education policies (Shmis et al. 2020).

### **Early government measures and their short-term effects**

At the beginning of 2020, Covid-19 has been spreading relentlessly all around the globe and its consequences are still visible in almost every part of the world. What is interesting to observe is the fact that the measures that have been applied in order to mitigate the damage and the spread of the pandemic are almost the same in every country that has been affected by the crisis, but of course, not all these countries have the same economic situation and life conditions, from a good healthcare system to a stable government. For these reasons, the pandemic has highlighted even more the differences between poor and wealthy countries (Shmis et al. 2020).

This disparity can also be observed in the context of education; in particular, this essay focuses on higher education. The main measures that many countries have opted for, in order to guarantee the continuity of education and, on the other hand, the containment of the virus are school closures and the adoption of remote learning technologies. However, as mentioned before, these solutions have increased the disparities between students from lower income background and their colleagues (Arnhold et al. 2020).

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The inequality between countries is instead mainly related to the different degree of investment that the governments had previously made in the education and digitalization sectors. In fact, in those countries where a strategic approach towards digitalization had not been developed, the challenges were more complex to overcome, whereas those institutions that had effective teaching and learning services found themselves better prepared for the transition towards remote learning.

So, the switch to online learning has posed several local and global challenges. In many countries, a part of the population does not use or do not have access to the internet. For example, Bulgaria or Ukraine may encounter difficulties in the implementation of distance learning (Arnhold et al. 2020).

The main difficulties connected to distance learning are:

- the weakness of internet connection and internet speed in many countries;
- the prices of a good internet connection;
- the absence of devices that support online teaching and learning;
- the fact that many platforms crash with a high number of users connected to them.

However, apart from the income discrepancy issue, the remote learning measure has been broadly discussed and the debate on whether this solution can be useful also in a post-Covid era is still open (it was evident in the context of the University of Bologna – Toyo University – Aoyama Gakuin University Students' Conference), with a faction affirming the importance of remote learning technologies and highlighting their versatility and the benefits that can come from using them also in the future. On the other hand, the opposite side supports the idea that physical attendance has much more pros than the remote one. These pros are mainly related to the psychological part of the learning experience, such as the interaction between students, the possibility for the professor to receive immediate feedback from the audience and a greater degree of attention.

Nevertheless, since remote learning has been applied as a short-term solution in a state of emergency, its results can be considered satisfactory, and this is shown by the fact that many institutions have opted to continue providing remote learning activities.

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Together with remote learning, because of the obstacles posed by the pandemic, several other short-term solutions have been applied:

- the introduction of innovative and creative ways to learn at home through interactive apps, live television broadcasts, online classrooms and teleconferences;
- the upgrade of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) education's infrastructure through solutions provided by public-private partnerships. In fact, many firms from the education sector have given support to institutions and students, offering access to free courses in many languages;
- the prioritization of at-risk students, trying to decrease the digital divide between wealthy and poor areas. This action is important to keep students engaged with education and to prevent future economic loss (Arnhold et al. 2020).

### **Digitization Transition- Statistics**

During the school closures, higher education institutes had to face the challenge of distance learning and teaching overnight. This could be seen as a very difficult task for most of those that did not have a digital strategy and had to create one in a very short time. At the same time, a research carried out by The International Association of Universities that measured the impact of Covid-19 on higher education around the world (Marinoni, Van't Land, and Jensen 2020) shows that this transition could have a positive part. The survey was conducted in 109 countries and the results were analysed at both regional and global level. The Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) were divided accordingly to the geographical area: Africa, Americas, Asia and Pacific and Europe. The results can be also divided on four main categories:

1. Partnerships: 64 percent of the Institutes reported that Covid-19 had different effects on partnerships but not all of them are negative. While the half of this percentage reported that Covid-19 weakened the partnerships, the remaining 49 percent reported that Covid-19 strengthened them or at least helped creating new connections and opportunities.
  2. Mobility: The closure had a very negative impact on physical exchange and mobility, but 60 percent of HEIs reported that the crisis has created new opportunities on virtual mobility and collaborative online learning. This is an important data: before the crisis the only way to consider the exchange of
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research, study and learning was the physical one. This is a great opportunity that, sadly, not all the students and researchers can take 1. because of the costs and the logistical implications. Think about parents and worker students.

3. ICT adoption: Covid-19 was a boost for data sharing and ICT adoption. This transition came with some challenges; the most complex to face was the infrastructural one, but also the competences and pedagogies for distance teaching and learning posed a serious challenge, considering that they are not the same for all the types of studies.

4. Research: The 80 percent of HEIs reported that research has been affected by Covid-19 because of the impossibility to travel. Most of the Research Institutes and Universities cancelled or postponed scientific conferences and half of the research projects remain uncompleted. On the other hand, while physical research is in danger, intellectual research is increasing.

During the crisis, HEIs have been surely affected but the statistics show that this change of the modalities of working and teaching improved the potential of new and unexplored fields. Thanks to the telematic work, most of the HEIs had to get in contact with another kind of institutions that were excluded in the past, maybe because of the distance, the budget or other reasons closely linked with the physical limitations. Furthermore, the mobility exchange was stopped but the possibilities to contact colleagues and authorities in the other part of the world increased. There is an interesting result about the telematic collaboration during the crisis, this is about the internationalization of research and mobility. During the most dangerous part of the pandemic, the necessity to create solutions and to collaborate with other scientific researchers became global and urgent. There was no time to lose and every nation in all the globe was included in the research, which means that all of them had a common objective: fighting the virus (van der Aalst, Hinz, and Weinhardt 2020).

Something was changing during this process: the way to do research. The time that was required to publish a new scientific paper was reduced because every change, every finding, every lost second was vital (Apuzzo and Kirkpatrick 2020). According to some scientific researchers, in this context they got in touch with colleagues that they never contacted before and, by doing so, the collaboration and efforts became stronger, they felt that the most important thing, beside the recognition about the

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singular findings and publications, was the sensation of being part of something bigger, a global mission. At the same time, the feeling of union and global collaboration helped reducing the bureaucratic steps, to publish new works faster, organize meeting and create new virtual spaces of information sharing, and these spaces are still increasing (Sentell, Vamos, and Okan 2020).

Everything has a cost, the one for remote working is infrastructure. Most of the HEIs, especially those that are based in places where the internet connection issue was not even on the agenda, had many troubles to get in touch with the students and to prepare and continue with the academic life. So, a solution had to be found to improve infrastructure and guarantee internet connection and devices in order to allow even the students under more difficult conditions to keep up with their academic lives. From this perspective, Covid-19 was a boost to put the internet connection on the local agenda. Before the pandemic, talking about internet access as a “legitimate right” was too excessive, whereas now it is possible to talk about the “right of connection” because it became normal and essential, not only for students and researchers but for all kind of workers. Moreover, the digital divide is still an important issue, not only because of the lack of infrastructures and connection: in those countries with good access to the internet, students and teachers do not have sufficient technical knowledge of media literacy or even a good place at home to work and study properly.

### **Objectives and main long-term solutions**

Even though the short-term solutions applied in the context of the pandemic have proven to be generally successful for the aim they were applied for, the governments, in order to mitigate the effects of the crisis in the years to come, should focus on three main goals:

- ensuring the continuity of learning;
- accommodating finances to support targeted interventions;
- building resilience to ensure a strong education system.

As regards the first goal, remote learning should be used to mitigate the loss of learning and maintain students engaged with education, but how can this result be achieved concretely?

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There are many measures that aim at achieving this goal and these are the most common:

- the sharing of educational material and resources among institutions. Better coordination and guidance at a national level, as well as sharing experiences and information among countries, would contribute to more efficient responses to infrastructure challenges faced by higher education institutions. An open letter by the members of the European Parliament has been sent to the European Commission stating that “[t]he European Union and member states need an EU created, funded and driven educational platform for European schools and universities. While some educational establishments can appeal to available tools, a vast majority of schools and universities do not have access to an infrastructure ensuring quality educational solutions on a permanent basis. This makes the e-learning environment unequal both at European level as well as at national level”(Members of the European Parliament, 2020).
- Provide support to those institutions whose countries lack the resources and infrastructures to overcome the crisis.
- “Internationalization at home” measures. In fact, mobility restrictions have particularly affected higher education. According to a survey conducted by the European Association for International Education (EAIE), more than two thirds (73 percent) of the respondents indicated that both outbound and inbound mobility of students had been affected as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak (Arnhold et al. 2020). Moreover, according to the European Students Network (ESN) survey, conducted in March 2020, a quarter of student mobility was canceled, almost 40 percent of students experienced problems related to their exchange and Italian and Asian students have experienced discrimination based on their nationalities because of the impact that coronavirus had in these countries since that the beginning of the pandemic.
- Ensure equity, by providing devices and internet access to students without access to technology. For example, this has been done by the University of Bologna that distributed free SIM cards to students without access to the internet.

As regards the second long-term objective - the accommodation of finances - governments should balance their budgets to fund the education system and to prevent further increases in inequalities; in fact, insufficient financing in teaching

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and learning will harm post-crisis economies in a definitive way, having a negative impact on countries' competitiveness and development.

Government must stabilize their economies during and, mainly, after the crisis, when the difference between higher education institutions will become even more apparent. Moreover, the development of a high-performing digital education ecosystem should be fostered. According to a 2018 study by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), less than 40 percent of educators feels ready to use digital technologies in teaching and that more than 1 out of 5 young people across the EU fail to reach a basic level of digital skills (Shmis et al. 2020).

Finally, the building of resilience aims at ensuring a high-quality education system in a post-crisis era. Indeed, Covid-19 crisis has to be considered as an opportunity to strategically prepare for the challenges to come. This measure of building resilience is necessary in order to ensure that in the future the education sector is globally prepared to face another challenge such as the one that put us in difficulty in the last two years.

“Institutions would be well advised not to consider the Covid-19 pandemic as a once-in-a-lifetime crisis whose effects will disappear in a few months. Most colleges and universities failed to heed the lessons of the SARS epidemic. Hopefully, this crisis will serve as a wake-up call to reassess the vulnerabilities of the higher education sector and the challenges of living in a global and interdependent world. If anything, it has shown the importance of contingency planning and risk management, the benefits of supporting innovative delivery methods, and the need for flexibility in learning assessment and admissions requirements”(Arnhold et al. 2020).

Remote learning, in fact, could become a common modality for many learners, so it is important to develop e-learning technologies, but how can this objective be achieved concretely without increasing even more the disparities between countries?

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The main action that can ensure an effective building of resilience is cooperation, an international cooperation, for example through cross-border-collaborations and partnerships within university institutes from different countries.

Thanks to cooperation, in fact, those countries that have less resources can be helped by those countries that have more advanced remote learning systems in terms of substance and quality (Shmis et al. 2020). An example of successful cooperation in the education sector is the Bologna process, one of the reasons why the ECA region is, overall, in a more favorable situation than many other regions of the world.

The Bologna process is a cooperation process whose Declaration was signed in 1999 by Ministers responsible for higher education from 29 European countries. The process aligns most national tertiary education systems, gives them some joint direction for development, makes them more compatible, and provides a joint “language” to communicate. This European cooperation process has radically changed higher education and, nowadays, the number of signatory countries has risen to 48. The positive results achieved by the countries cooperating in this process demonstrate the importance of collaboration in facing global crisis (European Commission 2018).

## Conclusions

“When written in Chinese, the word ‘crisis’ is composed of two characters. One represents danger and the other represents opportunity.”

— John F. Kennedy, 35th U.S. President.

As a result of the need to rely on remote working, two thirds of HEIs adopted distance learning and, outside its big challenges, it is possible to notice some results. Students and teachers can study and work in a more flexible and self-managed manner, the world of data sharing has been opened and the use and creation of new tools and systems for learning are surely an opportunity for innovation technology of teaching pedagogies. This kind of innovations result in an interesting strategy of inclusion for the students that used to be affected by the impossibility of attending classes regularly. Think, for example, about the working students, parents, international students, etc.

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Thanks to the crisis, it was possible to open the possibility to think about hybrid methods of learning, which means that even in a future without pandemic, the hybrid pedagogy will be still used as a method of teaching, giving the possibilities for all the students, researchers and teachers to have access to the teaching materials thanks to asynchronous learning, increasing the benefits for all. Moreover, social interaction is still important for studying. Physical campuses are points of meeting between students with different backgrounds and knowledge, that is the reason why even if the hybrid method may become the main practice, traditional teaching will always be present.

The aim of this paper is to consider the “positive” results of the emergency. It is impossible to forget about the big challenges and problems that were created because of the Covid-19, but, still, it is also possible to notice that the collaboration and sense of union created in this context was not seen before in history. This is the first time that every single country has a common “enemy” and has the possibility to get instantly in touch remotely and talk about the strategies to fight it. Most of the scientific and academy institutes are interested in maintaining these relations and continuing the collaboration.

This is the proof that it is not necessary to stay permanently on crisis in order to be permanently in contact and focus on increasing the results and positive impact which derives from collaboration. Also, all the nations learned that there are problems on the other side of the world that need collective effort to be solved, which means that considering research and education from a “nationalist” perspective is not the effective approach to have at the moment.

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## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: BETWEEN CHINA AND EU IN THE POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

*Noemi Capelli, Sofia Tishchenko*

### Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) has moved from being the main character of science-fictional movies to becoming a reality in our everyday lives. This has become even more true during the Covid-19 pandemic. The development and understanding of AI are not a globally shared concept and each country focuses on different applications of AI technologies. In particular, this analysis is focused on China, with its tech-surveillance approach, and the EU, characterised by a human-centred approach. Great importance is given to the role of Covid-19 in the development and regulation of AI.

### What is Artificial Intelligence?

John McCarthy coined the term Artificial Intelligence (AI) in 1956 at the “Dartmouth Summer Research Project on Artificial Intelligence”, an event that brought together researchers from a variety of disciplines including language simulation, neuron nets, complexity theory and many others.

Today, AI is considered a subfield of computer science related to how machines can imitate human intelligence. In fact, the current level of development of AI mostly uses human logic as a guide to provide better services rather than provide a perfect representation of human reasoning. The tasks often associated with AI are speech and image recognition, translation between languages, and many others. Still, a unique definition of AI does not exist yet and the definition has been changing according to the goals that are trying to be reached with a specific AI system.

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## **AI and Covid-19**

Since AI is becoming an integral part of our daily life, those working with AI prioritise the definition of the problems that a specific AI application will solve and the benefits that this kind of technology can have for the society. The primary goal is no longer to get AI to operate as a human, which has created science fictional fears of AI dominating the entire humankind, but rather to have a technology able to improve our world.

This need was boosted by the pandemic. Around the world, AI applications have been exploited to try to accelerate the search for a solution. For example, the pharmaceutical companies of Pfizer Inc. and Moderna declared the importance that AI had in the process of developing of the vaccine for Covid-19 (Castellanos, 2021).

## **The International Politics Context of AI Policies**

The two global leaders in the development of AI are China and the United States. The European Union (EU) has started to move a few years later in the field and still lags behind concerning some aspects. One element that is not attractive for business in the EU landscape of AI is the strict regulation. AI works better with a large amount of data that allows technologies to do efficient correlations. The largest amount of data nowadays is produced in China through controlling systems. In the EU, a large share of public and industrial data is not being used for AI right now (European Commission, 2020a).

The reasons behind the different level of development of AI in China and the EU also have cultural motivations. This paper analyses the divergent AI landscapes in China and the EU, exploring at first the EU perspective and secondly the Chinese approach. Particular importance is also given to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the development and understanding of AI applications in both China and the EU. Finally, the paper explains possible cooperation between the two global actors.

## **The European Perspective**

“If the European Union is to be internationally competitive, it must carry these values to the global stage” - EU Commission

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AI is already present in the everyday life of European citizens. Both in the private and public sector, it is gaining strategic significance for the Union, which has started to stress the importance of having a human-centred approach to AI and its related technologies. The human-centred approach means a usage of AI that is anchored to the fundamental rights of the EU. These are the respect of the privacy and human dignity, non-discrimination, freedom of expression, intellectual property rights and cultural diversity as enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The ultimate goal of this approach is to make AI a trustworthy and responsible instrument that serves people and the general interests of the citizens.

The ability to create a system of international cooperation within the EU will be one of the elements determining the future level of competitiveness of Europe. However, as the EU is a union of states, the perception and development of AI differs a lot among countries. The most enthusiastic countries about application of AI are Italy, Spain, and Romania, versus Germany and the Netherlands that have a rather critical approach. On the contrary, the more competitive players in the field of AI are Anglo-Saxon and Northern European states (Bughin et al., 2019).

According to the “Artificial Intelligence in Public Services” report by the AI Watch, in the EU there are 230 current applications of AI to public administration. Despite the goals of inclusivity declared by the EU, the report states that only 21 percent, meaning 49 projects out of 230, is involved in inclusion-driven goals like making public services more accessible for those citizens who do not feel comfortable with a large amount of digital information to be consumed. Paradoxically, only 10 percent of the AI initiatives considered (24 out of 230), have the primary goal of improving the openness of government, for example by increasing the amount of information available for citizens.

At the moment, the US and China are the global leaders in AI application, particularly in the application of passive patterns. However, according to AI4EU, “Europe should pursue to pave the way for the next AI wave to come.” There is an increasing demand for AI to be applied to more critical societal challenges that are essential for sustainable development. According to the Classification of the Functions of Government (COFOG), respondents to the questionnaire stated the following preferences for public services priority: health, education, safety,

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environmental protection, and economy. These applications require “good” AI that helps to make people’s lives more comfortable, healthier, safer, longer and more sustainable.

This need has become even more urgent during the Covid-19 pandemic. The health emergency has fostered AI adoption and data sharing, particularly in medical and clinical areas, such as the boost for telemedicine, computer driving techniques for medical imaging, analysis of genetic data, etc. Besides medicine, governments have thought of ways to prevent a further spread of the Covid-19. The most glaring examples are the mobile tracing applications (apps) that appeared all over the world.

The first proximity-tracing example was the Pan-European Privacy Preserving Proximity Tracing (PEPP-PT) that demanded a centralised mechanism of data collection by governments receiving constant data through Bluetooth from mobile phones tracking nearby contacts. Later, a decentralized alternative was proposed: the Decentralised Privacy-Preserving Proximity Tracing (DP-3T) (Troncoso et al., 2020). The main difference with the previous system is that in the DP-3T data about people who had been in proximity is stored on mobile devices and not saved on a central server. As the last alternative, Google and Apple partnered and proposed a joint solution named Exposure Notification, which also follows a decentralised approach and was inspired by DP-3T (De Nigris et al., 2020).

The potential and the new applications of AI during the Covid-19 pandemic have also amplified concerns for democracy and social inequality and highlighted European vulnerability on data.

Superpowers like China and the United States compete to dominate the field of AI. The academic world denounces the “surveillance capitalism” system in the US and authoritarian surveillance in China. These tensions are an obstacle to globally recognised regulations on AI. Efforts by several countries (such as France, Canada, and Japan) to create an Intergovernmental Panel on Artificial Intelligence, and later a Global Partnership on AI, have been undermined by the lack of trust and the growing competition between the US and China. The EU shall try to enter the competition as a non-aligned actor, providing a third way of AI regulation and application, also given the fact that today, the EU has the most developed policy,

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legal, and regulatory framework on internet issues anywhere in the world and the same can be developed for AI related technologies (Franke, 2020).

## **The Chinese Perspective**

China has had an AI implementation into the daily lives of Chinese citizens that started long before the pandemic began. Being a country with a specific national background and state regime, China presented a process different from that in Europe and the rest of the world. Even so, Chinese society also encounters similar problems to those occurring in the EU.

Already in 2017, AI was fully admitted by the Chinese government as an important sphere of national strategy, the best example being the “Next Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan.” In the five-year plans and “Made in China 2025”, AI and high-tech development has been an invariable strategy. The need for that especially grew in light of the intensifying trade war with the US, and China’s underdeveloped semiconductor sector: the government wants to both free the country from dependence on other nations’ producing capabilities, as well as reach a higher stage of high-tech progress and finally become a global leader in the field. That leads to a China that is strengthening its AI capabilities and is not interested in international cooperation, especially in terms of protecting users from the government.

Long before the Covid-19 pandemic, the AI industry had already been developing through bottom-up approaches in China and had begun to be promoted by the government, as the Communist party was applying protectionist measures to the inner market. The Chinese state, as always, proceeded to support an industry that was rapidly growing, but in such a way that would benefit the government. A very important characteristic here is exactly how much control the state exercises over the field, both in a way that is beneficial for the industry, and in ways that empower the party to even more strict and close regulation of citizens’ lives and the Chinese economy.

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These tactics led to the implementation of restrictive AI usage, such as the infamous “social credit” system that allowed the government to control every individual’s life through social media, their interaction with the state, and their movements and everyday lives through security cameras and wide-spread surveillance systems. This scheme is aimed at giving credit points to every citizen for their behaviour and letting these points influence the easiness of people’s lives, such as in communications with banks or the police. Thus, very close control was implemented already before the year 2020.

Even though there are always some voices against these policies, most of the public is quite engaged in them and appreciative of the government (Kostka, 2019). Moreover, the majority of the population is successfully using AI in their own daily lives. The scope of application of AI will only be developing due to the size of China, its enormous market that still holds the largest population in the world, the protection the government offers it from external competitors, and the determination to obtain leadership in the field. Such well-known Chinese companies like Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent and Bytedance have enormous branches spread out across the country that offer countless services to citizens, as well as handle payments (especially through Alipay and WeChat pay; China has already reached 852.4 million mobile payment users) (Slotta, 2021), and store huge amounts of data that are also available to the state.

The possibility of success in such a fierce application of AI stems from the unique relationship that the Chinese nation has with its ruling party. According to Yang and Zhao (2015), the Communist party’s legitimacy is based on a virtuous ruling relationship with the nation, where the latter accepts the strict rule for the benefits that the state provides. This Confucian phenomenon can be seen even today, when the government enables wider control over the citizens in exchange for safety and healthcare protection, as it will be shown next. Moreover, even though lots of different ethnicities are united in the People’s Republic of China, they hold the same Confucian values and a similar political culture, which, combined with strict state control, allows a unified approach without the cooperation problems characterising Europe.

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During the pandemic, the government achieved its previous goals in activating AI in healthcare (Weinstein, 2020). Through remote monitoring of patients and faster detection of disease with the help of technology, AI made fighting the pandemic easier with the help of both state-funded and private enterprises, such as Paradigm, Potevio, Beijing SEEMMO Technology (Candelon et al., 2021). On top of that, AI has been used for faster disinfection of areas and voice-assisted limitation of human contact with surfaces. Naturally, an important sphere of AI use during the pandemic was surveillance, which was also performed with the support of the companies mentioned above. An important part of that was transmission tracing, which tracked interactions with contaminated citizens. This led to further developments in using video services to identify people, as well as their health conditions, such as temperature, heart rate, breathing, which in turn caused further progress in face recognition technologies.

We see that the development of AI in China has reached unseen levels, which both have beneficial and negative consequences for citizens' lives. The mentioned developments show great progress, but also allow greater control over individuals, as well as enormous amounts of data being available to the state and the dominant media. The agenda on protecting users' data as in Europe is also becoming relevant in China and is being addressed top-down.

One of the latest government actions related to the issue was a law passed in August 2021, which is directed against media giants storing user data and utilising it in disapproved and unauthorised ways. The bill aims to limit the type of data that businesses can store and sets rules regarding ways in which it must be stored, as well as requires obtaining users' permission to share data to third parties (Grewcock, 2021). The specific characteristic of this initiative is that, unlike most European ones, it does nothing to curb the government's access to user's information. As well as this, analysts say that the party is trying to lead media behemoths into digitalising public services instead of monetising user data leakages (AP News, 2021).

Thus, we can see that both the European and the Chinese perspectives have issues in common, but the different executions come from the specific governing and national differences of the regions. China, even though home to more people than the EU, unites citizens with more similar ideologies and more consistent political cultures, which allows it to give more control to the state without causing intense criticism from the citizens.

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## Conclusions

Globally, the pandemic has spread the development and usage of AI. Its applications are growing in everyday life, with challenges and consequences which differ around the globe and are faced in different ways.

The comparison of the European and the Chinese approach to AI must be done more thoroughly, given the importance of the field to the future of both regions and the system of international relations globally. Nevertheless, even such a brief exploration gives us a broad picture of their directions of development. The biggest difference is in the mentality and political cultures: highly varied in the EU but quite consolidated in China, which allows for a more consistent and systematized approach. Another difference is the level of governmental intervention in the industry, which in China is highly controlled and sponsored by the government and protected from foreign competitors. On the contrary, the EU that does not exercise such involvement in the market and does not show a similar strong growth of the industry but focuses on a human-centred approach to technologies, which is mostly absent in China. This shows us the main differences of the regions and allows us to predict the strategies that they will take: on the one hand, China will continue to focus on state control, national safety, and global leadership in competition with the US and the EU; on the other hand, the EU will carry on placing importance on the rights and freedoms of individuals, evaluating international cooperation rather than competition, as well as resisting the US and China's more aggressive approaches.

We can predict some prospects of cooperation in AI between the actors. Europe and China have been negotiating some development schemes, for example through the "EU-China High-level Digital Dialogue", and on cooperation in research and innovation, with mutual funding of projects. Still, competition is obviously present in their relations, which is aggravated by China's chasing of global leadership in AI. Europe, instead, may look for a place amidst the rising US-China confrontation and find ways to detach itself from both conflicting sides, while keeping cooperation and maintaining standards. It can be expected for Europe to keep placing more emphasis on security and demanding more trustworthy AI technologies from China. The Chinese government can also be predicted to start paying more attention to security issues, as well as to the problem of tech giants, all of which are important to Chinese citizens. China will start spreading its AI even more and

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improving the connection between the government and the developers, while the EU should try to create a more consistent approach from its member states.

Overall, the differences of the two regions will endure, but the similar problems that AI brings may promote cooperation between the sides. Both are interested in bilateral relations; China in Europe's market and the EU in Chinese products. These interests can be sustained only through cooperation and the establishment of mutually supported standards, especially in the areas of security and trustworthiness.

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