

Pandemics in History: Before and After

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- Histocial Perspective (for HH)
- Athenian Plague (5th century BCE), Black Death (1347-1351),
- HK/Manchurian Plague (late 19th century), SARS
- Before, During and After
- Encounter, Debates and Reflections
- Health Sciences (Public Health) and Humanities – conversation and mutual aid
- Humanist: To be engaged or not
- A long Pause



1. Introduction

- Although history as a discipline tends to be retrospective, it often takes a current event to push historians to search up and down, interrogate from right and left, looking desperately for meaning and insights. Thoughts on plague and the people, as William McNeil had observed, is no exception.
- COVID-19 jolted armchair scholars out from their desks and studies as acquired knowledge from education begin to dawn on them as to what pandemics used to do to individuals and society, West or East, past or now.



2. Athens

- Here, I like to take examples of understandings on the Athenian Plague (430-425 BCE), Black Death (1347-1351), in European history, as well as the more recent Hong Kong and Manchurian Plagues in the late 19th Century and the SARS in early 21st Century Asia to shed some light on our current experience with the Covid-19 of the 21st Century.



The Plague of Athens, Michiel Sweerts, c. 1652–1654



3. Black Death

- This longer gaze may help us to see how poorly prepared people were, and still are, not only regarding their own activities, battle grounds in the Peloponnesian War, but also regarding their own wellbeing in the matters of life and death, in the movements of population and goods, whether it's in the Eurasian continent in the Middle Ages, or on the East Asian land and towns on the eve of or at the height of modernity.



- Ironically, mixed blessings could and did come of these terrible encounters, whether with the Athenian Plague that ended the Classical Greek, or the Black Death that cleared the ground for Renaissance which came with revived urban prosperity after for the 16th century European cities.



4. Hong Kong (1894-96) and Manchurian Plagues (1910-1911)

- More closely at hand, Manchurian plague certainly turned the pages of public health for China. Not to mention how SARS now seemed like an unwelcomed dress rehearsal for the shocks of these last 3 months and counting, for East Asia and now 200 countries all over.



5. 2003 SARS

2003年臺灣地區SARS病例人口學分布情形				
雙項名稱		確定病例(N=346)	可能病例(N=318)	合計(N=664)
性別	女	218 (63%)	129 (40.6%)	347 (52.3%)
	男	128 (37%)	189 (59.4%)	317 (47.7%)
死亡		73 (21.10%)	107 (33.66%)	180 (27.11%)
感染來源	境外移入	27 (7.8%)	38 (20%)	65 (9.8%)
	親友感染	36 (10.4%)	8 (2.6%)	44 (6.6%)
	醫院感染	246 (71.1%)	129 (40.6%)	375 (56.5%)
	交通工具感染	5 (1.5%)	2 (0.6%)	7 (1%)
	其他	32 (9.2%)	141 (44.3%)	173 (26%)



6. Further Thoughts



- Spanish Flu (1918)
- The 1918 influenza pandemic was the most severe pandemic in recent history. It was caused by an H1N1 virus with genes of avian origin. Although there is not universal consensus regarding where the virus originated, it spread worldwide during 1918-1919. In the United States, it was first identified in military personnel in spring 1918. It is estimated that about 500 million people or one-third of the world's population became infected with this virus. The number of deaths was estimated to be at least **50 million worldwide with about 675,000 occurring in the United States.**[according to CDC report]



7. Conclusion

- Whatever the circumstances, however or whenever it turns out to go off stage, as Winston Churchill (paraphrasing George Santayana) said: **“Those who fail to learn from history are condemned to repeat it.”** Since pandemic is one kind of history that we prefer not to repeat, not as frequently or as badly as this time, it may be high time that we walk through the museum of classical Athens, Medieval Europe, modern Manchuria, and Hong Kong or China from 17 years ago.
- Humanities are yet to be invited to help with their expertise to better meet up with the COVID-19 pandemic now. Not all humanists are ready or willing to engage either. For those who are interested to join their public health colleagues in informing politicians and economists to rise for the occasion collectively, nonetheless, here forth are some samplers of foods for thought.

