Students’ friends, families in China endure impact of coronavirus epidemic

BY ESTHER ANIMALU
News Editor

White medical masks obscure what were once smiling faces. Streets that were previously bustling with life are now stagnant and stale with fear. Planes that used to soar high above the mountains are grounded, keeping the skies eerily quiet. China, a hotspot of industry, innovation and tourism, has rapidly morphed into the epicenter of a global pandemic. The echoes of a growing panic span across borders. Residents of several Chinese provinces remain bound to their homes, attempting to avoid a new nightmare: exposure to the coronavirus. Daily life is at a virtual standstill.

The 2019 novel coronavirus has caused an outbreak of respiratory illness first detected in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. According to the latest World Health Organization data, authorities in 32 countries and territories have reported more than 78,000 cases of novel coronavirus since Dec. 31. The vast majority of cases have been rooted in mainland China. The epidemic is a major public health emergency, with the illness being highly contagious and causing a range of symptoms. Due to the virus’s long incubation period, authorities have struggled to control the spread of disease.

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What is WeChat?

As the global pandemic of the coronavirus continues to spread, many Asian students at UM are using WeChat as a means for connecting with family and friends overseas. The app is owned by Chinese tech giant Tencent and has more than a billion monthly users, trailing behind Facebook’s WhatsApp and Messenger.

UM students Yaru Ji and Yuchen Guo first got word about the coronavirus outbreak through posts and messages from loved ones on WeChat. “The whole Chinese population uses it,” said Ji, a senior advertising major. “It’s our main app we communicate with. I first saw the news on there.” Ji said she fears that she won’t be able to visit her home country anytime soon, meaning that WeChat will be her main connection to China until the outbreak subsides.

Sophomore Shiyang Li is from Shanghai but has friends in Wuhan. She said via WeChat, they’ve described a life of restrictions. They cannot leave the house to get food. “The government goes to every family everyday giving out fresh vegetables and food,” said Li, adding that she hopes a medicine will be developed as soon as possible to save lives.

WeChat is one of the primary ways people communicate in China. Even while doing business, people prefer WeChat to email, students said. It’s significantly more predominant in that region because apps such as Facebook and Instagram are blocked by the Chinese government.

Parker Gimbel, Kirstin Krupa, Isabella Popaduk, and Emmalyse Brownstein contributed to this report.
The new coronavirus, 2019-nCov, has been the focus of many students at UM. In a class on Chinese studies, freshman Yuchen Guo fears the worst from home in China. “I know many students are doing online classes instead of going to school,” Sun said, “but it has been difficult for her grandparents to adapt.”

“About 1,000 people in my hometown were to come into contact with the virus. I’m scared,” Guo said. “I just hope the conditions get better so everything can go back to normal.”

In Hubei’s neighboring province of Anhui, there have been 335 confirmed cases. According to Guo, her relatives have friends who have been infected with the coronavirus. “I feel very scared,” Guo said.

Mikayla Kaptzan, a junior majoring in finance, said she has been unable to return to her family’s home in Shanghai, a city located 474 miles east of Wuhan. “I know many students are doing online classes instead of going to school,” Sun said. “But it has been difficult for her grandparents to adapt.”

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In Foshan, a city located 15 miles from Wuhan, the students faces many challenges. “There’s just such a lack of information.”

Despite this development, fear of the coronavirus has essentially forced them to stay inside, said the student from Shanghai. “The whole situation is terrible, and I’m worried that it would be worse.”

The UM student, “But it does worry me if they can’t go out to get groceries and regular activities. However, because of the quarantine, the possibility of coming into contact with the coronavirus has essentially forced them to stay inside, said the student who is originally from Ap Lei Chau, a metropolitan city that is several hours away from Wuhan. “I hope the government will give information when the epidemic has already prevented one of her friends from flying back home for spring break, as most flights into China have been suspended.”

Jennifer Sun, a 20-year-old freshwater fnance major, expressed similar fears. “It’s so weird that everything here is so normal, but back home my parents can barely leave the house,” Sun said. “But it has been difficult for her grandparents to adapt.”

“At the University of Miami, Chinese students make up 9 percent of the population of international students on campus, and many students at UM have direct ties to China and Chinese universities.”

Now, these students are sharing their stories to shed light on one of the darkest corners of the human condition.
Student organizations collect money, supplies for China

BY REBECCA GODDARD
Editor-in-Chief

Chinese students at the University of Miami are mobilizing in response to the coronavirus epidemic, refusing to sit idly while their friends and families are under quarantine back home. Since the outbreak began, they’ve been collecting donations to benefit their communities in China.

Earlier this month on Feb. 13 and 14, members of the Hong Kong Student Association were stationed in the Breezeway, giving out information on the epidemic and asking students for monetary donations to benefit Wuhan and the surrounding areas. Their efforts raised a total of $600.

Dorothy Chan, a junior economic major and an e-board member of the HKSA, said her main goal is to raise awareness about the current plight of Chinese citizens. Although it’s difficult to help from so far away, Chan emphasized the importance of keeping the UM community informed.

“It’s extremely easy to get caught up in school,” Chan said. “However, I think it is also equally important to take advantage of the fact that I am on an extremely international and diverse campus so there is already a Chinese community whose voices are muted during this time.”

She cited language barriers and cultural differences as obstacles that are making life more complicated for Chinese international students during this difficult time. As an Asian-American, Chan said she feels it is her duty to help bridge the gap between Chinese students and the rest of the UM community.

The Chinese Student and Scholars Association has also been collecting donations for people affected by the coronavirus. Many areas of China are suffering from shortages of medical face masks, so the group is collecting money to buy masks for Wuhan and the surrounding areas.

All in all, the CSSA spent $3,800 on masks, supplying a total of 4,000 masks to people in China.

In addition to receiving donations from students, the organization also received a $1,000 donation from the Miami Herbert Business School.

“The business school provided us a lot of help,” said Xinyu Li, a sophomore majoring in music business and the CSSA member in charge of the fundraiser. In addition to the donation, Li said the business school helped the CSSA figure out the logistics involved in buying masks and sending them to China. Due to the shortage of medical supplies in the region, the masks had to be purchased from a company in Los Angeles and shipped to Wuhan.

“We just really appreciate the UM students and faculty that donated,” said Li.

Rachelle Barrett and Sebastian Morales contributed to this report.

Coronavirus causes surge in racism, students say

BY ESTHER ANIMALU
News Editor

While Chinese students at the University of Miami are distressed about the impact of the coronavirus in China, many say they face another source of distress on campus—prejudice, ridicule and xenophobia.

“People have literally yelled at Chinese students to put masks on,” Kaptzan said. “I just wish more people would understand how insensitive they’re being. There have been no outbreaks down here; there is no need to shun anyone.”

Despite the lack of cases in South Florida, rumors regarding the coronavirus have been circulating around campus. At the end of January, one student posted a viral TikTok video that alleged his roommate, an exchange student from Wuhan, was on the way to the hospital with flu-like symptoms. However, the student, who asked to remain anonymous, later confirmed that the video was completely fabricated. He does not even have a Chinese roommate.

Jihan “Doria” Qu, a freshman psychology and gender studies major, said there is no reason for these types of discriminatory comments and accusations, many of which revolve around the medical facial masks that some Chinese students have been wearing.

“We wear facial masks to protect ourselves not because we are a carrier of the virus,” said Qu.

Shiyang Li, 23, said people in China wear face masks to prevent any kind of infections. Li, a junior motion pictures major, has carried this prevention method into her daily life on UM’s campus. But she said she has not received the best reactions from other students.

“Recently I noticed people around me look at me frightened, but I will always wear a mask because I have to protect myself, just in case,” she said.

Kaitong Zhang, a 21-year-old sophomore from Xi’an, said she is aware that non-Asian students might look at her differently following the coronavirus outbreak.

“Sometimes yes, I started to care about how people see me,” Zhang said. “I’m not from Wuhan, and I haven’t even been to China for more than half a year; and to be honest I was afraid to contact people who just came back from China.”

Zishan Cai is a senior majoring in creative advertising from Dongguan, an industrial city in China. Cai said she hasn’t faced any type of discrimination at UM, but some of her friends told her that students make fun of them when they wear their masks.

“Even though people may be rude sometimes, my friends and I are grateful for having the opportunity of being here in the United States safe,” Cai said. “We just hope that this issue ends soon.”

Katherine Begg, Nicole Bozkurt, Maria Flores, Victoria Kline, Sebastian Morales, Isabella Popadiuk and Ciana Quintero contributed to this report.