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PROFESSOR TIM SOUTPHOMMASANE:

The topic of tonight's event, the social and political responses to the COVID-19 outbreak. It has certainly been at the top of all of our minds these last few weeks. It's hard to remember anything of a public health nature during recent memory that has caused this much anxiety and alarm.

The story so far, we know in December 2019 there were reports of a virus been discovered in the Chinese city of Wuhan and by late January the Chinese government had begun imposing travel restrictions, suspending travel to and from Wuhan and they started to build new hospitals to house coronavirus patients.

In Australia, the start of February, the government announced it would bar entry to noncitizens entering the country from China.

Later that month, more than 200 Australians were evacuated from Wuhan and sent to Christmas Island for quarantine.

Later that month as well, 19 Australians on board the 'Diamond Princess' cruise ship were evacuated and sent to Darwin for quarantine.

We've seen movement in the markets, the markets have taken a tumble as the economic components of the coronavirus become clear, but it is the human cost of has alarmed us the most.

Globally, there are now 88,000 confirmed cases of infection with close to 3000 deaths.

More than 95% of cases of confirmed infection are in China but COVID-19 has also been detected in 59 other countries, with countries including South Korea, Iran, and Italy recently reporting significant increases in infection.

The situation is moving fast. Over the weekend, the West Thailand, and here in Australia, reported the first deaths from coronavirus.

79-year-old man had contracted the illness on the 'Diamond Princess' cruise ship. Over the weekend health minister Greg Hunt announced a travel ban on Iran, and as for the illustration of high quickly things are moving, just today the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Australia is now 29.

About 90-120 minutes ago, NSW Health confirmed the first case of person-to-person transmission was announced in Australia.

So, that is the background to tonight's panel and there is a lot for us to get through.

The outbreak of disease as always, of course, accompanied by fear. In the case of COVID-19, has that fear also taken on racialised dimensions?

What role has misinformation or disinformation played and what does it say about the global digital age?

How effectively have governments both here and elsewhere responded to this global health emergency and apparent looming pandemic?

Does viral panic pose as big a threat to us as the COVID-19 virus itself? Last but not least, what exactly is going to happen next?

These are all big questions for us tonight and tonight they will be tackled by the expert panel. We have drawn together a panel from a range of perspectives to help as of these questions and tonight we will find what happens when you put an epidemiologist, a historian, a member of Parliament, a student representative and a University Vice Chancellor together to respond to the pressing issue of the day.

I will now invite my panellists to join the stage. Let me introduce them to you individually.

First, we have Associate Professor Ying Zhang from the University of Sydney. Please join us on the stage. She has over 15 years experience conducting research on climate and health and her research focuses on building community resilience to changing climate and environment, especially for the most vulnerable populations in the Asia-Pacific region.

We also have Jenny Leong MP, the member for Newtown in the NSW parliament and the Greens spokesperson for multiculturalism and human rights.

She was first elected in 2015 and is a passionate advocate for equality, justice and human rights. Earlier in her career she worked for Amnesty International in London, Hong Kong and Sydney and is also a fellow of the University Senate when she was a student.

Next, Dr Sophie Loy-Wilson. Sophie is a historian who specialises in the social history of Australia's engagement with China. Her research is on labour rights and Chinese cooliemigration to Australia and the Pacific and prior to taking up a position in the Department of history here at the University, she worked as a post doc fellow in the

laureate research programme in international history and was a lecturer at Deakin University.

Next we have Abbey Shi, who is a student in law and political economy here at the University and is also the general secretary of the student Representative Council.

She was the key organiser of petition that called for delay at the start of the semester at the University, given a significant number of the student cohort has not been able to return to Australia thanks to the travel ban applying to Australia.

Last but not least, Dr Michael Spence AC who has been Vice Chancellor here since 2008. An alumnus, he graduated with first-class honours in English, Italian and last year and he also speaks Chinese and Korean and is an expert in intellectual property and, as many of you would know, was recently announced as the new president of University College London and will be commencing his work in London in January, 2021. Please give our panellists a big round of applause.

(Applause)

Let's open up with a question to you, Ying, as the public health expert on a panel. There has been a lot of talk about upgrading the classification of the coronavirus from an emergency to a pandemic, which sounds alarming, but I am not sure we all know what it really means. Can you explain to us the significance of declaring a pandemic? If we get to that stage of declaring a global pandemic.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR YING ZHANG:
Thank you, it is a pleasure to be here to talk about this crucial situation In epidemiology there are different levels of disease outbreaks for stop we caused an outbreak when there is a sudden increase in number of cases in a particular geographical area. When the outbreak is rapidly spreading beyond that geographic area, we call it an epidemic. Pandemic is where the epidemic is rapidly spreading in many other countries as well. So technically, the WHO has not declared that a pandemic is upon us yet. It is not a simple decision to make. It is all based on risk assessment. The severity of a pandemic, the risk is assessed by three factors, generally.

One is the transmission ability of the virus, how fast the virus can be transmitted in the community.

The second is how many people are affected and the severity of the symptoms.

The third is the impact on health sectors. We recently saw really high mortality of the COVID-19 in Iran, because of the relatively weak public health and health sectors in the country.

PROFESSOR TIM SOUTPHOMMASANE:
We have pandemics around the world from time to time if you look at recent years we have had pandemics such as the H1-N1 pandemic, SARS, MERS are other examples. Can you talk about how the COVID-19 compares to those examples?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR YING ZHANG:
The only one classified as a pandemic this century was the swine flu, H1-N1, and the death rate was really high. SARS did not spread as fast as this COVID-19 epidemic here. But it had a relatively higher mortality rate compared to COVID-19.

All we can see here based on data at the moment, currently we have the death rate in China around 2.5%. The majority of the cases of COVID-19 is mild, and in Australia we only just confirmed the first person to person case in Australia. So you can see why the WHO has not yet declared a pandemic at this time.

PROFESSOR TIM SOUTPHOMMASANE:
So if things continue and we see more cases of infection, can you talk us through what we would have to do differently in terms of our everyday life here? I want to just play a clip, because it may mean that we may not be able to…

(Video plays)

PROFESSOR TIM SOUTPHOMMASANE:
That is a clip that has been doing the rounds, it is from China in response to advice for people to no longer greet each other with handshakes or with a kiss on the cheek, this being one reason, I have heard put forward for why there has been a spike in Italy of the coronavirus, because of the customary kissing on the cheek as a greeting. I don't mean that as a joke, I am absolutely seriously.

Ying, can I get your expert view on this – should we be thinking about how we treat people and change our normal way of saying hello to people in light of the likely pandemic?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR YING ZHANG:
Yes, we have to reflect on the impact on our daily life because of the epidemic. Technically, in practice, we need to strengthen our public health responses, our systems.

The Australian government has already announced the health emergency response plan, which clarified what kind of measures we can have in case it is declared a pandemic and more cases are confirmed in Australia.

Although we have a relatively robust health system compared with other countries, we still need to take a precautionary approach to prepare for the worst and to protect people's health.

Individually, I think we need to think about the risks, and make your decisions based on reliable information.

PROFESSOR TIM SOUTPHOMMASANE:
Jenny Leong, let me bring you in. Ying mentioned the Australian government's response, how do you rate their response, has it been a good one?

JENNY LEONG:
I am definitely not a public health experts, I am not an expert in this virus, I am not an expert in the tips or information that people need to be aware of in terms of being able to contain and protect their own public health.

I would say after over a decade of being involved in politics and having made a decision to enter, from the performance studies department into politics around the time that Pauline Hanson and John Howard were in their place whipping up racism and fear, I do consider myself to be quite an expert in the use of whipping up racist fear in the political spectrum.

I think that it is really, really important, when we look at this response, that while we may not have immediate concerns about how the government at a national or a State level have been dealing with this, it is standing on the track record of a shift from what we have seen within migration and immigration to a system called Border Force.

It is shifting on the idea of putting people into quarantine on Christmas Island, with the long history of what has occurred with the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees on Christmas Island.

We cannot ignore this fact and what is being brought to bear. One of the most concerning things that is not being factored in here, you look at the travel ban imposed in relation to china, and I know we will speak more about whether or not people have the money to be able to travel to a third country and come back - it appears to be the size of your wallet, the colour of your skin, the colour of your passport, determines whether or not you will get an adequate health response, as opposed to what is should be which is everybody in our community should be getting the same treatment and care.

I acknowledge the international student at the University that are doing it really tough, but we also need to remember that there are students from the African continent that are studying in Wuhan that don't have the same luxury of wealthy governments able to

send in planes to be able to evacuate their citizens, and they are not getting the support that is needed.

I think we really need to recognise that if we are moving to the idea of this being a pandemic, the pandemic will not look at passport and the colour of skin as to who it infects and the government needs a public health response that looks to treat everybody equally across the spectrum.

PROFESSOR TIM SOUTPHOMMASANE:
You mentioned racism and fear factors, Jenny. Have you experienced an increase in racism and fear?

JENNY LEONG:
It was not until today that I experienced it myself. It's important to be frank and open about how it is to do what we do. I know Abby has been on the front line of doing a lot of media around this. I was walking to my local IGA supermarket in Newtown today and there was a big "Keep our children safe from the Chinese flu." That was just there as I have taken my daughter to gym class, just dropping in to get bread on the way home. You don't need that in your life.

That is a very small thing, but we have seen people being evicted from their homes, we have seen people being discriminated against in their workplaces, we have seen people being attacked on public transport. We know that this happens anyway, we understand the level of abuse that can happen to people who do not speak English on public transport is already significant, but we see this escalating at a rapid rate.

The big fear here, I think, is that what we see is a public health response to the coronavirus, but we don't see a public health response to the increased amount of discrimination and racism people suffer as a result of this.

When we talk about the investment is needed, we need to see the investment in this whole crisis as beyond just the health impacts of those who may contract the virus, because in actual fact, the virus itself is a scary thing.

As we know, and as we heard from Ying, people are dying from it, but we must also never forget that people die from racism and discrimination. That should be taken just as seriously as a public health outcomes.

PROFESSOR TIM SOUTPHOMMASANE:
On racism, Jenny, is the situation complicated by the fact that you have Chinese and Asian Australians themselves feeling panic or a sense of fear? We know there is diminished custom going through Chinatown and Eastwood and Chatswood here in Sydney. How do you disentangle that from the racism you see around?

JENNY LEONG:
How do you make a decision? We say in this case one person has died in Australia as a result of this virus. But we know, from looking at financial support given to farmers in drought, or people who have lost their jobs from the closure of coal port and car factories, these get government support to ensure families don't fall apart, that individuals can cope. And I question and wonder where that same level of rescue packages for our china towns; diverse communities, for our shopkeepers, for our incredible, delicious dumpling makers of this city.

I wonder where that rescue packages, and sadly, because of the type of discrimination that Chinese Australians have faced for so long, I fear that package won't be coming, and it will be up to a community response to be able to engage. I hope we hear from the vice chancellor, but I would hope that we see leadership from our universities, who don't expect international students to front for rent and fees they can't actually return to the country. How do we divide financial support and also provide the support and counselling that people need to get through this? Because it is tough.

PROFESSOR TIM SOUTPHOMMASANE:
Will hear from the Vice Chancellor shortly. Can I bring you in please, Sophie. And get your perspective as a historian. Is there part of the response because the virus originated in China?

DR SOPHIE LOY-WILSON:
I would like to echo Jenny by saying I'm not an expert on the science. What I do know is that there is a long history of human beings reacting to pandemics and epidemics with the big fear of outsiders and a deep fear of difference.

Often, the couple the fear of the disease itself with the fear of so-called others. All diseases arrive in our communities in a cultural and social context.

It moves us to educate ourselves about the social and cultural context if we want to come together as a community, as opposed to being divided by fear.

In Australia, the social and cultural context around this virus is obviously a very loaded one.

One thing that I study is the first place in the world to legislate against Asian migration was the colony of Victoria in Australia in 1851.

That was the first place in the world to introduce a specific ban on immigration from Asian people. It is part of the infamous White Australia policy.

Whether we like it or not, we have this legacy in our communities and when we have a community that has, for a long time, experienced being labelled as outsiders or as a threat in our society, we must be particularly sensitive with the way we discuss issues around disease and infection.

What history also teaches us is that it does not have to be this way. We don't have to be divided by these things. We don't have to experience viral panic.

We can actually practically come together as a community and work against misinformation and support each other.

There are two lessons from history - one is to be vigilant against racism and the other is that we have the potential of human beings to come together and not go in that direction.

PROFESSOR TIM SOUTPHOMMASANE:
On the question of vigilance, when the Australian government announced it would be quarantining Australian evacuees from Wuhan at the former detention centres on Christmas Island, many commented that this involved a form of dog whistling or discrimination.

Is that a fair assessment in your view when you place it into a social and cultural context?

DR SOPHIE LOY-WILSON:
I am not a bureaucrat and I'm not responsible for organising quarantine, however, I do think that the government well knows that around this particular location in Australia has been a lot of noise.

It is well-known that this is a place construed in media narratives and political narratives as a place of punishment.

You go here if you break our immigration laws. So, to say to people who are trying to come here to study or to live that you need to stop here in quarantine, I think it is an odd choice. Maybe there was no other choice, but I think it was an odd choice.

PROFESSOR TIM SOUTPHOMMASANE:
Abbey, can I bring you in? Now as an opportunity to get a perspective from the student body here at the University.

There are many thousands of our students who have not been able to join us on campus here as a result of the travel ban.

I presume that you have been keeping in touch with many of the students in China. How are the students, our students in China, feeling at the moment?

ABBEY SHI:
As a reaction to the travel ban policy, people are feeling very anxious and confused and they are in fear of coronavirus in China at the moment and also in fear of facing an indefinite future of not knowing when they can come back here.

PROFESSOR TIM SOUTPHOMMASANE:
I mentioned in the introduction, Abbey, that as an SRC leader, you started a petition calling for the University to provide more support for students.

What would you like to see the University do in its response right now?

ABBEY SHI:

So, let me give everyone here a bit of background information on the petition. On February 1, when the travel ban was announced by the Department of Home Affairs, barring people who had been to China in the past 14 days from entering the Australian border, there were tens of thousands of international students involved in tertiary education in Australia.

They are un able to catch up with the start of the semester and education will be affected by the policy.

As a response, as a student leader, I needed to ask the university to respond and to make systematic adjustments around the policy.

The ideas are that we have gathered electronically signed signatures for around 6000 people in around two days.

We are asking the University to delay the start of the semester and for there to be a latest arrival date. Before that date, the student can get back to campus, they can attend classes as normal and finish exams.

In the past, international students, if they decide to defer their studies, apply before the Saturday, they could only have 50% of their tuition fee refunded by student accounts.

After the petition, to which the University have responded, they will be a 100% refund to the student's bank account, and they must have delivery of courses for the students.

The purpose is also to have an antiracism campaign on campus and make people feel welcome as part of the community here at the University of Sydney. It is the content of the petition.

Often when it's has been picked up by the media it has been oversimplified but I believe that the petition has been evolving to this ongoing conversation between the student body and the University.

Together, we are exploring the solution to the problem right now.

PROFESSOR TIM SOUTPHOMMASANE:
Michael Spence, can I bring you in? The University of Sydney has been working through the response to the issue and many thousands of our students have not been able to join us on-campus just yet.

Can you talk us through what the university is prioritising in its response to the COVID-19 issue?

DR MICHAEL SPENCE AC:
The most important thing for us is to make sure the students who have started their studies with us can finish their education and make sure that students who have been often saving for years to come to the University and are very excited, like all students are when they set out on a university course, that they are able to join us.

Because the situation has been unfolding, our response has also been unfolding with the desire to make sure that the students who are affected are as impacted as little as possible.

We have put over 1000 units of study online. About half of those, you will be able to study for the whole semester so you can do your whole first semester away from the university.

About half of them that involves science labs and the rest of it, you can do up to March 30 online and then you would need to be here on the census date in order to finish the semester.

Also, as the travel ban progresses, we are looking at options like compressing and having an intensive winter school and then a second semester option for people and then an intensive summer school so that you can enter the second year having done a first year that is not compressed in terms of intellectual content that is compressed in terms of time as a possibility.

Several of our major courses, we did delay the start of the course for two weeks.

Interestingly, the largest group that complained about that, in fact I think of all the letters came to my office complaining about the delay for the start of the semester, were from Chinese students who said, "I made it here and I'm paying rent so why can't I go to class?"

It is really important to remember that in the University's response, what we are trying to do as much as possible is to respond to the needs of each individual student.

There are core lines and the rest of it, and to communicate as much as we possibly can with each individual student than with their families so that they can think through their options.

One of the problems, I think, of the kind of othering that Sophie talked about is that there can be a terrible generalisation that goes on about the Chinese or Chinese students, or whatever it might be.

When we are talking about a country as big as Europe with a country of 1.4 billion people and were talking about people is a very different life situations so we have to make sure that we respond to students individually as well as having lots of different ways of accommodating people's need so that they can continue their studies.

I have to say that I am very grateful to the University staff. Within two weeks, alternative arrangements had been made for over 1000 units of study, and that is a huge effort on behalf of the University staff.

PROFESSOR TIM SOUTPHOMMASANE:
Michael, it is very clear that the university sector in Australia will be hit hard by the coronavirus outbreak.

Over the weekend, there was some comments about this and there was an article discussing some of the issues in the Coalition party room where some members of the government spoke about having sympathy for the tourism industry but not having sympathy for the university sector because it has been overreliant on Chinese international students.

To cite one quotation used over the weekend, "Universities rode the cycle up, now they can ride the cycle down." Is that fair?

DR MICHAEL SPENCE AC:
I am going to call it out. That is plain, old-fashioned racism. It is OK for Chinese people to come here as tourists because they go home again, and in fact my students go home the end of the course, but that is by the by, but the notion that we might be engaging

with the young people of China in the exchange of ideas, and search for education, somehow that is threatening or problematic or not so good.

There is sympathy for the tourism industry because that is OK that you can have Chinese people here for one week but if you have them here for three and four years as a part of the community and engaging in the life of the mind, that is somehow problematic.

To me, that is old-fashioned racism and I am deeply proud of the fact that the University of Sydney, when it was founded, they said they would draw students from all over the world and if you read William Charles Wentowroth's speech in the legislative assembly, we do, we draw students year from 140 countries.

You would expect that, given the number of Chinese students who are globally mobile and I am very proud of our work in international education and research and that is what stops this place being a bit of a hick place in a cultural backwater and actually makes as part of the international conversation and I will not apologise for it.

PROFESSOR TIM SOUTPHOMMASANE:
Strong words. Jenny Leong, can I bring you in on this? You have talked about racism manifesting in overt forms and in the form of vilification. Does Michael have a point in identifying what may be more insidious forms of racism within the discourse?

JENNY LEONG:
There is a lot to unpack about this, and we see universities having increased market pressures, such that the need to have international students pay exorbitant fees to be able to come to the University is not something necessarily of the University's choosing, but of broader successive government's move to put those pressures on. I think in the same way that we can't look at the quarantining of people on christmas island, and I think we have two ask if we were stopping people coming from Europe, would we be putting people in Darwin or Christmas Island as we have done with the people aboard the Diamond Princess? I think we all know the answer.

I think that absolutely there is a genuine view that international students have been contributing large amounts of money to the university sector through fees for a long period of time. The question is then, should that be treated any differently to the tourism industry, where people have also, where people visiting from China have also contributed a large amount of money to the tourism industry soI think it is absolutely something that needs to be called out in terms of that lack of equality. I would like to take issue with one of the things that Michael said about not treating all Chinese international students – trying to create a big stereotype of all people doing this. There are some things that are common to international students at this University that coming from China, and that is that they pay the fees and they are currently probably paying

rent and unable to be in the country. So they are two practical things that I would say a vast majority of international students would be suffering as a result, and they are things that could be dealt with in a systematic way to actually look at the university advocating for those private student accommodation places to be waiving rent while those students cannot be here, and to be giving them a discount or refunding their fees, given those pressures so I absolutely take it that personal circumstances can change, and some people have gone to the effort of being here and want to go to class, and because they are feeling the pressure of finishing their degree, but we need to take the context of commonalities of international students all paying huge fees.

If I had my way, all university would be free, but that is another conversation for Sydney Ideas in the future. Some of the older people have had their degrees are free, put your hands up. There you go.

So we need to look at the absolute failure of leadership. It is completely the critical to say that on tourism we need to subsidise, and on education we don't. That is part of a broader agenda. We have the Assistant Minister for multiculturalism saying the most offensive stuff on social media on the weekend around how all of the Chinese people need to stop eating this and spreading more bile into the debate. So I don't think we should be expecting much from the current cabinet debate at the moment, and I hope that people with health expertise are listening to people who are health experts, and hopefully we can listen more to the education experts.

DR MICHAEL SPENCE:
Just to speak to the fees issue, we are looking at ways to provide assistance at the moment. The difference between a domestic student and an international student is the domestic students receive a subsidised education that an international student does not. In fact, the work we are doing to provide online assistance and all of that means it will be more expensive to teach individual students who begin their courses overseas than it would be if they were here. Nevertheless, this will cause real financial hardship for some people, and one of the ways we are looking at it at the moment is how we make sure, as we make provision to relieve financial hardship in the international student committee, that is does go to students that needed most.

That is partly about thinking about people's individual circumstances.

PROFESSOR TIM SOUTPHOMMASANE:
To change gears quickly, and to bring you back in, Ying, I have been struck by news reports in recent days that are characterised by panic occurring here in Australia. There have been some reports of shop shelves being stripped bare as people begin stockpiling for the hit of the pandemic.

From a public health perspective, how prepared should people be right now? Is there such a thing as being too well-prepared? Or being panicked into doing this kind of buying?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR YING ZHANG:
That is not an easy question to answer. Panic is normal, we are human beings. We can't ignore that. The WHO so far has published about 13 technical guidelines, and one of them is focussed risk communication.

The principal is the communicate clearly the public what is known, what needs to be confirmed, what has been done, and what it means to the public.

There are also guidelines to individuals on how to protect yourself from the risks, such as better hygiene, washing your hands frequently, avoiding contact with too many people together. And a specific…

PROFESSOR TIM SOUTPHOMMASANE:
Relax everyone.

DR MICHAEL SPENCE:
Will we all get dermatitis from using too much antiseptic wipe? (Laughs)

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR YING ZHANG:
There are some specific precautions individuals can take to reduce the risk of infection. In terms of whether there is a threshold to trigger emergency responses, or how much, to what degree individuals should stock up on food, for a few weeks to survive the epidemic, I don't think there is yet a need for the Australian population.

PROFESSOR TIM SOUTPHOMMASANE:
I would like to get a historical perspective on this, turning our resident historian, Sophie. Have there been examples in history were panic is accelerated because of the element of race, particularly around health panics?

DR SOPHIE LOY-WILSON:
Right here in Sydney so many of you will know that part of our city history is that we have long had Chinese migration here, and one of the first Chinatowns was not in Haymarket, it was down at The Rocks.

In 1888, a ship arrive, *The Afghan*, arrived with Chinese on-board, at the same time as a smallpox outbreak that was affecting the population in New South Wales. The newspaper link this to a young Chinese boy living in The Rocks with his family, very incorrectly.

So in a situation like this, things can move very quickly, and to make erroneous assumptions about the origin of infection. And we are not all at the epidemiologists, we don't all know about this.

So there is definitely a historical precedent. The moment when that ship arrived in Sydney, it was an early moment of proto globalisation.

We have this world now, it started back then with ships and empires, where everything is connected. We love the benefits of that, but I think we are less prepared for the downside, which is that infections spread faster. They affect us quicker.

As a global community we need to think about the challenges of living in an interconnected world, and what it requires of us as citizens. History can teach us a lot about that

DR MICHAEL SPENCE:
In my first year at The University of Sydney, I wrote an essay about whether the mortality rate of the Black Death was commensurate with the impact European imagination.

With the Black Death, it would have been impossible with the epidemiology of the disease for people to die as was reported that they died, but these things are spread panic. Will you respond to panic in a grown-up way, or will you let panic drive you apart as a community?

JENNY LEONG:
I think it also speaks to our concept of universalism. I made a slight remark about free education, but if we are actually talking about, we talk about the quality of our health-care system, we talk about that as a universal health-care system. It is a very national health-care system.

So when we are talking about global pandemics, when we talk about the travel of hundreds of thousands of people that are not citizens of this country, that don't have access to the same healthcare in the countries that they are from, regularly crossing borders, the idea what is important to invest in globally, and going back to the idea of globalisation and the good bits of it, the idea of saying it is in the interests of the health of our citizens to invest in foreign aid to ensure there is adequate medical treatment in other countries to ensure that if there is a pandemic, we don't suffer the consequences of it.

When we look at this in terms of workplace relations, the treatment of that first doctor, the broader context of lack of transparency in the Chinese government, the structure is that many people may be fearful of speaking out, those issues of freedom, human

rights, transparency, they have an impact on the public health of people living in Sydney, whether or not they travel. So we need to share these ideas and values is that there is no need for people to come here for healthcare, because it is available where they are.

PROFESSOR TIM SOUTPHOMMASANE:
Michael, I would like to come back to you on panic. Panic can also exist in the workplace, and there was recently reports on staff at the Louvre in Paris refusing to turn up to work because they were fearing they would contract the coronavirus.

Can I put to you a hypothetical – given the panic that is rising, Howard the University of Sydney respond if they were to be staff here who refused to be around students from China because of the health risk?

DR MICHAEL SPENCE:
I think there is a very simple answer to this. I think the university follows the public health advice, and so we make sure that our pandemic plan, that we have had long before the coronavirus arose, that our pandemic plan is put in plan, that we follow the advice of the government in relation to questions such as ours.

And then if somebody doesn't want to teach because a student is Chinese, or even because they are Chinese and they have a cough If they don't want to teach, they don't want to work, they don't want a job, and they are not welcome at the university. This is the kind of thing that we cannot, as a community, tolerate. The basic fact is, of 25 million Australians, 25 million of them will die. That is just true.

PROFESSOR TIM SOUTPHOMMASANE:
Not from the coronavirus.

(Laughter)

DR MICHAEL SPENCE:
No, not from the coronavirus.

JENNY LEONG:
The responses on the live stream just want a little bit crazy there.

DR MICHAEL SPENCE AC:
Death and disease have got to be managed sensibly by organisations applying good advice, and we cannot, particularly in the environment of a university that should model respect for science, intolerance for panic, intolerance for hyperbole, intolerance for overreaction, that is what a university has got to model for the community at large. And we will not tolerate racism.

PROFESSOR TIM SOUTPHOMMASANE:
Abbey?

ABBEY SHI:
I arrived in Australia one week before the travel ban was imposed, and I was in China when the epidemic broke out. I got to Australia, it struck me that people do not understand the many perspectives of the virus.

They imagine China as being a place where everybody on the street carries the virus, everybody is dangerous. In the survey done in China at the moment, 99.9% of the students have never been in contact with the coronavirus case.

China is a very big country with billions of people, with a confirmed case in China is around five digits. And that put into perspective, that is equivalent to Goulburn having an epidemic and barring all of Australia from going anywhere.

I work at the student council, and we have 10 to 15 staff on hand at all times. To comply with WHS, we talked to them about basic health information. Until today, the majority of the Australian public don't know what type of masks should be used to protect themselves in the face of coronavirus is that it is a medical mask and the n-95 mask that is resistant to the transmission of these diseases. And people do not know this. It confuses me, how this is happening, why?

PROFESSOR TIM SOUTPHOMMASANE:
Lots of questions and I'm sure you have got questions, too. We have got roaming microphones going around the hall.

PROFESSOR TIM SOUTPHOMMASANE:
Here's how we will do this, because we are running out of time. I will give all the panellists a chance for one last word, and if they wish to address any of the three questions that have been posed, they may do so. There was one questionnaire about the university can do to promote messages that people protect themselves, a question about lessons from the HIV crisis in the past that we can draw upon now, and a question about whether we need leaders to be more vocal in speaking out against racism. Ying, why don't you kick us off with your final thoughts.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR YING ZHANG:
My key message is that the virus is spreading, and we should all be united, because the enemy is the virus, not a particular ethnic or regional group. In order to win the battle against the virus, we have to work more collaboratively.

PROFESSOR TIM SOUTPHOMMASANE:
Jenny?

JENNY LEONG:
I think the comment about the risk of being a target if you wear a mask is a genuine concern, and I think that demonstrates the other public health and safety risks to people who look of Asian descent in terms of how they engage with the advice of others, because of the risk that what you will get back then is it some kind of verbal abuse or other attack as a result of you wearing a mask.

I think there are a lot of lessons we can learn from the AIDS epidemic and the failed responses. The director of the AIDS Council of New South Wales wrote a piece that I thought was quite insightful into how we can deal with responding to epidemics and pandemics without fuelling dissemination and here, and I think it would be – I would absolutely hope that at a state and federal level, talking to some of those a councils and the advisory councils on how to do that would be an impressive thing.

To our friends in the back, I am guessing you did not contact the Greens MP, but I would always be happy to comment on how the Murdoch press attacks Chinese people. I am always happy to take the side of the Chinese community over the Murdoch press, any day.

(Laughter)

DR SOPHIE LOY-WILSON:
I think the AIDS epidemic is a great example here. Human beings can do terrible things to each other. This was a community, and I have studied throughout my teaching some of the communities in Sydney that were affected by that epidemic, and they suffered deeply at that time.

However, at that moment, small acts of cruelty were also met with small act of kindness. Just as there are particular ways in which racism can be spread by very small acts of cruelty, small kindnesses can go a very long way in communicating an alternative way of behaving in moments like this.

I am talking about people that reach out and did hold hands, who touched and helped people who are perceived to be affected by the ATV disease at that time. The paragraphs at a grassroots level, each of us has so many choices this is not predetermined, it has a long way to play out. What we can learn from situations like the AIDS epidemic is we all have a choice to choose our own path through this situation and resist the herd mentality of panic that comes with it.

ABBEY SHI:
I think the debate here is not whether coronavirus is contagious, but whether policy-making is in the right place, and keeping up with information about coronavirus right now.

On the front page of the Washington Post today, it is that the stock market has taken the biggest hit ever since the 2008 financial crisis. The takeaway here is that while we are discussing the economic impact and bilateral trade relationships, it is very important that we talk about university in a different sense. The University is not a commercial sector – International students are not a commodity or a financial resource. People come here for university because they want to obtain tertiary education in the first instance.

What we are asking is why the university has shifted from educating people to be the leaders of tomorrow to having a conversation about the commercial impact. That is my question.

MICHAEL SPENCE:
I think the fascinating thing about the masks is that medical practice, like everything else, is deeply enculturated. One of the things about which there is enormous debate is whether or not masks are affected, but whether they actually increase the problem. The wearing of masks is part of the Asian cultural practice that has taken in other places. My father-in-law, who is Korean, in Seoul, desperately tried to get his non-Korean daughter-in-law to wear a mask and there was a lot of debate between.

There is a science, and there is the cultural way that we respond to science. The real question is, is there a diversity of voices in the Australian leadership that reflect the diversity of voices in the Australian community that allows us to have a conversation that are lively and inclusive of society? In that context, are people showing small act of kindness a small act of friendship, that are building bridges?

I have been very proud of our students on the internet sharing notes, with students who are in China who cannot get notes, and very positive things from the student community, responding to, from the student community here, responding to their peers who are overseas.

To the last interlocutor, leadership matters. At the end of the day, there is a certain sort of demonisation of China and the Chinese that is going on in Australia at the moment. This is a relationship that is incredibly important to Australia. It is really important that leaders from civil society as well is business and politics speak out about the rich opportunities that there are for better collaboration between Australia and China.

In fact, as some of Sophie's other work hass shown, the remarkably complex intertwined personal history between Australia and China, this is a great friendship, and a great friendship for our future, and we have got to have leaders speaking of it at the moment.

PROFESSOR TIM SOUTPHOMMASANE:
Well, folks, perspective and proportion are very hard to come by at the moment when we have so much panic, but I think you will agree that we got some valuable perspective and a lot of common sense and decency from our panel tonight. If you do leave tonight with some messages, I hope you take out of this discussion the importance of empathy and kindness, the importance of having a diversity of voices in our public discourse, and finally, just how essential leadership is in setting the tone of our society.

With that, will you please join me in thinking our panel - Ying Zhang, Jenny Leong, Dr Sophie Loy-Wilson, Abbey Shi, Dr Michael Spence AC. We look forward to seeing you at the next Sydney Ideas. Thank you.