

CHINA - COVID ONE YEAR ON

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Introduction

Earlier this year, the Henry Jackson Society (HJS) published *'Coronavirus Compensation? Assessing China's Potential Culpability and Avenues of Legal Response'* which sought to highlight the Communist Party of China's (CPC) negligence in the early outbreak and catastrophic impact of COVID-19 on the rest of the world.¹ Of course, since April 2020, when the report was being written-up, the spread, death toll, and economic impact of the virus have vastly increased.

Throughout the mid-part of 2020, large numbers of new Coronavirus cases were reported on a daily basis from all over the world. By late December global cases had passed 78 million and, more tragically still, claimed the lives of 1.7 million.² This figure dwarfs the death toll on April 1, cited in *'Coronavirus Compensation'*. This should come as no surprise given the exponential growth of the virus. While it took six weeks for cases to climb from 10 million to 20 million, when the virus first started spreading around the globe, by the end of the year it only took half that

time for cases to jump from 50 million to 60 million. This has forced governments across the world to take unprecedented steps to protect the public's health.

The economic hit from COVID-19 has been much harder than first anticipated as countries, like the United Kingdom, have had to extend and re-impose lockdown measures designed to contain the spread of the virus. This has hit the hospitality, leisure, and travel industries particularly hard. Meanwhile, consumer confidence, and thus consumer spending, has fallen alongside increases in unemployment. As this briefing will highlight global economic growth is expected to decline further than originally expected, according to forecasts from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Predictions of a global recession, matching if not exceeding the 2008 global financial crisis, appear not to have been hasty doom-mongering.

Looking back it is difficult to believe that the cause of all of this destruction and disaster

¹ Henderson et al, *'Coronavirus Compensation? Assessing China's Potential Culpability and Avenues of Legal Response'*, The Henry Jackson Society, (2020), available at: <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/publications/coronaviruscompensation/>, last visited: 24 December 2020.

² *'Coronavirus Resource Centre'*, Johns Hopkins University, available at: <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/>, last visited: 24 December 2020.

emerged in Hubei Province, in the People’s Republic of China, just over a year ago. It is a point that should not be forgotten nor should we be fatalistic when looking back on this year’s events. As HJS’s original report makes clear the CPC failed to share critical information about the virus’s transmission with the outside world. Furthermore, leaked reports, published recently by CNN, give credence to the accusations of negligence in Hubei, amongst other criticisms, with discrepancies between official statistics and those publicised on a number of occasions from January to early March 2020.³

This briefing follows from ‘Coronavirus Compensation’ with updated information on both China’s original concealment and the economic damage of the disease. In addition, it will update the report’s timeline to include new revelations from CNN’s ‘The Wuhan files’, additional information related to the disappearance of citizen journalists inside China, and key data milestones since the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) declaration of a Global Pandemic on 11 March 2020.

Updated Timeline of Key Events

Date	Event
17 November 2019	First record – in unpublished, unconfirmed Chinese government documents seen by the South China Morning Post (SCMP) – of a virus infection matching what is later identified as COVID-19 in a 55-year-old male from Hubei Province. Eight comparable cases are recorded in November, according to SCMP.
1 December	A later report in The Lancet, published by Chinese scientists, states that the first known COVID-19 case is recorded on this date.
8 December	A further patient is recorded with what have become recognisable symptoms. A later World Health Organisation (WHO) document reports that the first case of COVID-19 was recorded on this date.
Mid December	Between 1 and 5 new cases are now being recorded each day, according to unpublished, unconfirmed Chinese government documents seen by the SCMP.
20 December	60 confirmed cases have been reported by this date, according to unpublished, unconfirmed Chinese government documents seen by the SCMP.
27 December	A friend of the now famous deceased COVID-19 ‘whistle-blower’ Dr Li Wenliang later writes that on this date the friend’s own medical department was the first to report the new outbreak to the Wuhan Centre for Disease Control. Another doctor involved in diagnosing cases of the virus on this date later said he had been sure then that the disease would spread from human to human.
	Unpublished, unconfirmed Chinese government documents seen by the SCMP report that 181 cases of infection have now been recorded.

³ Walsh, Nick Paton, ‘The Wuhan files’, CNN, 1 December 2020, available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/11/30/asia/wuhan-china-covid-intl/index.html>, last visited: 24 December 2020.

Date	Event
30 December	<p>Dr Li sends a message to his friends about a SARS-like outbreak. He and these friends were later investigated by police, and Li was obliged to sign a pledge not to spread any more “disruptive rumours”.</p> <p>Medical authorities ban staff from publicising the outbreak, and impede efforts to bring existing research into the virus to completion by delaying approval to circulate necessary data.</p>
	<p>Unpublished, unconfirmed Chinese government documents seen by the SCMP report that the total numbers of cases stands at 266.</p>
31 December	<p>China reports the outbreak to the WHO.</p> <p>A low-key public notice by Wuhan health authorities describes a new flu outbreak with 27 cases, 7 of them serious, linked to the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market, as yet no clear evidence of human to human transmission, and advises people with persistent fever to seek medical help.</p>
	<p>The New Year speech of Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, makes no reference to the outbreak.</p>
	<p>Xinhua, China’s official state-run news agency, reports that all cases are linked to the Huanan Market in Wuhan and that there is no evidence of human-to-human (HTH) transmission.</p>
1 January 2020	<p>Huanan Market is closed. 31 biological samples collected that day at the market from the animal sales area are later claimed in state media to contain virus DNA akin to COVID-19.</p>
	<p>Unpublished, unconfirmed Chinese government documents seen by the SCMP report a total of 381 cases.</p>
2 January	<p>41 new cases confirmed on this date at one Wuhan hospital were reported to include 27 patients who had been to the Huanan Market, while the rest had not.</p>
2-16 January	<p>Wuhan authorities maintain that new case numbers have fallen significantly.</p>
	<p>Around this time, the surge begins of visitors to and from Wuhan for New Year celebrations.</p>
6-11 January	<p>Hubei Province CCP holds annual meeting of the Provincial Peoples’ Congress.</p>
7 January	<p>State news agency Xinhua reports a meeting of Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) which would have been led by Xi Jinping. Later, in the text of a 3 February speech published on 15 February, Xi states that at this meeting he issued ‘requirements’ for the control of the outbreak.</p>
9 January	<p>Record of death of a patient from COVID-19 who had earlier infected his wife, demonstrating HTH.</p>
10 January	<p>A Shanghai laboratory completes genome sequencing of the COVID-19 virus; a report of this is passed to WHO.</p>
	<p>Dr Li Wenliang falls ill with COVID-19, caught from one of his patients.</p>
	<p>Chinese officials, auditing testing facilities, reported that the SARS testing kits that were being used to diagnose the Covid-19 were ineffective and regularly gave false negatives.</p>

Date	Event
11 January	A Western medical journal later reports 7 other healthcare workers have been infected with virus by this date. Chinese official media refer to one other case of a doctor with the virus.
14 January	WHO epidemiologist says that COVID-19 shows 'limited' HTH. WHO then says this is a 'misunderstanding' and issues a tweet saying that there is no evidence of HTH, citing Chinese health officials.
15 January	Caixin (a major media group funded by state-backed and private entities, and one of the PRC's apparently least subservient media voices) reports that one radiologist had himself detected 50 new cases in one Wuhan hospital on this date.
16 January	Wuhan Municipal Health Commission states that the virus may have been spread by HTH.
18 January	Public banquet based on home-made food shared by 40,000 guests in one Wuhan District, soon followed by numerous viral infections.
20 January	Xi Jinping's first public statement on the outbreak, referring to "the need for timely release of information".
	An epidemiologist, famous for his work on SARS, says on Chinese state television that COVID-19 can be spread by HTH.
22-23 January	Wuhan put under lockdown. The Mayor of Wuhan later says in a public statement (on 26 January) that five million travellers had already left the city by this time.
23 January	The WHO's International Health Regulations (IHR) Emergency Committee meets in Geneva. It notes that HTH has been observed, but defers decision to declare a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). China is asked to collaborate further with WHO on the understanding of the COVID-19 virus's full potential for HTH.
25 January	Beginning of Lunar New Year. The text of speech given by Xi Jinping on 3 February, published on 15 February, indicates that he chaired another PSC on COVID-19 on 25 January, at which he took pains to demonstrate his ongoing concern with the issue. 56 million Hubei residents are now under lockdown.
27 January	Xi Jinping appoints Premier Li Keqiang as head of the COVID-19 task force.
28 January	Xi Jinping meets Tedros Adhanom, Director-General of the WHO. Xi is reported in state media as "personally commanding" the Chinese response to the epidemic. State media also reports that Xi told Tedros that "the Chinese government has released information about the epidemic in a timely, open, transparent and responsible manner".
29, 30 January	China's Supreme Court rebukes Wuhan police for suppressing "rumours" about the outbreak.
30 January	Tedros Adhanom chairs a WHO meeting that declares an PHEIC. No reference to Chinese delay and obfuscation.
1 February	Fang Bin, a businessman who began sharing videos of the situation in Wuhan on YouTube, uploads a clip which appeared to show eight corpses piled in a minibus outside a hospital in the city. That night he claims the police entered his home and interrogated him

Date	Event
3 February	Chinese state media begin a propaganda on the merits of the CCP response to the outbreak.
5 February	First public appearance by Xi Jinping, who says that he knew about the outbreak ahead of sounding the alarm.
6 February	Dr Li Wenliang dies of COVID-19 infection complications.
	Professor John Mackenzie, adviser to WHO Emergency Committee, strongly criticises China's failure to share timely information which could have reduced deaths at home and abroad. Tedros Adhanom later shrugs this off, saying that Mackenzie is not on the WHO staff.
	Former human rights lawyer turned video journalist Chen Qiushi disappears after travelling to Wuhan, according to a video from his mother published on his Twitter account.
7 February	Wave of grief and anger rapidly builds across Chinese social media before succumbing to censorship. The CCP's Internal Discipline Enforcement Agency announces investigation into "complaints by the masses" regarding the persecution of Dr Li.
9 February	Fang Bin posts a 13-second video with the words "all people revolt - hand the power of the government back to the people". This followed his interrogation on 1 February. No further videos were published and his whereabouts remains unknown.
10 February	Xi Jinping is shown, wearing a facemask, demonstrating command and leadership of anti-COVID-19 activity.
	Although not made public at the time by this day six Chinese health care workers had died from Covid-19.
	China officially announces 2,097 confirmed cases, with an additional 1,814 suspected cases, but leaked documents from Hubei show a total of 5,918 newly detected cases, broken down into a variety of subcategories.
12 February	Sudden surge in reported number of new cases in Hubei (14,840 new confirmed infections in one day) raises more foreign concern about previous under-reporting.
	Hours after new infections are confirmed in Hubei, top provincial and municipal CCP leaders are sacked.
17 February	Hubei officials reported just 93 deaths for the day when in reality the figure stood at 196.
24 February	Buying, selling, and eating of wildlife banned by the Chinese legal authorities.
26 February	Li Zehua, a citizen journalist, was chased and detained after travelling to Wuhan.
7 March	The publicly declared death toll in Hubei stood at 2,986. However, a leaked report, obtained by CNN, puts the figure at 3,456, including 2,675 confirmed deaths, 647 "clinically diagnosed" deaths, and 126 "suspected" case deaths.
10 March	As the outbreak begins to decline, Xi Jinping finally visits Wuhan.
11 March	WHO declares a Global Pandemic.

Date	Event
13 March	The WHO Director-General says Europe had become the pandemic epicentre with more reported cases and deaths than the rest of the world combined, apart from China.
4 May	COVID-19 global death toll reaches 250,000.
10 May	COVID-19 global cases worldwide reaches 4 million.
	First new case confirmed in Wuhan after weeks of no cases.
15 May	Shanghai police detained citizen journalist Zhang Zhan on suspicion of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” after she went missing the day before in Wuhan. She had previously travelled to the city, in early February, where she reported on the detentions of other independent reporters and harassment of the aggrieved families of victims.
19 May	Member states of WHO agreed to EU-brokered independent probe into the UN agency’s handling of the coronavirus crisis.
21 May	COVID-19 global cases worldwide reaches 5 million.
13 June	Chinese authorities had provided information about new COVID-19 cases in Beijing, according to WHO.
18 June	COVID-19 global death toll reaches 450,000.
09 July	COVID-19 global cases worldwide reaches 12 million.
10 July	WHO experts departed for China to work together with their Chinese counterparts to prepare scientific plans for identifying the zoonotic source of COVID-19.
30 August	COVID-19 global cases worldwide reaches 25 million.
29 Sep	COVID-19 global death toll reaches 1 million.
04 Oct	COVID-19 global cases worldwide reaches 35 million.
19 Oct	Live coronavirus found on frozen food packaging in China but authorities say there have been no cases of transmission to consumers.
13 Nov	COVID-19 global cases worldwide reaches 50 million.
25 Nov	COVID-19 global cases worldwide reaches 60 million.
03 Dec	COVID-19 global death toll reaches 1.5 million.

China's Negligence

'Coronavirus Compensation' found that the Communist Party of China had acted — at the very least — negligently in the early months of the virus's outbreak. The report documents government attempts to censor Chinese citizens who tried to expose the truth regarding the origins, nature, and danger of the virus. It also points to the role of local officials in hushing up whistle-blowers as well as Chinese officials' lack of transparency in dealing with the World Health Organisation.

One early sign that the CPC's official narrative was not accurate came from a report from the South China Morning Post. This news article, dated 13 March, states that initial cases were recorded on 17 November 2019 and rapidly rose to 266 by the last day of December.⁴ At this early stage, medical authorities withheld permission to report on the outbreak. More importantly, during this time, evidence was already emerging suggesting human-to-human transmission as one-third of cases were not linked to the Huanan Market in Wuhan, the area first thought to be the source of the outbreak. This information proved critical but was not clearly expressed in a low-key notice from Wuhan health authorities nor in a report from the official Xinhua News Agency both put out on 31 December. Additional evidence of human-to-human transmission emerged in early January too.

Furthermore, it appears that the WHO was not given sufficient data or information regarding the outbreak. On 14 January, an official from the health body said that there was "limited" human-to-human transmission, a statement which was retracted that day with a correction put out claiming that there was no evidence of this.

During January, it should also be noted, that the authorities in Hubei's understated the severity of the growing epidemic which was allowed to spread seemingly unchecked. For example, it was acknowledged by the Mayor of Wuhan that five million people had travelled out of the city prior to the imposition of quarantine measures.

Lastly, it should also be remembered that at the end of December 2020, Dr Li Wenliang wrote privately to colleagues warning of a new SARS-like outbreak. An action for which he was summoned by authorities for and ordered not to spread disruptive "rumours". Tragically, Dr Li died from the disease on 7 February 2020. Additionally, as our updated timeline notes, several citizen journalists have been disappeared and/or detained for trying to shine a light on events in Wuhan since the beginning of 2020. These include; Chen Qiushi, Fang Bin, Li Zehua, and Zhang Zhan.

The charge of negligence, supported by the above evidence, is reinforced by 117 pages of leaked documents from the Hubei Provincial Center for Disease Control and Prevention, shared with and verified by CNN which point to failures and a lack of transparency in the local health system.

CNN's 'The Wuhan files': Data Discrepancies

The recent publishing of leaked files from Hubei Province, by CNN as part of their 'the Wuhan files' report, further shines light on the discrepancies between what Hubei officials knew about the virus in the early days of the outbreak. Notable days in early 2020, added to this briefing's updated timeline, include; February 10, February 17, and March 7.

- **February 10:** China officially announces 2,097 confirmed cases, with an additional 1,814 suspected cases, but leaked documents from Hubei a total of 5,918 newly detected cases, broken down into a variety of subcategories. Furthermore, by this date six Chinese health care workers had died from Covid-19, a fact concealed from the public.
- **February 17:** Hubei officials reported just 93 deaths for the day when in reality the figure stood at 196.
- **March 7:** The publicly declared death toll in Hubei stood at 2,986. However, a leaked report, obtained by CNN, puts the figure at 3,456, including 2,675 confirmed deaths, 647 "clinically diagnosed" deaths, and 126 "suspected" case deaths.

⁴ Ma, J. 'Coronavirus: China's first confirmed Covid-19 case traced back to November 17', *South China Morning Post*, 13 March 2020, available at: <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/3074991/coronavirus-chinas-first-confirmed-covid-19-case-traced-back>, last visited: 24 December 2020.

These, especially February 10 and March 7, are the figures highlighted by CNN although they describe the discrepancies between China's public statements and their internal reports throughout this period as being, at times, "blunt". Andrew Mertha, director of the China Studies Program at John Hopkins University, who spoke with CNN suggests that officials many have under-reported to disguise their under-preparedness and a lack of funding. Yet CNN are also keen to stress that the leaked documents themselves do not point to a deliberate attempt to obfuscate findings and that later changes were made by officials to improve the reporting system.

Nevertheless, this initial misreporting mattered, according to political scientist Professor Dali Yang, as it distorted global perceptions. Perhaps lulling foreign leaders into a false sense of security that COVID-19 would eventually, like SARS, be contained.

CNN's 'The Wuhan files': System Failures

Furthermore, 'the Wuhan files' also points to failings of the health system in Hubei, and its general lack of preparedness, which led to errors in the first few months of the outbreak. Of course, problems with testing and diagnosing were not unique to China during this crisis as governments across the world have struggled. Yet the Wuhan files also highlight the top-down, bureaucratic constraints on the local health system which further prevented it from adapting to the challenges of the virus outbreak between October 2019 and April 2020. Some of the key problems highlighted by the documents are as follows:

- The Center for Disease Control and Prevention operations in Hubei appeared to be; "underfunded, lacking the right testing equipment, and with unmotivated staff who were often felt ignored in China's vast bureaucracy."
- An audit of testing facilities, on January 10, highlighted serious problems with

testing. SARS testing kits, which were being used regularly gave false negatives. While the lack of personal protective equipment meant that virus samples became inactive before testing.

- A report from early March states the average time to confirm a diagnosis, from the appearance of symptoms was 23.3 days.

Such details would have seriously affected local officials' ability to monitor and control the outbreak. Especially the three-week delay in confirming a diagnosis which, according to Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security's Dr. Amesh Adalja, would have made public health interventions much harder. Moreover, they fly in the face of the publicly released white paper written by China's state council which stressed efficiency and transparency of the country's system.⁵

The Economic Cost

'Coronavirus Compensation' asked the economic impact of coronavirus by comparing the 2020 global economic growth forecasts by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development in October 2019 and March 2020. At this point, the economic outlook already looked bleak with growth forecasts for China and the G7 being revised down. At the time it was thought that Italy and Japan would be the hardest hit, with annual projected growth rates of -0.4% and -0.2%.⁶ The report also noted that China, despite being the origin of the virus, was set to have a relatively high rate of growth.

Nine months on the economic forecasts look even more dire with a sharp contraction in the world economy in 2020 predicted.⁷ Again China's GDP, unlike this time of those in the G7, is expected to grow – albeit by 1.8%. Moreover, compared with the G7, its forecasted reduction in growth is relatively small.

⁵ Ma, J. 'Coronavirus: China's first confirmed Covid-19 case traced back to November 17', *South China Morning Post*, 13 March 2020, available at: <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/3074991/coronavirus-chinas-first-confirmed-covid-19-case-traced-back>, last visited: 24 December 2020.

⁶ 'Coronavirus: The world economy at risk', Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, March 2020, available at: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/7969896b-en.pdf>, last visited: 24 December 2020.

⁷ 'OECD Economic Outlook, Volume 2020 Issue 2', Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, December 2020, available at: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/economics/oecd-economic-outlook/volume-2020/issue-2_39a88ab1-en, last visited: 24 December 2020. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/7969896b-en.pdf>, last visited: 24 December 2020.

Table 1: OECD Economic Forecasts for China and the G7 in 2020, October 2019 v. March 2020 v. December 2020

Country	October 2019 forecast for 2020	March 2020 forecast for 2020	December 2020 forecast for 2020	Reduction Oct 2019 to Dec 2020 forecasts
China	4.9%	4.1%	1.8%	-3.1%
Canada	1.3%	1.0%	-5.4%	-6.7%
France	0.9%	0.6%	-9.1%	-10%
Germany	0.3%	0.2%	-5.5%	-5.8%
Italy	0.0%	-0.4%	-9.1%	-9.1%
Japan	0.2%	-0.2%	-5.3%	-5.5%
United Kingdom	0.8%	0.6%	-11.2%	-12%
United States	1.9%	1.8%	-3.7%	-5.6%

In this forecast, it is the United Kingdom which sees the largest fall in GDP, -11.2%. This is in line with the UK's Office for Budget Responsibility prediction of an 11.3% fall, a figure which would mark the largest drop in over 300 years.⁸ Despite subsequent growth in future years the OBR does not expect the UK economy to recover to pre-COVID levels until late 2022 and warns of long-term economic scarring.⁹

As noted in 'Coronavirus compensation', lockdowns and restrictions imposed by governments have necessitated spending to support public services and businesses, as well as provide enhanced social security. Additionally, governments have also expected to raise less in taxation as unemployment increases and workers are kept on government-backed job retention schemes.

Both are true of the UK which is forecasted to borrow a total of £394 billion, the equivalent of 19% of the country's GDP.¹⁰ Which as the Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, noted in his November 2020 Spending Review is the highest recorded level of borrowing in the UK's peacetime history. For the British public,

the repercussions of this will likely be tax rises or spending cuts, or some combination of both in the near future.

Britain is not alone. 'Coronavirus Compensation' originally calculated that, together, the G7 would spend more than £3.2 trillion to meet the direct economic costs of COVID-19 as other nations take similar steps to the UK. However, as restrictions and lockdowns have been extended and renewed over the summer and into winter 2020 across the world this figure will have undoubtedly increased. Moreover, governments will in the future also need to spend more to deal with medium to long-term issues brought about by the pandemic such as unemployment.

⁸ Office for Budget Responsibility, 'Economic and Fiscal Outlook', (November 2020), available at: http://cdn.obr.uk/CCS1020397650-001_OBR-November2020-EFO-v2-Web-accessible.pdf, last visited: 24 December 2020.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ HC Debate(25 November 2020). vol 684, col.827. Available at: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-11-25/debates/6437F778-628F-48A1-ADF3-C06BA1C09EBA/SpendingReview2020AndOBRForecast>, last visited: 24 December 2020.

Conclusion

This short briefing sought to re-enforce the 'Coronavirus Compensation' report's central argument, that China's negligence has cost the rest of the world dearly, by presenting information that has come to light since April. Both new GDP growth forecasts and the revelations of 'the Wuhan files' make this case.

The previous report also highlighted several legal avenues that other countries could take in order to hold China to account for its actions and obtain financial compensation. Of course, it did not assess the prospects for such claims nor the likelihood of them being launched, noting such action would require both "courage and global solidarity". Nevertheless, it stated that policymakers may wish to pursue them for the sake of upholding the rules-based international order.

Perseverance is something they will need too. This year China has successively blocked and restricted access to Wuhan for international investigators and watered down calls for investigations at the WHO.¹¹ Only now is it expected that a WHO team will finally be able to travel to Wuhan in January 2021 to conduct investigations into the origins of the disease.¹² Yet getting to this point has been costly for some countries, like Australia, who have faced diplomatic and economic punishments from Beijing for daring to insist on transparency. After Canberra called for an independent inquiry, in March, into the origins of coronavirus, Beijing has imposed bans and sanctions on a string of imports including; barley, beef, copper, sugar, lobsters, timber, coal, with the latest being wine.¹³ Relations fractured further from there. As if the cost of COVID-19 was not high enough already.

¹¹ Gebrekidan et al, 'In Hunt for Virus Source, W.H.O. Let China Take Charge', *New York Times*, 3 November 2020, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/02/world/who-china-coronavirus.html>, last visited: 24 December 2020.

¹² Davidson, H., 'WHO research team expected to travel to Wuhan to investigate coronavirus origin', *The Guardian*, 16 December 2020, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/16/who-research-team-expected-to-travel-to-wuhan-to-investigate-coronavirus-origin>, last visited: 24 December 2020.

¹³ Mao, F. 'How a blow to Australian wine shows tensions with China', *BBC News*, 3 December 2020, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-australia-55167882>, last visited: 24 December 2020.

Policy Recommendations

As a matter of urgency, the UK Government and likeminded Governments around the world should:

1. Register in the strongest possible terms protestation to the WHO, the acceptance of the access granted by the Peoples' Republic of China to the team investigating the origins of COVID-19. The UK Government must state unequivocally its position that any investigation should have full unimpeded, unmonitored, and uninterrupted access to both Chinese locations and to documents held by local, regional, and national bodies in China.
2. Note concerns raised about some members of the 10-person WHO investigatory team who were appointed in consultation with China. Including concerns relating to some member's previous links with the Wuhan Institute of Virology. As a result of this or other factors if their investigation falls short then the UK should ask the WHO to appoint a new scientific investigatory team, in a process independent of the PRC, to conduct an investigation.
3. Take economic measures to belay the impact of Chinese economic sanctions on Australia. The Australian Government is to be commended for seeking an inquiry into COVID-19's origins. Yet — instead of plaudits — it has faced retribution from the PRC in the form of economic sanctions. The wider world has an obligation to negate the effects of these through a suite of measures to benefit impacted Australian companies.
4. Promote — in future negotiations — that China submits itself to binding dispute resolution mechanisms as part of its accession to any treaty or bilateral agreements. The UK could and should go further by making submission to binding dispute resolution mechanisms under international treaties a condition of entering any bilateral agreements whether or not the issues covered are similar.
5. Explore the introduction of a WHO-plus system under which early reporting of pandemics and maintenance of standards becomes not only mandatory but justiciable. Countries that agree to be bound by such rules should explore granting access to citizens of other members without health screenings that may form part of post-pandemic travel policies.
6. Condemn China's treatment of citizen journalists who were disappeared earlier this year after trying to report on the situation in Wuhan. This includes Zhang Zhan who was recently found guilty of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" and sentenced to four years in prison.