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SARS: China's Chernobyl or Much Ado About Nothing?

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The outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) provided China's new leaders, President and General Secretary Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao, with their first serious test since completing the leadership transfer in March 2003. Before they could develop an effective profile of their own they were knocked off course but SARS may provide them with an unprecedented opportunity to establish themselves as modern leaders concerned for the welfare of their people. It probably never occurred to Hu and Wen as they surveyed the policy minefields ahead that their first test would come from the health sector. It is even more unlikely that they realized that it would be a health problem with international consequences that would cause the party's credibility to be called into question.

A number of writers have speculated on the consequences of SARS for China's political evolution and opinions have ranged from the very optimistic that it would usher in significant systemic change to those who see next to no long-term impact. After Hu and Wen won their "war on SARS"¹ the specter of a "Chernobyl factor" that would produce dramatic systemic change looks a remote possibility and "old politics" began to reassert itself. The different factions in the party began to jockey to take credit for the "victory" while the party as a whole began to extol its virtues in taming the viral beast. The traditional propaganda system soon found its footing to portray the struggle in terms of patriotism and turned out little ditties such as "Angels in White Coats" that pay homage to the nurses and doctors of China who, moved by love of the party and concern for the people, have worked tirelessly. Normality even returned in relations with Taiwan. Having allowed a delegation from the World Health Organization to go to Taiwan for humanitarian reasons, China made sure that this would not lead to Taiwan gaining WHO observer status and, as usual, killed such a proposal in the committee stage.

This seems to suggest that the effects of SARS on the political system are minimal at best. This may underestimate the impact over the longer term. The final impact and outcome depends on whether the virus returns in winter and spring of 2003-04 and how the government deals with it should this occur. However, Hu and Wen's approach from mid-April on greatly enhanced their standing and will allow them to use SARS to push forward their own political agenda. Unlike Jiang Zemin (the former general secretary) and his supporters who looked irrelevant and out of touch, they

appeared business-like, open and willing to adopt modern management techniques. This should consolidate their position within elite politics. With the outbreak contained, Hu and Wen can concentrate on promoting social development to accompany economic growth, enhancing accountability within bureaucratic ranks, and restructuring the media to serve better the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) long-term objectives. They will also need to address the lack of trust among the urban elite in party "infallibility" that the cover-up and tardy response heightened.

This chapter looks first at the politics of SARS covering the questions of why it took the system so long to react thus inducing a crisis that may have been unnecessary. Second, it looks at five areas where lessons need to be learned and how the Chinese leadership has responded. By way of conclusion, it looks at how the policy response to SARS may help the policy agenda of the new leadership.

The Politics of SARS: New Disease, New Leaders, Old System

One of the most pressing questions to be resolved is why it took from November until mid-April before the Chinese leadership took decisive action. In part, this entails trying to understand who knew what when. A number of factors both systemic and specific contributed to the situation. The fact that China was undergoing a major leadership transition that started formally in November 2002 at the Sixteenth Party Congress and only ended in March 2003 with the Tenth National People's Congress meant that leaders were not only preoccupied with political jockeying but also no-one wanted to be the bearer of bad tidings. Second, leadership obsession with social stability and economic development meant that there was no incentive to release information about the disease for fear that it might cause panic or might slow down economic growth through reduced consumption or investor flight.² Third, there were strong bureaucratic disincentives. The Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) is a weak player institutionally and at the local levels is subordinate to party organs. Thus, if local party leaders receive and transmit messages to downplay the disease, there is little that health officials can do. In addition, there is a lack of clarity about who to report to and under what circumstances. In accordance with Chinese law, epidemics fall under the classification of state secrets and the localities do not have the power to make public comments about disease outbreaks before this has

been announced by the national level authorities. There is no incentive for local officials to report bad news before they have a clear signal to do so. This encourages optimistic reporting and the suppression of bad news. As discussed below the interplay of these factors led to a delay in timely reporting and exacerbated the impact of the disease causing precisely the kind of domestic and international crisis that the system is designed to prevent.

A Local Affair?

It is not easy to identify a new virus and this must be especially difficult in South China where SARS originated.³ The area has been the point of origin for a number of flu outbreaks and the close proximity of livestock with humans and eating habits make it ripe for producing new strains of disease. Thus, with presumably mutating strains occurring each year, how do local health officials decide what is important and what might become a dangerous new viral strain? In this context it is interesting to note that the World Health Organization (WHO) congratulated the local health authorities on identifying the new virus rather quickly. Indeed a researcher (Dr. Zhang Nanshan) from the Guangzhou Institute of Respiratory Disease rejected the idea that “human delay” had been involved. He pointed out that while the first case had been detected in December, it took some time for the scale of the infections to become apparent before it broke out on a large-scale in Guangzhou. According to this account once Guangdong had ascertained its seriousness, at the end of January, the local authorities promptly reported this to the MOPH and the central authorities.⁴ This contains elements of truth but politics did intervene to ensure that knowledge was not shared widely enough.

The first known patient actually caught the disease on November 16, 2002 in Foshan⁵ around the time that the new party leadership was settling itself into Guangdong. The new party secretary was Zhang Dejiang (formerly party secretary of Zhejiang) who is considered to be a close supporter of Jiang Zemin and who promoted his ideas on the “Three Represents”⁶ and of Jiang’s paradigm that “social stability” was paramount and that economic growth matters over all else. This was not a predisposition that lent itself to thinking about social issues and public welfare.

It seems certain that Guangdong authorities knew about the disease by early January at the latest. From December 15 the number of patients with a form of atypical pneumonia had been increasing in Heyuan City (about 100 miles northeast of Guangzhou). The provincial center for disease control sent a team to investigate and on January 3 they sent a fax to calm the local population that was published in the next day's edition of the Heyuan News.⁷ This produced a brief flurry of reporting before Guangdong authorities stepped in to prevent any further coverage. It seems that the main motivation for stopping any further reporting was to ensure that the Chinese New Year Holiday at the end of January would not be disturbed and that citizens would continue to spend.⁸ However, the limited press coverage that was allowed was designed to ridicule the idea that there was anything untoward happening. The articles followed government claims that "there is no epidemic" and that the idea that there was an identified virus on the loose was "rumor". Further the explanation given was that the illness was the "result of changes in the weather leading to a decline in people's immune systems."⁹

Publicly there was silence until February 11, when after outbreaks in Zhongshan and Guangzhou, a press conference was convened to still public concern. The provincial health authorities had informed doctors in Guangzhou that something was afoot and that they should isolate patients and wear masks but the information was not made public.¹⁰ On February 3, the Guangdong health department issued a notice on "preventing and treating the unclear pneumonia" and demanded that the illness be managed temporarily as a B-type infectious disease.¹¹ By early February, although Dr. Zhang mentions late-January, authorities in Beijing were being made aware of the situation in Guangdong. The Guangdong party committee and the provincial government filed a report to the MOPH on February 7 and on February 9, the Ministry sent a vice-Minister (Ma Xiaowei) with a team to investigate the situation. Thus, officials in the State Council certainly knew about the situation by this time if not before. In fact, Guangdong Party Secretary, Zhang Dejiang, is a member of the Politburo and thus should he have considered the issue important enough had ample opportunity to bring the matter to the attention of China's highest leadership. There are claims that the February 7 provincial report was read by members of the Standing Committee of the Politburo.¹²

Citizen concern expressed through the rapidly expanding new technology of instant messaging forced the Guangdong leadership to make some kind of public acknowledgement. Again the response was to acknowledge that while there may have been a problem, it was not serious and there was no longer anything to worry about. It is not known whether people sympathetic leaked the contents of the report but on February 8 the message “there is a fatal flu in Guangzhou” was sent 40 million times and 41 million times the next day and 45 million times on February 10 according to Guangdong Mobile.¹³ With party control over information systems breaking down, there had to be a response.

On February 11, Party Secretary Zhang asked health officials to hold a press conference to put a stop to the unofficial communications that were taking place. The same day the *Guangzhou Daily* ran a story that the virus had infected over 300 people and that five had died. There are claims that the paper had evaded the party secretary’s ban on reporting by seeking permission from the provincial governor, Huang Huahua.¹⁴ If true, there are overtones of factional struggle in this as the party secretary, Zhang, is a protégé of Jiang Zemin whereas the governor is thought to be close to Hu Jintao. The press conference officially announced the disease for the first time but again sought to dispel any public panic by stating clearly that the disease was under control. This was a regular pattern to be repeated until April 20. Each time the authorities were compelled to release information they claimed that all was under control. The fact that the number of infections jumped from just over 300 to nearly 800 by the end of the month with 31 deaths would suggest otherwise. However, it seems that the panic buying in Guangzhou and elsewhere had alerted the Ministry of Public Security and it had told local officials to concentrate on social stability at the time of the press conference.

When journalists asked local health official, Huang Qingdao, why they had not reported the outbreak earlier, he replied, “atypical pneumonia is not a disease we’re legally required to report, so we didn’t feel it was necessary to make it public. Now because it has had a big social impact, we decided to make it public.”¹⁵ This is a point worth considering as it helps explain the predicament for local officials should they wish to take action on new diseases. Not surprisingly the legal background is confusing and different laws contradict one another. The 1988 State Secrets Law is supplemented by a

1996 set of implementing regulations concerning health related issues.¹⁶ The 1989 Law on the Prevention and Treatment of Epidemics is also important. According to the 1996 implementing regulations SARS would have fallen under the category of highest level secret (*jia lei*) as it was an infectious disease such as viral hepatitis that covered a wide area.¹⁷ As a result, it could not be disclosed until the MOPH or those organs authorized by the Ministry had made the disclosure. This would mean that without Ministry disclosure any local official talking publicly about the disease would be liable for prosecution. This is a disincentive for transparency to say the least.

This problem was picked up in a May 13 *China Daily* article. The article referred to the 1989 law on treatment and prevention of epidemics and pointed out that although SARS had reached national proportions by March, it was still the local levels that were dealing with the disease. This created a problem as only the State Council and the MOPH were empowered to classify a new contagious disease. This restricted the capacity of the local levels as they could only use the law as a reference point but could not undertake the necessary policy measures. Because the disease appeared to be limited to Guangdong (one administrative jurisdiction), this did not trigger a national response with disastrous consequences. It was not until April 8 when it was long clear that this was no longer a “local” phenomenon that the MOPH listed SARS as a statutory epidemic.

Following the press conference despite attempts to play things down there was more reporting but still it was a month before more figures were published officially. Party Secretary Zhang tried to keep a lid on things and on February 14 ordered provincial authorities to educate the public to “voluntarily uphold social stability, not believe in rumors, not spread rumors” and to focus on the objective of the Sixteenth Party Congress to build China into a moderately well-off society (*xiaokang shehui*). The *Southern Daily* claimed that police had ordered operators of leading websites to carry only positive reports on dealing with the disease.¹⁸

A National And Global Problem

Thus, bureaucratic and other factors delayed Guangdong’s response and similar factors also affected Beijing. While it is clear that central leaders must have known about the disease in February, the initial response was very slow. In part, this may have been

because of underestimation of its impact and the thought that it was localized in the south. However, even as more information became available, no senior official would have been in much of a position to undertake action as they were preparing for the National People's Congress meeting that was due to open on March 5. As normal, reporting at the time of Congress was even more tightly controlled than usual and the media was required to present only positive news and concentrate on the events at the Congress itself. This was even more the case in 2003 as the Congress was to mark the final stage of the formal leadership transition from Jiang Zemin to Hu Jintao. Thus, on March 9 officials from the MOPH met with the heads of major Beijing hospitals to inform them about SARS but told them that this was not for public distribution and certainly should not be repeated to the media.¹⁹

This period of delay for the Congress was fatal in terms of preventing the spread of the disease in the Chinese capital. At the Congress a group of 30 delegates from Guangdong did table a motion calling for the establishment of a nationwide epidemic prevention network but the motion was not acted upon. This may have been a way for delegates to try to register their concern. However, forces had been set in motion that would put the Chinese leadership under sufficient pressure to shift their position and to begin to deal with the SARS epidemic.

On March 15, three days before the NPC concluded its meeting, the World Health Organization (WHO) issued its first global warning about SARS but the Propaganda Department instructed Chinese media not to report it.²⁰ After the Congress, things began to change but it took international pressure and domestic dissent to force China's leaders to undertake action. It is unlikely that without the pressure from international organizations such as the WHO and the postponement or cancellation of high profile events such as the World Economic Forum China Business Summit and the Rolling Stones concert the leadership would have changed their approach of assuring in public that all was under control while seeking internally to cut off the spread of the virus.

On March 26, the authorities admitted that SARS was being dealt with in Beijing hospitals but the news was restricted to a small mention on inside pages of newspapers and contained the upbeat view that "imported atypical pneumonia in our city has been effectively controlled."²¹ On March 28, China finally informed the WHO that it would

classify SARS as a category B disease meaning that from now on provincial authorities were obliged to notify central authorities of any cases. Experts from WHO had arrived in Beijing on March 23 and on April 2, WHO issued a travel advisory warning people against travel to Guangdong and Hong Kong. The impact of SARS was becoming hard to ignore, yet it would still take Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao another two weeks before they could lay the ground for a dramatic shift in policy.

On April 2, new premier Wen Jiabao presided over a meeting of the State Council Executive Committee that heard a report from the MOPH that told them that SARS had “already been brought under control.”²² This misleading report may explain why Minister Zhang Wenkang was eventually dismissed as yet again it became quickly clear that the disease was far from under control. The meeting also set up a leadership small group under Zhang to oversee the work of SARS control and to manage coordination work with the WHO. Some report that Beijing Municipal authorities and the MOPH were aware of the problem but suppressed the information and thought they could deal with it. For example, on March 27 a leading Beijing virologist warned senior MOPH officials but was told that they were aware of the problem but could not act as they had to negotiate with other government departments.²³

In this new position, Minister Zhang held a press conference on April 3 that repeated the notion that all was under control and that the number of cases in Beijing was very small: only 12 with three deaths. This was enough for a retired army doctor, Jiang Yanyong, who knew that in one Beijing military hospital alone (no. 309) there were 60 patients and seven deaths. His ire and that of his colleagues at the cover-up led him to fax CCTV and Phoenix TV from Hong Kong with his complaint. The information was ignored but given to *Der Spiegel* and *Time* Magazine who put it on their website leading to a deluge of critical articles in the foreign press that were read by educated urban Chinese or were translated into Chinese and circulated.²⁴ In light of these information flows, it was becoming increasingly difficult for the Chinese authorities to maintain the stance that there was a small problem but that basically all was under control.

On April 4 at Wen’s behest, vice-Premier Wu Yi visited the Chinese Center for Disease Control where she delivered a strong message that health work was very important and that “top priority” should be given to controlling SARS and implementing

preventive measures.²⁵ As a result the Director of the Center, Li Liming apologized to a press conference that excluded foreigners stating that China's "medical departments and the mass media" had suffered from poor coordination.²⁶ However, the Mainland media did not print the apology.

Things began to unfold more rapidly. On April 7, Premier Wen himself visited the Center and while the public reporting was positive, it seems that he criticized the military for not reporting on SARS cases and called on people to start telling the truth.²⁷ On April 13 at a national meeting on SARS prevention, Wen said that although the situation was "under effective control" the situation remained "extremely grave". Rather than being a nuisance in the way of economic progress, he announced that SARS "directly affects the overall situation of reform, development and stability" and called for better cooperation between the various departments.²⁸ The latter could also be taken as a criticism of the military system and its reluctance to divulge statistics to the civilian authorities. On April 13 while Hu Jintao was still visiting Guangdong,²⁹ Wen oversaw an emergency meeting of the State Council and warned that the country's economy, international image and social stability could be damaged and that "the overall situation remains grave."

The new sense of urgency and the notion that a new approach had to be undertaken was confirmed at a key Politburo meeting on April 17. This meeting marked a watershed in senior leadership response to SARS. Effectively it acknowledged that China had been lying and called on officials to report periodically to the public (daily reporting had begun on April 1), not to delay reporting and not to cover up the situation. It also called for greater international and local cooperation and the exchange of experiences on limiting the disease. It linked combating SARS to the policy line of the party congress calling on each party committee and government to recognize the extreme importance of SARS work and to carry out prevention work through the realization of the "Three Represents."³⁰ The following day it was reported that a new task force had been set up to oversee SARS work now under the leadership of Beijing Party Secretary and Politburo member Liu Qi.³¹ Its deputies were Zhang Wenkang, Minister of Public Health, Meng Xuenong, Beijing Mayor, and Wang Qian, deputy director of the PLA General Logistics

department.³² The latter appointment clearly highlighted the need for better military-civilian cooperation.

The appointment of Zhang and Meng as deputies made it all the more surprising when they did not turn up for the April 20 press conference that was run instead by vice-Minister of Health Gao Qiang.³³ The conference was a public turning point in the Chinese leadership's attitude to dealing with SARS. Gao acknowledged that work had been lacking and that the fragmented jurisdiction over medical facilities in the Capital had meant that accurate information had not been collected. In particular, he noted that it was difficult for municipal authorities to gather information on the epidemic from military-run hospitals but noted that Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao had remarked upon this. As a result, they had decided to put epidemic prevention work of all organizations whether party, government or military under the leadership of the Beijing Municipal Government.³⁴ He announced a number of other new measures. Unlike at Chinese New year, it was now recognized that it was not a good idea to have tens of millions of people crossing the country for the seven-day May Day vacation, which was cut to one day. Supervision teams were to be sent out to investigate the situation in key provinces and special concern was raised to prevent the disease from spreading into rural areas where the health system was liable to collapse. A special medical aid fund was to be set up to provide subsidies for those unable to cover the costs. The budget was to be shared between central and lower-level governments.

More dramatic than the press conference was the revelation that Minister of Public Health, Zhang Wenkang, and Beijing Mayor, Meng Xuenong, had been relieved of their posts in a public display of ministerial responsibility for the mishandling of SARS. While not unprecedented, this was rightly interpreted as a dramatic move to acknowledge culpability, restore public trust but not to undermine the party's credibility for having exacerbated the problems in the first place. To show the seriousness with which the leadership now viewed the "war", vice-premier, Wu Yi, was placed in charge of the Ministry and was entrusted to oversee policy. On April 23 a central command center was established headed by Wu with a budget of 2 billion *yuan*.³⁵ Hainan Party Secretary, Wang Qishan, was appointed acting Mayor. Ms. Wu is an experienced politician in China with good connections and a reputation for getting things done. She

had worked with former Premier Zhu on WTO-entry terms and was considered not only to be well versed in Beijing politics but also had the trust of the foreign community.³⁶ Wang is one of the party princelings being the son-in-law of Yao Yilin but has an important reform track record of his own dating back to 1980 and covering rural and financial sector work as well as provincial leadership. On April 30 he conducted a news conference that was screened live on television giving the impression of a new-style, straight talking, modern leader. He acknowledged that the health care system was strained to cope with the disease and that citizens had been panicked by the outbreak of the disease and that much needed to be done to ensure social stability. One of his first acts as acting mayor had been to order the building of a new hospital to deal with SARS, a hospital that was completed in record time.

However, the personnel changes did have a taint of factional intrigue attached to them. While it is clear that Minister Zhang had mismanaged developments, Mayor Meng seems to have been made a scapegoat. There were suggestions that Jiang Zemin would only accept the removal of Zhang, reportedly his personal physician, if Meng who is thought to be close to Hu Jintao was also removed. While the mayor stepping down to take ministerial responsibility may seem correct, in the Chinese political system it is the party secretary who exerts supreme power and nothing can happen without his or her agreement. This would suggest that Liu Qi as party secretary would have been a more fitting sacrificial lamb. However, this was not possible for at least two reasons. First, Liu is a member of the Politburo and thus too important to be touched. Second, the party had tried consistently to absolve itself of blame, as in other incidents. Thus, it was important to dismiss the mayor, a government official, while leaving the party beyond culpability. Liu seems to have got away with a self-criticism that in highly unusual fashion was reported in the official media on April 21. Liu acknowledged that he had provided inaccurate and late data and failed to contain the spread of SARS. He stated “There have been obvious deficiencies in our work, I take responsibility of leadership and make a sincere self-criticism.”³⁷ At the same meeting, the Head of the party’s Organization Department criticized the municipality for its poor work thus justifying the personnel changes.³⁸

The dismissal of these two high profile figures was accompanied by reports of 120 or more local officials being dismissed for failures in SARS work.³⁹ However, there was one very noticeable absentee from the list of dismissals, Guangdong Party Secretary, Zhang Dejiang who had overseen much of the original cover-up. Again the need to protect the name of the party probably aided Zhang but the fact that he is a close supporter of Jiang Zemin must have helped. His survival was ensured by the upbeat account that WHO officials gave on April 4 of the handling of the disease in Guangdong. They congratulated Guangdong authorities for identifying the new disease and generally absolved them of their slow response.⁴⁰ This was subsequently used in late-May as part of a counter-offensive to justify China's actions.

The energetic approach of Hu and Wen and the new appointments ushered in a brief period of unexpected cooperation and openness of reporting about SARS in the media. This not only helped warn the public of the dangers and allow them to take sensible precautions but also indicated to other officials that they had to take SARS work seriously or face punishment. As in Guangdong, the disease peaked and new infections began to come down, helped by the stricter monitoring and reporting put into effect.

Restoring Politics As Usual

At the time, a number of observers were moved to optimism that this response might mark a fundamental change in China's political system and way of conducting business. However, the remarkable events were soon accompanied by conflicting signals and the reemergence of "politics as usual". While senior leaders such as Hu and Wen might have been convinced that "politics as usual" would not do, this was not shared by all senior leaders. Nor was it signed onto by many local officials who have become accustomed to particular ways of conducting business that do not include greater openness and transparency and use the latest campaign to pursue their own agendas.

Given that the crisis had domestic origins, it was natural that Hu and Wen would take the lead but their energetic approach contrasted remarkably with that of former President (and still Chair of the Central Military Commission) Jiang Zemin and his supporters. Jiang remained silent and his supporters invisible until April 26 when he met India's Defense Minister, George Fernandez, in Shanghai. His comments seemed

strangely out of line with the national mood, noting that China had achieved notable achievements in containing the disease.⁴¹ His comments were much derided in the various Mainland chatrooms and some suggested uncharitably that Jiang had fled to Shanghai to escape the threat of SARS. It did mark the start, however, of attempts by Jiang and his supporters to take a more visible role in the fight against SARS. His close protégé, Zeng Qinghong went to the Central Party School on April 26 to tell them that it was “extremely important” that a regular teaching and study program be maintained,⁴² this at a time when schools across Beijing were being shut down.

The residual influence of Jiang and his supporters was demonstrated at an April 28 Politburo meeting that again stressed the need to link the struggle against SARS with the need to promote Jiang’s notion of the “Three Represents” and party-building. The economic impact of SARS was also causing concern with decreased consumption that would be exacerbated by the cancellation of the May Day Holiday and the concerns of foreign investors. Thus, SARS was linked to the need to maintain economic development.⁴³ The theme was also taken up by Hu Jintao who on a tour of Sichuan called on cadres to aim for a “double victory” in combating SARS and maintaining economic growth.⁴⁴ The military over which Jiang presided had been a major contributor to the confusion concerning the real state of SARS and its publications remained conspicuously silent. However, in a traditional move, on April 25 Jiang signed an order to send 1,200 army medical personnel to Beijing to help battle SARS. This was clearly intended to restore PLA prestige that had taken a battering in recent weeks both domestically and internationally.

These developments went hand-in-hand with the traditional propaganda system getting to grips with the new demands. While the new campaign was geared to mobilizing people’s support for the struggle against SARS, it was accompanied by more familiar restrictions on reporting. On April 25, the Propaganda Department met under its head Li Changchun to plot a new approach. He acknowledged the predicament that China was in because of SARS and stated that it was “more necessary for us than ever before to enhance our great national spirit.”⁴⁵ The following day, the Propaganda Department highlighted the importance of Jiang’s “Three Represents” in struggling against SARS and called on the nation’s propaganda units to push the “great national spirit” in the struggle

and victory over SARS.⁴⁶ This was more familiar ground and the media began to be filled with patriotic gestures and accounts of individuals struggling against heroic odds and making personal sacrifices to defeat SARS. Traditional CCP language now took over. While the language of Leninism is that of struggle the language of the CCP is that of war and sure enough on May 1, Hu Jintao declared that indeed China was engaged in a “people’s war” against SARS for which the “masses should be mobilized.”⁴⁷ This recourse to traditional propaganda techniques and the tools of mass mobilization disillusioned many who thought that SARS might herald real change but they were effective in restoring party morale and dealing with the epidemic. In fact, Party Secretary, Liu Qi, saw the lifting of the travel advisory ban as a victory for national spirit.⁴⁸

Constraints on the media were soon put back in place and the limited openness around SARS did not spread to other areas, despite optimism caused by the unexpected reporting of a major submarine accident that had resulted in the deaths of 70 sailors. By mid-June, the Propaganda Department was clearly worried that the relaxation might go too far and moved to censure some publications while calling for all publications to stop reporting on sensitive topics.⁴⁹ This included writing stories critical of how Guangdong handled SARS and reporting about Dr. Jiang Yanyong who had brought the government cover-up to international and domestic attention. By the end of June, media outlets and academics had been warned not to analyze how the government had dealt with SARS. This was apparently prompted following the appearance of a sociology professor on China Education Television in early June, who had analyzed systematically government shortcomings.⁵⁰ This was in marked contrast with mid-May when a senior official from the Beijing Municipal Party Committee announced that “media have the right to expose any cover-up or false report on the epidemic situation” and referred positively to Dr. Jiang Yanyong.⁵¹

This followed the general pattern of reluctance to allow open discussion and has even led to those who have reported honestly coming in for criticism and official rebuke. For example, the Guangzhou based Southern Metropolitan News was the first to report on SARS in February but its editors and parent company were censured. The Southern Weekend based in Guangzhou had also earlier run into trouble. It was prevented from reporting about conditions in Shanghai on April 24 and was told that all SARS stories

from outside the province could only be based on official sources such as *Xinhua* and the *People's Daily*.⁵² The openness concerning reporting of SARS did not extend to other infectious diseases such as the spread of Encephalitis B and HIV/AIDS. Further the June 20 edition of *Caijing* magazine was withdrawn from the newsstands for its coverage of SARS and a political corruption scandal that was brewing in Shanghai.⁵³

There were also attempts to exonerate the performance of key individuals and the party more generally. At a press conference on May 30, vice-Minister of Public Health Gao Qiang startled those present by defending sacked Minister Zhang claiming that he was still offering many good suggestions for work, denying that China had covered up the extent of the SARS outbreak and questioning why people were interested in Dr. Jiang, who had sounded the alarm. He had stated "I do not agree that Comrade Zhang Wenkang was relieved of his duties for concealing the situation of the epidemic. The Chinese government did not conceal the truth."⁵⁴ In Gao's view Zhang had simply "lacked sufficient information at the time."⁵⁵

This appears to have been part of a concerted attempt to deflect criticism and push the view that the government and its officials had not acted improperly. Gao blamed the institutional fragmentation of the system for preventing accurate reporting, while others blamed the difficulties in identifying a new disease. The head of the Beijing Propaganda Department (Cai Fuchao) acknowledged that statistics were inaccurate but insisted there was no cover-up. In contrast, he felt that "we have fully ensured the broad masses' right to knowledge of the epidemic and of work in other areas."⁵⁶ It was also reported that Jiang Zemin on a visit to Beijing had been seen drinking tea publicly with Zhang Wenkang. The *Economic Observer* was also apparently censured for criticizing the performance of Zhang and for Gao's attempts to belittle Dr. Jiang.⁵⁷ This appeared to herald a possible rehabilitation for Zhang but at a conference on June 12, Gao was forced to acknowledge that the State Council "made the decision, and the facts have proved that decision was entirely correct."⁵⁸ In Guangdong, officials even suggested that the disease had not originated in China but had been present in the USA in February 2002.⁵⁹

Chinese authorities concerned about the use of new technologies to spread unauthorized views arrested 107 people in the second week of May for sending rumors by text messaging services to mobile phones.⁶⁰ Last but not least, the "war" on SARS has

been used to fight some old battles. *Falun gong* was attacked for holding up prevention work for SARS. It was claimed that followers had refused treatment and tried to cause unrest at treatment facilities. The group was attacked for its “evil intentions of anti-mankind, anti-science, and anti-society” and wishing to see China fail in the fight against SARS.⁶¹ Last but not least it seems that SARS has even been used to detain migrants who have complained about resettlement programs associated with China’s massive Three Gorges Project. One report cited instances where residents of Gaoyang who complained about resettlement issues were put into SARS quarantine.⁶²

Lessons Learned or that Should Be Learned

However official publications might rewrite history, it is clear that fundamental shortcomings in China’s system of management and governance exacerbated the problem and got the party into the mess in the first place. This has been recognized in a number of pieces in the official press and other media and is reflected in a number of measures introduced by the Chinese government. While none of the policy responses amounts to a significant change in practice, if implemented they should enhance China’s capacity to respond to future emergencies and to provide a modicum of increased transparency.

A number of thoughtful pieces have pointed out the out-dated mode of crisis management and the challenges that new information systems present.⁶³ The *China Youth Daily* pointed out that misleading the public even if for good reasons can only end in creating more trouble than is necessary.⁶⁴ This was a theme explored in one of the more complete critiques written by Xue Baosheng a researcher at the Central Party School’s Policy Research Center. He lamented the fact that government was not used to dealing with the open flow of information and was overly concerned that it might cause social panic and disorder. However, as the author notes this led to a swarm of rumors and the kind of social panic that leaders sought to avoid. He claimed that some officials were more concerned with economic losses than people’s health and safety and more preoccupied with saving face. Again the result was the reverse of intention resulting in public resentment and causing economic loss and damage to their public image.⁶⁵

With the benefit of hindsight there are five key lessons that China’s leaders should take from the SARS outbreak, as this will not be the last crisis that they will have

to deal with. These five areas range from dealing with global integration to putting national systems in place to deal with crises effectively, to enhancing incentives for timely reporting, to paying greater attention to social development, and to new ways of dealing with information flows.

Global Integration

China's leaders need to understand what it means to be a global player. China's entry into WTO following its agreement to sign the two UN covenants on human rights in 1997 and 1998 would appear to signal the Chinese leadership's intent to be a part of the global community. By signing these agreements, China has implicitly acknowledged that international monitoring is justifiable not only for domestic economic practice but also for political behavior. Membership of the world community entails a number of obligations and expectations on the part of others about what constitutes correct, ethical behavior. China, as others, would like to derive the economic benefits of globalization without having to deal with the social and political consequences. However, in practice, while China clearly wants to be a respected member of the international community it is deeply conflicted about how active a role to play in international governance and few have thought about how the process of globalization might impact on domestic governance. The fact that globalization has and will continue to impact on domestic governance is poorly perceived, other than in terms of the need to censor incoming information and cultural flows.

SARS reinforced for China's leaders the notion that it is impossible to maintain an open system for business investment but close off flows of information and deny transparency. China's leaders have often used upsetting foreign investors as an excuse to suppress bad news. However, foreign investors may draw the conclusion that accurate information and greater transparency might be more important for making investment decisions. It was after all foreign concern and pressure from the WHO and international media that prompted China's senior leaders to take SARS seriously and begin to engage in more open collaboration. One of the most clearly recognized impacts of SARS is on China's international image. The *China Youth Daily* quoted international affairs scholar, Pang Zhongying, approvingly: "The greatest damage to China caused by the SARS crisis

is the loss of China's reputation. For a great world-class economy that is growing vigorously, China's national image is especially worth maintaining and improving. Repairing the mutual trust between China and the international community is extremely urgent."⁶⁶

As a result of international concern, when Premier Wen went to a special summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and China on May 1 he was suitably contrite. He appealed for international understanding and stated that the Chinese government clearly had a responsibility to the world as a whole and proposed setting up region-wide confidence measures. He noted that "Chinese leaders and people have learned a lot" from SARS.⁶⁷ However, evading difficult questions and avoiding providing problematic information has a long pedigree in CCP history.

The residual suspicion of the international community combined with China's desire to be seen by all as a successful and civilized member of the world community explain the contradictions in China's international behavior. This can lead to decisions that are described as principled in China but that appear petty to others. China needs to improve its understanding of international norms and needs to become more comfortable with the framework for international governance that it seeks to join. SARS highlights how many issues beyond the directly political and economic, such as environmental protection, drug smuggling, trafficking in women and HIV/AIDS, need China's active participation to resolve. In turn other nations need to incorporate China as a more equal partner and to build China's reasonable concerns into the architecture of international governance. China for its part needs to reduce its suspicion of hostile foreign intent and adjust its outdated notion of sovereignty to accept that some issues need transnational solutions and that international monitoring does not have to erode CCP power.

Building Systems for Crisis Management

As we have seen China needs to set up systems at all levels that can deal with crisis management. The initial response to crisis is denial and cover-up and once action is called for, the vertical and segmented structure of China's bureaucracy hampers effective action. Initially leaders in Guangdong did not feel any urgency to provide information to Beijing thus undermining capacity to act effectively. Neither did the military hospitals

think that it was their responsibility to inform the civilian authorities. CDC head, Li Liming, is even reported to have said, “if we controlled the military hospitals at the beginning, we never would have had this epidemic in Beijing.”⁶⁸ The problem was recognized at the April 20 press conference that talked of the multiple jurisdictions under which the medical institutions fell. As vice-Minister Gao noted at the April 20 press conference the “loose administration system has caused lack of communication among hospitals: a failure to obtain accurate information on the epidemic and a failure to take very effective quarantine measures to prevent measures to prevent the disease from spreading.”

In the Chinese system it is notoriously difficult to gather information across different sectors. With respect to SARS, military reporting was a particular problem and it was not until after the sackings of Zhang and Meng on April 20 that the situation improved and even then it is not clear that reporting was timely and comprehensive.⁶⁹ It was not until May that senior PLA officials such as CMC vice-chairs, Guo Boxiong and Cao Gangchuan, began to make SARS related inspection tours.⁷⁰

China needs to develop a system that encourages cross-sectoral collaboration to provide comprehensive, integrated solutions. This is not just a problem related to SARS but very few if any local administrations have in place an effective crisis response network, something that the Ministry of Civil Affairs was concerned about before the SARS outbreak.⁷¹ All too often different ministries or localities work in their own interests to undermine national policy. In October, Wu Yi complained that some local governments had still not carried out central government directions for formulating emergency plans.⁷²

A major problem is that the MOPH is an institutionally weak player and, for example, the party secretaries of Guangdong and Beijing would outrank the Minister. This makes not only policy coordination but also policy implementation difficult. Provincial health departments and local disease control centers would have to report first to the local party authorities. Thus, when the Guangdong Party Secretary told provincial health officials that the “peak of SARS has passed” and that the situation was starting to be controlled,⁷³ why should they dissent? China often sets up ad hoc bodies that make decisions that cannot then be enforced or are subverted by agencies at the same level or at

lower levels. Even court rulings are not necessarily applied as local party secretaries will outrank local judges and the court may have no authority over actions to be taken in different ministries. Thus, it will not help much to set up the new Emergency Response Bureau if it is not given real bureaucratic power to enforce decisions.

The most recent example of conflicting interests within the bureaucracy that threatens to undermine prevention of future outbreaks is the question of the trade in wild animals.⁷⁴ On June 3, Guangzhou city authorities announced that they wished to move towards centralizing the slaughter of poultry to improve hygiene in wet markets.⁷⁵ This followed earlier directives in the city and Shenzhen to stop the sale and consumption of wild animals. Fines range up to 10 000 *yuan*. It is thought that the most likely origin of the disease is that it crossed from animal species to humans in Southern China; the civet cat being seen as a most likely suspect. However, this has not yet been proved conclusively and agricultural authorities and the Forestry Bureau have objected to the ban, in particular. The Forestry Bureau is involved in direct regulation of the rearing and sale of wildlife and has seen the development of this trade as a way to raise farmers' incomes, a primary policy concern of the government. They are reported to be considering pushing to lift the June ban arguing that there is no proven link that justifies its continuation.⁷⁶ Of course, should there be another outbreak of SARS, it will be the MOPH that receives the blame and not the Forestry Bureau. Under these circumstances, it is difficult to apply a coherent policy.

A number of steps have been taken in this regard. The initial steps were to set up leading groups but these are just short-term stopgap measures. However, in mid-May it was announced that China would set up an Emergency Response Bureau under the State Council to act as a powerful new agency to deal with future health crises and natural disasters.⁷⁷ This bureau is modeled on the US Federal Emergency Management Administration that was established in 1979 and in March 2003 was absorbed into the Department of Homeland Security. Bureau membership will comprise heads of key ministries and commissions and will be tasked with drawing up plans for dealing with future emergencies.

Another key step was the promulgation on May 12 of temporary regulations on dealing with health emergencies. These had been overseen by Wen Jiabao and approved

on May 9 and were drafted in a record 16 days. The six chapters and 54 articles dealt with outbreaks of infectious diseases, large-scale food poisoning and other serious public health threats. They laid out general rules and guidelines for prevention and reporting etc. The guidelines call, for example, for national authorities to be told within four hours of a major outbreak and provincial governments within eight hours. They also call for setting up CDCs all the way from the central government down to the county, something that will add to the fiscal burden of local governments.⁷⁸

Enhancing Government Performance

China needs to create an incentive system to encourage local governments to be more transparent and accept greater accountability. There is very little incentive for local leaders to provide accurate data and reporting, it is much better to report no problems or present statistics that exceed targets laid down by higher levels. The lack of accurate data makes policy coordination tough. Unsure of what higher levels may think, the first reaction is to delay or suppress information. SARS is the latest in a long line of disasters that have been ignored or dealt with only haltingly. Recently, there has been the poisoning of school children in Northeast China with bad milk and the disgraceful cover-up of those in Henan who have died from AIDS infected blood. Only when brought to the attention of a senior leader does action start by which time not only is the situation worse than needs be but also the problem must be solved without damaging CCP credibility. The need to “save face” and party infallibility all too often takes precedence over saving lives.

The response in the SARS case followed the normal pattern and while the removal of the Minister of Public Health and the Mayor of Beijing was dramatic it was not unprecedented during the reform period. For example, Ding Guan’gen was dismissed in 1988 as the Minister of Railways following an appalling safety record. Being Deng Xiaoping’s bridge partner enabled him to bounce back later as the head of the Propaganda Department. It seems that Minister Zhang’s close relationship to Jiang Zemin led some to try to protect him from too much criticism. The dismissals did provide the signal for other dismissals at lower levels but there are no norms in place to make officials accountable and to accept responsibility for mistakes. Political connections can

overcome involvement in even the most egregious of scandals. Perhaps the best recent example of this is the fact that Jia Qinglin who oversaw Xiamen at the time of one of the biggest corruption scandals in PRC history was promoted to the Standing Committee of the Politburo in November 2002 and to head the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in March 2003. While there is no sign that Jia himself was involved in the corruption, despite his wife's close connection to groups involved, his promotion does not send a very reassuring signal about accepting responsibility for events that happen under one's watch.

Increasingly, however, it is being recognized that greater transparency is necessary in the actions of local governments and that innovation will be necessary to provide a better framework for governance. Party officials have also raised the idea that innovation is necessary. Thus, Beijing Party Secretary, Liu Qi, at a party meeting stated that "Beijing will expand the orderly participation of Beijing residents in politics and the people's right to know" but he added the phrase "we will transform the will of the party into the will and action of all Beijing residents." Little thought seems to have been given to what might happen if the residents are not unanimous in their views or do not find the party's will acceptable. It has also been suggested that the party would experiment with a tripartite division of powers in Shenzhen and the party secretary of Fujian, Song Defu, advocated the expansion of grassroots democracy beginning with community self-rule.⁷⁹ These measures might help but unless incentives are changed for local officials there will be a clear limit to how much citizens can influence the decisions made on their behalf and demand the right to information that is crucial to their well being.

Improving Social Development

China needs to integrate better social development with economic development. The pressures of SARS have revealed the inadequacies of China's public health system. While markets have produced fabulous economic growth, they have changed ownership structures and incentives for healthcare resulting in highly unequal access, increased costs and an emphasis on expensive curative care over preventive services. Good health services, especially for the rural areas, are not a luxury or something that can be attended to once a high level of economic growth has been achieved.

The problems of the non-economic aspects of reform had already become a focal point of leadership attention before SARS and concern for those who have not fared so well under reforms has been a constant refrain of the Hu-Wen leadership. They have been at pains to portray themselves as more open, efficient *and* concerned about the plight of the poor. In the eyes of many, Jiang Zemin represents the interests of China's new economic and coastal elites, yet even in the latter years of his rule there was increasing concern about inequality and the potential threat this might pose to stability. During the leadership transition, Chinese reports played up the fact that both Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao had spent significant phases of their careers in poorer Western provinces. This is in marked contrast to their predecessors Jiang Zemin, Zhu Rongji and Li Peng who have worked in the developed metropolis of Shanghai or in the central ministries and bureaucracy in Beijing. The implied message was deliberate: the new leadership would show greater concern for those who have not benefited as well from the reform program.

The outbreak of SARS could provide them with the opportunity to push social development further, especially given that it revealed the weaknesses of the Chinese health system to cope. Importantly, at a January (2003) Rural Work Conference, the party called for the countryside to be accorded the highest policy preference and acknowledged that rural problems were more intractable than those of the urban areas.⁸⁰ The CC decided that most of any additional funding for education, healthcare and culture would be allocated to the rural areas. Perhaps, most importantly the Conference stated that it was necessary "to make further adjustments to the structure of national income distribution and fiscal expenditure". If this goes beyond allocating more funds as the economy grows to actually redistributing resources to the countryside it would be an extremely significant policy shift. However, given the current power structure and the benefits the coastal areas enjoy any substantive redistribution of resources will be strongly resisted. The fragilities of the system revealed by SARS might, however, help with this policy agenda.

Certainly, during the SARS crisis, the new leadership showed concern for trying to provide financial support for those who might not be able to afford treatment. With concern for rural China, Premier Wen promised on May 6 that there would be free treatment for China's rural dwellers. He urged all governments to provide free medication, food and accommodation to all SARS patients whether confirmed or

suspected. To meet this objective, the Ministry of Finance allocated 90 million *yuan* to cover expenses in nine poorer provinces in central and west China.⁸¹ This followed a May 1 circular from the ministries of health, finance, labor and social security, and civil affairs calling for patients with fevers to be treated immediately without going through the normal registration process and that they should be treated regardless of ability to pay. However, there were persistent reports of patients being turned away or being charged despite central government attempts to prevent this. Because of the problems with financing in the health sector and hospitals now operating on a fee-for-service basis, many localities ignored the instructions and charged fees or requested sizable deposits. In addition, some claimed that guidelines were unclear as to who qualified and some patients who were found later not to have had SARS were charged for their hospitalization fees.

Thus, the center may make any number of pronouncements and send out directives but without clear incentives, local government officials will underplay social and welfare issues. The need to raise revenues forces local officials to concentrate on short-term economic gains over longer-term social issues. In addition, major pressure comes from the political contract system and the performance contracts that local governments and officials have to sign.⁸² The precise nature of the contracts varies across time and place but they do set out performance expectations that provide the basis for official evaluation. Each county will set out performance contracts for the mayors and party secretaries of the townships under their jurisdiction to sign. Then contracts are signed between the towns and townships and the functional departments under their jurisdiction and then finally between the heads of these functional departments and their work personnel. This weakens the capacity for comprehensive development by township governments and disfavors social development.

The targets are divided into a mixture of priority, hard and soft targets. The priority targets are set nation-wide and usually are more political or policy oriented in nature. They would include, for example, the maintenance of social order, most recently including the eradication of the influence of *Falun gong* practitioners, and of course meeting the targets for family planning quotas. The hard targets concern primarily economic ones set by the county for the township and would include meeting tax

revenues and meeting certain levels of growth. The soft targets tend to relate to questions of social development such as health and education provision and the concern for environmental protection. Clearly meeting the hard and priority targets are the most important as failure to meet them will mean that the rest of the work for the entire period will be discounted and there will be no promotions, titles or economic rewards distributed. If social development goals were also written into these contracts and given more weight this would be a major step forward in changing local government incentives.

Dealing With Information Systems

The Chinese leadership needs to create a new system of information management. This is an issue that has been much discussed in the Mainland press and discussions. As we have seen the revelation of SARS took the actions of an incensed military doctor who, disillusioned with his own public health officials and the domestic media, turned to the international press that, in turn, mobilized international opinion to put pressure on China's leaders to act. There is a fundamental tension between a system structured to control and manage information flows and a society that is information savvy and "wired". Treating citizens as children who need to be spoon-fed information and only hear good news is no longer viable when urban elites are part of a global information community tracking down and trading information online. You cannot have a domestic system saying that there is nothing wrong while cyberspace tells China's citizens that there most certainly is a problem. It is not even a question of who is correct, it is dysfunctional. It is also dangerous and threatens to undermine the social stability that the leadership desires to ensure economic development. If there is no trust in domestic reporting, people will turn to foreign sources or listen to rumor leading to greater levels of discontent and distrust. Denial and cover-up work against the leadership's long-term interests.

The role of the media and information flows are areas that Hu seems to have singled out for reform and he has been trying to make the media more effective and possibly even more open. Since taking over as General Secretary he has been trying to promote the view that the media should be used to monitor some of the problems in

society. Li Changchun who oversees that propaganda system and the Minister of Propaganda, Liu Yunshan, have echoed this.⁸³ In late-March the Politburo echoed Hu's instructions that Chinese journalism should be "closer to the practical [world], closer to the people, and closer to life." Certainly many working in the Mainland media have been bridling to play a more aggressive, investigative role and it has been much more difficult in recent years to bury away scandals entirely. Both Hu and Wen encouraged the media to take a more active role during the SARS outbreak. For example, in May Wen called for the need for "timely, accurate and comprehensive" dissemination of information.

Many media outlets took the opportunity to blame the extent of the crisis on the way in which information was controlled early on. Academics such as the three Tsinghua professors noted that "The current diversification of information technology and broadcasting methods that is accompanying deepening globalization call for suitable modes for guiding public opinion. In the past, when the public's channels of information were narrow, to some extent the government propaganda policies of "internal vigilance and outward calm" could prevent information about crises leading to unnecessary panic." However, modern communication technologies had rendered such an approach outdated.⁸⁴ Similar messages were also picked up in more official media with *Study Times*, the paper of the Central Party School commenting that SARS had been a "salutary lesson" and that outdated information control had only deepened the crisis. To win the trust and respect of the people, it stated it was necessary to uphold people's right to be informed properly.

However, as in other areas, it is more likely to be commercial pressures that bring about change. With WTO agreements coming into force and many Mainland official press outlets between a rock and a hard place financially, foreign investment begins to look very attractive. The financial problems for party-run papers was enhanced by the decision that, in particular, rural entities should not be forced to take on subscriptions, in order to reduce the financial burden on them. This is a major blow as most party publications can only survive because so many party and government offices are forced to take out a subscription. The media outlets have the political connections and the networks that might be attractive to foreign investors but they cannot compete in the

market with many of the more popular journals and magazines (many of which it must be said are set up by these official papers as money earning subsidiaries).

The topic of media reform found itself onto the agenda of the Politburo in August. Hu Jintao chaired a “study session” to consider what issues might be involved in liberalizing the media. Hu noted that with increased international contact there was an inevitable conflict between “traditional thinking” and modernization. As a result, new ways had to be found to expand the “culture industry.”⁸⁵ The main objective will be to make the domestic media more efficient, and presumably more readable, without weakening party control over ideology. China’s new leaders need to draw the lesson that for continued rapid economic growth they must encourage high and open information flows, reduce coercion, promote transparency and enhance accountability.

Concluding Comments

The advent of SARS revealed some of the key contradictions in China’s development strategy, primarily that between its rapid economic growth and its lagging social infrastructure. However, it also reveals how reform of its politico-administrative system has not kept pace with China’s increasing integration into the international community. This is especially true of information management systems and the transparency of local government organizations. The fact that SARS became such a global crisis and that it was controlled so quickly once the system kicked in⁸⁶ are both results of the legacy of a top-down command political system.

Certainly when SARS was at its height and public distrust was deepest, confidence in the system was shaken. As one official is reported to have said SARS was a “huge shock for the entire party, you can sense this at internal meetings, where the atmosphere has changed and people are expressing criticisms more freely. The SARS epidemic is forcing us to rethink the whole theoretical framework for government that was developed under Jiang Zemin.”⁸⁷ This tallies with anecdotal conversations with urban Chinese colleagues and friends who moved from disinterest to annoyance at foreign reporting to disgust of their government once the truth began to be told. However, as things were brought under control these feelings of anger dissipated with many feeling the government had eventually done a good job.

It is unrealistic to think that something like SARS will lead to significant short-term changes in the way the Chinese political system works but it has revealed certain fault-lines between the people's desire to know and their leadership's desire to retain the monopoly on information. The fact that key information that affects the lives of China's and the world's citizens should be withheld to protect economic growth and to avoid social instability has been shown to be a myth.

If SARS does not recur or if it recurs and the new systems put into place work and it is dealt with more openly and effectively in the winter of 2003-04, this will have enormous benefits for the Hu-Wen leadership and will allow them to pursue their own agenda of political tinkering. If this is true, we may yet see greater attention paid to the social problems that now beset China and the difficulties that face rural China. In addition, not a free but a more challenging press may result and local government officials may be held to greater accountability. The new leadership need to complete the transition of governing structures from those that oversaw a communist state and planned economy to those that can run a modern market economy and accommodate the pluralized society.

SARS shows that in doing this they will not be able to rely on traditional CCP methods for controlling the country and will be under considerable pressure to find new ways to manage the Chinese polity. It is clear that the forces of globalization will require a considerable shift in the way the CCP governs the system and will require political reform that not only seeks to make the system more transparent but also more accountable. They will have to deal with a much more fluid domestic and international political order where many of the key decisions affecting China will be taken by international organizations that will not respect the CCP's outdated notion of sovereignty. Given its record to date, this will be a significant hurdle for the current leaders to overcome.

NOTES

¹ On August 16, 2003 *Xinhua* News Agency announced that the last two SARS patients had been released from hospital. A total of 5,327 cases had been reported with 349 deaths.

² In fact, the poor handling of information flows led to panic buying as well as rioting and destruction of quarantine centers.

³ For example, when the West Nile virus first occurred in New York City there was difficulty and controversy in identifying it, including initial faulty diagnosis, and it took around one month to sort out. It also revealed problems of underreporting and lack of knowledge about reporting procedures on the part of the region's doctors and nurses. See "The West Nile Virus Outbreak in New York City (A): On the Trail of a Killer Virus," *Kennedy School of Government Case Program*, C16-02-1645.0.

⁴ Hong Kong *Wen Wei Po*, May 8, 2003 translated in *FBIS-CHI-2003-0508*.

⁵ Xue Lan, Zhang Qiang and Zhong Kaibin, "Fangfan yu chonggou: cong SARS shijian kan zhuanxing qi Zhongguo de weiji guanli" (Be on Your Guard and Restructure: Reviewing the Stages of Change in China's Crisis Management from the SARS Outbreak), *Gaige* (Reform), no. 3, 2003, pp. 7-8.

⁶ The CCP will represent the advanced social production forces, the most advanced culture and the fundamental interests of all the people.

⁷ Matt Forney, "How Did a Deadly Virus find its Way from Southern China to the Rest of the World?" *Time Magazine*, April 21, 2003.

⁸ John Pomfret, *Washington Post*, May 13, 2003.

⁹ See, "Incident Resulting from Rumors of an Unknown Virus, Heyuan City Citizens Fight to Buy Antibiotics," January 3, 2003; "Heyuan City Citizens Go to Guangzhou in Panic Buying of Antibiotics", January 5; and "The Appearance of an Unknown Virus in Heyuan is a Rumor", January 9, *Jinyang Net*. *Jinyang Net* is the online version of the party's *Yangcheng Evening News*. These are quoted in *Congressional-Executive Commission on China* "Information Control and Self-Censorship in the PRC and the Spread of SARS," p. 3, May 7, 2003.

¹⁰ Forney, "How Did".

¹¹ *South China Morning Post (SCMP)*, May 17, 2003. B-type infectious diseases include viral hepatitis, AIDS, dengue fever, meningitis and allow those infected to be quarantined.

¹² Pomfret, *Washington Post*, May 13, 2003.

¹³ See, Guangzhou ruhe kangji buming bingdu” (How Guangzhou Resisted the Unnamed Virus), *Nanfang zhoumo* (Southern Weekend), February 13, 2003. On February 12, the WHO wrote officially to the MOPH requesting additional information about the disease and on February 14 received written confirmation about atypical pneumonia.

¹⁴ Pomfret, *Washington Post*, May 13, 2003.

¹⁵ David Lague with Susan Lawrence and David Murphy, “The China Virus”, *Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER)*, April 10, 2003.

¹⁶ See “Regulations on State Secrets in Public Health Work, their Level of Secrecy and Details,” in Li Zhidong et al, *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo baomifa quanshu* (Encyclopedia on the State Secrets Law of the PRC) (Changchun: Jilin renmin chubanshe, 1999), pp. 372-74, jointly issued January 23 1996 by the Ministry of Public Health and the State Bureau for the Protection of State Secrets.

¹⁷ As noted above it was only on February 3 that the provincial authorities had granted it B-type classification.

¹⁸ Lague et al, *FEER*, April 10, 2003.

¹⁹ Pomfret, *Washington Post*, May 13, 2003.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Lague et al, *FEER*, April 10, 2003.

²² *Xinhua New Agency*, April 2, 2003.

²³ John Pomfret, *Washington Post*, April 27, 2003.

²⁴ Susan Jakes, “Doctor and Party Member Insists There Are Many More Cases than Officials will Admit,” *Time*, April 8, 2003.

²⁵ *Xinhua News Agency*, April 4, 2003 and *SCMP*, April 5, 2003.

²⁶ Susan Lawrence, “For the Top, Sorry is the Hardest Word to Say,” *FEER*, April 17, 2003.

²⁷ John Pomfret, *Washington Post*, May 17, 2003.

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- ²⁸ *Xinhua News Agency*, April 13, 2003.
- ²⁹ While in the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone, Hu had ensured Hong Kong's Chief Executive (Tung Chee-hwa) that he would have Hu's full support in dealing with the epidemic. *Xinhua News Agency*, April 13, 2003.
- ³⁰ [http: www.sina.com.cn](http://www.sina.com.cn), April 17, 2003.
- ³¹ The Beijing Joint Working Group for the Prevention and Control of SARS.
- ³² *Xinhua News Agency*, April 18, 2003.
- ³³ *People's Daily*, English edition April 21, (<http://english.peopledaily.com.cn>).
- ³⁴ This was the committee under Beijing Party Secretary Liu Qi set up on April 18.
- ³⁵ *SCMP*, April 24, 2003.
- ³⁶ In fact, in one of her first acts she drew a long-term foreign resident of Beijing into an informal advisory role.
- ³⁷ *Financial Times*, April 21, 2003.
- ³⁸ *SCMP*, April 22, 2003.
- ³⁹ *Xinhua News Agency*, May 8, 2003.
- ⁴⁰ Information from participant.
- ⁴¹ *Xinhua News Agency*, April 26, 2003.
- ⁴² *Xinhua News Agency*, April 26, 2003.
- ⁴³ *Xinhua News Agency*, April 28, 2003. See, for example, the *Xinhua* article "We firmly Grasp Opportunities in the Time of Danger and Disaster," May 10, 2003, translated in *FBIS-CHI-2003-0510* and the various *People's Daily* commentaries such as "Unswervingly Carry Out Development, the Foremost Important Task," May 17, 2003, translated in *FBIS-CHI-2003-0517*.
- ⁴⁴ *Xinhua News Agency*, May 14, 2003 and *SCMP*, May 15, 2003.
- ⁴⁵ *Xinhua News Agency*, April 26, 2003.
- ⁴⁶ *Xinhua News Agency*, April 26, 2003. A series of commentaries in the *People's Daily* followed to set the tone. See, for example, "Forge Ahead Despite Difficulties and Dare to Win Victory—Fourth Commentary on Carrying Forward and Developing National Spirit," May 2, 2003 translated in *FBIS-CHI-2003-0502*.
- ⁴⁷ *Xinhua News Agency*, May 1, 2003.

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- ⁴⁸ He also threw in the importance of the “Three Represents” for good measure. “Liu Qi Points Out that the ‘Double Removal’ Marks the Great Triumph National Spirit,” *Xinhua* June 24, 2003, translated in *FBIS-CHI-2003-0624*.
- ⁴⁹ John Pomfret, *Washington Post*, June 20, 2003.
- ⁵⁰ *SCMP*, July 2, 2003.
- ⁵¹ *Zhongguo xinwenshe*, May 20, 2003, translated in *FBIS-CHI-2003-0520*.
- ⁵² *SCMP*, May 9, 2003.
- ⁵³ *Los Angeles Times*, June 26, 2003. In early September 2003, a Guangdong health official stated that information on infectious diseases collected on a cross-border scheme with Hong Kong would not be made public. *SCMP*, September 8, 2003.
- ⁵⁴ *Financial Times*, May 30, 2003.
- ⁵⁵ See Hong Kong *AFP*, May 30, 2003 and *Financial Times*, May 30, 2003.
- ⁵⁶ *Zhongguo xinwenshe*, May 31, 2003, translated in *FBIS-CHI-2003-0601*.
- ⁵⁷ Pomfret, *Washington Post*, June 20, 2003.
- ⁵⁸ *SCMP*, June 13, 2003.
- ⁵⁹ Willy Wo-Lap Lam, “Party Bickering Hampers SARS Fight,” *CNN.com*, May 13, 2003.
- ⁶⁰ Pomfret, *Washington Post*, May 13, 2003.
- ⁶¹ *People’s Daily online*, June 11, 2003, <http://English.peopledaily.com.cn>. See also Hong Kong *Wen Wei Po*, “The Ministry of Public Security Strikes Hard at *Falun gong* for Exploiting the Epidemic to Spread Rumors,” translated in *FBIS-CHI-2003-0509*.
- ⁶² Kelly Haggart, “SARS and *Falun gong* Provide Pretexts for Three Gorges Arrests, at <http://www.threegorgesprobe.org>)
- ⁶³ See, for example, Xue Lan et al, “Fangfan yu chonggou.” This is based on a report that was originally presented to the Politburo in mid-April on the question of SARS and crisis management. The authors had canvassed quite widely for opinions. Subsequently, Tsinghua set up a crisis management advisory group that included both Chinese and foreign experts and held an inaugural public forum in Beijing on July 18. See Qinghua weiji guanli luntan zai Jing juxing (The Tsinghua Crisis Management Forum is Held in Beijing), www.people.com.cn , July 19, 2003.

⁶⁴ Ai Wenbo, “SARS Tests the Government’s Credibility,” *Zhongguo qingnian bao* (China Youth Daily), April 28, 2003.

⁶⁵ See Xue Baosheng, “Valuable Lessons for Government to Learn” <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn>, June 6, 2003 and “Cong SARS shijian kan zhengfu xingwei” (Looking at the Government’s Behavior From the SARS Incident) in *Zhongguo jingji shibao* (China Economic Times) at <http://www.cet.com.cn>, May 15, 2003 and “SARS: huanxing guomin xiandai yishi (SARS: Awakening the National Contemporary Consciousness) at <http://www.lsyswy.com>, June 13, 2003.

⁶⁶ Shi Hongtao “China Rebuilding its relations with the World During SARS Period” *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao* (China Youth Daily), internet version May 21, translated in *FBIS-CHI-2003-0522*. The original can be found at <http://www.cyd.com.cn>.

⁶⁷ This was a relatively safe venue. *SCMP*, May 1, 2003.

⁶⁸ Pomfret, *Washington Post*, April 27, 2003.

⁶⁹ Certainly in mid-April, PLA hospitals in Beijing were trying to hide the extent of the disease by transferring patients or driving them around during WHO visits. See *Time*, April 18, 2003.

⁷⁰ Lam, “Party Bickering”, May 13, 2003.

⁷¹ Interview with relevant Ministry of Civil Affairs officials, January 2003.

⁷² *Xinhua News Agency*, October 10, 2003. She also complained that many hospitals and local disease control centers had not even downloaded the software that would allow them to report cases of epidemics.

⁷³ Lague et al, *FEER*, April 10, 2003.

⁷⁴ In her October comments, Wu Yi referred to the “uncivilized lifestyle” of many localities that laid on big banquets and feasted on exotic animals.

⁷⁵ *SCMP*, June 4, 2003.

⁷⁶ *FEER*, August 21, 2003.

⁷⁷ *SCMP*, May 13, 2003.

⁷⁸ See “Wen Jiabao’s Speech at a Seminar on Implementation of ‘Emergency Regulations on Sudden Outbreaks of Public Health Incidents’”, *Xinhua News Agency*, May 13, 2003,

translated in *FBIS-CHI-2003-0515*; and “Wen Jiabao Stresses Enforcement of SARS-Related Laws”, *Xinhua News Agency*, May 15, 2003.

⁷⁹ Wang Dan in *Taipei Times*, January 2, 2003.

⁸⁰ Of course, as far as we know SARS was an urban phenomenon but the biggest fear was that the migrant population would spread the infection into the rural areas thus overwhelming the system. HIV/AIDS offers the same threat. See, for example, “China: Ministry Issues Circular on Controlling Spread of SARS to Rural Areas,” *Xinhua News Agency*, May 8, 2003.

⁸¹ *SCMP*, May 7, 2003.

⁸² See T. Saich, ‘The Blind Man and the Elephant: Analyzing the Local State in China’, in L. Tomba (ed.), *On the Roots of Growth and Crisis: Capitalism, State and Society in East Asia* (Milan: Annale Feltrinelli, No. XXXVI, 2002), pp. 92-96.

⁸³ See, for example, *Xinhua News Agency*, January 8 and 9, 2003.

⁸⁴ Xue Lan et al, “Fangfan yu chonggou”.

⁸⁵ *SCMP*source.

⁸⁶ Although it must be said that the onset of summer probably also had much to do with reducing the number of infections.

⁸⁷ Eric Eckholm in *New York Times*, May 13, 2003.