

Coronavirus: Our Relationship with China Should Never Go Back to Normal



By Alex Berezow, PhD — April 1, 2020

Bad luck played a role in the COVID-19 pandemic, but China's criminally negligent and malevolent behavior has placed the world in a position in which bad things are likelier to occur. Therefore, China must bear the brunt of the blame, and our relationship with that country should not go back to normal.



Credit: Christopher Corneschi /
Wikipedia [1]

When the COVID-19 pandemic finally slows down, there will be one burning question that all of us will want to know the answer to: "Who is to blame for the coronavirus?"

As a rule, I believe that Americans (and probably people in general) are too quick to assign blame. Day-to-day events are largely unpredictable, knowledge is imperfect, humans are fallible, and nothing is permanent. Toss in a healthy dose of entropy, and you have a recipe for bad luck.

But nobody likes "bad luck" as an explanation for events. That's why after catastrophes occur, lawsuits fly, particularly in the United States. *Someone must be held accountable.* Who will we blame for COVID-19?

The American public will blame the Trump administration. President Trump will blame Europe. The Europeans will blame Italy. The Italians will blame China. The Chinese will blame the government.

All over the world, citizens will point fingers at their own politicians, asking, "Why weren't you prepared for this?"

COVID-19: All Fingers Point to China

Ultimately, China is to blame. Even if bad luck played a role -- and it certainly did -- China's actions have exacerbated the crisis and put the world in a position in which bad things are likelier to happen. That is why, for at least four particular reasons, China deserves the largest share of the blame:

(1) Wet markets. The long-standing practice of wet markets — in which live animals, some exotic, are butchered in front of eager customers — set the stage for the pandemic. Millions of people coming into regular contact with both living and dead animals is simply asking for a virus to jump between species. It is believed that a wet market in Guangdong was responsible for the SARS outbreak in 2002.

What exactly is a wet market like? Let Melissa Chen [describe](#) [2] it:

"A distinctly fetid stench greets you long before entering the market; soon it becomes apparent why they're referred to as 'wet'. Unidentified fluids, sometimes with ribbons of red swirls, pool around your shoes, draining from the blocks of ice used to keep all the meats fresh."

...

"Pictures and video clips circulated on Weibo and other social media platforms showed the range of animals on sale — wolf pups, rats, peacocks, raccoons, porcupines, snakes, crocodiles and foxes, all jammed side-by-side in flimsy cages awaiting their own slaughter, making it easy for zoonotic diseases to leap from species to species and from animals to humans."

(2) Poor regulation. Chinese food safety standards are essentially non-existent. According to [CNN](#) [3] in 2015, nearly "half of Chinese food-processing plants fail to meet internationally acceptable standards." Fraud is common. Food labeled organic and exported to the U.S. is often [not actually organic](#) [4]. In 2007, there was a [massive recall of pet food made in China](#) [5] because it was contaminated with melamine.

(3) Coverups. China has a long history of covering up infectious disease epidemics, such as HIV and SARS. China wanted to shed this reputation, and at one point, the [government warned](#) [6] that anyone who covered up SARS-CoV-2 would be "nailed on the pillar of shame for eternity." That must have been an inside joke. Reverting to true form, [whistleblowers were silenced](#) [7]. And we now know that [China covered up the coronavirus outbreak](#) [8] for at least three weeks.

(4) Global disinformation campaigns. Worse than a coverup, China is now trying to re-write history. [ProPublica](#) [9] reports that thousands of fake or hijacked Twitter accounts spread disinformation and attack the Chinese government's political opponents. One official [blamed the outbreak on the U.S. military](#)

[10]. This is all part of a coordinated effort to deflect blame.

It's time for the world to face reality: On the global stage, China is at best criminally negligent and at worst a malevolent force. As Shadi Hamid, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institute, wrote for *The Atlantic* [11]: "[T]he relationship with China cannot and should not go back to normal."

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Links

[1]

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019–20_coronavirus_pandemic#/media/File:Dried_pasta_shelves_empty_in_an_Australia

[2] <https://spectator.us/time-ban-wet-markets/>

[3] <https://edition.cnn.com/2015/01/16/world/china-food-safety/index.html>

[4] https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/the-labels-said-organic-but-these-massive-imports-of-corn-and-soybeans-werent/2017/05/12/6d165984-2b76-11e7-a616-d7c8a68c1a66_story.html

[5] <https://www.fda.gov/animal-veterinary/recalls-withdrawals/melamine-pet-food-recall-2007>

[6] <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-51185836>

[7] https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/xgqk9n/china-is-trying-to-rewrite-the-history-of-silenced-whistleblower-doctor-li-wenliang

[8] <https://www.axios.com/timeline-the-early-days-of-chinas-coronavirus-outbreak-and-cover-up-ee65211a-afb6-4641-97b8-353718a5faab.html>

[9] <https://www.propublica.org/article/how-china-built-a-twitter-propaganda-machine-then-let-it-loose-on-coronavirus>

[10] <https://www.businessinsider.com/chinese-official-says-us-army-maybe-brought-coronavirus-to-wuhan-2020-3?IR=T>

[11] <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/03/china-trolling-world-and-avoiding-blame/608332/>