China's Struggle against Covid-19: Crisis Management under Analysis

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Abstract

The Chinese government combat against the dissemination of the new coronavirus1 should be seen as a case study capable of explaining the political system and the country's economic model, taking into consideration the strategies adopted by the Communist Party of China (CPC), fundamentally supported in science and technology. Based on the understanding that the management of the sanitary crisis should be seen as an example of public policy action, this paper is to present the importance of communication and coordination to overcome the challenges to civil society by the pandemic through administrative mechanisms and organizational structures. This analysis considers the governance of the Chinese state in combating disease as a disruptive process and aims to share practical solutions from the instruments used, such as the industrial conversion, the mobilization of the workforce, the QR code and the Social Credit System (SCS), among others. For such analysis, we will take into consideration the adopted actions during pandemic crises, contextualizing it into China's historical and cultural aspects as well as the referent CPC?s policies, inserting the global conjuncture, to point the direction to be followed in a post-covid-19 scenario, contesting the social stigma against the country and its people

Index terms— crisis management, covid-19, disruptive, social technology, public affairs.

1 Introduction

should be seen as a case study capable of explaining the political system and the country's economic model, taking into consideration the strategies adopted by the Communist Party of China (CPC), fundamentally supported in science and technology. Based on the understanding that the management of the sanitary crisis should be seen as an example of public policy action, this paper is to present the importance of communication and coordination to overcome the challenges to civil society by the pandemic through administrative mechanisms and organizational structures. This analysis considers the governance of the Chinese state in combating disease as a disruptive process and aims to share practical solutions from the instruments used, such as the industrial conversion, the mobilization of the workforce, the QR code and the Social Credit System (SCS), among others. For such analysis, we will take into consideration the adopted actions during pandemic crises, contextualizing it into China's historical and cultural aspects as well as the referent CPC's policies, inserting the global conjuncture, to point the direction to be followed in a post-covid-19 scenario, contesting the social stigma against the country and its people. he health crisis caused by the new coronavirus pandemic triggered a collapse in the global economy, challenging current contemporary models and the power structure in society. Upon identifying the first outbreak of covid-19, at the turn of 2019 to 2020, in Wuhan, capital of Hubei province, China was faced with an unknown disease, about which 1 This article was awarded among the best papers presented during the International Conference on Public Organization (ICONPO), organized by the Asia Pacific Society for Public Affairs (APSPA). The theme of the event was "Digital Governance and Crisis Management During Covid-19". there was still much confusion related to the origin of the SARS-CoV-2 virus as well as the means of transmission.

However, China's "readiness economy" (JABBOUR, 2020), the coordination of public policy actions and the communication of procedures show the overcoming of a hitherto unknown and invisible -but lethal -enemy through

administrative mechanisms and organizational structures. This national unity between the Chinese State and the people contrasts with the strategies of liberal democracies as most capitalist societies had come across a choice between who lives and who dies, adopting the so-called necropolitics (MBEMBE, 2016).

In turn, in China, the government's moves in the first days of 2020, including Wuhan's total confinement (lockdown) as of January 23, and the decisions taken by all levels of government and within society (neighborhood's committees, business sectors and civil entities) to fight back an unknown virus outbreak are a clear demonstration of the superiority of socialism over capitalism. China has developed a four-pronged strategy that enabled the country to break Sars-CoV-2's entire chain of infection. This strategy mixed the strict vigilance to quarantine and social isolation, seen as collective duties, the effective control of the disease through mass testing, proactive tracking of the virus, and the treatment of the infected people.

For its turn, liberal democracies, notably Western developed countries, exposed its fragility when facing a severe health crisis, placing alleged individual freedoms above actions against coronavirus' spreading. As a result, Western's countries mostly failed. **??**in (2020) puts it in another way, arguing that high human rights have become a disadvantage for the West in its fight "What if 'human rights' means 'no humans left'?" (QIN, 2020).

The Chinese State's role in fighting the disease must be seen as a disruptive process, which takes into account organizational structures, technological innovation, practical solutions' communication and technical instruments' use coordination. Therefore, the political economy paradigm in China can only be a Marxist one. "At the fundamental level, the capability of our Party and the strengths of socialism with Chinese characteristics are attributable to the fact that Marxism works." (XI, 2021) This is because the Communist Party of China (CPC) holds control over these gears as the country's political system remains detached from the interests of private capital. On the other hand, people' needs are addressed through market socialism, which works in the opposite direction to liberal democracies. It is also because China's market initiatives are socialist, as companies, state-owned or not, have limited political leverage when compared to capitalism.

As a result, on April 8, 2020, 76 days after the lockdown, Wuhan City was reopened. There is, then, an antithesis between the health of the population and the economy. Chinese system shows the priority of the paradigm in which the economy is for life -and not life for the economy -, placing people as agents of capital organization, while commodity-based capitalist societies turn merchandise into protagonist, "reifying" human beings, according to Marx [1867], who links "fetishism" to "reification".

Therefore, the coronavirus' crisis has offered the opportunity for outsiders to understand China's political system and economic model, inserting the experience of socialism with Chinese characteristics into the global landscape. To show why the covid-19 pandemic explains the functioning of the Chinese state and its market relationship, it is necessary to take into account Chinese society formation process as a millenary civilization and the CPC's mission for national rejuvenation. It will make possible to understand the disruptions and technical-scientific progress with CPC's lead as a key role in this process, breaking up with the misunderstanding of a linear, continuous civilizing process of the Chinese people over 5,000 years.

It is based on the analysis of the health crisis management as an example of public policy action, that the Chinese state's governance model in fighting the disease presents itself as a disruptive process, taking into account the mistakes and achievements. Therefore, it is necessary to rescue the historical and cultural aspects of China and the CPC, placing them in the global context, in order to point out a direction to be followed in a post-covid-19 scenario.

Thus, the purpose of this article is to respond to the assumption that the Chinese political system and economic model reaffirms itself in the face of the crisis and challenges of the new millennium. The logic of this reasoning considers that CPC should remain in the lead of China's development process, planning the next steps of scientific-technological progress towards the goals set for 2049.

2 II. Communication and Coordination

Binomial: Method Analysis and Basic Theory

Our research considers an approach of the Communication and Coordination binomial as the most appropriate method to analyze China's struggle against Covid-19 pandemic, by articulating these concepts and relating them to the country's civilization aspects and its political-economic system. By doing so, the theoretical framework is consistent with the materialist paradigm, which sees reason as an argument for apprehending reality.

Therefore, we insist here that our basic theory, in the perspective presented so far, is linked to relations between historical-cultural process and public policy action, with the aim to understand how communication organizes and coordination builds and transforms networks that demonstrates China's great internal containment capacity of the coronavirus spreading.

Nevertheless, it is important to contextualize that the first type of communication in human history took place when the hominid became a hunter, using hands for hunting and gathering, enhancing brain development and, consequently, the need to count **??**BULLA, 2015). Such a process should not only be seen as the ability to make sounds, report facts and tell stories, but also to perform finger counting to calculate. "By having the ability for calculation, the notion of writing had been born, reinforcing the link between words and numbers. Thus, it is understood that numbers were the first form of writing for human beings" (BULLA, 2015: 20).

Such an achievement was paramount to the rise of civilization, portraying the gateway to scientific

understanding, a link between the primitive mind and intelligence. Marx [1867] states that the hominization of ancestors is due to the emergence of work, by creating the consciousness of man, with language as a historical product of practical reality. Thus, after the development of work through the domestication of fauna and flora, the ability to speak and count was central for human organization in society. Although it has changed many times, the word civilization is used in multiple ways to refer to societies whose stage of development and social organization is deemed as advanced and complex, in cultural and technological aspects.

However, China is not a continuous people of more than 5,000 years. What does exist is a historical, economic and social accumulation over the millennia, turning a conglomerate of peoples into a civilization that emanates from the sharing of recorded technicalscientific means by a writing system. Therefore, without communication there is no civilization. In other words, communicating is the way to describe and change reality, and the relationship between human work and language is responsible for people's socialization and the creation and transformation of material bases for society's way of life.

Considering the proposal of this article regarding China's unparalleled capacity of response to a major public health problem, communication in society, in this sense, implies an example of public policy action. Dr?gan (2019) affirms that contemporary's complex problems require a collaborative approach.

Volume XXI Issue VI Version I 30 ( ) According to him, in crisis situations, such as natural disasters, terrorist attacks and pandemics, communication and coordination go hand in hand as a public policy action. That is why numbers and language need to be accurate, since communication in crisis management requires efficient, practical information use and sharing, avoiding failure, delay or loss. Otherwise, the ability to coordinate diminishes.

Dr?gan (2019) further explains that crisis coordination requires collaborative resources, through an interorganizational arrangement that allows public agencies and private institutions to cooperate with each other in a joint effort to solve complex problems that any agent alone would not be able to manage. "Crisis coordination implies a full integration of the operations of the different actors involved in crisis management" (Dr?gan, 2019: 29).

Besides that, Christensen et al (2016) state that crisis means situations in which there is a serious threat to basic structures or fundamental norms and values in civil society, requiring crucial decisions to be taken quickly and under unknown circumstances. According to the authors, to manage such situations the main problems are: decision making; communication and coordination; and the recovery, prevention and preparation phases.

That's why the fight against covid-19 in China was highly efficient. What made it possible for the country to face a "people's war" against the virus was the political system under which the central authorities perform general command, with the governing body represented as the State coordinating the strategies to be adopted, at the same time in that local authorities and all other sectors of society follow the lead and the instructions that are being communicated, performing their respective social functions.

China's efficient command is exercised by the Communist Party of China (CPC), whose power structure is the result of the 1949 Liberation War, securing a strong state, centralized government. Under this political system, the ruling party is the agent responsible for coordinating measures, while the State is the public administration's rank that communicates the actions and processes to be carried out.

However, this mechanism's main axis is at the base, since people, organizations, companies etc. -the social actors -fulfill their social functions and collective duties not because it is an autocratic regime, but because the social fabric formed by the people recognizes itself in the Party, thus legitimizing this control. The CPC has no interests of its own. Otherwise, the decision-making and commitments assumed to manage projects, based on science and technology, stands on the relentless pursuit of bringing concrete benefits to the vast majority of its people.

After all, if the Party or any ruler fails for a long period, legitimacy is weakened. And the CPC has been successful so far for not being careless with the people' needs, having a constant sense of crisis management and what needs to be delivered as a result to the population, improving the living conditions of the country and its people. This means that many of the public policies needed by society can only be secured with a strong state and an empowered government.

It was such an structure that allowed China's expedite, effective fighting against the coronavirus spreading, with unparalleled results in the world, showing the Chinese political system and the so-called "market socialism" economic model superiority over liberal democracies and capitalists in their financialized phase, protecting life and waging every efforts to support triumph over this challenge. Thus, this unparalleled capacity to respond to such a major public health crisis brought to the fore the discussion on capitalism and socialism, which seemed to have been overcome since Fukuyama (1992).

From strategic state-owned companies to private ones, the CPC mobilized all Chinese society for a common good. Under the socialist market economy, capital is managed by the State, which executes coordinated actions capable of efficiently allocating funds and generating benefits, compensating for the limits and failures of private capitalism. In Western democracies, from the 1980s onwards and, notably, after the end of the Cold War, the neoliberal doctrine determines that the interests of capital are above the interests of the nation-state, giving companies the power to define public policies and actions on behalf of a small, affluent portion of the population.

Gabriele and Schettino (2012) explain that Market Socialism allows the overcoming of an intrinsic disadvantage of capitalism, namely, the potential contradiction between savings and investments caused by the appropriation of surplus value. According to them, this overcoming occurs because the bourgeoisie in socialism is not a class

endowed with effective internal mechanisms of coordination to undertake economic decisions, with the State being responsible for formulating and implementing an advanced form of planning, with a focus on speed and qualitative characteristics of the accumulation process.

Therefore, it was through a socialist market economy that the CPC was able to convene strategic industries, reconverting activities and innovating the technological tools available, such as QR Code and Social Credit System (SCS). In addition, the Party mobilized the necessary workforce in several areas (health, civil construction, services etc.) to operate at full speed in order to coordinate public policy actions and communicate the urgent needs of the health crisis. In the next section of this article, we will illustrate that in each of these mechanisms there was a disruption, as crisis coordination efficiency depends on adequate crisis communication.

3   III.

Findings and Discussion: ocial, Technological Disruption

The insights presented so far must be considered in a broader context, since the coronavirus pandemic was a global, unprecedented phenomenon, triggering specific challenges and different types of crisis in each country, horizontalizing the world in the face of a public health's global issue. Consequently, the management capacity in each region influenced the way in which the covid-19 contagion was faced.

The proposed discussion is to show that Wuhan's contingency plan posed as a model to control and prevent the spread of the disease, becoming a tool that could be replicated throughout China and that could, perhaps, serve as a reference outside its borders. However, the strategy used in the city served as a learning, scientific method due to the re-creation of existing protocols, with the CPC be taking previous experience during 2002-2003's SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) epidemic while improving its techniques through disruptive processes -whether in the form of social organization or through the tools used.

Such a procedure is part of the social technology idea presented by Helmer-Hirschberg (1965), by proposing a science-based reassessment of the social sciences methodology, modifying traditional procedures and allowing operational approaches to models and research. That is illustrated by Supreme Leader Deng's (1982) analogy of "crossing the river feeling the stones you are stepping on", perceiving the challenges of the journey as part of a socio-economic development strategy. Therefore, understanding social technology as a technical-scientific method of applying the political system and the economic model encompasses understanding how Marxism changed China, incorporating new values, concepts and structures, while absorbing lessons of success and failure.

Marx [1852] (2011) states that a society that does not learn from history is doomed to repeat it -first as a tragedy and then as a farce. Therefore, with a growing knowledge of the virus, the CPC leaders improved and optimized their response measures, making them more effective, ensuring that prevention efforts were strictly based on science.

So much so that since Wuhan reopening, in April 2020, the four fighting fronts (social isolation, mass testing, tracking and treatment) added to the cleaning of public places and the use of masks as a form of individual protection have continued in progress all over China. By listing these actions as effective tools, capable of breaking the whole infection chain, the CPC showed that it has learned to deal with public health crises, adapting the good results and practices left in the management system (blueprints) generated with the SARS, at a time when the covid-19 vaccine did not yet exist.

This was the case in all subsequent cases: from the densely populated region of the Pearl River Delta in the south to the most populous cities, Shanghai and Beijing, and Qingdao in the east; and Kashgar and Chengdu in the west; and the emblematic experience in Shijiazhuang to the north. In all of them, there were efficiency gains, notably in terms of time and space, which allowed the adoption of localized measures, directing actions in restricted areas, without the need to close an entire city.

In doing so, the "people's war" called upon by the Party's General Secretary, President Xi Jinping, became continuous. Wang (2020) states that the Chinese leader's appeal made the battle take a form of defense and control by groups of people -including family communities, work units, individuals and several levels of government. Therefore, China's battle in defense of Wuhan against the disease was a victory won in a socially and historically organized space. After all, "Wuhan is China in miniature; it is a heroic city" (BENJAMIN, 2020: 13), where several battles that mark the country's history took place, shaping the image of a fortress.

That is why the lockdown in Wuhan turned Hubei province's capital into a "stage" for changes in society and modes of production, with public policy actions reaching both social life and the production of essential goods. It is this social engineering that explains the sending of 42,000 medical staff or the construction of two brand new hospitals with 1,000 and 1.6 thousand beds in record time of 10 and 12 days, respectively.

Claiming victory in the battle against covid-19 also depended on logistical support, with the industrial reconversion strategy showing the capacity to react and reorganize production in short notice, as well as updating and expanding existing digital components of the technology ecosystem, such as We Chat and AliPay applications, or through the improvement of the Social Credit System (SCS), in order to generate rewards for good behavior in society. In all of these mechanisms, the participation of state-owned companies (SOEs) was a centerpiece. Lin et al (2020) states that SOEs respond to the orders and recommendations of the Chinese government due to social responsibility commitments, to the detriment of profit maximization that prevails in private corporations.

Therefore, beating the coronavirus in China was based on experience and science. The prevalence of Chinese State governance in hierarchical arrangements and technological network, which ensured the quality of the

response in fighting the coronavirus spreading, evidenced in the adoption of practical solutions in the economic and social environments, betaking tools managed by the political system.

4   Conclusion

From a crisis management organizational point of view, China's struggle against the dissemination of the coronavirus means an in-depth dive in the country's political system and its economic model in order to ensure the strengthening and legitimacy of governance, by making the citizens' demands effectively met. Official statistics expose this discussion's core, showing that the most populous country in the world recorded just over 92,000 people infected with the SARS-CoV-2 virus and less than 5,000 dead, compared to more than 187 million global cases and more than 4 million confirmed deaths from the pandemic's outbreak to the first half of July 2021. The Chinese population was estimated at 1.44 billion people in July 2021, or 18.23% of the world population, estimated at 7.9 billion people at the time. However, the Asian country accounted for 0.05% of confirmed cases and 0.12% of deaths from the disease.

However, the Chinese government's skills are not restricted to the health crisis, whether the current one or previous health collapses. The aim of this article is to show, through the rescue of the historical process of the CPC, that since Marxism reached China, even before 1921, the year of the Party's foundation, this thought brought with it a fresh philosophical notion, which leads towards a correct scientific judgment of social, political contradictions from a practical point of view, allowing coordination and communicate measures that can become concrete.

According to Qiang (2018), for this reason, the Party's first mission is to resolve the tension between philosophical truth and historical practice, to unify the universal philosophical truth of Marxism with the concrete, historical reality of China's political life, producing lines, orientations and policies that can provide concrete guidance in practice. This process is one where theory guides practice and practice tests theory, and where practice allows for the evaluation, improvement, and creation of theory. "This process of dialectical movement between theory and practice, philosophy and history is precisely the 'Sinification of Marxism'" (QIANG, 2018: 7).

It becomes clear, then, the importance of the strategy adopted through China's five-year plans (FYPs), which systematize the process of organizing actions in order to achieve the proposed goals, bringing the basic information to guide what needs to be done, serving as a roadmap even when the route is changed and, after the problem is solved, it is possible to know which direction to take. This is exactly what happened shortly after the control of the first covid-19 outbreak in Wuhan, with President Xi Jinping urging the nation to return to work and daily life, calling for stronger policies to keep the momentum of economic and social development in the country while paying close attention to the achievement of the goals defined for 2020, such as the eradication of extreme poverty.

The FYPs have been used in China since 1953, bringing socio-economic development goals that shape a national project -not just every five years, but also in mid and long terms. Since 1954, the Two Sessions (??) have been held, one of the country's main political events, in which the National People's Assembly, the highest legislative body, and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference meet in Beijing to set such goals.

At the most recent meeting, in May 2021, the leaders of social bases not only defined national priorities under the 14th FYP for the 2021-2025 period, but also outlined long-term goals eyeing 2035, with the premise of developing modes of production and releasing the productive forces for China's new journey in building a modern socialist state. In the understanding of the CPC, placing communism in a cultural, civilizational sphere allows for an evolutionary leap in geometric rather than linear progression.

The Chinese Dream (???), a motto conceived in 2013 by President Xi, encompasses prosperity, harmony and shared destiny. Such an ideal must be achieved together with the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, at the time of the celebration of the Second Centenary, in 2049, when the 100th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China is expected to be celebrated. More than a concept that finds fertile soil in the collective imagination of the Chinese population, the motto goes back to China's history and has deep roots, such as the traumatic events that marked the so-called Century of Humiliation, and is used as a promise of renewal and modernization of the country.

Before that, in 2035, China plans to become a leader in innovation, accelerating technological progress through the 5G mobile network, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Big Data, in order to build a more sophisticated production system that can even protect nature, reshaping global biodiversity. After all, the covid-19 pandemic intensified the discussion about sustainability, as human beings became more vulnerable to diseases, leading to re-thinking the ways of natural resources exploitation.

Such a target includes the so-called "3060" climate goals, with China reaching its carbon dioxide emissions peak by 2030 and zeroing it in 2060. As part of this project, there are also new rural revitalization and urbanization strategies, such as the development of 19 superregions, with Wuhan being part of the "Nine Cities, One Dream", integrating the country's regional business environments with global economic strategies such as the Dual Circulation and the Belt & Road Initiative.

The West is left with only rhetoric, misrepresenting the achievements of Marxism in China while building an ideological wall, which identifies and points out to New China as a society governed by another system. For the

outsider, the Confucian state that prevailed throughout many dynasties because of a "mandate from heaven" still reigns to this day in the Middle Kingdom, even after the dismantling of the political power of the Qing dynasty, in early 1900's.

For Marx [1853], "the English cannon in 1840 (...) broke down the authority of the Emperor, and forced the Celestial Empire into contact with the terrestrial world". Since then, the West has tried to keep the Chinese people under the influence of the same "soporific drug", inducing the world to look at China as a place within the parameters of the past, that country that was humiliated, semi-colonized and would be dominated again if it returned to the Confucian era. But the New China breeded from 1949's War of Liberation, under the communist aegis, despite being opposed to liberal democracies, has served as a basis for capitalism to overcome the many crises that have occurred since the end of the gold-dollar standard, in 1971, with this mode of production remaining hegemonic until now.

For all these reasons, this article responds assertively to the assumption that the political system and economic model in China are reaffirmed in the face of the 21st century's crises and the challenges of the new millennium, recognizing that the solutions presented by the CPC sets a route simultaneously suited to specific national conditions and global challenges, overcoming the problems in order to promote human life in the productive force's collective. A closer look is enough to realize that there is no single path to the world.

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