

Youth not likely to buy into virus propaganda

Written by Huang Yu-zhe 黄宇哲
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While the world makes a concerted effort to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, China's approach to educating the public about the outbreak is puzzling and, more importantly, not helpful, if not counterproductive.

With the coronavirus crisis worsening, governments across the globe are looking for a pragmatic approach to handle the situation. As more cases are confirmed, medical experts are becoming more anxious to find a solution. Needless to say, if timely actions are taken to fight the virus, more precious lives can be saved.

Yet, instead of focusing on openness and transparency, China is seemingly busy working to save the face of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), rather than people's lives. Beijing first refused to acknowledge the outbreak, then tried to blame other countries for it.

The reason is ultimately attributable to the Chinese authoritarian political system. The ruling party to all appearances is determined to hold on to power, no matter how badly the situation deteriorates.

On Monday last week, the Chinese Ministry of Education, in conjunction with People.cn, the online counterpart of the People's Daily, invited four professors to produce an online presentation entitled "A Lesson on COVID-19 and Political Consciousness for University Students in the Nation."

The speakers were Beijing's Tsinghua University professor Ai Silin (艾世琳), Renmin University of China professor Qin Xuan (秦璇), Beijing Normal University professor Wang Binglin (王秉林) and Central University of Finance and Economics professor Feng Xiujun (冯秀军).

They are all well-known and are among the most prestigious academics in China.

They primarily addressed how Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平) and the CCP have taken the lead in responding to the virus crisis. The speakers put great emphasis on Marxism, and

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two of them explained how Chinese had successfully fought quite a few wars since the 1950s, giving the Korean War as an example.

Separately, each of the professors gave a 30-minute speech to raise awareness of patriotism among young Chinese.

The problem is that they seem to have misinterpreted Marxism in a manner that would hardly convince young people. For example, the concept of responsibility for “protecting our home and defending our country” was mentioned several times to remind younger Chinese of their task to help overcome “the disease struggle.”

Patriotism has never been a core Marxist principle, because the state is supposed to wither away after a communist revolution. What is more perplexing is that it is not clearly explained how national disease prevention efforts could be turned into an effective tool for indoctrinating the students.

Moreover, the speakers referred to history time and again, but hardly touched on Marxist concepts of history, which are pregnant with the idea of progress by moving the society to a higher level of development. Where is this idea of progress in the lectures of these academics?

These lessons will not register with young Chinese, but rather leave them wondering where the CCP and Xi are leading them to?

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