

OPEN GOVERNMENT AND TRANSPARENT POLICY:

1

CHINA'S EXPERIENCE WITH SARS

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the close link between information exposure and good governance as well as high government institutional performance in light of a special case study of how the Guangdong provincial government and China's central government responded to the outburst of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic in November 2002. It analyzes the possible reasons behind the initial misinformation on the crisis. Also, it analyzes the lessons the Chinese government learned from the event and the mutative character of government behavior toward information exposure after this short SARS episode. In this regard it focuses on several pioneering programs leading to more open government and transparent policy, such as in Guangdong and Shanghai, and emphasizes the significant importance of public participating for sound policymaking and democratic governance in the country.

INITIAL REACTION TOWARD THE SARS OUTBREAK

At the end of February 2003, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), an atypical pneumonia epidemic caused by some unknown etiology suddenly disrupted Chinese people's everyday tranquility. According to an official report later, between November, 2002 to February, 2003 there were 305 "atypical pneumonia" cases in Guangdong province, among which 5 patients died. It was reported later that approximately 5663 cases had occurred in 26 countries as of 30 April 2003. At least 372 deaths occurred, and a significant number of cases were reported with health care workers. The unprecedented phenomenon was an omen of an impending dire epidemic. The World Health Organization (WHO) immediately took the initiative in giving a global warning and distributing travel advisory information. At the same time, WHO tried to enhance global surveillance by establishing two network systems, one a global outbreak alert and response network, another a specific global network composed of hospital and medical research laboratories, case management work groups and epidemiological research centers all over the world. But, unfortunately, the initial response toward the SARS epidemic given by the authority of Guangdong province in China, where the first case of SARS emerged, was late, and at the debut stage of the terrible morbid attack, the perplexed local government was at a loss, reluctant to share information about the disease with the world.

Why was this the case? Many reasons may be speculated upon; I shall try to find the answer to this riddle. For one thing, there are institutional factors deeply rooted in the unique Chinese cultural tradition. China is a society with a long history of feudal governance and political anarchy. Also, the most influential ideological for China was provided by Confucius (circa 551-479 BC), the ancient sage and philosopher who founded Confucianism. This philosophical system has dominated Chinese socio-political life for much of Chinese history. Confucius spoke on such basic issues of his

day as the nature of human beings, the rights of the people against tyrannical rulers, and the influence of the supernatural in human affairs. One of Confucius' famous apothegms is in his book *Analects*² -- that the common people can be made to follow the way, but they cannot be made to understand it.³ He believed that a distinctive hierarchy of family, society, and state would bring harmony to the world, in which everyone would be at peace, order, discipline and which, in turn, would result in material prosperity both for state and people. According to his view, the most important individuals were the ruler and his bureaucrats, so that throughout China's history, the national government of every dynasty has been the primary, often the monopolistic producer, publisher and repository for all kinds of information relating to social, economic, and political affairs. From this view of hierarchy local government is only the tool of the central. Inheriting this ancestor's tradition. Guangdong provincial government, when faced with the unprecedented and unpredictable SARS outbreak, placed itself in a passive and subordinate position to the national government by political instinct, and perplexed waiting for an order to act from the high level. That is the first reason that I submit to explain the delay in information exposure about the threat of SARS.

The second reason is the long tradition of isolation, self-dependence, and "swallowing" of all misfortunes, a distorted tendency that has long prevailed in the China as a way of dealing with stress and absence of political, social and economic progress. There are many aphorisms that reflect this view common in the Chinese language, e.g., do not wash dirty linen in public, spread only the good message whereas cover the bad news. The self-concealing instinct solidified during the Mao Zedong⁴ era as a form of protection against the state. In that period, all calamity such as drought, flooding, earthquake, plague of pests, famine due to crop failures and so forth were covered up inside China and to the outside world, intended rightly or not to train people to an unyielding mettle, encouraging them to constantly strive to become stronger. One such example is the response to the Tang Shan earthquake of July 28, 1976, which is believed to have been the third most destructive of the last two centuries. Almost every building was destroyed, mineshafts were flooded, and estimates of the dead ranged up to 8.2 million. Encountering this great tragedy, the Chinese people were educated to conceal the wound, to rebuild the city successfully atop the ruins after being struck by several more earthquakes in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The same "hush up" attitude also has been shown towards schistosomiasis, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, and other diseases for a long time in the country.⁵

However, SARS presented a different type of problem. The SARS virus is so strong and contagious by nature, and it was spreading secretly and rapidly in only a few months. Unfortunately, the population floating and family reunions during China's traditional spring festival season promoted the SARS virus diffusion from the south to the north, and it finally reached and attacked the capital city of Beijing in a blitzkrieg. The mayor of Beijing and the health minister's initial reaction were very much alike the leaders in Guangdong province. They tried to minimize knowledge of the threat and to contain the numbers of infected patients. Their strategy of concealment worked until April 8, 2002 when a military doctor sent a letter to the media revealing the true story to the world. Dr. Jiang Yanyong, a retired surgeon, People's Liberation Army veteran, and long-time Communist Party member was one of the heroes of the SARS epidemic. In early 2003 when SARS began to spread from its original habitat in Guangdong Province to Hong Kong and beyond, through contacts in Beijing's hospitals he learned of the alarming

number of SARS cases and deaths in the capital. Yet as the threat of an epidemic mounted, on April 3, China's health minister announced SARS figures that grossly understated the facts. Jiang wrote and signed a letter to the national Beijing TV station and Time magazine telling the truth about the magnitude of the SARS epidemic in Beijing. Other doctors and the World Health Organization corroborated his revelations and the news spread around the world. As a consequence, Chinese authorities acted quickly; they fired the health minister and on April 21 made SARS the subject of a massive public health campaign. By June, a comprehensive system of monitoring was in place and by July the deadly virus was contained.

With whatever reasons, the initial handling of SARS virus by Guangdong and Beijing local government must be criticized. It laid bare the weaknesses in China's medical and public sanitation network, and the absence of transparent mechanisms in information sharing and expositing. The shortcomings revealed in the response to SARS -- in China's social and political infrastructures -- exhibit that the society has not matured into a "culture" of transparency. In such a culture citizens would obtain value in having certain kinds of information made public, and would have strong enough incentives to take part in public decision-making processes, and where government provides citizens with predictable and quantifiable public goods and service to promote people's warfare on the whole.

Economists regard environment pollution as a "public cost" a concept contradictory to public good. Negative spillovers from pollution result in external costs affecting a wide range of the population. The quantity of public cost is of concern to all individuals. Air pollution, for example, is a pure public bad or cost if pollutants diffuse in the atmosphere, thereby affecting all individuals, independent of the location of their residence (Hyman, 1993). As for the infectious diseases, such as SARS virus diffusion, they are sometimes much more fatal than a small range of pollution, because they usually occur in sudden, widespread outbreaks. Hence, infectious diseases should be viewed as posing significant "public costs".

To cut the throat of this devil, public action in the manner of a swift government response function is urgently needed. First and foremost, let people know the very situation is of the linchpin, upon which, people can take action by delegating authority to all levels of government for prevention and therapy under their own power, which could spread the government burden to fight disease. Under a more active posture a "public cost" event also may transform into a "public good" by encouraging the duty of materially well-off persons to aid the less fortunate and spreading philanthropy spirit in a society. However, if government glosses over the truth, what will happen? There will be rumors spread, panic, disorder in communities, disbelief among society, and the terrible effect of proliferation of the "public cost".

LESSONS FROM SARS RESPONSE

What should China learn from the SARS event? First, medically SARS presented a huge challenge to the entire healthcare system in the country. At the clinical level, doctors and nurses were infected in disproportionate numbers, hospitals quickly became overwhelmed, and the army stepped in to provide medical staff for civilian hospitals.

Public health oversight capacity was also strained by SARS, as virtually all-infectious disease specialists in the government were unable to continue their daily work on other diseases. Second, politically, SARS exposed the poor communication between the Ministry of Health and local health authorities. Even in the capital city, lower-level officials did not always report problems in a timely and accurate fashion. The subsequent firing and reprimand of close to 1,000 provincial and local level officials for inadequate handling of the SARS epidemic illustrates the central government's frustration with officials who did not follow its commands quickly enough.

Whether it was necessary to punish some officials to motivate others is not clear. However, it is clear that in addition to relying on its own government, China must build a more active and closer relationship with the World Health Organization and United Nations public health teams. China's government tradition exhibits an implied distrust of outsiders, which does not bode well for more openness in the future. Although the Chinese political establishment eventually mobilized society and improved communication between the provinces and the center, it is unclear at this point if these developments will translate into more effective responses to other dynamic crises in the future (Gill and Thompson, 2003).

As China enters the new world economic order, every nation is subject to natural hazards that threaten people's lives and property. Many lessons learned from past disasters have resulted in crucial changes to the ways in which communities and governments prepare, mitigate, respond and recover from disasters. Both emergency management and preservation should be advanced beyond mere response to encompass better planning; a more proactive and comprehensive approach to their overall missions must be put in the place.

REMEDIAL MEASURES AND POLICY MUTATION

When the first case of SARS was recorded in the southern Chinese province of Guangdong, it was the very time that new President Hu Jintao, Premier Wen Jiabao and other new leaders were coming into power in the aftermath of a long-planned hand-over from leaders of the older political generation. The new leaders have enjoyed a reputation as benevolent, practical, hard working and concerned for ordinary people. But the SARS epidemic was an unexpected attack, posing a challenge to the competence of the new government. The new leaders endured the pressure and criticism that resulted from admission that Chinese authorities had tried to conceal the scale of SARS outbreak. The new leaders and government did not let the public down; they took responsibility, changed the policy and adopted remedial measures as soon as possible.

The first measure was dismissing China Health Minister Zhang Wenkang, who was accused of bungling the response to SARS. Another person punished was Beijing Mayor Meng Xuenong, criticized as having not exposed true information about SARS patients in the Beijing area. The second measure was to launch a nationwide movement of almost unprecedented scale, mobilizing thousands of health care workers and urging them to communicate honestly about the disease. Premier Wen Jiabao ordered officials at all levels to work hard against the illness; otherwise they would face harsh punishment. The third measure was to seek international co-operation more closely to

manage the SARS crisis. On March 21, 2003 the Chinese Ministry of Health requested assistance for epidemiological and laboratory support to aid ongoing investigation of a possible outbreak of SARS epidemic. A team of experts from the World Health Organization traveled to China to assist in the investigation, and China's experts also joined the collaborative network sponsored by WHO to work against the SARS outbreak. The central government strictly directed governments at all levels to report information on SARS accurately, honestly, and in a timely manner, threatening harsh punishment for any delay or cover-ups. Other preventive measures were taken including screening and quarantines that had proven effective.

An old Chinese proverb states that, "It is never too later to mend the fold after a sheep is lost." The SARS has done what other infectious diseases in China have thus far failed to do -- draw the attention of top leadership and the international community, China's century long tradition of closing up in time of crisis has been broken to some extent by the SARS virus. The Chinese government response to SARS mirrors the government's reaction to HIV/AIDS and other diseases. Still, the Chinese government also reacted with ambiguous information at first stage about these diseases. Now the policy has changed dramatically. Not only has the government admitted the existence of various illnesses and poor health conditions in rural China and reported the information honestly but has cooperated with foreign partners in teamwork against the various diseases.

This policy mutation may be witnessed in the rapid respond and reporting on the first bird flu case on January 27, 2004. When bird flu cases first came to light in China, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Health immediately informed the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization, and ordered the epidemic-stricken areas to make daily reports. Chinese and overseas journalists were dispatched to the areas where most bird flu cases occurred. Moreover, through training, explanations by experts, and issuance of leaflets, the government kept local farmers informed of the seriousness of bird flu, and how to handle it.

Under the leadership of the new government, China has been making a great leap forward toward increased information transparency. Now both the paroxysmal epidemic and chronic diseases including hepatitis B and C, schistosomiasis, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS have been reported to the public regularly. There is no doubt that the SARS episode resulted in a movement for greater openness in government affairs, ratcheting up the trend toward greater transparency and government accountability to support China's economic development drive, to help curb official corruption, and to providing a safety valve to dissatisfied citizens who increasingly demand more accountability from government at all levels. Pursuant to its World Trade Organization entry agreement the Chinese government has vowed to make trade-related rules and requirements more transparent. As part of the campaign toward open government and transparent policy in the country, "e-government" projects were launched to make government affairs more publicly sensitive. Government agencies have been pressured to provide public goods and services more efficiently via the Internet. The SARS episode may turn out to be a blessing in disguise, pushing the procession of open government and transparent policy in China.

Despite this progress one of the greatest impediments to open government and transparent policy is the absence of law. China still lacks legislation in the area of

government transparency and does not provide clear guidance for information rights. To the contrary, the 1988 Law on Guarding State Secrets, which emphasizes confidentiality and secrecy, is part of government and social culture. Although bills calling for national legislation on government information transparency were submitted at several recent annual meetings of the National People's Congress, no substantive nation-wide law has been enacted. Thus, efforts to promote greater transparency have met with no small degree of resistance from officials accustomed to working behind a shield of secrecy. Statistics indicate that roughly 80 percent of all public information is held by the government and that most of it is treated as "non-public". It is undeniable that information control contributes to economic losses and misallocation, fraud, and corruption.

Still, there is reason to hope for improvement. Guangdong province, a place teemed with revolutionary tradition, has pioneered the way on the long march toward open government and transparent policy. The capital city of the province, Guangzhou, for the first time in history is breaking the Chinese feudalistic and autarchic traditions of government secrecy. It passed a law aiming to institutionalize government transparency on a wide range of matters. Guangzhou was one of the first jurisdictions to embrace the policy of making government affairs public; it undertook experiments in the late 1980s and adopted pilot experiment in 1992. To gain even greater administrative efficiencies from enhanced transparency, Guangzhou city decided to formulate government information disclosure legislation that would standardize municipal practice and raise the standards for compliance. Drafted with the assistance of scholars from the university and academic world, and taking account of international experience, the Guangzhou Municipal Provisions on Open Government Information were announced on 30 October 2002, and went into effect on January 1, 2003. The provisions establish a presumption that government-held information should be public, making nondisclosure the exception rather than the norm. Moreover, the provisions call on the government to release drafts of policies and regulations for public input before they are finalized and implemented. Following Guangzhou's example, Shantou Municipality promulgated Open Government Affairs Information Provisions on April 11, 2003 that took effect on June 1, 2003. Subsequently, Shenzhen Municipality adopted what is reportedly the first Online Open Government Information legislation in China on February 25, 2004.

The Guangzhou provisions contain some fundamental principles: that the government agencies have an obligation to disseminate automatically, and disclose upon request, most of the information that they hold, and that citizens have a right to access such information. The provisions aim to protect the "right to know" of individuals and organizations. Individuals and organizations are empowered as "persons with the right to access" to government information at all levels, except that involving government security. Hence, the provisions establish unprecedented rights and obligations in the area of access to government information.

Another major innovation of the Guangzhou provisions is that of announcing, "matters affecting important interests of individuals or organizations or that have a major social influence," before they are finalized and implemented for public input. Although the text of the article of the law is unclear on this point, commentary about it by officials involved in drafting the provisions suggests that the term "matters" includes draft rules as well as policies and administrative decisions. The responsible government department is to publicize the proposed regulation, policy, or decision and its

justification and make the final decision only after seeking "sufficient" public opinion and adjusting the proposal as appropriate. The concept, again, is revolutionary, but conforms to recent Chinese Communist Party calls for greater public participation in government affairs. Most of the media reports on the promulgation of the provisions praise this article, anticipating that it will permit "ordinary people" to participate in government decision making and make governance more transparent and democratic (Horsley, 2003 □).

Together with Guangdong's initiative, Shanghai, China's most important port city, commercial hub, and industrial center has joined the open government campaign. The Shanghai Provisions on Open Government Information went into effect on May 1, 2004, the same day that Shanghai launched its "Transparent Government Program." The Provisions represent the most comprehensive framework to date in China for accessing government held information, containing more detail than other local pioneering provisions. For example, the Shanghai Provisions are significant in at least three respects. First, they represent the latest and most sophisticated approach to open government information in China. Second, they were formulated through a relatively open process that included posting a draft for public comment, inviting diverse input and publishing it. Third, the Shanghai government has launched unprecedented organizational, training and preparatory work to help ensure the effective implementation of the Provisions (Horsley, 2004). The Shanghai Provisions specify a non-exhaustive list of broad categories of information that must be disseminated on their own initiative by government agencies, a useful device in a country where government is not accustomed to sharing information in the ordinary course of business. In addition to general matters relating to development plans, municipal rules and regulations, budgets and actual expenditures and information about each government agency, the list requires publication of information on issues of particular public concern. These include information in relation to public health, natural disasters and other emergencies, urban land use plans and approval documents relating to redevelopment involving demolition of existing structures and relocation of residents and other rules. Home to some 16 million people, Shanghai's experience could have far-reaching consequences for the whole country in the future.

Boosted by Guangdong, Shanghai and other successful trial projects, China's central government is adopting national legislation on open government and transparent policy. The State Council issued the "white paper" on China's human rights situation on March 30, 2004, in which specifically prescribed "freedom of information" clauses are included so as to guarantee an open government information system and increased transparency to provide Chinese ordinary people with great access to government policy making.

Thus far in China, a series of nationwide programs have been launched to make government affairs more open to the people and to build "e-government" networks under which government agencies at the central and local levels may make an ever-increasing amount of information available. In addition, they are better positioned to provide administrative services on the Internet. Meanwhile, the drafting of a national law on open government information has been placed on the National People's Congress (NPC) legislative agenda for the current session running through 2007. Thus it is possible that the ideal of open government and transparent policy will eventually become reality in China.

FUTURE NEEDS AND INITIATIVES

China's goals to establish a well-governed and highly civilized society is promising and optimism may be intensified by the new amendment to the Constitution approved on March 14, 2004. The legal stipulation that, "the state respects and safeguards human rights" has been adopted by the People's Congress with an overwhelming majority vote, erecting an important milestone in China's human rights development process. Since it was enacted in 1954, for the first time the words "human rights" have been added to the Chinese Constitution. For a fairly long period after the founding of the People's Republic of China, the country never included the human rights concept in its Constitution and law, with human rights considered taboo in ideological and theoretical sense. By amending the Constitution, China has put human rights into a high place of the state's fundamental law. Combined with other laws and rules of governments at all levels, China has set up a legal framework to protect human rights in which citizen's information right or "the right to know, to ask, to be told the truth" is included and guaranteed. Now the question is how will this new provision be implemented and interpreted under circumstances of high profile stress.

Viewed from the history of thousands of years of feudalism and absolutist tradition, China's endeavor to open up government and to make more transparent its policy is by no means an easy leap. It will require hard work, diligence and at times arduous struggle. The cited circumstances that have held China back from reaching an open, transparent and democratic regime will not wear away automatically just because government had passed laws. On one hand, enforcement of law in China has long been a difficulty, and on the other hand some entities will predictably resist -- doggedly and cunningly -- under the new laws and orders. Crucial challenges facing Chinese government must be kept in mind, and decisive strategies are needed to ensure proper implementation. The following are some fundamental elements of the strategy that is needed to achieve China's ambitious democratic goals that Chinese governments must accommodate:

● Government Commitment

In the political system in which the central government consists of the People's Congress, the legislative, the State Council, the executive, and the Supreme, the judiciary, all of which are under the *de facto* leadership of the political bureau of the Communist party, nothing is more critical to the success of open government program than the political will of the government itself. This is especially the case for the political bureau of the Communist party. Resolution on its part to put the whole government body and all of government performance under the supervision of the Chinese people would be a dramatic reversal of China's centuries long history of absolute monarchy. As with any social reform undertaking, there will be delays and mistakes; political scandal exposures will incur distrust and disloyalty and even political risk to the government. Inside government, the bureaucracy will resist change in procedures and possibly the increased transparency that open government provides. In face of such problems, sustained progress in open government and the good governance goal will be achieved only if the leadership believes that the benefits outweigh the costs and risks. Therefore, the leaders must champion the cause and make an effort to build political support across the whole country. A successful open government policy would

create good will among citizens that increases demand for further opening to generate further government commitment to push for reform.

● **Elimination of Corruption**

Since the start of the reform transition in the early 1990s and with the progress of an open market economy in China, corruption has been increasingly referred to as one of the main problems that China has faces on the path to democracy. In response to the perception of escalating corruption, the Chinese people increasingly have undertaken anticorruption campaigns to get rid of this social cancer. The purpose of open government is in part to expose government to the monitoring by its citizens. This campaign should be targeted at all levels of the state and population, including the civil service, municipalities, politicians, business circles, police, judges, legislators and their staffs, mass media, youth and women organizations, civil society and NGOs. China's National Audit Office has examined more than three million institutions around the country and seized illegal and suspect funds worth 130 billion yuan (US\$ 15.7 billion) since it was established in 1983. In spite of the great improvements that have been made, China's auditing system still lags behind that of developed countries in content, method and information release. For example, auditing work still depends on outdated hand checking and the auditor community has not set up a regular reporting system of auditing results. This clearly hampers the development of an even more transparent atmosphere to facilitate fiscal transparency and good governance.

● **Awareness of Citizens**

"Putting people the first" is a sonorous slogan advocated by Chinese government. If it is oriented to produce substantial results, it is the Chinese citizen who will be the beneficiary of open government reform. In a country with a long cultural tradition of hierarchical structure, it is not difficult to increase awareness of citizens of high ranking classes, such as intellectuals. But it is more difficult to raise awareness of lower class persons, who live in the remote countryside, who often are illiterate, and come to China's large cities to do manual labor. It is absolutely necessary to empower the lowest people with an understanding of the right of knowing, and of participating in the process of public policymaking. This may be viewed as necessary to provide them with higher standards of service, access to information, more efficient transactions with government, and support whenever and wherever it is needed. As civilization is the base of awareness, poverty reduction and basic education should be emphasized in poorer regions. Government also should be a vibrant, visionary and dynamic source of advice, information and support, rather than simply a provider of a little food and money to the vulnerable and needy. The advance of public awareness about anticorruption is also due to growing institutionalization, especially the growth of the civil society movement, and local, regional, national and international co-ordination. The Chinese government should take action to promote this momentum.

● **Moral Integrity**

Integrity is the quality being honest and holding firm to moral principles and justice. A country's moral integrity should be represented in a political and administrative system that encourages social equity and justice. Honesty, particularly to make sure that all government agencies and public sectors are honest, practical and realistic is a key lever to cultivate moral integrity nationally. Unfortunately, in recent years, numerous cases of bribery, cronyism, embezzlement, extortion, fraud, graft, nepotism and bureaucratic corruption seem to be increasing to some extent. Economic progress provides opportunity and greater rewards for corruption. One tragic incident is where several dozen babies died of malnutrition in rural central China region after being fed fake baby milk powder. The case highlighted the widespread and potentially deadly problem of production and distribution of bad products in the country -- everything from fake rice to fake medicine is sold to unsuspecting consumers. As long as a country is full of fake products, it would be meaningless to expect reform from mere information exposure because, as with bad products, information issued by governments may be artificially compiled, misused or totally wrong. High quality information is a critical ingredient to an efficient, well-functioning economic and political marketplace. True and honest information supply allows better analysis, monitoring and evaluation of public policies that are significant for increasing economic and social welfare. Accordingly, Chinese governments should do their utmost to foster a culture of moral integrity by putting an end to corrupt customs and bureaucratic procedures, carrying forward the spirit of compassion, benevolence and fairness, and promoting ethics in serving the public.

● **Gross Roots Reform**

China is a country with five levels of administration. The governing structure is arranged as follows: (1) central; (2) provincial; (3) prefecture; (4) county; and (5) township. The open government program should be synchronously approached, both of top-down and bottom-up. The bottom-up approach with ties to strongly rooted social and political reform is urgently needed because it is always at lower tiers of the government where national laws and regulations must be carried out but often fail due to the low quality of ability and training of local officials. It is not rare that at the local level, politicians and bureaucrats are likely to be more subject to pressing demands from local interest groups in matters of taxation and authorizations. At local level, there are more opportunities for bribery, mercenary and other corruption activities than at any other level. In China at present, misinformation occurs at local levels, especially with high profile "image projects", in that some local construction projects are mainly built to exhibit current leadership's achievement for which the leader will get promotion in the bureaucratic ranking. It is no wonder these kinds of projects exhibit corruption, and result in disastrous accidents, e.g., as a result of bad highway construction. Therefore, it may be argued that because local governments are closer to citizens. A prerequisite for successful reform is the push for grass roots changes in transparency. Let the peoples' voices be heard to encourage the civil movement for open and good governance.

CONCLUSIONS

In 2003, Chinese people suffered the misfortune of a sudden SARS epidemic that took many lives. The tragedy exposed to the Chinese people the weak links in its public sanitation, health and emergency response systems. The SARS epidemic also unmasked flaws in the country, including government dishonesty, negligence in attitudes of government agencies and officials, and taught the Chinese people a lesson about the value of proper information exposure. Exposure of the SARS crisis urged China to seek a strategy of greater public transparency. However, China has reached only an initial point in the drive towards achieving a democratic and civilized society with good governance. China still has a long way to go to reach such lofty goals.

It is important to note in conclusion some other factors pressuring the Chinese government towards increased openness and transparency. Among these are China's rapid economic growth, increased level of education (particularly in urban areas), spill over effects from practices of foreign investors, the example of greater openness from Hong Kong, the need to maintain industrial competitiveness, and perhaps even the prospect of reuniting families through improved interaction with Taiwan. This set of factors may be explored relative to their the relative importance in influencing increased transparency in Chinese government.

Open government and transparent policy means adhering to principles of information clarity, honesty and openness in all government activities so that people and social groups whose interest is or will be affected by government action and public policy making will be informed about issues that affect them. From this view, it is the duty of government agencies, civil servants and managers to act honestly, visibly, predictably and understandably. Openness and transparency should encompass access, relevance, quality and reliability of public information provision to enable an increasing flow of timely and accurate information concerning public good and service delivery, monetary and fiscal policy and all matters of government activity. Openness is needed to teach to the public how to be better consumers of government. Moreover, open government processes and decision making and increased transparency should improve the accountability of government, reduce the potential for corruption, improve resources allocation, enhance efficiency and increase economic growth and the spread of consumer benefits such as health and education more widely in Chinese society.

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NOTES

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1. This article is one of the results of support from the Chinese national social science research program, No. 04BZZ040.
 2. Analects, a book recording the "Confucius said" aphorisms, was compiled by his students after his death. Because the Analects was not written as a systematic

philosophy, it contains frequent contradictions and many of its philosophical doctrines are ambiguous. The Analects became the basis for the Chinese social lifestyle and the fundamental religious and philosophical point of view of most traditionalist Chinese intellectuals throughout much of the nation's history.

³ The Analects, book eight, ninth logion.

⁴ Mao Zedong (1893-1976) founded the People's Republic of China in 1949, and he also was one of the founders of the Chinese Communist party in 1921. Along with the founders of the Han and Ming dynasties, Mao Zedong was one of only three peasants who rose to rule all of China in a lifetime.

⁵ Tang Shan is a major industrial city situated in the Kailuan coalfield near Beijing in China's northeast region in Hebei Province where coal mining is a primary economic activity.

APPENDIX A

A Chronological List of SARS Outbreak

16 Nov 2002	Outbreak of a mystery flu type virus reported in Guangdong province in South China. 5 people reportedly died.
26 Feb 2003	Doctors in Hong Kong report the first case of a flu-type virus "Atypical Pneumonia," now more commonly known as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). Cases affecting medical staff who treated infected patients were also reported.
12 Mar 2003	The World Health Organization (WHO) issues its first global alert about SARS.
14 Mar 2003	SARS spreads to Canada, Singapore and Vietnam indicating it is highly contagious.
15 Mar 2003	The WHO http://www.who.int/csr/don/en/ issues its first SARS-related emergency travel advisory. The advisory increases global awareness of SARS, alerts travelers and health staff to symptoms, and initiates prompt reporting of cases.
17 Mar 2003	The WHO coordinates an international effort to identify and treat SARS and increases activities to bolster international response to SARS.
21 Mar 2003	The Chinese Ministry of Health requests assistance for epidemiological and laboratory support to aid ongoing investigation of a possible outbreak of SARS. A team of experts from WHO travels to China to assist in the investigation. At the same day, Suspected and probable cases of SARS, including 10 deaths, have been reported from 13 countries.
26 Mar 2003	Chinese authorities update their figures to 792 SARS cases and 21 related deaths in 7 cities in the southern Chinese province of Guangdong since November 16, 2002. Several countries introduce maximum measures, including quarantine, to prevent the further spread of SARS. Also WHO hosts an electronic meeting that unites 80 clinicians in 13 countries.
27 Mar 2003	Despite alerts and precautions, a total of 1408 SARS cases and 53 deaths are reported. The Chinese Ministry of Health reports additional SARS cases in Beijing (10 cases and 3 deaths) and the northern province of Shanxi (4 cases, no deaths).
28 Mar 2003	Chinese authorities agree to join the collaborative network of the http://www.who.int/csr/don/en/ WHO to help contain the SARS outbreak.
31 Mar 2003	The Hong Kong Department of Health issues an unprecedented isolation order to prevent the further spread of SARS, requiring residents of Block E of Amoy Garden housing estate to remain at home until midnight on 9 April. Amoy Garden is a large housing estate with approximately 15,000 residents. A total of 213 residents of the housing estate have been admitted to hospital with SARS.

2 Apr 2003	Chinese authorities update figures for the number of cases of SARS and deaths in Guangdong Province. Previous figures for Guangdong province were 792 cases of SARS and 31 deaths up to February 28, 2003. The new figures include data up to March 31, 2003 with 1153 cases of SARS and 40 deaths.
Apr 2003	Chinese authorities update their total cases to 1,190 with 46 deaths and report SARS cases in four more provinces and municipalities: Guangxi (11 cases, 3 deaths), Hunan (11 cases), Sichuan (3 cases) and Shanghai (1 case).
9 Apr 2003	SARS deaths breach the 100 mark, with 106 fatalities reported by WHO. As of today, there are a total of 2,722 confirmed SARS cases worldwide, affecting approximately 18 countries.
14 Apr 2003	Canadian scientists publish the first full DNA sequence of the SARS virus, an important step in developing tests and treatment options. Other labs, including the U.S. CDC's coronavirus sequencing team, are reported to be close to achieving the same feat.
15 Apr 2003	Hong Kong schools start reopening in stages this week after being closed as a precaution since March 27.
19 Apr 2003	Hong Kong health officials reported 12 more fatalities from SARS, the highest number of death reported in a 24-hour period. Today, WHO reports a total of 3,547 SARS cases worldwide, with 182 fatalities, in 25 countries on five continents.
20 Apr 2003	China's State Council cancels the annual weeklong May Day holiday due to SARS.
21 Apr 2003	Beijing Mayor Meng Xuenong and China Health Minister Zhang Wenkang were removed from office and stripped of their Communist Party positions as the number of SARS cases jumps tenfold in a matter of days, largely due to underreporting by officials.
22 Apr 2003	The total number of SARS cases in China exceeds 2,000 - almost 25 percent are health care workers. Today, WHO reports a total of 3,947 SARS cases worldwide, with 229 fatalities.
23 Apr 2003	Approximately 2 million school children in Beijing will learn from home as the city closes its public school classrooms from April 24 through May 7. China sets up a national task force, known as the SARS Control and Prevention Headquarters of the State Council, to coordinate national efforts to combat the disease. WHO extends travel warnings to include Beijing and Toronto and recommends postponing all but essential travel to those destinations.
27 Apr 2003	Beijing authorities temporarily close public places such as cinemas and libraries and suspend the approval of marriages as part of stepped-up efforts to stem the spread of SARS.
29 Apr 2003	The WHO announces that SARS appears to have peaked and gone into decline in Canada, Singapore and Hong Kong, and had disappeared in Vietnam, although it is still spreading in mainland China and Taiwan.
30 Apr 2003	China reports an additional 166 probable SARS cases with 11 deaths, bringing the cumulative total to 3,460 cases and 159 deaths there.
1 May 2003	Poland reports its first case of SARS. A cumulative total of 5,865 probable cases with 391 deaths have been reported from 27 countries. This represents an increase of 212 cases and 19 deaths from the day before. The deaths occurred in China (11), Hong Kong (5), Taiwan (2), and Singapore (1)
2 May 2003	Xinhua News Agency reports that China bans foreign tourists from Tibet and other western regions of the country, amid mounting travel restrictions meant to stop the spread of SARS. Doctors at the Chinese University of Hong Kong complete genetic sequencing on virus samples taken from 11 SARS patients and find two forms of the illness in Hong Kong. This could indicate that the virus can mutate, which would complicate efforts to develop a vaccine and solid diagnostic data.
4 May 2003	Elementary and middle schools in Beijing are closed for an additional two weeks as Chinese officials continue to try to stop the spread of SARS.
9 May 2003	The WHO reports a cumulative total of 7183 probable cases of SARS worldwide. 514 deaths have been reported from 30 countries on six continents.

15 May 2003	The Health Protection Agency today reports the first confirmed case of SARS in the United Kingdom after laboratory testing provides a positive result for the SARS corona virus on one existing probable SARS case.
16 May 2003	The World Health Organization (WHO) reports a cumulative total of 7,739 probable SARS cases and 611 deaths have been reported from 29 countries. This represents an increase of 54 new cases and 13 deaths compared with yesterday.
23 May 2003	WHO removes its recommendation that people should postpone all but essential travel to Hong Kong and Guangdong Province in China. The advisory to those areas was originally issued April 2.
27 May 2003	Toronto is again placed on WHO's list of places with local transmissions of SARS. Toronto had been removed from the list 10 days ago. At a meeting in Geneva, World Health Assembly, made up of representatives from 190 countries, unanimously adopts a resolution that recognizes SARS as the first severe infectious disease to emerge in the 21st century.
29 May 2003	WHO reports a cumulative total of 8,295 probable SARS cases and 750 deaths have been reported from 31 countries.
31 May 2003	Singapore is removed from the World Health Organization's list of areas with recent local transmission of SARS. The change in status comes 20 days after the last locally acquired case in Singapore was placed in isolation 11 May.
4 June 2003	No new SARS deaths are reported today, marking the first time since 28 March that a day has passed without a fatality attributed to the SARS outbreak.
13 June 2003	WHO removes Hebei, Inner Mongolia, Shanxi and Tianjin regions in China from its travel advisory list of areas travelers should avoid if possible. Information suggests that SARS is no longer a potential threat to international travelers to these regions.
17 June 2003	WHO holds the first global conference on SARS in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. WHO removes Taiwan from its list of areas to which travelers are advised to avoid all but essential travel.
19 June 2003	Today marks one hundred days since the WHO issued its first official warning to the world concerning the threat of SARS. WHO officials declare, "the global outbreak, at least in this initial phase, is clearly coming under control."
20 June 2003	WHO reports a cumulative total of 8,461 probable SARS cases and 804 deaths have been reported from 29 countries. During June, the number of new cases has "gradually dwindled to the present daily handful," according to a WHO statement.
23 June 2003	Hong Kong is removed from WHO's list of areas with recent local transmission of SARS. Twenty days, or twice the maximum incubation period, has passed since the last case reported in Hong Kong June 2. WHO officials call the action "significant," saying Hong Kong had one of the hardest outbreaks to control.
24 June 2003	WHO lifts its recommendation that people postpone all but essential travel to Beijing, China. The city was the last area under such advisement and had been in effect since April 23.
26 June 2003	Following the removal of Hong Kong and Beijing from its list of areas with recent local transmission of SARS, WHO issues a statement that after almost four months, "the global public health emergency caused by the sudden appearance and rapid spread of SARS is coming to an end."
27 June 2003	WHO reports a cumulative total of 8,450 probable SARS cases and 810 deaths have been reported from 29 countries. The cumulative case numbers reported by WHO began to decline on a daily basis this week.

Source: Author, 2004, and World Health Organization, 2003. *Epidemiology & Clinical Management: Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)*. WHO: Western Pacific Regional Office.

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