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THE EPOCH TIMES

# CHINA INSIDER

KEVIN FRANZ/GETTY IMAGES

THE REALITY OF THE

# CHINA'S PANDEMIC

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A mourner wears traditional white funeral clothing as he carries a photo of a loved one at a funeral home in Shanghai on Jan 14, 2023.



A mourner carries the cremated remains of a loved one as he and others wear traditional white funeral clothing, during a funeral in Shanghai on Jan. 14, 2023.

## COVID IN CHINA

# China's Funeral Parlors, Suppliers Crushed by Demand Amid COVID Death Surge

EVA FU

Never has the winter felt so suffocating for Zou, who counted about 20 deaths among his social circles amid the massive COVID-19 wave that's gripping China.

Memorial tents, indicating households that have lost family members, are visible on every street in his hometown in the historic city of Yueyang in southern China's mountainous Hunan Province, with a population of about 20,000 people.

It's so many that "it's scary," Zou, who only provided his surname for fear of reprisals, told The Epoch Times.

He said the sky seems darker than usual, without much sunlight, further heightening a sense of dread in the small town as the outbreak casts a huge shadow. In the past three to four days alone, 100 to 200 people have died from the disease, he said on Jan. 23.

In Shaoyang, a city with a population of about 1.5 million people that's about a four-hour drive south, a resident who declined to provide his name for safety reasons said thousands of elderly people have likely died during the outbreak. At one point, four families living on the same alley were in mourning, he told The Epoch Times on Jan. 18, describing it as "unbelievable."

The mounting fears have dampened the holiday spirit amid Lunar New Year festivities, normally the biggest celebration of the year, that began over the weekend.

A video clip circulating on social media two days before the Chinese New Year, captured from a car passing through a residential area, shows a deserted street lined with an unceasing array of wreaths and blue-and-white paper lanterns marking the deceased.

"You watch what happens to your neighbors and worry about your own families," a woman surnamed Bao from Shijiazhuang city in Hebei Province, told The Epoch Times.

Bao declined to provide her first name because of safety concerns. The new year for her went by without the usual visits to her extended relatives, she said.

As the virus sweeps across the country, the Chinese communist regime has continued to conceal the true scale of the outbreak. However, widespread accounts of deaths, overwhelmed hospitals and crematoriums, and a shortage of funeral supplies point to a significant death toll.

The rise in deaths has led to crematoriums around the country scrambling to dramatically expand their capacity.

An Epoch Times review of 10 provinces and major cities found that more than 30 funeral homes published tenders for cremation ovens, ash urns, vans to transport

**It's a tragedy in human history. They see this as a funny joke and even want to boast about their accomplishment and make it a model for the world.**

Zou, Chinese resident

bodies, and refrigerators over the past three weeks alone.

"Because of the sharp surge in business, we urgently need to buy two ash sorting machines and post-processing equipment," reads one Jan. 19 notice published by Huzhou Funeral House in Zhejiang Province, located south of Shanghai.

In a now-deleted Jan. 6 tender from the Shantou city government in southern Guangdong Province, a funeral parlor solicited an "emergency purchase" of two incinerators to be ready for use in 10 days. At about that time, a major Shanghai crematorium told The Epoch Times that they were burning 400 to 500 bodies every day—four to five times their highest workload before.

### Funeral Supplies Exhausted

As mourning displays lined Chinese streets and hearses created traffic jams outside of crematoriums, the price of burial merchandise has surged amid skyrocketing demand.

Multiple ash urn and coffin suppliers confirmed that they were out of stock or running extremely low on inventory when reached by The Epoch Times ahead of the Lunar New Year. Each interviewee either gave only their surname or declined to be identified for fear of reprisals.

An ash urn manufacturer in Henan, the country's third-most populous province, was out of stock and restocking could take about a month, a sales representative surnamed Sun said. Sun noted that this was unprecedented in the nearly two decades that she has been working in the industry.

"It was never like this," Qiu, a representative of a different urn maker in neighboring Shandong Province, told The Epoch Times, pointing to COVID-19 as the cause of the

"storm" of incoming orders.

A coffin maker in Jingdezhen, a city that's famed for ceramic arts, said he had no more than two items on hand for the product lines that haven't sold out and has advised clients to buy whatever is available without choosing.

"Frankly, too many people died this year, and the demand is too high; we just can't make enough," he told The Epoch Times.

Accounts from the locals across the country were equally grim.

Liang Yan, who used a pseudonym for safety reasons, from Suzhou, a city near Shanghai, lost three older family members, including her mother on the same day earlier this month. The local funeral home had set a limit of 400 spots over a 24-hour period. On Jan. 5, she and several others from her family tried to grab a number when the spots opened at midnight; in 28 seconds, they were placed at about 160th. The funeral cost for her mother was more than 10,000 yuan (about \$1,474), double the amount for such a service in the past.

The extreme shortage of funeral supplies meant that there were no cardboard or wooden coffins available for her mother's remains. All that was left was a paper bag and shroud, she told The Epoch Times.

On the same day that a top Chinese state-backed university released a report indicating 900 million infections during the latest wave of COVID-19, officials at Beijing's Center for Disease Prevention and Control convened a conference celebrating three years of anti-outbreak work, during which they gave out dozens of awards.

*Chang Chun, Yi Ru, and Frank Fang contributed to this report.*



Patients are cared for by relatives and medical staff in the lobby of a busy hospital in Shanghai on Jan. 13, 2023.

**\$14,740**

Funeral costs in China have doubled to about 10,000 yuan (about \$1,474), according to a resident of Suzhou, Jiangsu Province, China.

## US-CHINA

# US Would Run Out of Munitions in War With China: Report

ANDREW THORNEBROOKE

The United States would likely run out of critical munitions during a major conflict with China's communist regime due to its inability to adequately mobilize the defense industrial base, according to a new report.

The report, titled "Empty Bins in a Wartime Environment," examines how the United States has depleted key arms reserves by supplying Ukraine's resistance against Russian invasion, and extrapolates how a similar situation could negatively impact the nation in a wartime scenario.

"The U.S. defense industrial base is not adequately prepared for the competitive security environment that now exists," says the report published on Jan. 23 by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a security-focused think tank.

"In a major regional conflict—such as a war with China in the Taiwan Strait—the U.S. use of munitions would likely exceed the current stockpiles of the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), leading to a problem of 'empty bins.'"

"Empty Bins" follows closely behind the release of results from CSIS wargames, which found that the United States would suffer from low levels of vital munitions in a war with China over the continued de facto independence of Taiwan.

That wargame found that Japan and the United States could likely defeat an invasion of Taiwan by communist China, but only at great cost in lives and materiel. In such a conflict, the United States would likely run out of long-range anti-ship missiles (LRASMs) early on.

"The problem is the U.S. has such low stockpiles for those long-range anti-ship

missiles that in our wargames, in multiple iterations of the wargame, we run out [of LRASMs] in less than a week virtually every time," said Seth Jones, the author of "Empty Bins," in an associated video.

"We cannot fight in that case in protracted war because we don't have sufficient supply of munitions."

### US Unprepared for a Major War

The United States' ill-preparedness for a conflict with communist China has long been a point of contention among lawmakers and defense policy experts.

Back in 2021, for example, Rep. Mike Gallagher (R-Wis.) warned that the United States would "probably lose" a war for Taiwan, and noted trends in wargames over the past several years in which the United States regularly lost to China in simulated invasions of Taiwan.

"Empty Bins" adds further context to the issue by analyzing how the United States has rapidly depleted critical munitions through its support of Ukraine, noting that the nation's stockpiles of Stinger surface-to-air missiles, 155-millimeter howitzers and ammunition, and Javelin anti-tank missile systems have plummeted.

The report notes that the United States has sent more Stinger missiles to Ukraine in the last year than have been built for all non-U.S. customers over the last 20 years. Likewise, the nation has delivered more than 1 million 155-mm artillery rounds to Ukraine, and only placed orders to replace a fraction of that amount.

"More broadly, the war in Ukraine has demonstrated that competition and conflict between major powers will require a strong industrial base in the United States and in key ally and partner countries," the report says.



Taiwanese navy launches a U.S.-made Standard missile from a frigate during the annual Han Kuang Drill on the sea near the Suao navy harbor in Yilan county, Taiwan, on July 26, 2022.

**We cannot fight in that case in protracted war because we don't have sufficient supply of munitions.**

CSIS report

"The effort to deploy, arm, feed, and supply forces is a monumental task, and the massive consumption of equipment, systems, vehicles, and munitions requires a large-scale industrial base for resupply."

Thus, the report says, the problem is not that the United States is providing support to Ukraine, as a defense of Taiwan would draw largely on different kinds of munitions and weapons platforms. Instead, the problem rests in the United States' sluggish procurement processes and lack of a robust defense industrial base for munitions manufacturing.

The Javelin surface-to-air missile system, for example, requires a production lead time of approximately 30 months. This means that, if the United States were to order new units of the system today, it would take more than two years before they were in the hands of the military.

Notably, such slow estimates are what is achievable in peacetime. During war, procurement could take much longer when supply chains are disrupted and vital components like rare earth elements are scarce.

"These shortfalls would make it extremely difficult for the United States to sustain a protracted conflict—and, equally concerning, the deficiencies undermine deterrence," the report says.

"They also highlight that the U.S. defense industrial base lacks adequate surge capacity for a major war."

To that end, the report recommends creating a "break-glass" plan in which the government could streamline industrial production, acquisition, and deployment in wartime.

Similarly, the report suggests that the United States create a strategic munitions reserve that would include subcomponents with long production lead times, like metals and electronics.

Only by shoring up its defenses and rebuilding its stockpiles now, the report says, can the United States deter or win a conflict later.

"The main problem is that the U.S. defense industrial base—including the munitions industrial base—is not currently equipped to support a protracted conventional war," the report says.

"With growing competition between the United States and China—along with continuing threats from Russia, Iran, North Korea, and terrorist groups—the U.S. military needs to be prepared to fight at least one major war, if not two."



Servicemen of Ukrainian military forces move U.S.-made FIM-92 Stinger missiles and the other military assistance shipped from Lithuania to Boryspil Airport in Kyiv on Feb. 13, 2022.

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## OPINION

# Recent Deaths of China's Top Officials and Elites Amid COVID Surge Expose an Unspeakable Crime

HENG HE



During the new wave of COVID-19 cases and deaths in China, it's hard not to notice the number of deaths among high-ranking officials and elites.

For example, in less than one month, between Dec. 15, 2022, and Jan. 13, 22 members of the Chinese Academy of Engineering died, compared with only 12 in the entire previous year, according to the academy's official website. Most were between the ages of 80 and 100—their lifespans being way above the national average. Like officials at the provincial level and above, scientists and experts at the national academy level enjoy free medical care and many other benefits. Their health is well taken care of—even during the COVID-19 pandemic.

But why did many elites die at this time, when they had survived other health issues? What put this group at high risk just after Beijing abandoned its zero-COVID policy and the outbreak in China got out of hand? In the past month, bodies piled up in hospitals, intensive care units were overcrowded with patients, and fever clinics were overwhelmed by long lines.

## Former CCP Official Gao Zhanxiang

Of all the reported death cases among China's elite, one stands out.

On Jan. 2, state media outlet Xinhuanet announced that Gao Zhanxiang, former vice minister of the Ministry of Culture, had died at 87 on Dec. 9, 2022. The report didn't provide further information.

It gets even more interesting. According to the eulogy posted on Chinese social media by Zhu Yongxin, executive vice chairman of the China Association for Promoting Democracy, "over the years, Gao Zhanxiang has been fighting the disease tenaciously. He had replaced many organs in his body. He joked that many parts are not his own."

Gao wasn't high up in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) hierarchy, and there were at least several hundred officials at the same level. Why did he receive such special treatment, and how could he obtain "many" organs, when they're supposedly in short supply?

This may confirm the rumor that high-level CCP officials mainly rely on organ transplants—sourced from young and healthy people—to extend their lives. I believe that national-level experts also receive this kind of treatment. However, this privilege has become a disadvan-



Falun Dafa practitioners carry banners to raise awareness about organ harvesting in China during a march through the center of Warsaw, Poland, on Sept. 9, 2022.

tage amid the recent wave of COVID-19 infections.

The latest COVID-19 outbreak started in the hospitals in Beijing, where many elderly high-ranking officials and elites had reserved wards. What made things worse is that the organ recipients used immunosuppressants. A suppressed immune system leaves organ recipients vulnerable to viral infection. This explains why this time, top-level officials and experts between the ages of 80 and 90, who may have had organ transplants, died within a few days after Beijing abruptly abandoned its zero-COVID policy.

In China, human lives have different values. In the new wave of COVID-19 cases, the world witnessed how the CCP treated its people and took away their dignity. Not only is there a shortage of medicines, respirators, and hospital wards, but there are no proper funeral and cremation services throughout the country.

## When an organ transplant recipient becomes infected with COVID-19, his or her body will have no resistance—death is inevitable.

### Organ Transplantation

While the official number of deaths since early December 2022 reached 60,000 (although the number could be higher, given Chinese authorities' past record of underreporting infections and covering up information), the renowned Dr. Chen Jingyu announced a successful double lung transplant for a COVID-19 survivor. Given the limited medical resources at this time, why did this patient get special treatment?

It isn't the first time that Chen conducted a lung transplant during the pandemic.

He performed his first lung transplant on March 10, 2020, soon after COVID-19 first broke out in China's Wuhan city. He found an organ donor for his patient within two days.

Another operation was done in Wuhan. Chen went to the city on April 18, 2020, examined the patient the following day, and confirmed that the patient needed a lung transplant. The transplant was done on April 20, 2020! That means the organ was obtained in less than a day.

Four days later, Chen performed two other lung transplants in Wuhan. Both patients had suffered lung failure from



A patient on oxygen is wheeled into a busy emergency room at a hospital in Beijing on Jan. 2, 2023

COVID-19. There was suspicion about the source of the organs, the hospitals and doctors involved, and the identity of the patients. One transplant was done during the Wuhan lockdown, and the other took place just after the lockdown was lifted in the city. At that time, most COVID-19 patients couldn't even get diagnostic reagents, and medical equipment was in short supply. Who could use ECMO or life support while waiting for a lung donor?

Moreover, the transplant shouldn't have been performed even according to China's transplant guidelines during the pandemic. Generally, patients with acute infectious diseases aren't suitable for lung transplantation, especially those with lung infections, and these patients are in a period of potential infection, which is why the physician and nurses involved in the procedure are very cautious. In addition, due to the scarcity of lung sources, lung transplantation isn't recommended for patients who can't be guaranteed a transplant outcome. These are some of the reasons why these transplants aren't worthwhile or shouldn't be done.

According to Chinese media reports, those patients weren't rich or powerful. Thus, the transplants can only be considered part of the "981 Health Project for Leaders." The transplants weren't done to save those recipients' lives. They were experimental transplants that provided doctors with experience to operate successfully on China's most influential people when necessary. The project was first revealed by an ad for 301 Hospital, also known as the General Hospital of the People's Liberation Army, in 2019. The project's goal is to extend the lifespan of top leaders to 150 years.

It's noteworthy that Huang Jiefu, the tsar of China's organ transplant system, kept only two titles after he retired from his post as health minister: director of the China Organ Donation and Transplantation Committee and deputy director of the Central Health Commission, whose only function is to look after the top leaders' health.

It appears that Chinese leaders' longevity is linked to organ transplants.

### Transplant Tourism

CCP officials, the ultrawealthy, and the elites aren't the only ones to get organ

transplants. The overseas associates of the CCP's United Front Work Department (UFWD) also get transplants as a reward for their loyalty to the CCP.

For example, Rose Pak, a political and community activist from San Francisco, was one of the top friends of UFWD in the United States. She was an overseas executive director of the China Overseas Exchange Association, a united front organization. She went to China to have a kidney transplant in 2016. Sadly, she died several months after returning to San Francisco. That raised several questions.

Pak wasn't employed at the time of her surgery—so where did she get the money for the transplant? Where did she get the kidney in China as a U.S. citizen?

Organ tourism to China is already banned in Israel, Taiwan, Italy, and Spain. The UK also changed its bioethics law to prevent British patients waiting for organs from going to China for transplants.

Shouldn't the United States do the same?

### Where Did the Organs Come From?

China's organ transplant industry started booming in 2000, the second year of the persecution of Falun Gong adherents. In 2006, the state-backed crime of organ harvesting from live Falun Gong practitioners was exposed. In 2019, an independent people's tribunal concluded that forced organ harvesting has taken place in China for years "on a significant scale" and that killing to supply the transplant industry continues today. The main victims, the tribunal stated, were detained Falun Gong practitioners.

Beijing had insisted that most of the organs, if not all, were from executed prisoners. It took another nine years for China to establish a bogus organ donation and distribution system. The system was largely used for international public relations campaigns—and it worked. The global transplant community, mainly The Transplantation Society, lifted the restriction on China and endorsed the CCP's lies. The endorsement of the international transplantation community encouraged the CCP.

The transplantation business continues to expand without a functional organ donation system. However, the organ supply from prisoners of conscience isn't unlimited. Under the regime's umbrella, underground organ harvesting and trading started booming with the growth of the transplant business. From 2013 to 2017, more than 100 university students disappeared without a trace. Despite surveillance cameras being installed everywhere, none of the cases were solved. Many Chinese people began to believe that the disappearances had something to do with organ harvesting.

Recently, another wave of cases became a hot topic on Chinese social media: missing teenagers. One of the victims is Hu Xinyu, a middle school student in Yanshan County, Jiangxi Province, who went missing from school. The surveillance recording may have been tampered with because there was missing footage that may have provided clues about his disappearance. The case remains unsolved. The authorities' goal isn't to solve the case but to silence the victim's family. There are several unofficial versions of the story, but most link the teen's disappearance to organ harvesting.

Views expressed in this article are the opinions of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Epoch Times.

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## OPINION

# What Is the Chinese Communist Party Hiding?

The truth behind China's economic and demographic statistics

STU CVRK



A flurry of reports propagating various economic and demographic statistics from communist China have been in the news lately. Is China on the rebound after reversing Chinese leader Xi Jinping's signature—and failed—zero-COVID policy?

Have Chinese economic problems been obfuscated by false numbers from China's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) while avoiding the canary in the coal mine, that is, the economic and personal devastation wrought by COVID lockdowns and officially under-reported infections and deaths in recent weeks?

Let us try to make sense of recent Chinese statistics and related news reports.

### Demographics

Leading the news is the official report on Jan. 17 that China's population has shrunk to "roughly 850,000 people for a population of 1.41175 billion in 2022, marking the first decline since 1961, the last year of China's Great Famine," as reported by Reuters. The raw numbers are 9.56 million births and 10.41 million deaths in 2022.

Predictably, state-run Chinese media focus on fertility rates as the problem "being fixed" by Beijing's switch from a one-child to a two-child policy and now a three-child policy. From China Daily on Jan. 17, just as the report from the NBS was released: "That China's population decreased by 850,000 in 2022 is not surprising given that China's fertility rate has remained lower than the replacement level since 1992." No worries: the Chinese communists are omniscient and can be trusted to run the country (into the ground!)

But what about the other part of the demographics equation? Where do COVID-related deaths factor into the analysis?

According to Our World in Data, China's "pandemic death rate" from COVID-19 has been reported as three deaths per million population since the beginning of the reporting in May 2020. This statistic has been used as a bludgeon by authoritarians worldwide as the reason to emulate Beijing's zero-COVID policy and enforce (unscientific) lockdowns, mask mandates, and jabs.

In contrast, the death rate reported for the United States is 3,251 deaths per million population, while that reported for the European Union is 2,666 deaths per million. Splitting the difference at 3,000 deaths per million population for China (which is much closer to the true number), the total number of expected Chinese deaths to date due to COVID-19 would be over 3.4 million. These numbers would be consistent with reports of overwhelmed mortuaries in China in recent weeks, the report of 60,000 COVID-related deaths in December, and another report predicting 9,000 deaths per day from the latest wave of COVID variants sweeping through the country.

It could well be argued that the population decline in China was perhaps more due to the officially unreported and suppressed number of COVID-related deaths actually sustained. But that will never be officially admitted, as the narrative of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) supposed "world leadership in combatting COVID" would be proven to be as false as the day it was first uttered by Xi and his minions.

### Economic Statistics

What about the myriad of year-end economic statistics from the NBS? What are the numbers hiding? On Jan. 17, China Daily reported that China's GDP grew by 3 percent in 2022. "GDP growth in the fourth quarter was 2.9 percent year-on-year [which] marked a slowdown from 8.4 percent in 2021."

With the double-whammy of zero-COVID lockdowns and year-end protests and riots that depressed workforce turnout and productivity numbers, can those economic statistics be real?

Far better to trust the analysis of independent watchers of the Chinese economy. The Chinese Beige Book posted on Twitter: "Our proxy indicators suggest GDP growth was <2% for 2022. Q4 was a clear contraction."

Amid the rosier-than-expected economic reports from the NBS were these nuggets reported by Sino Market on Twitter that hinted at a collapsing Chinese economy: "In December, #China's total retail sales



A policeman blocks photos from being taken outside Zhongnanhai, the central headquarters for the communist regime in Beijing, in this file photo.

were recorded at 4.05 trillion yuan, dropping 1.8% y/y [year to year] ... retail sales of goods ... dropped by 0.1% y/y ... total revenue for the catering industry ... fell 14.1%."

Another nugget from Sino Market on Jan. 17: "#China's Jan-Dec #realestate development investment fell by 10.0% y/y [year to year]. ... Residential housing sales areas dropped by 24.3% y/y ... and the total sales dropped 26.8% y/y."

That the Chinese export economy could overcome the massive plunge in domestic real estate markets to achieve the stated 3 percent of GDP growth in 2022 is highly questionable.

### Overextended?

Thanks to massive Western investment and free trade policies in recent decades, China has built an export economy that is the envy of those who overlook the CCP's persecution of its minority populations and its citizens' lack of personal and economic freedoms.

## China cannot feed its own people and is the second-largest importer of foodstuffs in the world.

The Chinese economy is a hub-spoke-wheel arrangement in which China has become a key manufacturing hub that delivers finished goods via numerous supply chains (spokes) to the rest of the world while procuring raw materials for its industries via those same spokes.

At the start of 2023, strains abound in that export economy as the world is turning away from the globalist policies that allowed China-dependent supply chains to develop and flourish over the last 20 or more years. China is in a "supply chain crisis" due to the following:

- The shock to world energy markets caused by the Russo-Ukrainian war is causing a "de-globalization" movement



People wait for a funeral service for their deceased relatives at Baoping Funeral Parlor in Shanghai on Jan. 4, 2023.

and a securing of reliable energy supplies.

- The chaos associated with managing the economic and social impact related to the ending of Xi's failed zero-COVID policy.
- The loss of Xi's credibility on the world scene makes foreign leaders and multinational corporations nervous.
- The move by the European Union and the United States to restructure their China-dependent supply chains toward risk-resilient, self-owned, and trusted networks (for example, the U.S. chip industry).

China has other problems that it seeks to obfuscate, for a growing economy is of paramount importance in establishing the credibility of the CCP to continue to lead the Chinese people. The demographic decline is directly due to CCP mismanagement, as is the collapsing real estate market. Foreign firms are departing due to the tightening of Chinese regulations, increasing social surveillance and controls, and the hazards of the ongoing COVID pandemic, not the least of which involves shortages of therapeutic drugs.

China cannot feed its own people and is the second-largest importer of foodstuffs in the world. Similarly, energy-poor China is heavily dependent on other countries for hydrocarbon energy sources. And government-subsidized green energy technologies may be reduced worldwide as Europeans, Sri Lankans, and others are experiencing the deleterious effects of implementing environmental, social, and governance (ESG) policies in their own economies. As the world's largest supplier of electric vehicles, batteries, wind turbines, and other green technologies, China's economy cannot sustain any serious moves by the rest of the world away from green technologies and energy sources.

Even worse, domestic problems in China are shielded from foreign view. For example, Zero Hedge reported on Jan. 12 that China's \$7 trillion in local debt could become a real crisis in 2023. According to the article, "the recent loan restructuring of a local government financing vehicle shined

a light on this \$7 trillion in 'hidden' debt."

Local governments primarily finance infrastructure development projects through local government financing vehicles (LGFVs), and those loans to local developers are carried "off books," for example, not "on the government's balance sheet." The problems are manifold: uncompleted projects, unoccupied finished buildings (no return on investment), slumping land sales, a massive diversion of local government funding to COVID-related expenditures, and spiraling household debt. This is the real indicator of the endemic problems that exist in the communist-run Chinese economy.

The Diplomat pointed out that unreported local debt is a double-whammy for the CCP. Due to the large amount of household debt held by the average Chinese, any attempt to raise interest rates will create "serious social turmoil" as people would be forced to adjust their meager spending priorities.

Many observers anticipate rising inflation in China as the zero-COVID policy reversal puts price pressure on food and other basic commodities. Food prices were already reported to be 4.8 percent higher in China in December 2022 than the previous December, and movie box-office receipts fell more than 45 percent in 2022. This indicates that Chinese discretionary spending has dried up. Since monetary policy is one key tool to combat rising inflation, the People's Bank of China is ham-strung going into 2023 in its ability to raise interest rates that adversely affect the cost of living of Chinese citizens.

### Concluding Thoughts

The rosy economic statistics reported by China's National Bureau of Statistics are doubtless intended for multiple audiences: to convince Chinese citizens that the future is bright and that the CCP "has everything under control"; to persuade multinational corporations to continue to invest in China's export economy; and to paint a pretty picture for the globalists gathered at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, this week that China's long-term economic goals fully align with the WEF's globalist vision for the world.

Careful China watchers will look under the hood to see the signs of the real problems that continue to manifest in Cathay—as they eventually do in all communist-run countries. Refer to Proverbs 16:18, communists: pride goes before the fall.

Views expressed in this article are the opinions of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Epoch Times.

Stu Cvrk retired as a captain after serving 30 years in the U.S. Navy in a variety of active and reserve capacities, with considerable operational experience in the Middle East and the Western Pacific. Through education and experience as an oceanographer and systems analyst, Cvrk is a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, where he received a classical liberal education that serves as the key foundation for his political commentary.



Funeral workers load bodies into vans to be taken for cremation at a busy local funeral home in Shanghai on Jan. 13, 2023.

## EDITORIAL

# The Reality of China's Pandemic and the CCP's Demise

### EDITORIAL BOARD

The pandemic is spreading like wildfire again across China. Since December, an estimated 900 million people in China have been infected, according to Peking University. The number could reach as high as 80 to 90 percent of the population, according to prominent Chinese infectious disease experts.

Ever since the first wave of the virus in Wuhan in 2019, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has done everything in its power to cover up the true extent of the outbreak and its death toll.

In reality, the spread of the virus in China continued over the past three years, resulting in an immense societal impact and a massive death toll.

Sources on the ground in China have described the severity of the situation to Epoch Times reporters. Residents say it is difficult or impossible to secure a cremation or burial site for their loved ones.

Cremation centers across China have been overloaded and are working non-stop. In many cases, crematoriums have weeks of backlog, and refrigerator units for meat storage are being repurposed to store dead bodies. Cremation centers and funeral homes have sharply increased their spending on items such as body bags and cold storage containers.

For example, Reuters reported on Jan. 20 that in Shantou city, a funeral home made an "emergency purchase" of two additional cremation ovens. In the city of Zigong, a funeral service center ordered nearly 200,000 liters (more than 52,000 gallons) of diesel after being "almost exhausted." And in Jiesshou city, officials said "the funeral hall's remains refrigerator cannot meet the current unit demand," leading them to order 10 additional large-scale freezers. A manufacturer of incinerators in Shandong Province says its plant has recently been operating at full capacity and "working overtime 24 hours to meet the urgent procurement needs."

One way the CCP has kept the death toll artificially low is by forcing family members to sign papers claiming the deaths of their loved ones are unrelated to CO-

The ancients believed that plagues punished humankind when its sins became too great.

Ultimately, the best cure for this plague is to reject the CCP.

VID-19, in exchange for allowing the bodies to go through the system and actually be cremated. Meanwhile, staff members at cremation centers have received strict instructions not to share with the outside world any information on the number of bodies being burned.

The CCP has more than 100 years of experience in lying to deceive the public. Whenever a disaster hits China, no matter how bad, the CCP will turn it around and use it as an opportunity to glorify the Party and its response.

Between 1958 and 1961, at least 40 million people died in the Great Famine caused by the CCP. While starving its people, the regime celebrated its achievements, and the true death toll wasn't known until decades later.

Recently, the CCP publicly celebrated its self-proclaimed "success" in combating COVID-19 and claimed the death toll was as low as 60,000 people. However, this is statistically nonsensical, as it would suggest that the virus was over 160 times more deadly in the United States than in China.

The regime's nearly three-year-old "zero-COVID" policy has proven to be a humanitarian catastrophe. In the name of combating the outbreak, the populace was forced to endure extreme conditions. Hundreds of millions of people were put in quarantine centers or confined to their homes, leading to prolonged isolation and lack of access to food, basic supplies, and crucial medical care. Many were even forcibly sealed inside their apartments.

With Beijing's draconian control over all parts of society, no official number in China can be trusted. Even the total size of China's population is disputed. Last year, a data breach suggested that the CCP had been manipulating the country's official birth rate, and a 2020 analysis suggested that the actual population could be 130 million fewer than the official number of 1.4 billion.

Foreign research firms, such as London-based Airfinity, Ltd., are now estimating that 36,000 people will die from COVID-19 per day in China by the end of January.

The real number is likely many times higher.

Citing accounts of crematoriums oper-

ating continuously, Sean Lin, a virologist and former lab director at the viral disease branch of the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, estimated that Chinese funeral homes may have burned 6 million bodies in the past month. And because people in the countryside lack access to cremation services, the actual death toll could be as high as 10 million for the month—a conservative estimate, he said.

The Epoch Times reported in March 2020, just months after the initial outbreak of COVID-19, that the number of cell phone users in China had dropped by 21 million within three months. Cell phones in China are an indispensable part of everyday life, even being used for official identification. Data points such as this one suggest the real death toll over three years could be in the hundreds of millions.

During previous disasters, top CCP officials considered themselves protected by their ill-begotten wealth and power.

However, in recent weeks, information has leaked out about the deaths of many high-ranking CCP officials, including former senior military members, retired officials, academics, and industry experts. These officials, who are typically entitled to privileges, including every medical and life-saving treatment at the Chinese regime's disposal, are now dying in high numbers.

Notably, the astronomical spike in infections and a massive death toll in China since December haven't been seen in other parts of the world, despite China opening its borders in early January.

So why is the situation in China disproportionately worse than in the rest of the world?

The ancients believed that plagues punished humankind when its sins became too great.

In Eastern thought, specifically, there's the concept of karma, which is acquired as a result of committing bad or immoral deeds.

The Chinese Communist Party has, for the past 70 some years, committed numerous sins. Not only did it destroy China's rich traditions and culture, but it went so far as to destroy those who believed in the divine. Its campaigns have resulted in an

estimated 80 million unnatural deaths.

Most recently, the CCP has engaged in a whole-of-society persecution targeting an estimated 100 million practitioners of the spiritual discipline Falun Gong. The persecution was launched in 1999 by then-CCP leader Jiang Zemin, who died in November last year.

The persecution has affected all Chinese people and all aspects of society, with the CCP spending upward of a quarter of its GDP on carrying it out in the early years. Students are indoctrinated with propaganda smearing Falun Gong in school, while university applicants have been forced to sign a statement opposing the practice as a requirement for college entry. The regime has demanded that neighbors, family members, and coworkers report Falun Gong practitioners to authorities, turning members of society against one another.

Practitioners themselves, who believe in cultivating goodness based on the principles of truthfulness, compassion, and forbearance, have been subjected to torture, arbitrary detention in labor camps, and the harvesting of their organs while still alive.

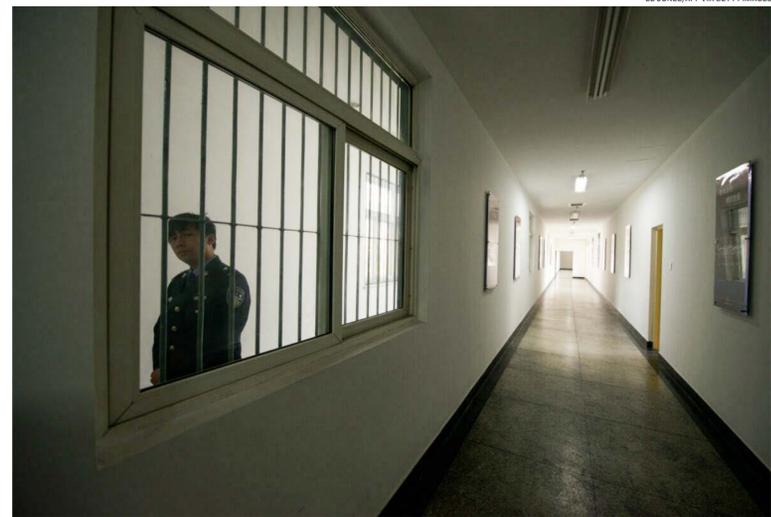
"Pandemics and plagues are part of a divine plan and inevitable in the course of history. When people become immoral they generate karma, become sick, and experience disastrous things," wrote Mr. Li Hongzhi, the founder of Falun Gong, in an article titled "Stay Rational" at the outset of the pandemic in March 2020.

"But a pandemic like the current Chinese Communist Virus (or 'Wuhan Virus') comes with a purpose behind it, and it has targets. It is here to weed out members of the Party and those who have sided with it," Mr. Li wrote.

History has shown us previous examples of this. In ancient Rome, the persecution of Christians resulted in four plagues, and the powerful Roman Empire declined and eventually perished. In China's history, a change of dynasty often occurred when the court became corrupt and social morality degraded; plagues frequently resulted.

Ultimately, the best cure for this plague is to reject the CCP.

We hope every person can survive this disaster safely and help to usher in a brighter tomorrow.



A guard looks through the window of a hallway inside the No.1 Detention Center during a government guided tour in Beijing on Oct. 25, 2012.

## OPINION

# Sanction China for Taking Hostages

Beijing's arbitrary detention of up to 200 Americans

### ANDERS CORR



China's communist regime has wrongfully detained as many as 200 Americans, according to a nonprofit humanitarian organization cited by Reuters on Jan. 18. As the country ends its COVID-19 lockdowns and again tries to attract tourists and businesses, they should realize it is an exceedingly unsafe country.

U.S. travelers to Russia, Iran, North Korea, Syria, and Venezuela also take undue risks of arbitrary detention.

Beijing and its allies sometimes detain Americans on spurious charges, allowing them little contact with the outside world. Detainees have been denied access to their families, health care, and U.S. consular officials. They can be held in solitary confinement, tortured, and deprived of food and clothing unless families arrange for delivery.

The families of the detained are understandably distraught. They pressure U.S. officials to prioritize their loved ones, but officials have limited bandwidth to negotiate. They have other priorities.

With Russia, U.S. diplomats prioritize ending the war in Ukraine that has so far caused 200,000 casualties. The United States also prioritizes damping down inflation, which has arguably caused trillions of dollars in U.S. stock market losses. Keeping Russian oil flowing at below the \$60 price cap is one anti-inflationary measure pursued by U.S. officials.

With China, the priorities are similarly peace and prosperity very broadly. The country does over \$650 billion in annual trade with the United States, and U.S. institutional investors had over \$2.3 trillion invested in China at last count. Many of those dollars profit major corporations with much more clout in Washington than the clout of family members

of the arbitrarily detained.

Unfortunately, for the detained, the risk of war between nuclear-armed superpowers, including over Taiwan and Ukraine, and trillions in global trade, usually take precedence over individual cases.

The prisoner swap of Huawei's chief financial officer—who all but admitted committing fraud to cover up Huawei's trade with Iran—for Canada's "Two Michaels" was a victory for the detained and their families. The same goes for the work of a Russian illicit arms dealer for basketball star Brittney Griner.

Countermeasures that do not give in include confiscation of rogue state assets for compensation of the detained and imposition of tougher travel restrictions on these countries.

But these exchanges were failures for international norms. Suspected criminals got away because their terrorist governments took hostages.

The United States has a policy of not negotiating with terrorists. The more rogue states violate international norms, the more they resemble terrorist organizations. Giving into their hostage-taking is arguably giving into proto-terrorism.

If every time the United States captures a foreign fraud or arms dealer, the perpetrating country can arbitrarily detain an American, knowing it will pressure Washington to free the suspect, deterrence is undermined.

Less than six weeks following the Griner prisoner exchange, for example, Russia on Jan. 19 arrested another American on dubious charges.

Rather than an unending cycle of submitting to demands from

Moscow and Beijing, Washington should increase deterrence in anticipation of prisoner exchanges. If the U.S. reaction to the hostage-taking of American innocents is the detention of their non-innocents, then subsequent prisoner exchanges are arguably not giving in.

We can arrest more criminals from the rogue nations that wrongfully detain Americans, so we have something to bargain with that we would not otherwise have. We can let rogue nations know we do this, which will deter hostage-taking in the first place.

Other countermeasures that do not give in include confiscation of rogue state assets for compensation of the detained and imposition of tougher travel restrictions on these countries. The Biden administration has increased warnings to travelers about the risks of traveling to rogue states, but warnings are insufficient.

Guileless travelers keep visiting countries they should not, risking not only themselves but U.S. national security. When detained, the U.S. government must expend resources, including through possible policy concessions, to get their return.

Since 1961, the United States has imposed a travel ban on Cuba. We can and must gradually increase such bans on other rogue states. This would simultaneously provide more leverage to get detainees released, and encourage economic decoupling from countries that do not follow norms.

Tourists, businesses, and their dollars would be channeled to friendlier nations that support democracy, ultimately strengthening U.S. alliance systems.

To avoid rewarding hostage-taking, we can create new sanctions on China and its allies that explicitly link to the issue of arbitrary detentions. Those sanctions can be bargained with for detained Americans without offering concessions on existing issues. That way, we prioritize freeing detainees without giving in to terrorism.

Views expressed in this article are the opinions of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Epoch Times.

Anders Corr has a bachelor's/master's in political science from Yale University (2001) and a doctorate in government from Harvard University (2008). He is a principal at Corr Analytics Inc., publisher of the Journal of Political Risk, and has conducted extensive research in North America, Europe, and Asia. His latest books are "The Concentration of Power: Institutionalization, Hierarchy, and Hegemony" (2021) and "Great Powers, Grand Strategies: The New Game in the South China Sea" (2018).



This screen grab made from a video released on Sept. 25, 2021, by Chinese state broadcaster CCTV shows Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou receiving flowers after she arrived following her release, in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China.

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