

Chinese Wolf Warrior Diplomacy: How Did Beijing Respond to External Challenges During the COVID-19 Pandemic?

Project Objective

This project examines the phenomenon of Chinese "wolf warrior diplomacy" during the Covid-19 pandemic – a confrontational style of diplomatic communication, marked by a readiness to defend national positions and respond directly to perceived challenges. The name derives from the popular action film series "Wolf Warrior" with strong patriotic overtones.

The main objective is to develop the first comprehensive model explaining when, why, and how China employed this communication strategy across three levels of diplomacy: national, bilateral, and within international organizations.

This project provides tools for understanding a new era in global diplomacy – one shaped not only by traditional statecraft but also by increasingly unconventional and media-driven forms of diplomatic engagement.

Why This Topic Matters

The COVID-19 pandemic marked a rare moment of acute global disruption, during which China faced simultaneous domestic pressures and intensified interactions with the outside world. At the same time, Chinese diplomats began communicating in unusually direct and assertive ways. The pandemic thus allowed us to observe certain tendencies that were amplified due to the enormous crisis, and therefore easily observable.

This phenomena carries long-term relevance – any state, organization, or major international actor may encounter similarly assertive diplomatic engagement from China in future moments of global tension. Understanding this shift is vital for anticipating China's reactions, managing diplomatic relations, and preventing unnecessary escalation.

Research Description

The project addresses questions such as: did wolf warrior diplomacy differ at the state level, in relations with individual countries, and in international organizations? What specific events or statements provoked aggressive reactions from Chinese diplomats? Was wolf warrior diplomacy a coordinated strategy or spontaneous reactions by individual diplomats? Why did some countries experience harsher rhetorical attacks than others?

The project examines this phenomenon for the first time on such a large scale:

- **Three databases comprising of thousands of official statements** by Chinese diplomats,
- **12 European countries + the European Union** in comparative analysis,
- **3 international organizations** with varying degrees of politicization,
- Almost **four years** of diplomatic activity - a full timeline from the rise to the decline of this approach.

Expected Results

For science – the project will offer a new theoretical model explaining how China uses assertive communication as a strategic tool during times of global crisis. Results will be published in international academic journals and presented at conferences, promoting Polish scholarship.

For diplomatic practice – the model will offer a practical tool for interpreting and anticipating Chinese diplomatic responses, helping officials navigate interactions with greater clarity.

For public debate – the project will show that wolf warrior diplomacy was not a spontaneous reaction or individual outburst, but a deliberate and adaptive form of state communication shaped by broader strategic goals.