

China's Response to COVID-19: Turning Crisis into an Opportunity

By **TINA J. PARK**

ON April 13, the number of the accumulated confirmed COVID-19 cases worldwide surpassed 1.8 million, with over 110,000 deaths, according to the COVID-19 Dashboard by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University. Governments around the world are struggling to contain the pandemic, taking measures ranging from total lockdown to travel bans, as well as financial injections to their respective economies. As public anxiety and paranoia continue to soar across the globe, experts predict a global recession in the near future.

While panic spreads across Europe and North America, China has not only emerged as a leader in containing the virus, but also took the opportunity to forge stronger ties with its allies like Italy. On March 10, Chinese leader Xi Jinping paid a visit to Wuhan, the capital of Hubei Province, where the coronavirus outbreak began. On the day of his visit, there were only 24 confirmed new cases in China, a noticeable shift from thousands at the peak of the outbreak in February. Contrary to the trends in the European Union and North America, Chinese factories and restaurants are re-opening their doors again. Local governments in less-affected areas of China are relaxing travel bans and encouraging people to go back to work. Around 93 percent of the 83,597 Chinese people affected by COVID-19 are said to have recovered from the virus as of April 13.

The Chinese word for “crisis” (危机) also carries the meaning of opportunity. Instead of taking draconian measures under the cloud of fear and uncertainty, we

can learn five lessons from China's handling of the novel coronavirus outbreak and adopt similar measures to save lives.

First, proactive and close cooperation with international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) is essential. In late January, the WHO delegation conducted a field visit to Wuhan to investigate the novel coronavirus and discuss necessary containment measures for the outbreak. A few notable developments took place during this visit. Most notably, the delegation monitored and discussed such measures as temperature screening at airports, infection prevention and control mea-

asures at health care facilities, as well as deployment of the rRT-PCR test kit to detect the coronavirus. The WHO delegation also discussed expanding the definition of the coronavirus, which in turn, enabled China and the international community to build a clearer picture of the spectrum of its severity. In addition, Chinese experts shared with the delegation a range of protocols to be used for developing

international guidelines, including case definitions, clinical management protocols, and infection control among others. This WHO mission ensured that there was a coherent policy between the Chinese national, provincial, and Wuhan health authorities, as well as sharing protocols, epistemology of the virus and increasing transparency.

Second, clear and coherent communication from the government is absolutely critical in times of crisis. Following the WHO delegation visit, the Chinese government released the primers and probes used in the rRT-PCR test kit, which followed China's rapid

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A Chinese anti-epidemic medical team member communicates with his Italian peers in Pavia, Italy on March 21.

identification of the virus and sharing of the genetic sequence. According to the WHO's director general, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the uncontrolled virus spread is "...not a one-way street. This epidemic can be pushed back, but only with a collective, coordinated and comprehensive approach that engages the entire machinery of government." As early as January, the Chinese authorities at all levels ensured that the latest information about the outbreak was shared with the public, including detailed guidance on hand and respiratory hygiene, food safety, and avoiding mass gatherings.

Third, a concrete and coordinated action plan from the government can help flatten the coronavirus curve at an early stage. Chinese authorities locked down Wuhan, epicenter of the outbreak, on January 23, cancelling flights and trains leaving the city and suspending public transport. The Chinese Ministry of Education announced postponement of the spring semester of schools, colleges, and universities as of late January. Chinese residents in Hubei were also advised to limit all non-essential social gatherings. Many of them relied on delivery service for their daily supplies. China's early lockdown decision stands in sharp con-

trast to Italy, where a nationwide lockdown was only imposed in early March. Moreover, China built two new 1,000-1,300-bed hospitals to fight the coronavirus, both completed in around 10 days, with the help of thousands of laborers working around the clock. Such investment made a big difference in providing relief to the overburdened healthcare system and providing additional hospital beds for treatment of patients in isolation.

Fourth, providing easy access to testing centers and medical facilities for treatment is absolutely critical for containing COVID-19. This is largely thanks to the Chinese government's allocation of RMB 110.48 billion for patient treatment, diagnosis, subsidies for medical staff, and medical equipment. Those who exhibited symptoms of the coronavirus were immediately sent to a special fever clinic, and diagnostic tests, as well as treatments were provided free of charge. Other provinces and regions sent more than 40,000 medical workers to the center of the outbreak. When it came to the non-medical response, there was a nationwide sense of solidarity with Hubei. These nationwide investments and collective efforts from the general Chinese public had synergistic effects in curbing the mortality rate.

Fifth, using hi-tech systems to track the transmission of the virus is essential in fighting the battle against coronavirus. China has adopted facial-recognition systems with thermal-imaging capabilities to identify and track people with fevers which is particularly effective in the transport system. Passengers' movement can be easily traced with their ID information and facial recognition facilitated by big data. In the face of the COVID-19 crisis, these tools have been tested and proven to be effective in saving lives.

Many of these lessons from China's handling of the coronavirus can be implemented elsewhere. The Chinese government has been proactively engaging with other countries affected by the crisis, most notably Italy, which shares a long history of friendship and alliance with China. China sent a team of medical experts to help Italy fight the coronavirus, and essential medical supplies and equipment arrived in that country on March 13. Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio told his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, that Italy was "paying close attention to and learning from" China's experience in tackling the coronavirus. Unfortunately however, the Italian government has not been successful in providing clear communication to its public about its response to the COVID-19 outbreak, which has contributed to a greater degree of panic and anxiety among the public. In Italy, there is a general lack of infrastructure when it comes to testing facilities and intensive care facilities, in addition to having a very large aging population. The Italian economy at large, which relies heavily on tourism, is suffering greatly from the lockdown, and the government has been unable to finance additional costs needed for the COVID-19 testing and treatment. All of that points to a greater need for external support and an opportunity to strengthen Sino-Italian bilateral relations in times of crisis. Millions of Italians confined to their homes have been chanting "Andrà tutto bene," which translates to "everything will be fine." Saving lives is a top priority for humanity, beyond all borders. It is time for Italy and other European countries to take lessons from the Chinese example and step up their efforts to protect their citizens. ■

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Joining Hands to Fight the Epidemic

By **HOU YUXIANG & WU SIKE**

RECENTLY, the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) epidemic continues to spread and wreak havoc in many countries, causing great concern worldwide, and leading to many countries and regions declaring a state of emergency. It first broke out in the city of Wuhan and has since raged across China. Where is the source of this disease? Scientists are still exploring, but that the virus is the common enemy of mankind, a security threat facing all humanity, is a general consensus. The World Health Organization (WHO), after declaring the outbreak "a public health emergency of international concern" at the end of January this year, upgraded the global risk several times to "very high," its top level of risk assessment. Facing the threat of the virus, China did its utmost to take effective and transparent measures to contain the virus. Meanwhile, China actively strengthened international cooperation to prevent the epidemic from spreading to other countries in the world, and has been striving to build an epidemic-resistant world community, so that people can gain confidence in winning the war against the pandemic.

Non-Traditional Security Important to Mankind's Future

Since the advent of the new century, non-traditional security issues such as terrorism, climate change, and epidemic prevention and control have been on the rise, exposing the international community to a series of new threats and challenges. Taking global epidemic prevention and control as an example, the Ebola outbreak in West African countries in 2014 and the