



Italy: The Real Reasons a Chinese Virus Is Ravaging a European People

Italy is no stranger to Asia-born diseases. One of the Roman Empire's most famous emperors, Marcus Aurelius, likely died of smallpox, which came from Asia. But we may be surprised that in the age of modern medicine an advanced nation such as Italy could be ground zero for Wuhan virus mortality, with 427 people dying in one recent day alone. Yet connections with China, Italy's aged population, socialized medicine, and small personal space may explain the phenomenon.



While the PC thought police don't want the disease's Chinese origin mentioned, there's a simple reason why *northern* Italy is especially plagued by the Wuhan virus: Many Chinese work there.

Northern Italy has a robust fashion and garment industry, with major brands such as Gucci and Prada based in the region. And with "China offering one of the cheapest manufacturing options in the world, it came as little surprise that most of these fashion brands were working with China," the *Times of India* [reported](#) Thursday. "A large number of these Italian fashion and garment houses had outsourced their manufacturing to Chinese labour, specifically in Wuhan."

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"Italy also has direct flights from Wuhan and reports suggest over 100,000 Chinese citizens were working in Italian factories," the *Times* continued. "Chinese made a slow and steady move into Italy and many Italian fashion firms are now owned by them as well. As per a news report, there are more than 300,000 Chinese and over 90% of them work in the Italian garment industry. As per reports, there are thousands of small companies that are active in exports. This region is also very interconnected as well." (Hat tip: [American Thinker](#).)

Moreover, the Wuhan virus (WV) is like the flu in that it most seriously affects the elderly, and nearly 60 percent of Northern Italy's population "is aged 40 and over, of which about 23% is over 65 years of age. This puts nearly one-fourth of the population at grave risk," the *Times* also informs. Note here that the average age of those dying from the WV in Italy is 79.5.

This demographic phenomenon is due to Italy's low fertility rate, which in some parts of the nation dips below *one child per woman* (replacement level is 2.1). So, sadly, part of the reason Italy is experiencing great WV-caused death is that it is a dying nation (demographically).

Yet Italy's socialized medicine system may also be complicit. The nation lacks the healthcare resources to treat everyone, and its health commissars have prioritized tending to the young, say critics. In fact, an anesthetist at a Bergamo hospital [admitted](#) that if "someone between 80 and 95 has serious breathing difficulties, you probably don't proceed [with providing care]," [reported](#) *The New American* yesterday.



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on March 20, 2020

As TNA pointed out, this triage decision might be justifiable if the young and old were equally at risk. But given that “only 17 of those who have died have been under age 50,” as TNA also wrote, and that all “Italian victims under age 40 have been persons with serious existing medical conditions” (who should also be prioritized), this is disgustingly immoral.

Then there’s an unmentioned possible factor in Italy’s WV woes: personal space. “In North America, the standard socially acceptable distance between acquaintances having a conversation is around 4 feet,” [writes](#) the blog Quatro Fromaggio. “In Italy, instead, the norm is 2-3 feet, a distance that North Americans tend to reserve for intimate relationships.”

In other words, “social distancing” isn’t exactly a thing in Italy (though it may be now).

The blog continues, “In Italy, it’s also common for people to establish extended physical contact when having an exchange. For instance, a person may reach for a friend’s forearm as a way to communicate openness and honesty or walk arm in arm with a coworker (of...[either sex]) as they discuss something confidential.”

Moreover, in keeping with this culture of intimacy, in Italy “many households are multigenerational, either still living under the same roof or close by with frequent large family interactions,” Fox News [adds](#). In other words, this habit of intimate contact might have played a role early on in the WV’s spread.

What’s not so touchy-feely, unfortunately, is Italy’s current response to the WV pandemic, which is to implement “measures that would have made *Il Duce* blush,” as TNA [put it](#) Saturday. In contrast, South Korea quickly got WV problem under control while respecting personal liberties — by [applying common sense](#).

So what can we learn from this? First, we should be prudent, not panicked. Note that one Stanford epidemiologist even [claims](#) that the WV crackdown is based on “bad data.” In fact, [states](#) Professor John Ioannidis, if we didn’t know a new virus existed, we might just “have casually noted that flu this season seems to be a bit worse than average.”

Odd statement? Well, note that an estimated *61,000 Americans died of flu* during the 2017-18 season alone, and the disease normally claims tens of thousands of victims annually. So we should embrace better hygiene practices — as I outlined [here](#) — but it should be a *permanent* change. It could spare many a flu-related death.

Lastly, I think the Italians’ cultural intimacy is beautiful. And while it can be avoided during a pandemic — as can shaking hands — it would be a shame if human contact became a permanent victim of the WV (electronic devices already limit it enough).

The deaths caused by the WV are sad and tragic. Let’s hope we don’t compound the tragedy by making casualties of our freedoms and culture, too.

Image: Oleksii Liskonih via iStock / Getty Images Plus

Selwyn Duke (@SelwynDuke) has written for The New American for more than a decade. He has also written for The Hill, Observer, The American Conservative, WorldNetDaily, American Thinker, and many other print and online publications. In addition, he has contributed to college textbooks published by Gale-Cengage Learning, has appeared on television, and is a frequent guest on radio.



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