

## **Introduction**

The COVID-19 epidemic that broke out globally has continued to affect all aspects of human activities. In March, when the epidemic situation was taking a relatively favorable in China but continuing to worsen abroad, the situation of Chinese students studying overseas drew great attention from all walks of life. In this context, the Institute of Area Studies, University (PKUIAS) launched a project themed “Overseas Chinese students amid the epidemic,” inviting some of the students to write down their experiences and observations, as a way to gather insight into the group’s overall situation and a true picture of the epidemic overseas.

The project was launched against the backdrop of a large volume of news about overseas Chinese students — true and — going viral on domestic news and social media platforms, forming a few different varieties of stereotypes about this group of students. In view of this, we chose the macroscopic theme “overseas Chinese students amid the epidemic” without setting specific requirements to restrict the writers’ microscopic perspectives or content (which are difficult to limit in advance). The purpose was for students to write down what they most wanted to say, in order to showcase the real situation.

Overseas Chinese students are scattered all over the world. Considering that epidemic conditions in different countries differed, and students of different educational backgrounds may have had diverse experiences and observations during the epidemic, nine overseas students from the US, the UK, Spain, Belgium, Germany, India, Israel, Russia and Japan, including

PhD candidates, graduate students, undergraduate students and short-term exchange students, were invited to participate in the event, in hopes of getting a systematic, correct and comprehensive understanding of overseas Chinese students' situation during the pandemic. This should be able to demonstrate the situation of overseas students at different levels and the conditions of the pandemic in different regions in Europe, the Americas, the Middle East and Asia.

The nine articles by students reflect the complicated situation they were in during the pandemic. They may have experienced the domestic epidemic through online sources as well as the real-life epidemic where they were, facing increased pressure. They also encountered double discrimination – misunderstanding from China on one hand and unfriendliness from the country they were in on the other hand. These articles feature a backdrop of different efforts to fight the pandemic by different countries, which originated from their political, economic, cultural, and social differences and their different levels of medical infrastructure. This inspires us to further explore ways to coordinate the global and national characteristics of the global public health governance system.

Hu Li

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## **Overseas Chinese students amid the epidemic:**

### **Being labeled and marginalized**

By Liu Weichen from the London School of Economics and  
Political Science

As a Chinese student studying social sciences in the UK, I seriously sensed my powerlessness in society in recent months. All the theories I've learned are based on conventional contexts, but scholars seem to have never considered the huge impact brought about by COVID-19. As the British media said, one month ago, no one had expected that things would be like this. With the pandemic, everyone equally faces an unprecedented challenge.

#### **Marginalized Chinese students: anxiety caused by wearing a face mask**

The city of London is not only international and pluralistic, but also full of conflicts and misunderstandings, and also self-centered. On the streets, almost every walker seems to chat with a secret language hardly known by others. It should have been easy for a foreigner to integrate into this inclusive society. However, this was not the case.

It seems that the Chinese in the UK are shouldering double pressure, both from the pandemic and from the act of wearing a face mask. If you walk on the street in a mask and meet another people wearing a mask, nine times out of ten, you can confidently talk with him or her in Chinese. I am not going to argue "whether wearing a mask works" because that is the business of medical experts. I am neither talking about whether

everyone has the right to wear a mask or whether wearing a mask should be a cause for discrimination, because the facts obviously say everything and it is unnecessary to have this discussion. I only want to say from the cultural perspective that the face mask in British society before the pandemic happened was an exclusive signal, and those in a face mask were labeled as patients, vulnerable people or Chinese people.

A face mask has provided a new excuse or even created a clearer target for those who had already held a bias toward Chinese people. This explains why after some overseas Chinese students were discriminated against or beaten up for wearing masks, all overseas Chinese felt mounting pressure, fearing that once they wore a mask, they were exposing themselves to discrimination. As local mainstream media released propaganda labeling face masks as useless, face masks intensified the “marginalization” of Chinese students, pressuring them not to wear masks although they wanted to. As foreigners, we are worried about being isolated by local society and suffering. Even an unfriendly gaze from a passerby could make us anxious.

However, the British people’s weak awareness and ineffective measures from the government at the beginning of the pandemic obscured the hidden dangers of the virus. The situation worsened in early March. I once told my friends in China that the UK would close its schools by the end of March, and I would wear a mask on public transport and in public places. Even so, I felt upset, especially when no one else around me was wearing a mask. I seemed to be an alien. When the subway car was mostly empty during non-rush hours, I would

take off my mask, and put it on again when getting off the train or transferring. When I was in class, it was difficult to persuade myself to wear a mask when communicating with my classmates, because I was not sure if they could accept this. They might even become hostile to me.

Frankly speaking, I was attempting to do something to change the situation around me when I realized the pandemic was getting increasingly serious in the UK. I told the British students in my class we are not doing enough — for example, not everyone covered their mouths when they coughed — and the measures implemented by the government were completely insufficient. One of the students said, “All the medical students I know said this (COVID-19) is not a big deal. Don’t worry.” I smiled bitterly and handed her some disposable hand sanitizer. “Then please wash your hands with it (as the British government suggested).” She also smiled but refused without hesitation. Later in class, I asked the professor whether he was worried about the virus. The professor, who was not worried, told us, “Everything will be fine.” I felt helpless, and knew that without the correct guidance of the government, what I have said and done was only a drop in the bucket. A Chinese friend who is very close to me said, “Without experiencing an explosion of information [as we did] during those two months, they won’t understand.” This is true. Those of us who are cautious every day and want to go back to our home country are still “aliens” in society and “marginal people” acting contrary to British government policies, and are excluded from mainstream epidemic discourse and even the mainstream discourse of overseas students.

## **Herd immunity: Schools closed, farewell party and turning point**

The turning point appeared when the UK's chief scientific adviser Sir Patrick Vallance publicized the concept of "herd immunity" for the first time, which made the British public suddenly see clearly the government's attitude. We learned that we could not rely on the government for protection. Since then, everyone has felt an unprecedented huge amount of pressure created by media reports. Many British people do not trust print media, thinking that the media usually exaggerate facts and use sensationalism to draw attention. So, the British instead trust social media. But one day they suddenly found that even social media was flooded with anxiety and fear about the pandemic. My classmates had a farewell party on the last day of classes. We were chatting, drinking, having snacks and crazily washing our hands with disposable hand sanitizer. We all knew that danger was lurking nearby, but no one was willing to admit it or surrender to the pandemic. The classmate who previously said the pandemic is "not a big deal" now complains about Boris Johnson while drinking Corona beer to vent her frustration about COVID-19. Luckily, the school gave me a strong sense of belonging when I was caught at the fringes of society due to the pandemic. The university president was very rational and decisive, making our university one of the earliest in the UK to suspend classes. Teachers in our department spent their weekends preparing plans about our future classes, seminars, and exams, and planning postponements. Students shared information, and encouraged and supported each other, all of

which helped me find a sense of belonging, acceptance and being cared about. In light of some British schools' tough insistence on treating students who wanted to return to China as dropouts — only one week before the lockdown — I felt lucky, and I felt concern from the community.

The British government sharply changed its attitude toward the pandemic after experiencing a slew of criticism and blame. On March 23, one week after our school was closed, the British government issued a very strict lockdown measure. Outside of four essential circumstances, no one was allowed to go out, and the police had the power to punish those who violated the regulations. Although the government's measures came late, they were better than nothing. At least the government was no longer passively responding to the epidemic to achieve “herd immunity,” a move showing no respect toward life. But beyond the expectations of many Chinese students studying abroad, what followed their long-awaited active response from the British government was the struggle of returning home.

### **Anxiety and hesitation of going home**

After the epidemic was under control in China, overseas Chinese students were suddenly put on the opposite side of domestic anti-epidemic efforts, getting a completely different treatment from what they had previously received when they made donations to China. The exaggerated messages from Chinese and foreign media spread anxiety about these students, making Chinese parents increasingly worried about their children overseas. Returning to China became something that all overseas Chinese students and even all the Chinese in Britain

were considering and even looking forward to. The epidemic situation in China stabilized and was coming to an end, and in contrast, the global epidemic situation was worsening. Most Chinese students studying overseas had no one to look after them because they were living alone, (in light of the epidemic, having a roommate was more frightening than comforting), so it was natural for the students to think about going home.

However, an increasing number of infections in China coming from overseas not only proved the way back home was risky, but also increased antipathy in China toward Chinese returning from overseas. Being “locked down” at home for two months, many Chinese people saw their income sharply drop. And the long period of staying at home without any social activities brought about mental pressure, making people extremely sensitive to any increase in COVID-19 cases. Reports by news media further grated on Chinese people’s sensitive nerves. From the news reports about Chinese students insisting on drinking purified water, to reports about overseas Chinese who returned home and went jogging without wearing masks, to reports about returning Chinese insulting quarantine personnel at the airport, returning Chinese were labelled as dishonorable. The conflicts and sentiments were continuously amplified by social media, finally being escalated to conflicts and disputes on social networks, including social media platforms, news media apps and online sport communities. Since most overseas students are young and extremely active on social media, the conflicts then gradually shifted to focus on overseas students.

Every day, we had to struggle with the drastic changes in flight plans. A flight could be cancelled at any time. This



struggle did not end until March 29, when the Civil Aviation Administration of China made a so-called “Five One” policy stating that an airline could maintain only one route to one country, and each route could carry out up to one flight per week. In this sense, most overseas Chinese students could not go home, and China was able to solve the crisis caused by cases of infections coming from outside the country.

However, overseas students did not suddenly become free of anxiety with the cancelation of flights, but still desired to go home. As one of them, rationally speaking, I am not planning to go home now, and neither are many of my schoolmates. Our biggest concern is that the number of flights going home won't increase, the policy limiting returning home won't relax, and the quarantine imposed on people returning from abroad won't lift. The epidemic continues to spread in foreign countries. What shall we do in June and July, the graduation time for a lot of students like me? June is an important date for overseas students studying in the UK and all of Europe, because many students' rental contracts will expire and they need to go home to do research and write essays. Some are also planning to join summer internships and hunt for jobs. Seeing that Italy has not seen any favorable turn after experiencing the peak period for more than a month and that there is no sign that China will loosen its policy in the near future, we are full of concern about our future.

In addition, some airlines and agents are using the opportunity to sell tickets at a price three, five times or even 10 times higher than usual. Most overseas students are not what some social media commentators depicted — born into rich

families and never planning to serve their homeland. Instead, those born into rich families have more channels to go back home, and those stuck abroad are mostly the ones who did not get back their refunds from airlines in time, running out of money and losing hope. Our families have already spent considerable savings to let us study abroad. We would not waste tens of thousands of yuan on a flight and finally exchange the ticket for an airline voucher that we will not use in a year.

**Conclusion: When there is a motherland, there is hope**

At the end of March, China assigned expert teams from Shandong Province to aid the UK, which boosted the confidence of tens of thousands of Chinese students and scholars in Britain. Relevant departments also especially stressed the care of Britain-based Chinese students. It made us feel more secure when facing the fragile NHS. A strong motherland is always the best cure when we face crisis. I believe that China will make persistent efforts to overcome the epidemic and bring more confidence to overseas students. Although the domestic consensus on overseas students is still unfriendly, it has been eased a lot due to the gradual tightening of policies and the clear attitude of the country. Topics related to “overseas Chinese students” are now rarely seen in “hot trending searches.” Under strict controls, many people in London have proactively put on masks or scarves and consciously keep a social distance from others. Toilet paper, water and frozen food supplies in supermarkets survived the panic buying crisis and returned to normal – although one has to wait for dozens of minutes before entering a supermarket because of limits on the number of

people inside. The first wave of the epidemic has gradually faded. However, the struggle against the epidemic abroad is far from reaching its climax.

## **Overseas Chinese students amid the epidemic: caught in a dilemma**

By Lu Hanyu from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

### **A contradictory identity**

As an overseas Chinese student in the US, I have stayed at home for dozens of days. It is not boring because I can still connect to the world by smartphone and computer, getting to know what has happened in China and the US through media reports and catching up with friends on social media platforms. Most importantly, I have seen the paradox and conflicts in the hearts of Chinese students studying overseas during the pandemic.

Most students in this group have long subconsciously doubted their identity. The outbreak of the pandemic has just exposed these existing problems. Holding a Chinese passport in the US, I am only counted as a stranger and a minority in a foreign land, without enjoying the same rights as locals. Meanwhile, the Chinese public misunderstands overseas students and media reports about us are usually negative. All of this has led to an unprecedented bias toward us from the public during the epidemic.

Chinese students studying overseas have actually lived in a dilemma for a long time. Taking the pandemic for instance, Chinese students studying in the US have to pay on their own for intravenous drips if they have a fever, not to mention expensive treatments for serious illnesses. But if we return to China, our medical treatment fees will still be paid for by ourselves. Many overseas students may not realize that from the

moment we study abroad, our domestic social insurance is cut off, and the government will not reimburse medical expenses for people without social insurance. Therefore, once we are infected with COVID-19, no matter where we are, we face high medical fees.

### **‘Birds’ that lost the chance to fly**

The policy of reducing the number of flights to China has ignited anxiety among overseas students. My WeChat moments are full of expressions of dissatisfaction with this policy, and the belief that this group of students was not treated equally by the country. I can comprehend their feelings, because it is difficult for us to trust the changing media and inefficient medical systems abroad. All we can believe in is our Chinese citizenship. But this flight policy makes most students studying abroad homeless.

This psychological gap is understandable, because even though we are abroad, we trust our motherland much more than foreign governments. At the beginning of the epidemic, many overseas students actively purchased masks and protective items for their hometowns. At the same time, we also witnessed China’s strong capacity for the execution of effective prevention and control measures. In contrast, foreign epidemic prevention measures are limited, the public pays less attention to the epidemic, and the public statements of many heads of government are incomprehensible and lack support from scientific evidence, making it difficult for overseas students to feel safe. Therefore, many students want to return because of their trust in China. But the flight policy makes them think that

they have lost the support of their own country. In my opinion, our country's policies are formulated from a practical point of view. The starting point of these policies is different from the vantage point of overseas students, and this leads to misunderstanding.

First, the cancellation of most international flights mainly resulted from the conflict between “principle” and “operability.” From the perspective of economics, resources are limited and scarce. If the country has sufficient medical and human resources, more flights will operate to meet the demand of overseas Chinese to return home. But in fact, the country has consumed lots of medical resources after months of fighting the epidemic. Customs staff resources were stretched thin after accepting a large number of returning overseas workers who required quarantine and isolation. Some would say such a big country should always have solutions. If so, the US should theoretically have more solutions, because it has richer medical resources than China. However, the overwhelming pandemic has been hard for the US to tackle. In this sense, China has done well overcoming many difficulties to control the epidemic.

Second, the evacuation of Chinese nationals also depends on the number of nationals overseas and the overall conditions they face. The conditions facing developed countries' evacuation of their nationals from China were that there were almost no infections in their home countries at the time, and their number was much smaller than the number of Chinese nationals overseas. China has hundreds of thousands of students studying in the US alone. The evacuation and transportation of all of them would be a huge project. This is similar to how difficult it is for

heavily stricken Western countries to evacuate all their nationals home from overseas.

Third, the return trip risks infection. If China implemented an overall evacuation of its nationals from overseas, it must start from the hardest hit areas. In the closed cabin of flights, although people may sit separately, the risk of infection may be high. At present, there have been many suspected cases of infection from flying.

Therefore, I opine that starting from a practical point of view, reducing international flights is a reasonable policy whether it is for the country or an individual. As Dr. Zhang Wenhong from Huashan Hospital Fudan University put it, if overseas students take good personal protective measures abroad, the chance of infection will be greatly reduced. Returning home, they will risk infection on the way back home and face complicated issues like a 14-day centralized quarantine and possible loss of their visas. Taking the US as an example, it is still unknown when restrictions on Chinese entry into the US will be lifted, and when the processing of visas to the US will resume. So, out of consideration of my studies and the risks of travelling home, I chose to stay in the US.

### **‘Prejudice’ across the Pacific Ocean**

The pandemic has posed a huge psychological test for Chinese student groups overseas who are facing inner struggles and uncertainty, and vulnerable to negative emotions caused by the surrounding environment. I think the key to psychological adjustment is to not focus on your personal gains and losses, or place yourself on the opposite side of national policies. The

epidemic affects every individual in the world. Everyone wants to lose nothing and to maximize their own interests. However, the fact is that no one can be completely spared from the crisis. It is okay to feel sad or propose suggestions to the country to promote better policies. But we should not criticize the country's efforts because of a policy that comprehensively takes everyone's gains and losses into consideration. A country is made up of individuals. I hope all overseas Chinese students can think about the situation that our country is in and take into consideration the exhausted staff behind the making of the policies.

I also hope domestic public opinion can be friendlier to overseas students. Hostility will not help in solving problems. It is also my hope that Chinese readers of my article can have a clearer picture of our dilemma and thoughts, and overseas students who read it can cast off some negative emotions. During the pandemic, I have been living in the cyber world, witnessing all kinds of strong sentiments. But I firmly believe that rational thinking is the most effective way forward in solving current problems.



## **Overseas Chinese students amid the epidemic:**

### **Waiting for the epidemic in Munich**

By Liu Keyu from Technische Universität München

When people are forced to face an unexpected disaster, face a massive explosion of information within a short time, and have to accept a different lifestyle that throws them completely off track, they will fall into confusion and be overwhelmed. This might describe the state of Chinese people when they first encountered the epidemic. However, to me, the epidemic is more like an anxious and long wait. I feel like an animal about to be slaughtered listening to the sound of sharpening knives, or a prisoner with his head covered by a bag being dragged to the execution ground. But even though disaster is approaching, I still have some unrealistic fantasies that all I am waiting for might be “Godot” — nothing at all.

On March 13, Saturday, it was announced that all libraries in Munich would be closed the next day, a message that I read when walking on the street. It was sunny that day. There are a few small streets full of restaurants and cafes near my university. Young people sat on wicker chairs, talking and laughing. Everything looked beautiful in sunshine, and even the cigarette butts on the ground looked cute. In the crowded streets, people in a hurry or leisurely strolling seemed to be in a good mood. Only few of them frowned, and I bet it was not because of the epidemic. These scenes made me wonder if I was suffering from paranoid delusions of persecution as I worried about the epidemic.

My winter vacation started at the end of February. Those

who had finished their exams earlier had been in home quarantine for one week. The pandemic situation in Italy tightened in early March, but most Germans were still indifferent to the pandemic. One of the reasons behind this perhaps is a lack of detailed reports about the epidemic in China in German media. Because overseas Chinese students were worried about their families, they became familiar with COVID-19's characteristics and ways of spreading. Thanks to the Internet, many students have been able to track down all events that happened in China since the virus broke out. By contrast, German media did not have many scientific reports about the epidemic and the public's understanding of COVID-19 remained at the level of hearsay. Among the reasons is language barrier, difficulty in information-sharing due to different social circles, the helplessness of journalists stationed abroad during the epidemic as well as German people's limited interest in a crisis that was occurring in other countries. When Italy was witnessing quickly mounting cases in early March, there were still Germans traveling to North Italy to enjoy the last snow. Local media should have given enough reports about the international epidemic to help the general public, rather than providing people with shallow and entertaining information.

In early March, my safety precautions were halfway between the average German and Chinese, and I still went outdoors every day. At the time, discussion in Germany about whether to wear masks, and discussion in China about whether overseas students should return, continued to heat up. The discussion about masks is related to different countries' different social customs and habits as well as Western governments' and

Western media's previous judgement of masks as useless. The winter vacation, a traditional time for overseas students to return home, has not seen many students traveling. Most of us are not considering leaving in order to avoid the pandemic, but rather judging and weighing the situation. Although the spread of COVID-19 in each country has proved its strong infectiousness, we still hold illusions of safety due to our incapacity to predict the future.

The pandemic caused drastic changes in Europe in the middle of March. Italy took nation-wide lockdown measures on March 10, sounding the alarm for the European battle against the pandemic. A large number of infections appeared in the German state of North-Rhine Westphalia and Bayern, a state close to Italy, but the government kept delaying compulsory measures. On the one hand, this delay resulted from the shirking of responsibilities and ideology that are unavoidable in any political system. Conservatives and radicals have disputes, and there is also a conflict between the statistics from the public health department and the finance officials' abacus. In the chaos, all politicians panic and reject the upcoming unknown challenges, which is the consistent attitude of mankind when facing novel unknown and unexpected losses. The call for nation-wide isolation touches the core of Western culture – freedom – which put forward a question of whether Europe is excessively free.

Over the past two centuries, European society has experienced various kinds of madness and frustrations, leading the concept of personal freedom that has reappeared on the cultural stage since modern times to be warmly embraced and

prevail in contemporary society. People are becoming increasingly cautious and defensive in deciding whether to sacrifice personal freedom for the sake of a higher universal ideal. Some people with extreme thinking opine that personal freedom is above all else, unwilling to make any concessions or even to uphold their due responsibilities as a citizen toward society. By taking the time to help all the people recognize the challenges they are facing, the German government has paid a high price for its delays. Acting quickly is a matter of life or death when facing an epidemic. Seeking the understanding and cooperation of the whole nation toward the compulsory measures took time, because it was related to the dignity of the individual as a citizen, and also the core values of freedom, democracy, and equality. In the end, Bayern first declared a “state of emergency” on March 16, and the all-out war against COVID-19 began.

Since the libraries were closed, I’ve stayed at home in self-isolation. Even when going out, I only pick times that will not have crowds. Small-scale hoarding started, mainly of disinfection products at the beginning and toilet paper later on. Masks were unavailable because they had been sold out by overseas Chinese who purchased them and shipped them to Wuhan. Since Chinese students generally began home isolation earlier, Asian supermarkets also face shortages. For example, there are fewer flavors of instant noodles available. Hoarding is to reduce the frequency of going out. Excessive hoarding is indeed unnecessary. Based on my observations, there has never been a situation where a certain kind of goods or food is unavailable for long in a supermarket.

With the quick deterioration of the pandemic situation in Europe, the number of people who wanted to return to China to avoid the pandemic skyrocketed, which was followed by heated discussion in China about this. I did not choose to return home, although the reason behind it makes me kind of ashamed. My hometown is not a first- or second-tier city and the journey back home needs up to five different modes of transportation. In addition to the high risk of infection during the journey, I would also have to isolate myself for two weeks in three different cities as required by the relevant prevention and control policies. In this sense, returning home is obviously not an ideal choice for me. The reason why I feel ashamed is that my decision of not returning is not due to my rational judgement, but due to the difficulties of the journey that are impossible to overcome. The problem of whether overseas students should return home is more complicated than imagined.

From a personal perspective, students have the right to return. But from the moral perspective, since no one could ensure they are not infected before taking a nucleic acid test, any exposure outside means placing others in a dangerous situation. What's needed in anti-pandemic efforts is a shutdown society, everyone obeying "stay-at-home" orders, and the morality and conscience shown in a crisis of chaos, not to placing others in danger in order to protect themselves. There is indeed a conflict over the above-mentioned two perspectives. But at a deeper level, whether to return home also involves an individual's political judgement, which manifests whether the decision-maker trusts his or her home country, including its political system, social mechanisms, its people's quality and its

ability to ride out crises. The epidemic is a thorny challenge. At present, it seems that no country can solve it perfectly from beginning to end. Since there are so many questions entangled on whether to return home, I secretly feel glad that I didn't need to face this dilemma.

Since the “stay-at-home” order was launched, I have stayed at home every day, witnessing the tree outside the window change from having flower buds to going into full bloom. Downstairs, there are children playing and laughing, and also an old man coughing, frightening other people. The buses on the street are often empty. I only hope that I can still think and use this rare time to memorize every day since 2020, or at least not to forget those important days. At any time, we should put aside appearances to accept the complex nature of things, and refuse to forget hastily. Otherwise, everything the epidemic has brought us will surely become nothingness one day, and we will never be able to save ourselves.

One afternoon, it was said that the German people voluntarily organized to play Ode to Joy on their balconies. However, when the agreed time came, the chorus did not happen. Only a stumbling sound of trumpet came from my neighbor's balcony, calling for the Goddess of Joy and reminding the Goddess not to forget to guard our joy and hope. And for the short piece of music, my neighbor practiced for a whole afternoon.

## **Overseas Chinese students amid the epidemic: Spain**

By Zhang Jiaqi from Universidad Complutense de Madrid

I came to Madrid in September 2019 for my Master's degree. The sudden outbreak of COVID-19 worldwide changed my life and studies and ruined my original plan of traveling in April this year. I am now writing this article during my isolation at home. Tracing back all my experiences in Spain since the outbreak of the virus, everything is like an illusion.

### **At the beginning of the epidemic: indifference and prejudice**

The first infection happened in Spain on January 31. At the time, the majority of people had no awareness of the danger and local media reports still focused on the situation in China. The locals generally considered COVID-19 as an ordinary flu, not taking it seriously. The Chinese people in Spain, however, started to buy masks since they had a better understanding of the epidemic. There were Chinese who returned to Spain after the Spring Festival, and they did not resume work until finishing a 14-days quarantine at home.

Due to some people's misunderstanding and bias, there were many news reports about overseas Chinese people being discriminated against. Some of them were not allowed to get on buses because they wore masks. Two of my friends were also called "coronavirus" when walking on the street, which made us feel angry and wronged. Later, the Spanish people held anti-discrimination activities and coined the hashtag #nosomosvirus (we are not virus). Many local Chinese responded actively and took photos or videos to stem the spread

of hostile voices online. Most Spanish people are very friendly, and they gave us support and actively forwarded this content online.

The pandemic raged in Spain at the end of February. Italy witnessed a quick increase of infections earlier, but Spain did not take any lockdown measures. The two countries are close neighbors so we had to pay attention to Italy's situation, worried that Spain would probably suffer. Sure enough, the pandemic quickly spread to Spain. An Italian living in the Catalan region of Spain was infected, which was followed by two cases in Madrid. What worried me was that local people were still not vigilant at all, continuing their lives as usual. Bars and restaurants were still crowded. What shocked me more is that on February 29 in Valencia, where more than a dozen infections were confirmed, the important traditional festival Las Fallas was still held as planned. Tourists from all over the world gathered in squares and on streets. On the evening of Sunday, March 1, 80,000 people gathered at the Santiago Bernabéu Stadium in Madrid to watch the El Clásico.

However, a time bomb was hidden in the carnival. It was only a matter of time for the outbreak of the pandemic. At the time, the government did not take any effective measures and local media were also trying to comfort the public by telling people to not worry about the virus, comparing the death rate of COVID-19 with that of previous flus. As overseas students, we had nothing helpful to offer in the face of the local indifference to the virus, but tried to protect ourselves. Some of us insisted on wearing masks to go to school regardless of the dirty looks of passers-by, and others chose to walk to school or take a taxi in



order to avoid the crowds on the subway.

The Spanish government did not realize the seriousness of the emergency until March, when the infected cases skyrocketed in number. Local people started to change their attitude toward the pandemic. Some of them protested against holding the Women's Day parade in Madrid. But unable to suppress the call for freedom and equal rights, the large-scale parade was still held in the center of Madrid. In the face of local people's indifferent attitude toward the virus, some student unions organized by local Chinese advocated for closing schools after soliciting the opinions of a large number of overseas students. On the night of March 9, authorities finally decided to close the schools. Due to worries about the pandemic, many Chinese students had already stopped attending classes. I was still in class at the time. When the news was released, the whole class was in chaos. Schools announced they would be closed for 15 days at first. This was extended to reopening at the end of March. Some students then considered whether to return to China. Others planned to go to supermarkets to hoard some necessities on their way home. We were still glad when going off school that day, saying goodbye and reminding each other to take good care. Nobody knew that it would be the last class we attended in a classroom this semester.

### **Keeping a good mood matters during home isolation**

Today the whole of Spain is in a state of emergency, and we've also seen various changes from the closure of schools to the state of emergency declared by the country. When the schools were recently closed, the public still didn't pay much

attention to the pandemic. There were still many people on the street, with almost no one wearing masks. In order not to stand out in public, I wrapped a scarf around my mask, although it made me look stupid in light of the 20-degree temperature. After schools were closed, I went to the supermarket once. Unlike the Chinese who liked to hoard rice, the locals seemed to prefer to hoard toilet paper. Many supermarkets have sold out of toilet paper. Some supermarkets launched online platforms to encourage people to shop online. My roommate and I bought enough food for three weeks, preparing to fight a protracted battle.

On the evening of March 14, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez announced the “stay-at-home” order, requiring that everyone stay at home except for attending essential activities. Those who violated it would be fined. The next morning, the streets became unprecedentedly quiet, with only a few people carrying shopping bags and dog walkers passing by (walking dogs was one of the essential outdoor activities), which reflected the public’s positive response to the government’s call. The anecdotes reported by media during the quarantine period, such as someone borrowing a neighbor’s dog as an excuse to go out, or a resident wearing a dinosaur suit to go out to dump the garbage, were actually rare. As far as I’ve observed, the locals have been quite obedient.

There were some touching moments during the quarantine period. Eight o’clock every night is the time to give applause to medical staff fighting on the front lines. People poked their heads out from the balcony, cheering, applauding, knocking on pots, and whistling, as if watching a football game. At first, a

schedule was arranged, with different activities staged every night. But it seemed that everyone didn't take the schedule seriously, and they just enjoyed the activities as they wanted to. Those who owned a microphone or stereo would be the highlight of the activity. There is a singer in our community who sings "Resistiré" on the balcony every night. He has a very good voice, and every time he finishes singing, the neighbors would yell "encore," which was like a concert. If there were a police car passing by at around 8 pm, people would greet the policemen and shout "¡Viva la policía!" The police would sound the siren in response. After six or seven minutes of excitement, everyone said goodbye and "be safe" to each other. In addition, the police would sound the siren to sing birthday songs to children under the age of eight who were celebrating their birthday during the quarantine, which was a very unique experience.

Due to the worsening pandemic situation, the "state of emergency" in Spain lasted until the end of April. Some students returned home soon after the schools were closed, with those remaining overseas staying inside. We can make life fulfilling by studying, cooking, exercising and watching movies every day. I did not worry about my personal safety because I hoarded some masks before the quarantine and did not need to go out frequently. The Chinese embassy also provided help for students in need, including offering masks to them, which made Chinese students feel secure during the crisis.

Quarantine brings huge trauma to economic development, but it also pushes forward the progress of some industries. School courses were taught online and many teachers tested the

waters of online teaching. Online teaching platforms are not as common as in China, and online teaching was considered a new experience that might become popular in the future. Food delivery services also started catching on. Many food delivery platforms would offer discounts from time to time. They can drop off the food in agreed upon places to avoid human contact. Supermarkets also encouraged customers to swipe credit cards to pay instead of paying in cash. After the pandemic, mobile payment will possibly develop quickly.

I now feel at ease with the situation. The most important thing is to keep a good mood and spend time during isolation enriching myself. In the face of various voices on the Internet, one must keep a clear head. Even more terrifying than the epidemic are misunderstandings, discrimination and rumors. The global outbreak of the pandemic this time assures me that the world is a whole and everyone's lives are closely connected. We should not blindly point a finger at other countries' practices but need to analyze everything thoroughly. As overseas students, home isolation is our greatest contribution to fighting the epidemic. Having studied Spanish history, we know that Madrid is a heroic city that has overcome all kinds of disasters and wars that occurred in history. I believe it is the same case this time. We must keep our faith and wait for an early return to normal life!

## **Overseas Chinese students amid the epidemic: Belgium**

By Yu Jing from Ghent University

My anti-pandemic experience is unique because I experienced the pandemic twice. When the virus broke out in China at the end of January, I was at home for my winter holiday, thus I stayed at home for the whole Spring Festival. When the new term started, I returned to school because Belgium did not issue a flight ban against China. Unexpectedly, I was traveling to face the pandemic again, in Europe.

Experiencing the difficulty of purchasing masks and disinfecting alcohol back in China, I went to the pharmacy to buy disinfectant, hand sanitizer, alcohol cotton pads and other materials as soon as I arrived in Ghent. The epidemic in Europe was not a big deal at the time. Only countries with a big population like the UK, France and Germany had seen a few infections. But to my surprise, disinfectants were already in short supply and the two bottles of hand sanitizers I bought were the last ones in the pharmacy. Masks were unavailable. Someone said that local government probably smelled the seriousness of the virus at the beginning of February, and started to strictly control the purchase of anti-epidemic products. Others jokingly said that local people did not take the threat seriously, meaning the products were very possibly bought out by local Chinese, who were more alert to the danger than locals.

I did not return to my university office until finishing two weeks of quarantine at home. Italy had become the hardest stricken area at the time. Chinese media carried full reports about the Italian epidemic. However, my European colleagues were not worried at all but focused more on the Chinese

situation and my personal stories. This was positive interest rather than discrimination. I am lucky to have very kind colleagues and a supervisor who sympathized about the Chinese situation and did not worry that I might carry virus. They still have lunch with me every day. When they congratulated me for “fleeing” from China to “safe” Europe and told me that everything was fine here, I mentioned that the epidemic in Italy was getting serious. Considering the free flow of population within the EU and the travel rush to Italy during the holiday, Europe may face risks. However, my colleagues just thought that I was overly nervous after experiencing the epidemic in China. I put the alcohol-based hand sanitizer in the public area of the office and told them that they could use it freely, but no one except me used it.

Due to my anxiety, my colleagues comforted me with statistics released by the government showing that the elderly and those with chronic diseases were high-risk groups. As young and healthy people, we faced no danger, and even if we were infected, we would get well quickly, just like catching the flu. I concluded the phenomenon with a popular online saying, “The essence of human beings is repeating what we hear.” Sayings like this were usually heard at the start of the pandemic in China, with many media claiming that young people have a low risk of infection. But very quickly, it was proved to be nonsense, in that everyone can become a victim and only nationwide protection and control of the virus can overcome the crisis. I told my colleagues about the bloody lesson drawn by China to let them know that their information was incorrect. I hoped they could protect themselves, but they just laughed it away.

After the outbreak of the virus in Italy, Belgium, a small country, saw about 200 cases, which made me panic. I was not worried about the pandemic because I had learned lots of protective measures during my isolation at home in China, hoarded some materials and brought KN95 masks from home. Moreover, my supervisor and colleagues are easy going. They understood my worries and supported my working from home. I actually had worked from home for more than a week before the school was closed. What worried me the most were things like Chinese students being discriminated against or bullied. Lots of media reported incidents of Chinese students being bullied or beaten up in France at the time, along with reports of Chinese in Belgium being threatened due to wearing masks. As for me, who was alone abroad without much physical strength, this risk was scarier than COVID-19. I rehearsed scenes in my head in which I met such a situation while purchasing things outside, and pulled off my mask to cough, sneeze and spit toward my antagonists to frighten them away. Since they considered those wearing masks to be patients, why not use this to threaten them? Luckily, residents in Ghent are all friendly and rational. When I was in the supermarket wearing a mask, what I encountered was not discrimination. Rather, the cashier said it is good that I am cautious. Before handing me the shopping bag, she washed her hands with alcohol-based hand sanitizer to show me that her hands were hygienic. When the purchased products were delivered to my house, I wore a mask to open the door to pick them up. The courier did not show any shock, and greeted me with a smile as he did before the pandemic happened.

Belgium experienced an outbreak of the epidemic in

mid-March, with local governments starting to declare lockdown measures, stores and restaurants closing, schools starting to teach online, residents staying at home for quarantine and maintaining social distance, and medical staff, supermarket staff and police among other public service staff wearing masks at work. In my opinion, the raging pandemic in Europe largely lies in people's ignorance and unwillingness to cooperate. For instance, if Belgium had actually taken effective measures in time, coupled with the country's high medical infrastructure as well as its favorable bed vacancy rate in hospitals due to its high cure rate, the pandemic should have been controlled.

The Belgian government also mentioned in its official announcement that on the eve of national lockdown, hundreds of young people gathered to have a party to commemorate the special night rather than going home to isolate themselves. The consequences were predictable. Belgium saw a quick increase in the number of infections and almost all those at that party were infected. According to local reports, the two major cities of Brussels and Antwerp issued up to 500 tickets to people who went out and gathered in just one weekend. In this sense, one can see how locals disobeyed the anti-epidemic arrangements.

Experiencing domestic and foreign efforts to fight the epidemic, I've found that misunderstandings brought about by an "information gap" are very ridiculous. Rumors that have never been heard in China are spread in Europe. According to them, China has lost millions of lives, and the Chinese government is still concealing the truth. I tried hard to let people know the death toll in the epidemic in China is not as large as they imagine, but I am not sure whether they believed me or not.



When the epidemic in Europe became more serious than in China, the Chinese media also released some irresponsible reports, as if the whole of Europe had returned to the purgatory of the Black Death era. Some even spread gossip from nowhere on WeChat, falsely saying that sick elderly people over 70 years old in France were euthanized.

I used my humble French to search online news reports in France and found that it was not the truth. But such rumors still went viral among my middle-aged and elderly relatives, who were so worried that if France treated their own people this poorly, how would the Chinese based in France suffer? I know they are concerned about me encountering trouble in Europe, but still, I feel sad when seeing them spread such rumors. Thus, the information gap between both sides has created a huge space for rumors, which also reflects the importance and difficulties facing foreign public relations efforts.

To date, I have been working from home for several weeks. I went out a few times to purchase things and pick up the precious 10 masks offered by the embassy. I hear that more protective kits from China are on the way. From my inner heart, I am not very panicked or anxious, and not considering “escaping” to China. But witnessing the Chinese consensus that attack overseas students, I feel hurt. Such words are more hurtful than foreigners’ discrimination against us, and I never expected that Chinese could be so vicious to their fellow countrymen. I am fortunate that I am a homebody who likes to stay at home, spending time on writing papers and studying recipes, so life is not very sad. I hope the epidemic will dissipate from the world as soon as possible.

## **Overseas Chinese students amid the epidemic: Japan**

By Chen Nannan from Osaka University

Tokyo announced on March 24 that it would not host the Olympics this year. It was two months after the lockdown of Wuhan. Japan's "Olympic burden" was finally released for a while. Beginning from March 25, the number of daily confirmed COVID-19 cases in Japan (especially in Tokyo) began to hit a new high due to an expansion of nucleic acid testing. As Governor Yuriko Koike of Tokyo issued a warning about the "severe situation," people rushed to buy food and daily necessities in supermarkets for fear of being barred from public transportation. Entertainment facilities and department stores closed one after another on April 7 after the government officially issued an "emergency declaration," causing people to finally lose their everyday routines. People may wonder what Japan was like in the past two months, when large-scale infections successively broke out in its neighboring countries and massive infections were seen in Europe and the Americas.

I came to Japan at the end of October 2019 and have been living in a city in the northern part of Osaka Prefecture. A lot of Chinese students are living in the three cities here, from the nearby universities. Due to the epidemic, many students failed to return home during the spring break. After the global epidemic broke out in March, Chinese students studying in Europe and the US hurriedly returned home, but most of the students studying in Japan chose to stay and wait for the new semester. After all, unlike the terrible growth rate of confirmed cases in Europe, the epidemic in Japan did not seem to be very serious. "It depends

on the next two weeks to see if there will be any outbreak in Japan,” said Prime Minister Abe over and over again. However, many weeks passed, and COVID-19 did not reach the level of an outbreak.

When COVID-19 first broke out in Wuhan at the end of January, the Chinese in Japan panicked. Since masks were sold out in most Chinese cities, they went to various drugstores to snap up masks and mailed them back to their parents and relatives in China. Japanese people did not understand what happened in Wuhan then, and people who seldom read news did not even know about COVID-19. Therefore, they were very puzzled by the Chinese hoarding masks, and thought it was disrupting the market. I went to buy masks on January 25 and planned to send them back to China. At that time, there were no restrictions on purchases. I took several large packs to the cashier. When the friendly cashier saw that the shopping basket I handed over contained only hundreds of masks, her face suddenly clouded. When I asked to use Alipay to check out, she impolitely grabbed my mobile phone to scan the payment code. It was my first embarrassing checkout experience in Japan. After I paid for the masks and walked out of the store, the cashier did not say any “thank you” or “come back again” as she would usually say. I was wondering if I happened to meet a cashier with a poor working manner. A few days later, I learned from my friends that they had also encountered similar incidents.

During the first month after the COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan, most people, including me, thought that the situation in Japan was much better than in China. The facts seemed to support our idea. In the first two weeks of February when the

disease spread rapidly in China, Japan discovered only a few cases, except for those on evacuation charter flights and on the Diamond Princess cruise ship. In early February, my boyfriend came to see me in Osaka from China. We spent a few days traveling in cities in the Kansai region, of course wearing masks.

During that time, we went to the urban areas of Kyoto, Nara and Osaka. We found that there were almost no tourists from the Chinese mainland in the scenic spots, because all domestic tourist groups had been canceled. Eye-catching signs were placed at the entrances of well-known attractions in Kyoto to remind visitors to wear masks before entering. The number of visitors in Nara Park was less than half compared to two years ago, when I had last visited the park. It had snowed and Kasuga Taisha was desolate. I heard that the deer there had become quite hungry because there were no tourists. I was wondering whether it was true. The downtown area of Osaka was also desolate. At noon, I only saw a few passengers along the Shinsaibashi shopping street, which is known as “China Town.” There were almost no customers in the drugstore, and a Lotte restaurant had even closed. It is conceivable that the epidemic has caused a great blow to Japan’s tourism industry. Later, I heard a senior student who worked part-time in a department store in Shinsaibashi said that with few customers and little income, the store had to turn off all the heating to cut costs.

After March, I went outdoors even less frequently, except for going to school and the supermarket. Two weeks ago, I met a professor and a PhD student in the research room and we talked about COVID-19. The student said that she was very frightened after reading many news articles about the disease, and took one

month leave from her part-time job. The professor comforted us and said that he was more afraid of not being able to buy masks and toilet paper. He also told us not to let our concerns affect our normal lives. He said to go to the hospital if we have any symptoms.

The epidemic situation in Japan is confusing, and so is the way Japanese people see the virus. They have not experienced SARS and MERS, and they may have no concepts about such highly contagious acute respiratory diseases. Many young people, including the undergraduates in my research room, thought that it was just “a large-scale flu,” which could be cured by lying at home for a few days. They also believed that people cannot get infected if they are healthy enough with strong immune systems. In an interview by TV TOKYO of young people visiting clubs and bars on the streets of Harajuku, some laughed and said, “As long as you jump a few times, the virus will be gone.” People also believe that Japan’s medical system is very sound and can withstand shocks. Others think that everything will be fine as long as quarantine efforts are strengthened at major airports in order to prevent spreading caused by imported cases. But the fact was that the passengers on a flight from the US were released a few days ago without being tested and quarantined at all.

Afterwards, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare said that this release was caused by their “carelessness.” It is hard to imagine that the Japanese, who have always been proud of being rigorous, would make such a mistake. The Japanese are extremely afraid of being in a locked down city with supply shortages due to a severe epidemic, which would disturb their

normal lives and cause many unforeseen circumstances. They do not like that. They like everything being organized. As a result, every time they see a slight hint that a city might be locked down, they rush to the supermarket to hoard daily necessities and food. In the past week, rice, noodles, canned food and prepared foods in the supermarket near my house have been sold out every day. However, after the Japanese people satisfactorily inspected the supplies in their home, they went out to enjoy watching the cherry blossoms.

Many people have questioned Japan's nucleic acid testing standards and the number of daily tests. I remember that in February, a mother asked for help on Twitter, saying that she had had fever and cough for many days, but the hospital refused to let her do a nucleic acid test because she had no overseas travel experience and was not in close contact with any confirmed case. However, there were confirmed cases of unknown infection routes, which means it is not necessary to meet the two conditions above to be infected. People have speculated that Japan was reluctant to do more tests because it still wanted to hold the Olympic Games in the summer, but whether this is really the case is still inconclusive. Ordinary Japanese wage-earners do not want to be tested and diagnosed.

A senior student at my university worked in the downtown area of Osaka, and had a cough and fever for several days, but she still insisted on going to work. Since the symptoms are very similar to COVID-19, her classmates persuaded her to go to the hospital to see if she could get tested. She refused, because she believed that if she was diagnosed, it was a manifestation of weakness and incompetence. She would be discriminated

against by colleagues and friends and lose her job. Perhaps she was influenced by the traditional Japanese “shame” culture. During Japan’s annual flu season, wage-earners with severe fever still go to work after taking anti-fever medicine. They never take sick leave until they have to. They do not want to trouble others due to their failure to assume their own responsibilities. At present, most of the confirmed cases in Tokyo are wage-earners in their 40s. Since not all companies are able to let their employees work at home, even if they are afraid of the epidemic, they can only bite the bullet and take packed public transportation to go to work.

Spring is when the cherry blossoms are in full bloom. I saw on Twitter a photo of Ueno Park, a sacred spot for cherry blossom viewing in Tokyo. People were happily sitting under the cherry blossom trees for a picnic. The distance between families was only wide enough for one person to pass at a time. Naughty children were running around. Watching such a happy scene, I only feel scared. Only half of the people are wearing masks, which makes the picnic party a large virus petri dish. Although there are no large-scale cherry blossom viewing spots near my home, cherry blossoms can be seen around the facilities for children to play. The weather was very good last weekend. I passed by the playground on the way to the supermarket and saw many parents playing with their children, laughing and talking. Every time I see such a scene, I wonder if I am overly worried about the disease. However, a new confirmed case was announced to be around the tram station two kilometers away from my home.

Our university’s graduation ceremony and entrance

ceremony have both been canceled this year. I was worried about the new semester until our university issued an emergency statement banning students from entering the campus starting on April 9. Classes will not be stopped, and the students are asked to take online classes until May. I can't help but breathe a sigh of relief. I thought about going home, but the current situation is too chaotic and returning home may bring danger to myself and my family. So, I decided to stay. It can be said that I am not willing to make any decision at present, but I have to. I don't know how long the days of being trapped at home with great anxiety will last. I only hope the epidemic will pass soon, which I believe, is also the greatest expectation of all students studying in Japan.



## **Overseas Chinese students amid the epidemic:**

### **Israel and Palestine**

By Hong Shiyu from The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

#### **‘China, Corona’**

After the COVID-19 outbreak in China, the warm greetings of “Hello” and “Chinese!” from young Arab men to Chinese girls have changed to frequent and loud taunts of “China, Corona.” Some of the young men got together and stood by the road waiting for us to pass by, yelling and faking coughing one after another. Some of them deliberately stepped on the brakes and waited for us in the middle of the road for several seconds, just to do that. Even children who liked to stare at our weird Asian faces and greet us would cover their mouths and noses nervously. Their big flashing eyes are no longer as cute and innocent as they used to be, but full of hostility. I never said or did anything in such situations, but raised my head and pretended to be calm. I waited for them to stop. It is because the huge disparity in the number of Chinese people and their people. Also, I read about a horrible report on the internet that an Indian Jew studying in Yeshiva was mistaken for Chinese and beaten. Some Chinese people respond to the taunts by putting up their middle finger, and the feedback they get is not stopping, but even louder ridiculing and mocking.

My daily life takes place around the Hebrew University, which is surrounded by the Arab-dominated East Jerusalem area. Most of the shameless and ignorant people I encounter are Arabs who are obviously uneducated. The Jews are a little better. My Jewish classmates and professors will send private messages to

greet me and my family from time to time. There are also many encouraging comments and blessings for China in the Hebrew media reports on the epidemic situation in China. I am harassed by unfriendly voices less when shopping at Jewish supermarkets. The rabbis have chanted and prayed for Chinese people at the foot of the western wall of the second ruins of the Jerusalem Temple.

The Jews who have suffered from exile and genocide for thousands of years seemed to show more empathy with the epidemic, but it turned out not to be the case. In the early stages of the COVID-19 outbreak in China, many Israeli media searched for interviewees to discuss “the current situation of Chinese in Israel during the epidemic,” and then asked them only to answer questions about racial discrimination. In my opinion, they were just using the negative topic to attract bigger audiences, under the pretext of humanitarian concern. The increasing media exposure will strengthen the link between Chinese people and the virus.

I personally encountered many strange people and things. Once on a late-night bus, a Jewish girl asked about my nationality and shouted in excitement and horror: “I am riding a bus with a Chinese. Let’s see if I can survive tomorrow.” Then she tried to take a selfie with me and post it on a social media platform. A driver who took me to the lost and found office asked me: “What did you lose? The novel coronavirus?” Someone in the class coughed at the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak in China, and others joked in a relaxed tone: “What’s wrong with you, did you just come back from China?” When chatting on Zoom, some classmates also joked

that I was responsible for all the chaos in Israel. At the beginning, I would patiently explain the situation when hearing such intentional or unintentional jokes, and I would also say “shame on you” when I was indignant. Later, I stopped doing that when I discovered the notion that Chinese are virus carriers and spreaders was deeply ingrained in their minds. I would just roll my eyes and stop worrying about it. I have to say that the epidemic has exposed many dark sides of human nature, including adding insult to injury, showing a lack of empathy, racial discrimination, and pursuing happiness and superiority by taunting other ethnic groups.

### **Epidemic prevention policy and worrying administrative capacity**

In late January, many Chinese in Jerusalem began to stock up on masks. My classmates from Peking University and I were delayed for a day or two due to exams, and became latecomers in the mask rush. We went to the largest chain pharmacies in Jerusalem and all the pharmacies in the streets and alleys, but could not get a single one. While lamenting the purchasing power of the Chinese people, we also worried about our own destiny. Later, a local Chinese Jewish friend (with Israeli nationality) accidentally found N95 masks available in a hardware store, and immediately notified us to rush to the remote industrial area in southern Jerusalem for the masks. My classmates and I hurried all the way. Fortunately, the masks were still on the shelves. Then we heaved a long sigh of relief. “Ah! We finally bought the mask! Our lives are saved!” The hardware store owner looked at a loss, and couldn’t understand why we bought so many masks and why we were so excited.

After the Spring Festival, we are tortured by the daily review of the numbers of accumulated confirmed cases, newly confirmed cases, patients with mild symptoms, severely ill patients, and deaths in China. I am from Zhejiang Province. After finding Zhejiang had the highest number of confirmed cases after Hubei, I could not imagine how my parents survived, shrouded in the shadow of infection all day long without the company of their children during the long and boring quarantine period. I was eager to fly back to China and to get through the epidemic together with my family. Over the next month or so, the Israeli people didn't seem to realize how contagious COVID-19 was.

Israel's first confirmed COVID-19 case came from the Diamond Princess. After arriving in Israel on February 21, the patient was directly sent to Sheba Hospital to be quarantined. On February 22, the Israel Times reported that nine South Korean tourists had been diagnosed with COVID-19 after returning from an Israel package tour. The Ministry of Health announced their path of activity, which covered almost all famous religious sites in Israel and Palestine. The incident caused quite a stir in Israel. After that, the Israeli government decided to suspend direct flights between China and Israel on February 3, and refused entry to non-Israeli citizens who had visited China in the past 14 days. Israel immediately included South Korea on the flight suspension and entry prohibition list. The Israeli Ministry of Health issued a statement again saying that "it is only a matter of time before a COVID-19 outbreak occurs in Israel."

My friend and I decided to stock up on supplies for fear of a COVID-19 outbreak in Israel. We put on a mask before going

to the street, but no one except us was wearing them. Some old people passing by would half-jokingly say “don’t scare me” while comfortingly saying “Israel is safe.” The oncoming Israelis either crossed the road directly to the other side before running into us, or ran away. When entering our apartment complex, our security guard asked me nervously, “Are you a resident and why do you wear a mask?” We became the people who “caused panic.” Finally, we put away the masks timidly after being forced to compromise with the Israeli government’s policy that “healthy people should make thoughtful choices on whether to wear masks, and try to avoid causing panic.”

The COVID-19 outbreak in Israel began in early March. On March 9, Prime Minister Netanyahu announced that all Israeli citizens returning from overseas need to be quarantined for 14 days. Non-Israeli citizens’ entry will be refused if home quarantine is not available for them. At that time, Israel had just concluded its three-times-a-year general elections and people were obsessed with dressing up in novel and strange attire to celebrate the annual festival of Purim. The synagogues were swarming with men, women and children, reading the Book of Esther. The seaside of Tel Aviv was full of people basking in the sun, playing beach volleyball and having picnics. My graduate classmates were still actively preparing for lawn picnics. I suggested that they cancel or postpone their activities to avoid gatherings and advised them wear masks in crowded places. However, my efforts were all in vain. “We go to work, school, and entertain ourselves under the shadow of terrorist attacks and wars all the year round and we have become accustomed to chaos and disorder; we believe in the government’s epidemic

prevention policy,” they said.

On March 16, the Israeli Ministry of Health announced the closure of all educational institutions and public places except supermarkets and pharmacies. People had to keep a distance of 60 centimeters from each other during prayer and religious ceremonies, and a distance of two meters in public places. A week later, an even stricter limit was issued, only allowing walks within a radius of 100 meters from one’s own home, and the synagogues were closed. Posters calling for a 2-meter distance between people were put up in supermarkets, and the Ministry of Health’s epidemic prevention instructions were also broadcast again and again on the radio. Staff members were instructed to limit the customer flow at the gate of supermarkets while offering disposable gloves. A few people wearing masks could be seen on the street. My university, Hebrew University, postponed its new semester for one week and began to prepare for online classes.

By then, patrolling police cars could capture people who violated the ban and went outdoors. The working hours of medical laboratories for virus detection were limited on the Sabbath, and the staff members were reduced. It was a scandal to the public. Haredi (ultra-orthodox Jews) were still conducting rallies and prayers. In the ultra-orthodox city of Bnei Barak in central Israel, 35 percent of those tested were diagnosed with COVID-19. On April 2, Yaakov Litzman, health minister for Israel, who is a Haredi, violated the epidemic prevention policy made by himself and organized a Sabbath prayer at his home. He was later diagnosed with COVID-19. The Ministry of Health gave in and required everyone to wear masks in public places

when the total number of infected cases in Israel was reaching 7,000. This fully reflects the mentality of refusing to be convinced until one is faced with grim reality. The price of masks on the market skyrocketed due to a lack of stock. A great number of people could not distinguish the front and back of masks, and only covered their mouths with masks.

It can be said that the Israeli government's anti-epidemic policy is more reliable, strict and timely than those of other European and American countries, such as the "herd immunity" policy put forward by the Boris government in the UK. Before the virus enters Israel, the country was aware of prevention measures. In the early stage of the outbreak, hotels were actively used as treatment and recovery centers for COVID-19 patients. However, government officials and ordinary people had a very low level of compliance with the stay-at-home policy. They do not learn from previous mistakes until problems arose again. As an international student, even if I had done a great job to protect myself, I am still very worried about the epidemic prevention efforts of the people around me.

### **Daily life of Chinese female international students during quarantine: cooking, hoarding, online classes**

Israel is not a richly endowed country, and definitely not the same as it is described in the Bible, "a land flowing with milk and honey." Jerusalem, where I live, is a religious city with a long history. Restricted by Kosher Law, there is only a narrow range of food and daily supplies. The upcoming Passover would again cause all fermented products in the supermarket to be taken off the shelves. My roommate and I are free with food and we ate noodles for an entire final semester because it is

convenient. Noodles go with everything. We just throw anything we have into the pot when we cook noodles. The quarantine suddenly gave us a lot of free time at home, so I abandoned reading literature and began to study cooking. I managed to cook steamed buns, fried dough sticks, walnut cakes and biscuits. Before the quarantine I even did not know how to knead a dough. I also learned to cook many complicated dishes, such as boiled fish, *mapo tofu* and pickled fish. These dishes require many raw materials and relatively complicated procedures. Now I look for substitutes for the missing materials in Israel, and finish every cooking procedure step by step carefully. Cooking served as a time killer during the boring quarantine and helped my roommate and me get to know many like-minded friends who were willing to put on weight together.

When the Sabbath ended on March 14, the Netanyahu government revealed that it might close public places except supermarkets and pharmacies. After the bus lines were suspended or reduced, my friend and I temporarily decided to go to the supermarket to hoard some food. Unexpectedly, we only found the sections for toilet paper, rice, flour, noodles, milk and frozen meat were already empty. There were only one or two jars of salt and sugar standing lonely on the shelves. There was very little cheese left, only the frightening stinky ones. Having found nothing, my roommate and I decided to pick up supplies as soon as another supermarket opened on that Sunday. We had not woken up around 6 in the morning for a long time. We mindlessly stocked up on rice, noodles, oil, vegetables and fruits, tissues and sterilization supplies from the shelves, wearing masks and disposable gloves. “We have enough staple



food, and our lives are saved. Now we need to catch up on sleep!” During the quarantine, going to the supermarket for supplies became the only reason for us to go out and one of the only social outlets left. Many overseas students also went shopping together to avoid delivery fees.

There is no need to say more about the online classes. I have more time to sleep in, and I was fortunate to see how lovely the elderly professor was when he found that he was able to mute quarreling students. However, the online classes made me do more homework. Since we were not able to have exams in the end of the semester, many professors based our grades on weekly performance instead. The oral discussions in class were also required to be presented in written form, and the efficiency of interactive Q&A was not satisfying.

I would like to conclude by thanking friends at home and abroad for their care and company over the past few months. I also want to thank everyone who has worked hard to fight the epidemic. The health kits (three medical masks and a bottle of hand sanitizer) distributed by the Chinese Embassy in Israel to each Chinese student were very heartwarming. I hope that the virus will die out soon with everything returning to normal.

## **Overseas Chinese students amid the epidemic: Views on the epidemic of the Chinese and Russian people in Moscow**

By Li Yinan from Lomonosov Moscow State University

### **Attitudes toward Chinese people since the epidemic**

The Russian media began to intensively report on the COVID-19 epidemic in China after Wuhan was locked down. After that, the “virus from China” (a term used by some Russian media) became widely known in Russia. Up until mid-February, Russia did not take any special actions aimed at personnel exchanges between China and Russia and the Chinese people in Russia. At the end of January, some major universities issued presidential orders to extend the winter vacation for Chinese students until March. However, a large number of Chinese students still insisted on returning to school. Therefore, the Russian government strengthened the control on Chinese people. First, the Ministry of Higher Education asked the embassy on February 12 to postpone the return of Chinese students. Those who had returned were ordered by their universities to undergo quarantine in their dormitory.

Around February 20, the Russian government announced that Chinese citizens holding worker, private, student and tourist visas were temporarily prohibited from entering the country. The Moscow city government issued an order requiring all people arriving from China to stay at home. At that time, rumors about discrimination and brutal treatment against Chinese people in Russia were raging on Chinese media and social platforms. The rumors mainly came from fabricated hype or speculation by

domestic Russian haters and grandstanders. The Chinese Embassy in Russia posted an announcement to clarify this.

I personally did not have any unpleasant experiences, apart from passers-by yelling “coronavirus” when I cleared my throat at a subway station one day. I was checked on by the police in my dormitory or at the subway station many times. They spoke politely and thanked me and apologized afterwards. It was in sharp contrast to the random inspection for illegal workers I experienced last year, when the police came head-on to me and spoke to me without using any honorific. No one purposely made difficulties for me, whether I was going to restaurants, shopping, taking a taxi, buying flowers, or getting a haircut. I was only occasionally asked about the epidemic situation in China out of concern or caution.

This may be related to the fact that most of the employees in Russia’s low-end service industry are immigrants from Central Asia and the Caucasus. They themselves are discriminated against in Russia and therefore have no reason to discriminate against the Chinese. There was still some invisible estrangement. For example, when I went to take the elevator in the teaching building, a Russian student who had been waiting noticed that a Chinese was approaching and immediately walked to another elevator on the other side of the hall. But in any case, such “discrimination” is not worth mentioning when compared with abusive words or even fistfights.

It is worth mentioning that one of my Russian friends celebrated his birthday in mid-February, and I received the invitation long ago (when there was no confirmed COVID-19 case in Russia). I declined to avoid arousing unease, but after

repeated insistence from the friend's family, I attended the birthday party. There were many friends, who I had never met before. Of course, they didn't know if I had returned from China recently, but everyone (I was the only one who is not Russian at the party) behaved in a friendly and enthusiastic manner, even sharing food with me from the same plate. It was undoubtedly very touching.

It is important to point out that although the current large-scale spread of the virus in Russia comes directly from Italy rather than China, I think this cannot be attributed to the strict controls on Chinese people. The officials in Russia in charge of the inspection and supervision of Chinese are very bureaucratic and simply go through the motions. For example, none of these officials took any medical protection measures, including officials who register personal information door-to-door in dormitories, law enforcement officers who check passport entry dates at subway stations, and the college staff members who register Chinese students returning to Russia.

Moscow University even required all Chinese students to apply for health certificates together, regardless of whether they had returned to China during the winter vacation, which led to a large number of Chinese students gathering together in the university hospital. If there were hidden cases in the incubation period among the returning students at that time, a cross-infection would inevitably occur and cause a large-scale spread of the virus. Therefore, it was lucky that the virus was not directly imported into Russia from China.

### **How Russian people treat the COVID-19 epidemic**

The first COVID-19 case imported from Italy was discovered in Russia on March 2, and the total number of diagnosed COVID-19 cases in Russia exceeded 100 in mid-March. During this period, most Russian people were not vigilant at all (not to mention before March). Except for Chinese, no one wore masks, and there was no rush to buy masks.

Only after Moscow's primary and secondary schools and colleges were suspended on March 15 and the government announced it would cancel large-scale events and issued a ban on foreigners' entry did Russian people suddenly begin to care about the virus. Approximately 10 percent of people on the street began to wear masks, non-perishable food in supermarkets sold out, the number of citizens traveling by public transportation began to decrease, and long queues were seen in front of pharmacies. Therefore, mid-March can be regarded as a turning point in epidemic prevention efforts by the Russian government and people.

However, except for the suspension of the cultural and educational system, Moscow's workplaces and daily rhythms continued as usual until President Putin issued a presidential decree temporarily granting national paid leave for a week in the end of March. However, many people still went out to enjoy the warm sunshine of early spring on the first two days of the national holiday although the government called on people to stay at home as much as possible and deliberately closed large parks and most business establishments. When I was basking in the sun on the Sparrow Hills where Moscow University is located, I saw that although the once bustling flow of foreign

tourists disappeared, there were still a considerable number of local residents going out with their families. They took walks, rode their bicycles and roller skated. No more than 20 percent of them were wearing masks.

The Russian people's indifference to the epidemic and even arrogance in the early stage of the COVID-19 epidemic were also obvious among my Russian friends. As early as the first imported case was discovered in Moscow, I repeatedly tried to persuade my Russian friends to avoid eating in the cafeteria and to wear masks when taking public transportation, but they all laughed. One of my friends said, "We are Russians and we are not afraid of this little flu" and another said, "I have a fatalistic attitude toward the issue." Above all, a close friend told me not to panic too much because the death rate of the disease was only 2 percent. He also said that it doesn't matter if strong young people get infected, since most of the deaths are among old people. This kind of remarks left me stunned.

Intriguingly, this friend is a TASS correspondent based at the Russian State Duma. According to him, until he was asked to work at home in mid-March, no staff in the State Duma wore masks. They only set a body temperature detection device at the building entrance. Undoubtedly, the lack of vigilance among ordinary people was influenced by the model of the higher authorities.

The attitude toward masks best reflects a country's attitude toward the COVID-19 epidemic. Since the beginning of the epidemic outbreak in Russia, the Russian government has not widely called on or required people to wear masks. Although the Russian government has not said that masks are useless, like the

governments of US and Australia did, it only included masks in the recommended list of household supplies. As for the vast majority of ordinary people, they were inattentive at first, but later it was too late to obtain masks. At the very beginning of the epidemic, those who had masks were reluctant to wear them for fear of embarrassment or because they were inconvenient (the high-bridged nose of white people made it less comfortable to wear masks, and I noticed that many Russian people wear masks in irregular ways). As mentioned above, under the increasingly serious situation of the epidemic, most people still went out without wearing a mask. It is not because that they do not want to wear one, but now they can no longer find them.

Since I am allergic to dust mites but I have to go to the library to check old documents, I have been regularly purchasing and using masks since before the epidemic outbreak. As a result, I can keep tracking the local supply of masks. Before the epidemic, the average price of medical disposable masks in the pharmacies was less than five rubles (about 0.5 yuan) per piece. Since the end of January, the market became tight and the price skyrocketed. In mid-February, masks were sold out in all pharmacies in the capital and its surrounding satellite cities. This is because most of the masks in the market have been bought by Chinese people.

Chinese people in Russia buy masks for three purposes. Some people bought masks for personal use as a preventive measure, and others wanted to send masks to relatives and friends in China or donate to epidemic areas in China. There were also some hoarders who wanted to make money out of disasters. They directly bought stock from warehouses, hoarding tens of

thousands of masks.

The above behaviors and the lack of preparation by Russian people formed a sharp contrast. Masks became a symbol of social status to some extent when the epidemic became more severe and struck fear into Russians in mid-March. Except for a small number of people who took precautions beforehand and elites who could get masks through special channels, ordinary people could rarely get one, even at high prices.

Being aware of this, I managed to contact a Chinese student who had hoarded masks earlier, and bought 500 masks at the price of 2 yuan each to support my Russian teachers and friends around me. When the disease first discovered in China began to spread in Russia, the majority of Russians and even some of the teachers in Moscow University were unable to obtain masks, due to the large number of masks in the hands of Chinese people in Russia. This indeed reveals a lot of problems.



## **Overseas Chinese students amid the epidemic: India**

By Li Chunxiang from Tianjin Normal University

At the beginning of December 2019, after a marathon of application writing and waiting, my wish finally came true. I was able to come to my dream country India for an academic visit to Jawaharlal Nehru University (Nehru University for short).

Before I arrived in India, some people who had been to India for academic visits told me that Indian staff members were inefficient in doing their jobs, and I will encounter lots of complicated procedures related to the visit. They prepared me for patiently solving any problem I had in the registration process, including applying for the dormitory, registering for student status, and getting a visa extension. I also looked forward to everything about India, including its optimistic people, natural environment, leisurely animals, and free atmosphere. However, the COVID-19 epidemic disrupted all my plans.

At the beginning of January, I finished all the university registration procedures and was about to visit various places of interest in India. However, news about COVID-19 started to be reported. As the virus spread to many countries around the world, Chinese citizens living abroad began to suffer discrimination, including overseas students. When one of my Chinese classmates was helping her friend in China negotiate with several Indians wearing a mask, she leaned forward to let the Indians hear her more clearly, but the three Indians stepped

back two steps at the same time. She came back to the dormitory and cried, holding me and saying she wouldn't go out again. From then on, most of us stayed in the dormitory without going anywhere, even the library. While paying attention to the epidemic situation in China, I kept adjusting my plans in India.

During the COVID-19 epidemic, masks took a leading role in our lives. When there was a shortage of masks in China, a few classmates and I went to pharmacies and shopping malls around the school and bought all the N95 masks, planning to send them to our relatives and friends in China. Unexpectedly, as soon as we finished purchasing them, the Indian government issued an embargo on sending all kinds of epidemic protective supplies to China. We decided to keep them for ourselves.

With the epidemic spreading in China, the Indian government introduced a series of epidemic prevention and control measures, including prohibiting the export of all kinds of protective supplies such as masks and protective clothing to China, canceling flights between China and India, and invalidating the electronic and paper visas of all Chinese people. After that, the Indian government adjusted the ban, allowing ordinary masks to be sent to China. At that time, my cousin said that his company would resume work and he hoped I could buy some masks from India and send to him for his staff. So again, I went to the pharmacies near the university to buy masks, but I only found disposable masks there were as thin as a piece of paper. They had no product labels and seemed like fake products with neither a clear date of manufacture, the name of a manufacturer nor quality certification.

These masks were packed in only one plastic bag. Some packs

contained 50 pieces and some 100 pieces. If customers only wanted to buy a few of them instead of taking the whole pack, the shop assistant would open the bag and count the masks one by one with his hands, which might have touched anything. The price also doubled several times, rocketing from a few rupees to nearly 30 rupees per mask. I felt that such masks were poor quality, so I didn't buy any. Later, one of my classmates sent me an Amazon.com link, saying that she had bought masks from an online shop and they were of good quality. I was very happy and clicked on the link immediately, but found that the shop had a purchase limit for each customer. One could only buy 200 masks at a time, and my cousin needed more than 2,000 masks. In order to get enough masks in a short time, I mobilized classmates around me to order the masks from the shop, and finally got it done.

How could I send the masks back to China? I asked several courier service companies. My classmates said that the university post office would do, but the staff member there told me that "China is banned" without asking what I would like to send. His look of ridicule, sarcasm and unconcealed gloating made me suffer so much. I could not help thinking about the expressions in the eyes of the pharmacies' shop assistants when I was buying masks and the tone of their conversation talking about China in Hindi. The pain in my heart was beyond words. I was angry while buying masks. I also felt bad about wasting my own precious time, and prayed that the mask shortage in China would end soon. Some courier service companies in India could send ordinary masks to China, but the postage was surprisingly expensive. DHL was the fastest, and it would cost

7,000 rupees per kilogram. My masks weighed six kilograms, which would cost me 42,000 rupees (4,200 yuan)! Fortunately, my friend's husband was about to go back to China, so I asked him to take them home.

By February 14, all the three COVID-19 patients in India were cured, which made everyone relieved. We started to study and live as usual. My friends and I hurried to many cities, including Agra, Jaipur and Varanasi. There were no confirmed case in India when the epidemic in China was brought under control. We were all very happy, thinking that the epidemic would die out soon. Unexpectedly, in early March, it suddenly spread all over the world. Italy, Iran, the UK, South Korea, Japan, and the US fell one by one, and India also had imported cases again. We became nervous again and rushed to stock up on daily necessities and protective supplies, preparing for another period of staying inside.

At that time, my academic visit was coming to an end. I booked a return flight ticket departing from Kolkata, and I went to Visva-Bharati University in Kolkata with another visiting scholar surnamed Zhang on March 7 after completing the leaving formalities in Nehru University. I planned to return to China after spending a few days in Kolkata. When we arrived at Visva-Bharati University, the teacher who received us told us that we need to be quarantined for 14 days before participating in campus activities. We obeyed the arrangement and started quarantine the next day after purchasing enough food for half a month.

Santiniketan, where the Visva-Bharati University is located, had no new confirmed COVID-19 cases at that time, and

people's lives have not been affected much. However, the government closed Tagore's former residence. Visiting there was one of the main purposes of this trip! I was a bit restless. The next evening, when there were few people around Tagore's former residence, I took a walk there wearing a mask. Standing at the door and looking at the buildings and ancient trees from a distance, I imagined how Tagore's lived his life and wrote his great work there, savoring the poet's profound thoughts. "I really hope that the epidemic will pass soon, so that I can go inside and take a good look at it before I leave," I prayed silently in my heart.

On March 9, India banned all foreign cruise ships from calling at Indian ports. On March 11, the government of India issued a Revised Travel Advisory, ruling that all existing visas, except diplomatic, official, UN/international organizations, employment and project visas, were suspended until April 15. Also, all incoming travelers, including Indian nationals, arriving from or having visited high-risk areas were to be quarantined for at least 14 days. A few days later, Visva-Bharati University suspended classes, and the Chinese Bridge language competition planned for April 23 was put off indefinitely. Thus, there was no reason for the judges of the competition like us to stay anymore!

The March 27 flight back to China I booked was cancelled, and I changed it to March 29, only to find it was canceled again. I applied to change the date again, but the customer service representative of China Eastern Airlines told me that the next available flight would be in mid-April! I had to return the ticket and re-purchase the flight on March 26. At that time, the ticket price doubled several times, and it was quite difficult to get a

ticket. A few seconds of hesitation would lead to a missed chance to buy.

I thought I could finally calm down and enjoy the peaceful atmosphere of Santiniketan after getting an air ticket home. I didn't expect to receive news on March 19 that India would ban all international flights from landing in the country starting March 22! It meant that my March 26 flight would be cancelled again! I panicked because the tickets before March 22 were already sold out. What could I do?

The Consulate General of China in Kolkata advised me cut the journey to several sections and buy tickets for each. They said I might buy a ticket from Kolkata to Hong Kong, and then from Hong Kong to Beijing. Everything would be under control if I could leave India and reach Beijing. I immediately checked the tickets. I had to schedule the flight transfers and check the different local flight transfer policies, including whether transfers were allowed and how to check luggage in and out. I took out paper and pen to make detailed schedule for each flight section. Finally, I got two tickets on March 20, Kolkata-Singapore-Hong Kong and HongKong-Beijing-Chengdu-Hohhot.

I had to take great risks relying on these tickets. My luggage might be stuck in Hong Kong, and the flight transfer time between the two journeys was only two hours, which was very tight. I could very possibly miss the flight if everything did not go smoothly. However, I have no choice but to take a chance. With the help of the consulate general, I successfully sent my luggage straight to Beijing. With masks and various precautions all the way home, I finally arrived in my hometown

on March 22 after a nerve-wracking air journey of nearly 60 hours. Then I was quarantined.

Reviewing the past few months in India, I found that I seemed to be fighting against various “accidents.” First, I encountered a student strike and marches at Nehru University. Later it became an all-India student movement from November 2019 to February 2020. During the period, protest marches and riots against the Citizenship Amendment Act arose among Indian citizens. After that, the COVID-19 outbreak happened in China, followed by a global epidemic. Such an eventful academic visit truly occurs once in a blue moon!

What we lose in haste we shall have in herring, goes an old saying. Although the accidents disrupted my plans, I have gained a brand new understanding of India, the world, life and the development of human society through the experience.

This academic visit has taught me a lesson that life is a spiritual journey. Every personal experience and all of everyday life can be counted as certain kind of spiritual exercise. Through the exercise, we try to eliminate the evil in human nature and promote the good and the beautiful, so as to obtain divinity in the end. This is the case for the entire human race. Only in this way can human society be able to maintain long-term stability.