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Data has continued to be a major buzzword, being used by data experts and lay people, those who analyze data, and those who mostly participate in social commentary. No matter who you are, and no matter your area of expertise, simply introducing the term "data" inevitably amplifies ones credibility.

Since the outset of Coronavirus and COVID-19 reporting began, there was a strong emphasis on ensuring that data is available to inform our decisions, decisions of public health officials, and decisions of legislators.

Unfortunately for us, all of the earliest data came from China. More specifically, it came from Wuhan, a region in China where not only is it well known for its notoriously high levels of pollution, which are arguably the worst in the country, but where it has been broadly reported that its citizens have becoming increasingly frustrated with additional incinerator plants being added to their living environment, causing citizens to decide, in rising numbers, to protest.

For any citizen living in Canada, the notion of there being concerns about trust and honesty when it comes to data from China and data collection by China is not new. This is something that's already been on the news wire over the past year, due to Canadian authorities having arrested a finance executive from Huawei in December of 2018. In addition, there has been a consistent effort to improve the security of network infrastructure, data storage and data migration in any type of IT facility, whether in the public sector or among private companies, due to the assumed threat of spying by China.

With all this in mind, it's a bit disturbing to consider the behaviour of our leaders and international organizations in the time period following initial reports of the epidemic in Wuhan. There are rational reasons for wanting to make use of data coming out of Wuhan at that time, but there was no dialogue challenging the quality of this data, the possible intentions or incentives which might be affected by its dissemination, and what possible reframing of the data might be necessary, if not as a contingency then even just to demonstrate an adherence to principles of due diligence.

This was not demonstrated in their investigation of Wuhan, conducted from January 20-21 earlier this year. China, having been dealing with cases of the virus since at least the beginning of December, collaborated with the WHO delegation and allowed them to leave with the understanding that there is no evidence of human-to-human transmission. This surely can't be a believable narrative, given the posited incubation periods, onset of symptoms and remarkably high transmissibility. The most charitable interpretation of this would suggest incompetence, but in my opinion a charitable interpretation would be, itself, a naive one.