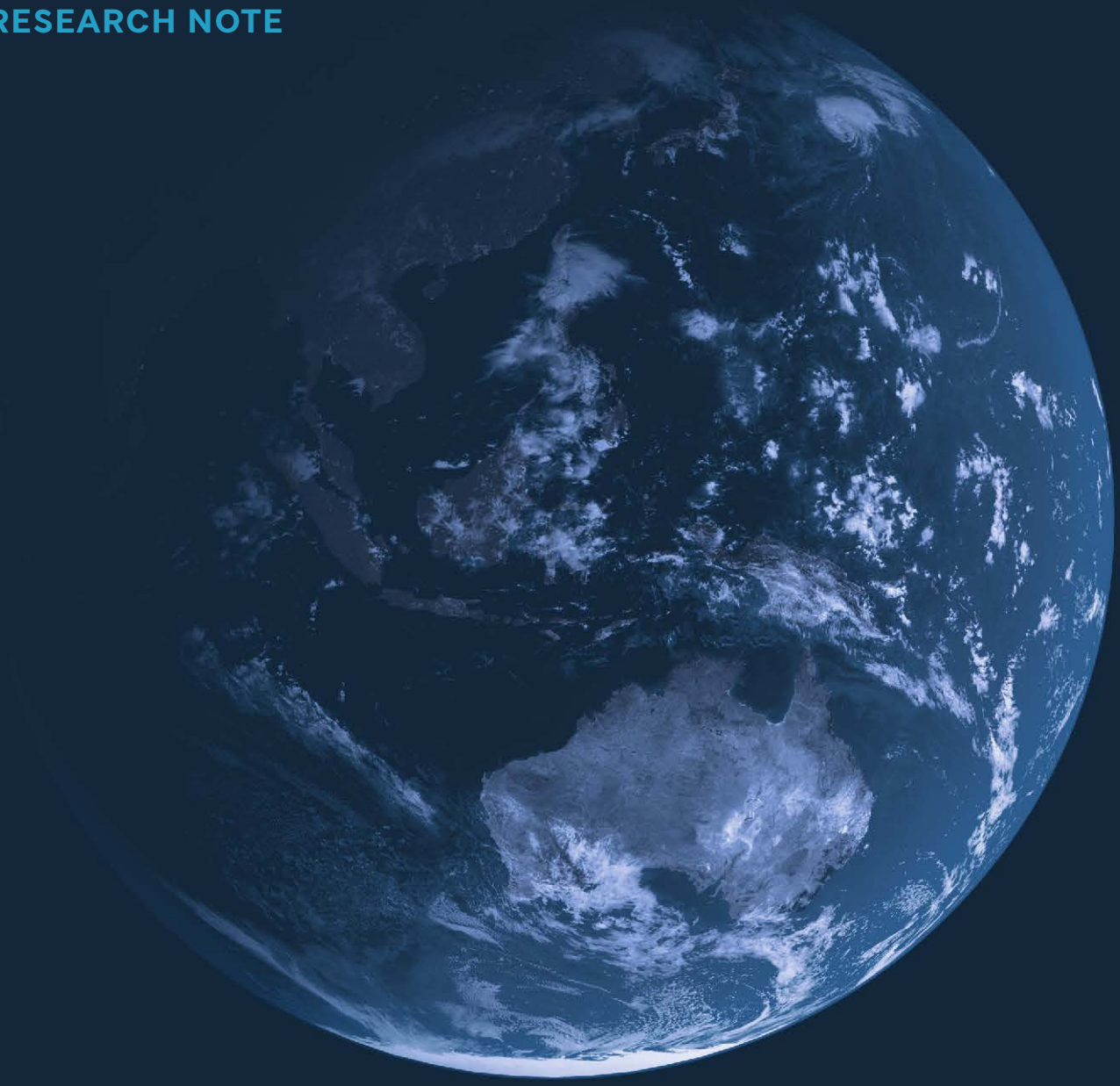
LOWY
INSTITUTE
RESEARCH NOTE



China's Deep State: The Communist Party and the Coronavirus

RICHARD MCGREGOR

JULY 2020

The Lowy Institute is an independent policy think tank. Its mandate ranges across all the dimensions of international policy debate in Australia — economic, political and strategic — and it is not limited to a particular geographic region. Its two core tasks are to:

- produce distinctive research and fresh policy options for Australia's international policy and to contribute to the wider international debate

- promote discussion of Australia's role in the world by providing an accessible and high-quality forum for discussion of Australian international relations through debates, seminars, lectures, dialogues and conferences.

Lowy Institute Research Notes are short papers analysing recent international trends and events, and their policy implications.

The views expressed in this paper are entirely the author's own and not those of the Lowy Institute.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of a new, deadly virus in Wuhan in late December 2019 triggered multiple, cascading crises in China, from a collapse in the economy in early 2020 to a wave of foreign criticism of Beijing's handling of the outbreak.

Equally important, but less examined, has been how the ruling Communist Party managed the emergency — both internally and, once infections began falling in China, overseas — to corral its critics and limit any backlash at home and abroad.

Beijing … openly touts the superiority of its system, in contrast to the failures of prominent democracies, especially the United States, which is the prime focus of internally directed propaganda.

Democracies across the world have come under scrutiny over their capacity to enforce lockdowns, protect health systems, and manage their economies through sharp downturns after the virus spread within their borders.

China, however, deserves special attention, and not just because the virus originated in Wuhan. China's rollercoaster ride of being the first country in and, at the time of writing, one of the first out, is notable as well.

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi claimed in a mid-April article chronicling the fight against coronavirus at home and the reaction abroad: "China will be the first country to win a full victory against COVID-19."[1] A fresh cluster of infections in Beijing in June took the edge off Wang's boast, but the country's progress from February after the initial cover-up was remarkable nonetheless.

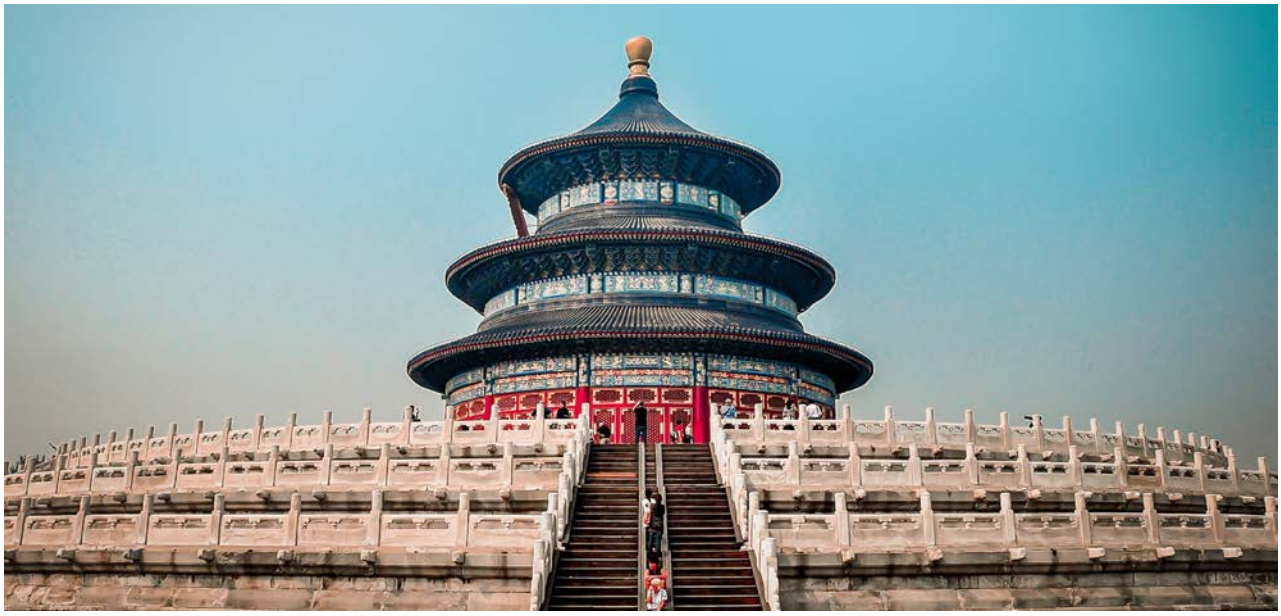
As an exemplar, Beijing is doubly important because it openly touts the superiority of its system, in contrast to the failures of prominent democracies, especially the United States, which is the prime focus of internally directed propaganda.

To understand how China managed COVID-19, it is best to think in terms of a political campaign. The phrase, 'the permanent campaign', was coined in the early 1980s to describe how politics had been transformed in the US, from being run by old style party bosses to more professional, data-driven contests that ran non-stop between elections.

The Communist Party of China (CCP) operates in a similar fashion, like a political party that does not distinguish between governing and

campaigning. During the COVID-19 crisis, the system has reacted with the speed of a 24/7 election campaign, from playing down the virus, to controlling its spread, and then declaring victory.

As this Research Note argues, China's failures in the early stages of the crisis, and in the overseas propaganda campaign it later mounted, were baked into the CCP system. So too was the extraordinary mobilisation of the country's resources to enforce lockdowns and stop the spread of the virus. Success and failure are two sides of the same CCP coin.



The Temple of Heaven, Beijing, with few tourists during the coronavirus outbreak (Image: Victor He/Unsplash, March 2020)

MANAGING FAILURE

So far, Beijing's approach to COVID-19 is akin to someone who lends you a book and urges you to skip the horrifying opening chapters and flip straight to the end, where the hero — in this case, the party-state — prevails, shining a path for the rest of the world to follow.

The missteps, and indeed the suppression of vital information after the initial detection of the potentially deadly new coronavirus by doctors in Hubei province, has been well documented, mainly by the Chinese themselves.[2]

Many brave local journalists, some working for established outlets, others writing as citizen bloggers, reported on the plight of overwhelmed medical workers. Scholars openly criticised the government's response.[3]

Local officials in Hubei … feared any announcement of the discovery of a deadly new virus could upend one of the most sensitive times on the political calendar …

In January, the Wuhan mayor admitted in an interview on state television that information had not been released in a "timely manner".[4] His immediate superior, the city's party secretary, admitted in the same month that he was in a state of "guilt, remorse and self-reproach" for not acting earlier.[5] Doctors in Wuhan who had treated the first patients tried to raise the alarm, but were ordered by police to keep quiet.[6] A number later died.

The party-state soon managed to regain control of the narrative, at least at home. The media was reined in. Critical bloggers were silenced. Some critics disappeared altogether, into detention. Officials got back on message.

Leaving aside the issue of political and moral culpability, the early failures of public communication were in part political, and in part structural.

Local officials in Hubei, and its provincial capital Wuhan, feared any announcement of the discovery of a deadly new virus could upend one of the most sensitive times on the political calendar — the Lunar New Year break and annual meetings of local legislatures — and attract the ire of Beijing. In doing so, the officials would have drawn attention to their own shortcomings and put their careers in jeopardy.

In the aftermath of the outbreak, the localities were blamed for delays in reporting new cases of the novel coronavirus. The central

government sacked two senior officials — the party secretaries of Wuhan and Hubei province — over their roles in allowing the spread of COVID-19. Their dismissals may not have been fair — we cannot judge because there has been no open inquiry, let alone ongoing, uncensored press reporting about the crucial early period in Wuhan and how local officials interacted with Beijing. But it is evident from dispassionate accounting of the way the crisis unfolded that local officials do not bear the sole responsibility for the rapid transmission of the virus.

Certainly, the central government had many chances to keep abreast of events on the ground in Wuhan. An inspection team visited the city on 31 December.[7] In a conference call on 14 January, national officials warned health experts in a closed door meeting that the then epidemic was likely to become a "major public health event."[8] Some analysts have suggested that Wuhan officials "intercepted the upward flow of information" and that direct reporting of new cases did not resume until 24 January.[9] This is possible. But at the same time, it is clear that the central authorities had ample opportunity to find out what was happening and press for further details.

"What we have is a system of complexity where all the parties are shirking their responsibility, and in this case everybody is culpable" — Dali Yang

Whatever the reason, at least part of the information log jam in early January was the result of the embedded hierarchies within the bureaucracy. The country's peak professional body, the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (China CDC), ranks below the National Health Commission, whose leaders in turn fall under provincial party chiefs in the bureaucratic pecking order. The city and provincial leaders needed permission from the top of the party and central government in Beijing to make announcements of any gravity.

"The local authorities in particular [were] responsible until, of course, they couldn't hide it," said Dali Yang, of the University of Chicago. "Then we later had the municipal leadership [say] they had no authority from above to announce anything. What we have is a system of complexity where all the parties are shirking their responsibility, and in this case everybody is culpable."[10]

Another possible reason for the delay in declaring emergency measures was Xi Jinping's diary. On 17 January, President Xi went ahead with a visit to one of China's important neighbours, Myanmar. He did not return to China until the following day. From 19–21 January, he was in Yunnan, the province adjoining Myanmar, still distant from the capital. The Wuhan lockdown was not

declared until a day after his return, on 23 January.[11] Indeed, by the time Xi arrived back in town, the State Council (China's cabinet), convened by Premier Li Keqiang, had already begun urgently seeking expert medical counsel.[12] Its recommendation for a lockdown may have been on Xi's desk when he returned to the capital.

Put another way, it was not just local officials who failed. The entire system, beset with fear, uncertainty, cover-ups, bad faith, and indecision at multiple levels, misfired until the top tier finally realised the gravity of the situation. The result was that the virus spread beyond Wuhan, into the rest of the country, and then the world — further, and faster, than it ever should have.

EMERGENCY MEASURES

Despite outlasting the Soviet communist party as a governing entity, the CCP still frets it will fall through the trapdoor of Chinese history, in which the glorious rise of dynasties has inevitably been followed by their corrosion and corruption, and then collapse. The CCP, in contrast to other fallen communist parties, has pledged to break out of the dynastic cycle by incessantly reinforcing a focus on political awareness and loyalty to President Xi and the party.

The party's military-style mobilisation, then, was the kind of overwhelming response that characterises its governing style. To borrow a phrase from American football, the party's modus operandi is to 'flood the zone' with manpower and resources, to galvanise the entire system for fear that it might lose control of events. The process was led from the top, in theory consistent with how Xi Jinping has managed the country since 2012, although a closer examination shows that he called on Premier Li at key moments.

The party's military-style mobilisation, then, was the kind of overwhelming response that characterises its governing style.

The period from 20 January, when the system began preparing for all-out war on COVID-19, was notable for the record number of meetings of the party's peak body, the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC). Some of their proceedings were broadcasted — another rarity. [13]

One meeting was held on 25 January, the first day of the Lunar New Year, which is akin to the Australian Cabinet convening on Christmas Day. [14]

The first highly publicised emergency meeting on 20 January set the tone, when President Xi (in absentia) called on all levels of party committees, governments, and relevant organisations to take action to maintain stability and control the information flow. At the meeting, held under the auspices of the State Council, Premier Li activated public health protocols, shut down wet markets, and required other provinces to send personnel and supplies to Hubei and Wuhan.[15]

The mobilisation of the party culminated in what might be the largest-ever conference call in history, when on 23 February, 170 000 party officials and military personnel convened to listen to Xi. Again, the message was squarely focused not only on fighting the virus, but on lauding and upholding the system.

"The effectiveness of the prevention and control work has once again showed the significant advantages of the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the socialist system with Chinese characteristics," he said.[16]

To get a sense of how deeply the call penetrated the system, China's bureaucratic elite — the senior officials screened by the party centre before they get their jobs — only number about 3500–4000. Xi's call, in other words, was listened into by officials from all tiers of government, right down to the county level. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the People's Armed Police (PAP), its para-military arm, were also on the call.[17]

The COVID-19 pandemic illuminated another aspect of China's political system, demonstrating how the party and its leader command all levers of power at a time of crisis in a way that cannot be replicated in democratic systems. China's deep state plumbs depths that democracies can barely imagine.

China's deep state plumbs depths that democracies can barely imagine.

Without the need for any messy, democratic debate about civil rights or so forth, the government was able, virtually overnight, to lock down more than 700 million people in residential detention. It was also able to seal provincial, city, county, and village borders; shut factories while commandeering the entire output of some businesses to supply emergency medical equipment; mobilise military and para-military units; build pop-up hospitals; mandate testing of tens of millions of citizens; and track the movements of residents through mobile phone apps.

In this respect, the crisis has been a reminder of the party-state's overwhelming capacity. Outside of military conflict, no country of any size or weight on the world stage has the ability to marshal resources like China, nor enforce a crackdown of a similar severity and dimension. The mobilisation of the state, businesses, and the people at such short notice was a potent reminder that the CCP has virtual war powers at its fingertips in any declared emergency, even in the absence of conflict with a foreign power.

The CCP had the means and the accompanying surveillance to enforce the lockdown through a system that covers the entire country — from the provinces, cities, and villages, down to individual streets and compounds. Staff at transport hubs and outside homes and residential compounds recorded and input people's personal information including names, national ID numbers, contact details, and data about

recent travel.[18] The staff could instantly detect whether someone had come from Wuhan, or other virus hotspots, and thus whether they were allowed to enter the locality or instead should go into quarantine.

The so-called 'Health Code', an app developed by the Chinese tech and e-commerce giant Alibaba, stores location data when scanned at checkpoints. The contact tracing apps are likely to become permanent features, both for future pandemics and for surveillance more generally. "Embedded in the popular WeChat and Alipay smartphone apps, the codes use automatically collected travel and medical data to generate red, orange or green ratings indicating the likelihood of people having the virus," reported Reuters.[19]

Another instructive lesson in the crisis was the system's ability to gain access to, and control over, the private housing compounds in which most urban Chinese live. From the mid-1990s onwards, the private economy and housing market uprooted much of the Mao-era structure of neighbourhood committees, which had played an essential part in surveillance and reporting on citizens. In the COVID-19 crisis, the neighbourhood police state was rapidly remodelled, revitalised, and remobilised to enforce quarantines.

The contact tracing apps are likely to become permanent features, both for future pandemics and for surveillance more generally.

In place of the old networks, the party commandeered the ubiquitous property management companies, which had been created to service the housing compounds and liaise with local governments when the real estate market was privatised. As early as 28 January, the peak industry body[20] issued an order that the companies organise residents and use their social media accounts to disseminate orders from the central government.[21]

As a result, the party was able to turn the compounds into lockdown zones and ensure residents were checked as they went in and out of their apartments, if they were allowed to come and go at all. In Wuhan alone, the property associations were able to deploy 100 000 people — about one per cent of the city's population — across 2000 sites to enforce the lockdowns.[22] The process took about two weeks to put in place, according to observers on the ground.[23] For the authorities, it was vindication of Xi's policy of forcing private companies and civil society organisations to set up party cells so they could be activated in the event of political emergencies.

The property associations received widespread praise in the official media for their work. Some of these companies, which are listed on the share market, saw their stock prices rise significantly at a time when

the market was otherwise flat.[24] The associations themselves, and the big privately-owned real estate companies that use them, such as Vanke, Wanda, and Country Garden, had ample incentive to cooperate. The property market relies entirely on the government, as the state controls access to finance and land, and can cut recalcitrant companies off without recourse should they get into political trouble.

The traditional neighbourhood committees played a role as well. Any resident who had passed through Wuhan was required to register with the committees, which in turn passed that information on to the police. The committees were responsible for telephoning any targeted person multiple times each day to ensure they were complying with quarantine regulations. According to one news article, a committee worker could expect to make, on average, 300 of these calls a day.[25]

Despite the party's propaganda system being focused on President Xi, there were significant missteps and odd gaps in the leadership narrative.

For a number of weeks, Xi disappeared altogether from public view, much like Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping did during crises.

In early February, at a moment when Beijing had not yet brought infections under control, the president authorised the publication of an article under his name in Qiushi, an authoritative party journal.[26]

The article disclosed that Xi had delivered instructions at a 7 January Politburo meeting on the handling of the outbreak. If it was meant to show that he had acted with appropriate alacrity to a potentially deadly surge of the virus, it was an empty boast, as authorities in Wuhan did not report any cases for more than a week afterwards. Nor did they publicise the concerns of their city's doctors about the virus.

On some occasions, Xi claimed he was intimately involved in day-to-day efforts to fight the virus. Or, in the words he used in a meeting in late January with the leadership of the World Health Organization, he was "personally deploying and personally commanding" policy.[27] At other times, this language was dropped.

For a number of weeks, Xi disappeared altogether from public view, much like Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping did during crises, only reappearing when they were able to take charge again.

For a period in late January, Xi handed responsibility for the crisis to Premier Li. Although this made logistical sense — as head of government, Li is theoretically in charge of the daily operations of

agencies — it was a rare retreat from a leader who has made sure he steers every important party and policymaking entity.

Premier Li convened medical experts to prepare a briefing for Xi on his return from Myanmar and Yunnan. Li was the first leader to visit Wuhan itself, just a week later. He was also tasked with ensuring that localities did not fabricate the number of infections in their areas — an issue that had hobbled China's response to the SARS crisis in 2003. On 24 March, Li warned local officials that "openness and transparency means reporting each case as discovered. There cannot be any cover ups or misreports."[28]

While Xi and Li drifted in and out of the picture in public during the crisis, the PLA and PAP were involved from the moment the CDC declared the virus a national emergency.

In early February, Xi referred to the battle against the crisis as "the people's war", a term of art in China which relates to a whole-of-society approach to both civil and military conflict. "In this whole-of-society approach, civilians, militia and the PLA all play a part," writes Charles Lyons Jones.[29]

PLA soldier in Beijing, 2020 (Image: Bruno Abreu/Flickr)

In Chinese, the character for plague[30] sounds similar to the character for military campaign.[31] From the moment of the PLA's mobilisation, in Xi's statements and elsewhere, the official narrative of the COVID-19 crisis took on strong war-like undertones. Aside from treating the emergency as a military campaign, numerous war analogies — such as

The battle over the coronavirus in China was never just about public health. For the CCP, like everything, it was and remains primarily a contest of politics.

talk of defensive battles, total war, and struggle — were commonly used in the official media.[32]

The battle over the coronavirus in China was never just about public health. For the CCP, like everything, it was and remains primarily a contest of politics, in which the party-state benchmarks itself against other governing systems, especially the world's most powerful democracy, and its superpower rival, the US.

Whereas the CCP once habitually described the party-state according to its unique 'Chinese' characteristics, Xi has struck a more messianic note in office. Unlike his predecessors, he has promoted what he calls the 'China solution' as a kind of a la carte statist model that foreigners can borrow from to develop their own governing systems. Western democracies, primarily the US, have long sold their model overseas. Xi has made it clear that China intends to compete.

As soon as infections began to fall at home, Beijing's diplomatic network was activated to offer versions of the 'China solution' to the coronavirus, convening video conferences with Pacific nations ministers and seeding YouTube with Arabic-language broadcasts for the Middle East.[33] Beijing also airlifted tonnes of masks and other medical equipment to scores of countries across the world.

EMBRACING VICTORY

By mid-April, Beijing felt confident enough about the declining rate of infections in Wuhan to lift the blockade on the city. Given that it had been the epicentre of the crisis only two months earlier, it was a symbolic declaration of victory. The propaganda campaign that followed, along the lines of how China beat the virus, had two target audiences: one at home, and the other overseas.

Confirmed cases worldwide via Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center, screenshot 20 July 2020

One may have worked. The other, directed at foreign countries, often backfired, especially in developed nations. The political and propaganda system, accustomed to deploying tried and tested methods in a largely controlled environment when facing inwards, often misfires abroad.

The political and propaganda system, accustomed to deploying tried and tested methods in a largely controlled environment when facing inwards, often misfires abroad.

The party always gives priority to propaganda work, especially at a time of crisis. In Xi's February article in Qiushi, an entire section was given over to the need to "control the narrative" of the unfolding drama and keeping the "positive effects" of the party's work at the forefront. The article included an emphasis on the party centre's decisions, positive stories of heroism, and the redirection of attention towards other, unrelated policy objectives, such as poverty elimination. President Xi also emphasised the need for China to present a united face to the world.

By the time the Qiushi article was published, the relative openness that had prevailed in both the traditional media and on the internet in the opening stages of the crisis was coming to an end. The early period of chaos and candour was noteworthy nonetheless.

In one respect, the early period of chaos simply represented the day-to-day bureaucratic imperatives that prevail at the centre and at the local level. The local authorities are responsible for controlling the media in their own patch. At the time of the outbreak, however, Wuhan had little ability to manage the national media and bloggers who flooded the city in January and February.

In the initial stages, the central government may have appreciated the deluge of unfiltered public information it was getting from Wuhan, as the centre was sceptical of dispatches it was receiving from its city officials. The unfiltered intelligence also helped the party's central apparatus to compile dossiers for the investigations they were about to launch into the localities themselves. In the pre-Xi Jinping era, parts of the media were occasionally allowed to play a watchdog role, especially if they were rooting out local corruption.

Much of the Chinese propaganda ostensibly directed at foreign countries is, of course, for domestic consumption. Xi's extolling of the 'China solution', along with the country's rising power and wealth, has exponentially elevated praise and advocacy in local propaganda organs of the benefits of party rule. In the words of prominent Chinese scholar Wang Xiaohong, democratic governments are characterised by division and inefficiency, and "endless power transitions and social chaos". In China, by contrast, "the new type of political party system has overcome all sorts of problems that the old [one] can't overcome."[34]

Much of the Chinese propaganda ostensibly directed at foreign countries is, of course, for domestic consumption.

This same message, however, landed with a thud overseas. China had received international aid in the early stages of the pandemic, which it had asked the donor countries not to publicise. When the aid began flowing in the opposite direction — from China to many countries and cities around the world, including to the US and Europe — the Chinese donors demanded that the recipients highlight their generosity.

China's behaviour subsequently prompted backlash of varying intensity from numerous countries. Issues of contention included Chinese criticism of nations for their handling of the crisis; the alleged spreading of conspiracy theories by foreign ministries about the origins of the virus; Beijing's initial belligerent rejection of calls by Australia for an independent inquiry into mismanagement in Wuhan; China's mistreatment of foreigners within its borders, especially its African population in Guangdong; and the state's often over-the-top 'mask diplomacy'. Chinese ambassadors on three continents were called in by their host countries for official complaints about their or their

government's behaviour. There were exceptions. China received praise in a number of European countries, such as Italy, Bulgaria, and Serbia.

CONCLUSIONS

The Chinese system proved susceptible to getting the country, and later the world, into the COVID-19 crisis. That same system was also instrumental in getting China out. It does not follow, however, as Beijing has suggested, that China's handling of the emergency provides a model for the rest of the world.

Although some have argued that particular governing systems are better suited than others to handle a pandemic, the evidence does not bear that out. Some democracies, including Taiwan, South Korea, Australia, Denmark, and New Zealand, did comparatively well, despite some outbreaks of new clusters. Others, such as the US, the UK, Spain, and Italy, floundered, racking up large death tolls and infection rates.

If Beijing had been open about its own early failings, instead of triumphantly promoting its later achievements, China's global image might have been enhanced by the COVID-19 crisis.

The true divide has not been between democratic and authoritarian states, nor between the West and Asia, or any other region. In general, competent states with intact, functioning institutions handled the initial challenge of the new coronavirus better than weak or frayed states with debilitated and divided systems.

The inbuilt incentives in the Chinese system, both generally, and especially in January itself, all mitigated against openness when the new coronavirus was first detected in December 2019. Likewise, the unparalleled ability of the system to mobilise resources, enforce quarantines, and trace the contacts of infected individuals helped get China, and its economy, back on its feet faster than many other countries. Other nations, however, achieved similar results without ditching democratic principles, rather than resorting to the harshness of China's quarantine regime.

If Beijing had been open about its own early failings, instead of triumphantly promoting its later achievements, China's global image might have been enhanced by the COVID-19 crisis. Outside China, however, for the most part, the opposite is the case.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

David Tang assisted with the research on this paper.

NOTES

1 Wang Yi, "Following Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy To Build a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind Through International Cooperation Against COVID-19", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China, 19 April 2020, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/activities_663312/t1771257.shtml.

2 Hu Xijin, "If Zhong Nanshan Had Not Broken the News, Would the Wuhan Health Commission have Continued to Hide the Infection of 15 Medical Personnel?", Fenghuang News, 21 January 2020, http://news.ifeng.com/c/7tPeT5QRTsG.

3 Austin Ramzy et al., "The Illness Now Has a Name, COVID-19", The New York Times, 11 February 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/11/world/asia/coronavirus-china.html.

4 Rebecca Ratcliffe and Michael Standaert, "China Coronavirus: Mayor of Wuhan Admits Mistakes", The Guardian, 28 January 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/science/2020/jan/27/china-coronavirus-who-to-hold-special-meeting-in-beijing-as-death-toll-jumps.

5 "Wuhan Party Chief Admits City Should Have Acted Sooner", The Straits Times, 1 February 2020, https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/wuhan-party-chief-admits-city-should-have-acted-sooner.

6 Amanda Hodge, "Praise for Chinese Doctors who Coronavirus Blew Whistle [sic]", The Australian, 31 January 2020, https://www.theaustralian.com.au/world/praise-for-chinese-doctors-who-coronavirus-blew-whistle/news-story/eb47484900dbd409099e20784a9dda96; Wuhan Internet Police Inspection and Law Enforcement, "Eight Rumour Spreaders Were Investigated and Dealt with According to Law", 1 January 2020, https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1654520375675083909&wfr=spider&for=pc.

7 Wang Han et al., "Unknown Causes of Pneumonia Discovered in Wuhan, Experts from National Health Commission Arrive in Wuhan", China Central Television, 31 December 2019, http://www.chinanews.com/sh/2019/12-31/9047818.shtml.

8 "China Didn't Warn Public of Likely Pandemic For 6 Key Days", The Associated Press, 15 April 2020, https://apnews.com/68a9e1b91de4ffc166acd6012d82c2f9.

9 Huang Yanzhong, "China's Public Health Response to the COVID-19 Outbreak", China Leadership Monitor, 1 June 2020, https://www.prcleader.org/huang.

10 Ananth Krishnan, "Coronavirus: Wuhan Initially Downplayed Crisis, Says China Expert Dali Yang", The Hindu, 2 April 2020, https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/interview/coronavirus-wuhan-initially-downplayed-crisis-says-china-expert-dali-yang/article31240608.ece.

11 Lara Zhou, "Chinese President Xi Jinping Wraps Up Myanmar Visit with String of Infrastructure Deals, Including Strategic Indian Ocean Port", South China Morning Post, 18 January 2020, https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3046694/chinese-president-xi-jinping-wraps-myanmar-visit-string; "China Coronavirus: Lockdown Measures Rise Across Hubei Province", BBC News, 23 January 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-51217455.

12 "Li Keqiang Chairs State Council Standing Committee Meeting to Further Direct Disease Control and Prevention Efforts Towards the Novel Coronavirus", Government of China, 20 January 2020, http://www.gov.cn/premier/2020-01/20/content_5471058.htm.

13 "Seven Politburo Standing Committee Meetings in 54 Days, Understanding China's Epidemic Prevention and Control", China Central Television, 20 March 2020, http://m.news.cctv.com/2020/03/19/ARTILI23zRWTQXgEaV568Zz0200319.shtml;"Unravelling the Politburo Standing Committee Meetings: The General Secretary Has Only One Vote", Sohu News, 3 March 2014, http://news.sohu.com/20140303/n395965636.shtml.

14 "Chinese Communist Party Central Committee Politburo Standing Committee Meetings — Summary", Communist Party Member Website, 14 May 2020, http://www.12371.cn/special/zzjcwwyhhy/.

15 Liu Yang, "Xi Jinping Gives Important Instructions on the Outbreak of Pneumonia Caused by New Coronavirus", Xinhua, 20 January 2020, http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2020-01/20/content_5471057.htm;
Li Runfa, "Li Keqiang Chairs State Council Standing Committee

Meeting to Further Direct Disease Control and Prevention Efforts Towards the Novel Coronavirus", Government of China, 20 January 2020, http://www.gov.cn/premier/2020-01/20/content_5471058.htm.

16 William Zheng, "Coronavirus is China's Fastest-Spreading Public Health Crisis, President Xi Jinping Says', South China Morning Post, 23 February 2020, https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3051988/coronavirus-chinas-fastest-spreading-public-health-crisis.

17 "'Without Total Victory, There Are No Easy Words of Success' — Focus on the Prevention and Control of COVID-19", China Pictorial, 1 April 2020, http://www.rmhb.com.cn/zt/zt2020/20200116_fyyq/202004/t20200401_800199434.html.

18 Paul Mozur, Raymond Zhong and Aaron Krolik, "In Coronavirus Fight, China Gives Citizens a Color Code, With Red Flags", The New York Times, 1 March 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/01/business/china-coronavirus-surveillance.html.

19 Aditi Bhandari and Simon Scarr, "Reopening a Megacity", Reuters, 4 June 2020, https://graphics.reuters.com/HEALTH-CORONAVIRUS/WUHAN/rlgpdkxzavo/index.html.

20 The China Property Management Institute (CPMI), like all other legal civil organisations in the PRC, operates under extensive oversight from the government. The CPMI also has a party branch embedded within it.

21 China Property Management Institute, "Proposal on Fully Ensuring the Good Performance of Property Management in Combatting the Novel Coronavirus", Leju News, 28 January 2020, http://news.leju.com/2020-01-28/6627742282454187863.shtml.

22 China Property Management Institute, "Hundreds of Thousands of People in Property Management in Wuhan Fighting on the Frontlines: Supplies Needed Urgently", China Property Management Institute, 26 January 2020, http://www.ecpmi.org.cn/NewsInfo.aspx?NewsID=9371.

23 Thanks to Chris Buckley of the New York Times, who was in Wuhan, for this observation.

24 "The Enlightenment of Property Management During the Novel Coronavirus: Buying Property Depends on the Property Management, the Last Mile is No Longer a Concept', Times Finance, 11 February 2020, http://kuaibao.qq.com/s/20200211A0HB1T00?refer=spider.

25 Li Feng, "Disease Prevention in a Community of 300,000 People", Xinhua, 11 February 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/local/2020-02/11/c_1125556922.htm.

26 "About Qiushi Journal", Qiushi Journal, 27 March 2014, http://english.qstheory.cn/aboutqs.htm; Xi Jinping, "Speech at the Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee to Study the Response to the New Coronavirus Pneumonia, 3 February 2020", Qiushi Journal, 15 February 2020, http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2020-02/15/c_1125572832.htm.

27 "The Secret Behind Changing Xi Jinping's 'Personally Commanding'", Radio France Internationale, 31 January 2020, http://www.rfi.fr/cn/%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD/20200131-%E4%B9%A0%E8%BF%91%E5%B9%B3%E6%88%91%E4%BA%B2%E8%87%AA%E6%8C%87%E6%8C%A5%E8%A2%AB%E4%BF%AE%E6%94%B9%E7%9A%84%E7%A7%98%E5%AF%86; Li Yuan, "Personally Deploying and Commanding, Thorough Directions and Instructions: Xi's Virus-Fighting Time", Communist Party of China News, 6 February 2020, http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2020/0206/c164113-31573729.html.

28 Cao Zhibin, "Li Keqiang: All Localities Must Seek Truth from Facts and Openly and Transparently Release Information on the Epidemic Situation', Government of China, 24 March 2020, http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2020-03/24/content_5494917.htm.

29 Charlie Lyons Jones, "The Chinese Communist Party's 'People's War' on Covid-19", The Strategist, 6 April 2020, https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/the-chinese-communist-partys-peoples-war-on-covid-19/.

30 疫

31 役

32 保卫战, 阻击战, 全民战疫, 斗争. Thanks to David Tang for these observations.

33 Edward Wong, Matthew Rosenberg and Julian E. Barnes, "Chinese Agents Helped Spread Messages That Sowed Virus Panic in U.S., Officials Say", The New York Times, 22 April 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/22/us/politics/coronavirus-china-disinformation.html.

34 Wang Xiaohong, "New Political Party System Contributes Chinese Wisdom to the Development of Political Parties and Systems Worldwide", China Radio International, 8 March 2018, http://news.cri.cn/20180308/962b9850-3a41-45ac-57c0-a4afdaa2d9e4.html; Huang Zheping, 'Xi Jinping Says China's Authoritarian System Can be a Model for the World', Quartz, 09 March 2018, https://qz.com/1225347/xi-jinping-says-chinas-one-party-authoritarian-system-can-be-a-model-for-the-world/.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Richard McGregor
@mcgregorrichard

Richard McGregor is a Senior Fellow at the Lowy Institute. He is an award-winning journalist and author who has reported on the top-level politics and economies of east Asia, primarily China and Japan. He was the Financial Times bureau chief in Beijing and Shanghai between 2000 and 2009, and headed the Washington office for four years from 2011. Prior to joining the FT, he was the chief political correspondent and China and Japan correspondent for The Australian. His book *The Party: The Secret World of China's Communist Rulers* won numerous awards, including the Asia Society in New York award in 2011 for best book on Asia. His latest book is the Lowy Institute Paper (Penguin Special) *Xi Jinping: The* Backlash, which looks at how Xi Jinping's authoritarianism has sparked a backlash at home and abroad. Richard was a fellow at the Wilson Center in 2015 and a visiting scholar at the Sigur Center at George Washington University in 2016. He has lectured widely, in the United States and elsewhere, on Chinese politics and Asia.

LOWY INSTITUTE

31 Bligh Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Tel. +61 2 8238 9000
Fax +61 2 8238 9005

lowyinstitute.org
@LowyInstitute