

China's Novel Coronavirus Pneumonia Battle: Responses, Results, and Reflections



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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the social and economic effects of a deadly epidemic that abruptly emerged in Wuhan, China and then spread to other regions of China as well as other countries in a short period of time. The “New Corona Virus” (NCV) caused deep worries, not only in China, but also the entire world. The present article addresses the outbreak, the way China responded to the epidemic, and the negligence that may have occurred during this intervention process. Successful measures taken by the central government and administrative disposals to eliminate negligence are also tackled herein. The article discusses the attitudes adopted by central and local governments throughout the epidemic process and their relations with the public and the outside world as well as the possible socio-economic effects of the epidemic on China. Overall, this Chinese NPC battle can also be considered to be a world anti-epidemic war, and China’s success will bring nothing but security to the entire world. The NCV’s case reveals the extreme importance and urgency of the world’s need to “build a human community with a shared future”.

THE SUDDEN OUTBREAK OF NOVEL coronavirus pneumonia (NCP in short, as is accepted by Chinese officials) has created a great deal of concerns across the world, since the reach of this epidemic was not only constrained to China and also extended to over 20 countries. In today’s globalized world, it is increasingly difficult to contain the epidemics within national boundaries and the survival of one country depends on another as far as global epidemics are concerned. The narrow-minded attitude of “cleaning up the snow in front of one’s own front door” can only result in worldwide diseases. In this sense, this Chinese NPC battle can also be considered to be a world anti-epidemic war, and China’s success will bring nothing but security to the entire world. The NPC’s case reveals the extreme importance and urgency of the world’s need to “build a human community with a shared future”.

As of 11:00 am on February 20, 2020, there were 74,675 confirmed NCP cases, 4,922 suspected cases, 16,180 cured cases, and 2,121 deaths in China. Compared to previous statistics, both the number of newly confirmed and suspected cases decreased, and the cure rate continued to rise,

and the mortality rate remained at around 2% (Baidu, 2020). More importantly, there is zero growth in many provinces for consecutive days. This shows that China’s epidemic prevention and control campaign is taking effect after one month’s strenuous efforts. We have reason to believe that the central government can cure the infected people and defeat the epidemic.

This article aims to answer the following five questions related to this epidemic:

- 1- What is NCP?
- 2- What was China’s response to this epidemic?
- 3- What may be the early neglect in China’s fight against epidemics?
- 4- What does the epidemic mean for China?
- 5- What are the results of the epidemic and its impact on China?

What is NCP?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses found in both animals and humans. Some infect people and are known to cause illness ranging from

common cold to more severe diseases such as the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

The novel coronavirus (CoV) is a new strain of coronavirus that has not been previously identified in humans. The new, or “novel” coronavirus, now called 2019-nCoV, had not previously detected before the outbreak was reported in Wuhan, Henan Province, China in December 2019. Chinese officials later adopted the name “Novel Coronavirus Pneumonia” (NCP).

On February 11, the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses officially named the “new coronavirus” as “SARS-CoV-2”. As this naming suggests, the current virus and the 2003 SARS virus are sister viruses. Subsequently, the WHO (World Health Organization) officially named this virus-infected pneumonia as “COVID-19”, which is an acronym that brings together Corona, Virus, Disease and 2019 (year). Including this 2019-nCoV in Wuhan, there are 7 coronaviruses that can infect humans, but not all of them are significantly dangerous. SARS-CoV, MERS-CoV, 2019-nCoV can cause infectious pneumonia, and the other four are more active every spring and winter, but just causing common flu.

There is definite evidence that NCP can be transmitted from person to person. However, what kind of animal vectors the new coronaviruses transmit to humans remains to be further studied, but the mainstream opinion of experts at home and abroad is that this disease is preventable, controllable and curable.

The main route of transmission for NCP is through respiratory droplets and can also be transmitted through contact. The incubation period of pneumonia caused by novel coronavirus

is generally 3-7 days, and the longest is not more than 14 days. Deaths are more common in the elderly and those with chronic underlying diseases.

China's response to this epidemic

First, the whole country united to fight against the epidemic under the strong leadership of the Party Central Committee. According to the Public Health Emergencies issued in 2006, the response of the central government can be described as rapid. General Secretary Xi Jinping personally directed this battle and held several sessions of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee to give important instructions on the prevention and control of the epidemic. On January 25, the Central Leading Group for N.C.P Epidemic Situation of the Chinese Communist Party was established. On January 27, Prime Minister Li Keqiang personally came to Wuhan to inspect and guide the epidemic prevention and control work. At that time, Deputy Prime Minister Sun Chunlan led the Central Steering Group to direct the struggle in Wuhan. As of January 29, 31 provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities in mainland China have initiated first-level responses to public health emergencies. The support of national leaders can bring confidence and necessary mobilization to the battle against the epidemic. According to calculations based on relevant data, if the strict isolation policy introduced by the country is three to five days later, considering the factors of population migration during the Spring Festival, family reunion, and large-scale outbound tourism, the infection rate would eventually reach 20%. If that happened, the medical resources across the whole country would be extremely scarce, and it could



Medical team from Guizhou leaves for Hubei to aid novel coronavirus fight. (Xinhua)

even trigger a series of deep economic and social crisis (Jiandong, 2020). At the same time, more countries and populations in the world would be in danger.

Although Wuhan closed the city, water, electricity, heating, communication, supplies of living, and timely treatment of the illness are provided. There was no disorder in the overall social order, and the state machinery was operating normally. Compared with the West, China has a big government, but the state and the Communist Party of China aim to serve the people, which is also a source of legitimacy. As a result, the country's decisive and timely decision made us avoid a huge catastrophe.

Local governments at all levels are also acting. Among them, Hubei Province has adopted strict measures. The government announced that from 10:00 am on January 23, 2020, the capital city Wuhan's urban bus, subway, ferry, and long-distance passenger transportation will be suspended; for no special reason, citizens are not to leave Wuhan, and the airport and railway corridor for departures from Wuhan will be temporarily closed. China has taken the most severe epidemic prevention measures that world history has ever seen: lockdown of the city with tens of millions of citizens. The closure of Wuhan City reflects the severity of this virus epidemic and the Chinese government's determination to prevent and control the epidemic.

Even though Wuhan was under coronavirus lockdown, water, electricity, heating, communication, living supplies, and timely treatment of the illness were provided. There was generally no disruption in the social order, and the state machinery operated normally.

According to calculations based on relevant data, if the strict isolation policy introduced by the country were implemented three to five days later, considering important factors of population such as migration during the Spring Festival, family reunion, and large-scale outbound tourism, the infection rate would have eventually reached 20% of the entire population. If that happened, the medical resources across the whole country would face extreme scarcity, and this could even trigger a series of deep economic and social crises (Jiandong, 2020). In the meantime, other countries would be put in grave danger.

Even though Wuhan was under coronavirus lockdown, water, electricity, heating, communication, living supplies, and timely treatment of the illness were provided. There was generally no disruption in the social order, and the state machinery operated normally. Compared with the West, China has a larger government. This being said, the state and the Communist Party of China aim to serve the people, which is also a source of legitimacy. As a result, the country's critical and timely decision made us avoid a huge catastrophe.



The president of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping, in Hubei. (APL Xinhua/Pang Xinglei)

Second, the counterpart support model¹ has shown its power again. Although Wuhan's medical capacity is relatively high, the epidemic situation is too sudden and too severe. Wuhan has been facing a serious problem, that is, the hospitals are short of resources, lack of beds, epidemic prevention supplies, medical equipment, and medical staffs. There is an old saying in China: "When disaster struck, help came from all sides." Under unified deployment, 19 provincial-level units began to support Hubei counterparts. As of February 11, the National Health Commission, the State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine, the Chinese Red Cross, 29 provinces (autonomous regions, municipalities), the Xinjiang Construction Corps, and military hospitals have sent a total of 178 medical teams and 21,618 medical team members to support Hubei (Hubei Daily, 2020).

¹ Counterpart support program is a policy behavior in which an economically developed or stronger party provides assistance to an economically underdeveloped or weaker party. Developed local governments are matched with the region to be supported in the program, and supporters from the supportive local government support another region in need in the relevant area when needed. This model basically consists of four main support models: Disaster Support, Financial Support, Medical Support and Educational Support. Supports can be intellectual, material and financial, source sharing and as well as labor support provided when deemed necessary. The first example of this was successfully accomplished in the Wenchuan earthquake. In the Corona epidemic originated from Wuhan, Jiangsu counterparts also supported the Hubei province.(see. <https://baike.baidu.com/item/>)

Rely on all the people to establish the defense line. General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that the epidemic is the devil, and we cannot allow the devil to hide. Therefore, the government and the party must mobilize the masses, organize the masses, gather the masses, implement joint defense and control, and build a people's defense line.

In response to the above problems in Wuhan, designated hospitals were quickly set up in various places, and two hospitals like Huo Shenshan and Lei Shenshan were completed in ten days, providing 2,500 beds. Many “mobile cabin hospitals” which can provide thousands of beds were also established at the same time. The Hubei government also uses 16 provincial universities as reserve isolation points just in case of more patients. Medical supplies and the supplies for prevention and control of NPC were provided in a timely manner. The manufacturing companies that can produce medical protective clothing, masks, and related medicines work day and night to satisfy the needs. Supplies such as vegetables and supplies from all walks of life are continuously shipped to Wuhan. The express companies open “Green channel” for the transportation of needed resources. The government has also a rapid allocation of special financial funds for public health services and preventions (Yongchao, 2020). As Academician Zhong Nanshan said, “A lot of things can be solved with the momentum. Wuhan can pass the country with the help of the whole country” (Changjiang Daily, 2020).

Third, rely on all the people to establish the defense line. General Secretary Xi Jinping

pointed out that the epidemic is the devil, and we cannot allow the devil to hide. Therefore, the government and the party must mobilize the masses, organize the masses, gather the masses, implement joint defense and control, and build a people's defense line. 1.4 billion people were demanded to remain at home, but the masses' general attitude soon changed from initial criticisms and doubts to widespread support, understanding and cooperation. Urban communities and rural areas have also implemented grid-based epidemic prevention and control. Countless medical staff, community workers, police, and volunteers battled day and night on the frontline of the epidemic. The army also rushed to the front line of epidemic prevention and control, bringing great confidence to the people. During recent attempts at epidemic prevention and control, China's thousands of years old customs have changed; adults and children no longer visit relatives and friends; they no longer admire travel and vacation, and have become overnight “home men and women”. Chinese people share food, express their affection with smile face emojis on WeChat, showing that Chinese are not pessimistic and panicked (People's Daily, 2020).

Fourth, they actively carry out international cooperation. China has identified pathogens at an unprecedented rate and shared relevant viral gene sequences with the WHO and other countries as soon as possible, providing the possibility of developing rapid virus detection tools. The Chinese health department also shared epidemic information with relevant countries and regions when needed, and provided valuable time for rapid action. Besides, the Chinese government also welcomes the WHO to send an international expert delegation to assist China in fighting the epidemic.

Turkish Ambassador to China and Turkish students shot videos, saying “Wuhan Jiayou, Zhongguo Jiayou” (Stay Strong, Wuhan; Stay Strong, China), showing Turkish people’s solidarity with Chinese people.

China has also received a lot of donations from foreign governments and institutions, including 21 countries in the first batch, and China must and shall remember these contributions. Among these countries, Japan is quite exemplary. In addition to donating a large number of medical supplies, Japanese officials also publicly stated that “Virus is bad, but not a human” in response to extremely discriminatory statements. Moreover, each parliamentarian of the Japanese Liberal Democratic Party will deduct 5,000 yen from his salary to donate China for fighting this epidemic (Tencent Net, 2020).

Another example is Iran. The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif is the first foreign minister of public solidarity with China and provided China with 3 million medical masks. Considering that Iran is still under full US sanctions, it was not easy for Iran to make this contribution for China (FMPRC, 2020a).

Turkey is also among the first 21 countries to send additional supplies to China. On January 31, 2020, the Turkish Air Force military aircraft transported aid to Wuhan, including a total of 1,000 sets of chemical protective clothing, 93,500 filter masks and 1,000 sets of disposable chemical protective clothing, among others (Chuanbao, 2020). Later, Turkey’s TIKA, AFAD, TIM, IGA and Turkish Cargo have organized several multiple batches of medical device assistance to China. Besides, Turkish Ambassador to China and Turkish students shot videos, saying “Wuhan Jiayou, Zhongguo Jiayou” (Stay Strong, Wuhan; Stay Strong, China), showing Turkish people’s solidarity with Chinese people. Just as State Council and Foreign Minister Wang Yi said when he met with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavosoglu, “the Chinese side appreciates that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Mr. Foreign Minister have repeatedly expressed support for China’s fight against the epidemic” (Xinhua Net, 2020a).

Early neglect in China’s fight against epidemics

In 2003, China had experienced a severe SARS incident. It stands to reason that it should have enough experience to deal with the epidemic, but it seems that the lessons of history have not been fully drawn. Although the epidemic situation was obviously controlled in the later period, various problems were neglected in the early outbreak, midway control, and public opinion control.

First, the local government and the epidemic control department underestimated the severity of the epidemic and took slow action to cause the epidemic to spread throughout the country. On January 21, 2020, Zhong Nanshan, a Chinese academic who serves as head of the high-level ex-



The Red Cross of China is supporting its government to fight new Coronavirus. (Xinhua)

pert group of the National Health and Medical Commission, inspected Wuhan and pointed out that “the virus can be transmitted from person to person” (The Paper, 2020a). Previously, the local government had not disclosed and controlled the mass gathering activities because of the Spring Festival. Wuhan’s resident population was more than 14 million, but 5 million people had “normally fled” before the city was closed (The Paper, 2020b). This is an important reason for the rapid spread of the epidemic across the country. It can be said that local governments are responsible.

Second, Hubei and Wuhan are seriously short of medical resources to deal with the epidemic. Even neighboring cities and counties have inadequate supplies, and they need help from all over the country. This reflects that the national public health system is still lagging in terms of personnel, technology, and equipment under this serious epidemic. If this epidemic happened in other areas without better medical resources compared to Wuhan, this epidemic would have caused more deaths. In this sense, there is still a huge gap in the distribution of public health resources between the East and the West, big cities and small and medium cities in China. This epidemic also exposes another problem, that is all cities in China still lack a complete public health system, infectious disease prevention system, and ICU isolation resource management system. Therefore, several counties and/or cities are in need of an independent public health and epidemic prevention system. Various hospitals with enough beds should be set up following the standards for treating infectious diseases, and other infrastructure related to controlling the infection (Qifan, 2020).

Third, the local government does not pay enough attention to public opinion, which leads

to the decline of the government’s credibility. The death of 35-year-old Dr. Li Wenliang on February 7 triggered a strong backlash from public opinion. At the end of December, Dr. Li has noticed that the virus can spread from person to person, but he was admonished by the police. In the end, the local government did not comfort him, and he insisted to fight on the front line after being cured.

If Wuhan wins then Hubei Province wins, if Hubei wins then China will win this battle against novel coronavirus pneumonia. Based on data on the number of confirmed cases in Wuhan and Hubei, the reshuffling of leaders proves to be accurate and effective.

He was regarded as a hero by common people and was highly praised by WHO. Also, many problems have arisen regarding the distribution of donated items by the Wuhan Red Cross, which has attracted criticism from public opinion across the country. As a result, the State Supervision Commission sent an investigation team to conduct a comprehensive investigation, responding to public concerns and raising expectations for restoring the truth.

Hubei Government’s policies were useful but not efficient enough, and cannot still satisfy the people’s needs due to their early neglect. On February 13, 2020, the central authorities adjusted the top leaders in Hubei Province and Wuhan. The mayor of Shanghai at that time; Ying Yong, was replaced with Jiang Chaoliang as the Hubei State Party Committee Secretary. Wang Zhonglin, then Jinan Municipal Party Secretary, was succeeded by Ma Guoqiang as the Wuhan Municipal Party Secretary (Xinhua Net, 2020b).

After this adjustment, the epidemic situation has been changing towards a positive direction. Focusing on the two major tasks of isolation and treatment, Wuhan carried out a large-scale network investigation, carried out the strictest closed management of the community for 24 hours, and severely punished officials for dereliction of duty. The purpose is to achieve five hundred percent, that is confirmed patients are 100% attended, 100% of suspected patients are tested for nucleic acids, 100% of patients with fever are tested, close contact people are 100% isolated, and community villages are 100% closed (Xinxin, 2020). With these strict policies into practice, the epidemic in Wuhan has been greatly alleviated. If Wuhan wins then Hubei Province wins, if Hubei wins then China will win this battle against novel coronavirus pneumonia. Based on data on the number of confirmed cases of Wuhan and Hubei, the reshuffling of leaders proves to be accurate and effective.

What does the epidemic mean for China?

China's NCP Battle encompasses four fronts. The first front is the medical battle. This is the most critical battle, which is a life-and-death situation. The first battlefield is the most important one, which is Wuhan City. The second battlefield is very important, which is Hubei Province. The third battlefield is also very important in other provinces across the country. Batches of medical teams gathered from all over the country, and even from the fourth and fifth-tier cities to Wuhan and Hubei. Regardless of the danger of life, these white angels realize the most beautiful retrograde.

The second front is the economic battle. In order to fight the epidemic, the country extend-

ed the holidays, which is no problem for the rich people, but for ordinary people, there is no work and no income, and an SME's boss cannot afford it. After all, tourism, catering, entertainment, production, transportation fell into stagnation during this period. On the other hand, the national economy also needs to operate normally and production must be started. Therefore, the question of balancing between prevention, control and economic development requires the central and local governments' efforts at all levels to find solutions.

The third front is the diplomatic campaign. In the face of the epidemic, many countries expressed their understanding and support for China, sending charcoal in the snow, and giving a helping hand. Pakistan donated national strategic materials to China. Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen made a special visit to China to show his standing together with the Chinese people (FMPRC, 2020b). In the country, there are still some countries and people that "drop down a stone on the man who has fallen into a well". Wilbur Ross, the Trump administration's Commerce Secretary said that the coronavirus could bring jobs back to the US from China. Walter Russell Mead said China is the "Sick Man of Asia" on the Washington Post. German Der Spiegel said the virus was "Made in China" (Hong Kong China News Agency, 2020). They all show the inhuman aspect of certain Western politicians and media. Under such circumstances, China must launch a diplomatic counterattack, show China's image of a strong and responsible country with its performance in the fight against the epidemic, and show the heroic spirit of the Chinese people to defeat the epidemic.

The fourth front is the battle of faith. In the face of the epidemic, some countries have adopted some extreme restrictive measures.



A medical team member leaving for Xianning City of Hubei Province February 12, 2020. (Xinhua)

This is not advisable. What is more terrible than the epidemic is the panic itself. Just as Franklin Roosevelt said, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself”. As long as the government, especially the central government, seeks the truth from the facts, keep an open and transparent attitude, and guides and responds to the public opinion rightly, it will help strengthen confidence.

What are the results of the epidemic and its impact on China?

On January 30, 2020, Professor Zhang Wenhong, the leader of the Shanghai Medical Treatment Expert Group, analyzed the three

outcomes of the epidemic. The first one is a success: the number of new cases has decreased in 2 weeks; the epidemic in Wuhan has been controlled in 2 months; and the peripheral area around Wuhan has been cleared in 2 months. There are basically no sporadic cases in major provinces and cities, and WHO ends its high-risk assessment of China. The second one is a failure. Then China follows the Mexican flu model in 2009, and the virus swept the world. The third one is the stalemate. Every hospital in China becomes an infectious disease hospital, and the disease is included in daily management until the society establishes a certain immunity

and then the epidemic gradually fades naturally (Wenhong, 2020).

At present, in terms of actual control results, China's national system and control measures are working towards the first result without thinking about any cost. The epidemic is expected to reach its peak in April and then will be significantly controlled (The Paper, 2020c). For China, there is no choice but to control the epidemic quickly and completely. Otherwise, China will pay three major costs.

The first one is a strategic cost. At present, the United States intends to use this epidemic to create a panic atmosphere and isolate China politically and economically, especially when the WHO lists the novel coronavirus epidemic as a public health emergency of international concern. The purpose of the United States is to achieve what they have not achieved in the Sino-US trade war. Therefore, China must stop the development of the epidemic as soon as possible and win a new period of strategic opportunity for China's development.

The second is the economic cost. China is at the heart of the global supply chain. If the epidemic cannot be controlled for a long time, the global supply chain will fall into the trap of violent turmoil, and global multinational companies will consider reorganizing their own supply chains. This is also a strategic economic loss in China. By then, if the jobs will not return to the United States, they will also partially be transferred to other countries, and once they are transferred, they will not return. If the core position of the global supply chain is disrupted, the transition of China's economic structure from low-end industries to high-end industries will be interrupted. Therefore, China needs to anni-

hilate the epidemic as soon as possible, resume industrial production quickly, and continue to attract foreign confidence and foreign investment.

The third cost is the cost on the people's livelihood. If the epidemic is not well controlled, it will inevitably have a huge negative impact on the people's livelihood due to serious economic problems. The result is that everyone will be threatened tremendously no matter the rich and the poor. The richer will get a greater economic loss, while the poor will get the worse economic conditions. If the epidemic continues for a long time, the society will be destabilized.

In Chinese, the crisis also means "opportunity within risk". If China can overcome this epidemic as quickly as possible, this will also bring huge opportunities and strategic benefits to China. First, China's authority and credibility will be further enhanced, and global rule-making capabilities will be enhanced. This time, China pressed the pause button directly, which involves 1.4 billion people. As a result, the country was suspended in an orderly manner, and then everyone united to fight the epidemic. What other country in the world can achieve this?

Second, China's economy will suffer significant losses in the short term, but it will continue to develop in the medium and long terms. If we achieve rapid and complete victory in this battle, although the economic benefits will be lost in the short term, the whole world will know that the Chinese government and people have a strong ability to avoid risks. It is safe to put eggs in China's basket, especially for financial and investment fields. Considering China's market potential and China's industrial capabilities, more resources will be concentrated in China, which

also means long-term economic benefits. Moreover, through this epidemic, new outbreaks including our work efficiency, emerging industries and new business models will inevitably increase in popularity, which will also generate long-term positive outcomes for the economy.

Third, China's social governance capacity will be greatly improved as a result. This epidemic has allowed us to see a lot of our shortcomings in national governance, so our improvement speed will become much faster. The ability to implement our policies from top to bottom will be greatly improved, and social problems will be more quickly exposed and quickly resolved. This improvement in the ability of state governance means an increase in the efficiency of social functioning, which is of great significance to the development of the entire country.

Since the establishment of People's Republic of China; New Corona Virus has created an important situation, because it sweeps and spreads the area swiftly, transmits the disease and affect the largest number of people with a nation-wide impact involving 1.4 billion people, not to mention the world population. Moreover, the mobilization of the health branches of the army on a massive scale, large isolations on the quarantine of the virus, hospital buildings and mobile treatment were included in China's struggle. In the process; the first response to the crisis is China's act to put a city of 10 million people in quarantine overnight and the Central bureau's action on the highest alarm level on the New Year's Eve. Despite all this, the Chinese enjoy the longest spring holiday in history and the development of construction services with training.

It can be said that China is struggling an extraordinary battle against this epidemic. Un-

doubtedly, this war will cost immeasurable human, material and financial resources for China. But the nation's confidence that "China will win! Wuhan will win" has always been there. Just as Chinese philosophy tells us, "Good fortune comes after disaster, and the disaster lurks in a good fortune." In other words, there are always opportunities in the crisis. Natural and unnatural disasters are inevitable experiences for the development of society. The victory of China against this epidemic will make a great contribution to the world. 🌸

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