Cities In Crisis

In the science fiction classic "Foundation" by Isaac Asimov, Trantor, a planet completely dedicated to the administration of its empire, falls prey to a blockade which brings to a standstill the logistical system that keeps it fed and supplied. It's an extreme example of what can happen if a city, or planet in this case, becomes so specialized that it is completely reliant on its logistics systems to deliver needed supplies. An actual case occurred in Paris in the 1870s when the city was under siege by the Germans. The city was cut off from France's agricultural lands, and a city reliant on fresh vegetables and produce thus suffered greatly during the blockade. They even ate the animals in their zoo.

In the first few weeks of February 2020, as the risks of the COVID-19 virus became more apparent, Chinese cities were largely shut down. Citizens started to check the level of food stocks at home, made quick visits to their local grocery stores whose shelves started to look a bit bare, and waited nervously as they started to sense how reliant they were on distribution networks most had never thought much about.

ECONOMIC ENGINES

Economist and urban planners have been touting the urbanization of China as one of its main economic drivers for the past 30 years and probably for the next 30 too. Vegetable plots and farmland directly adjacent to cities have been replaced as more dense and higher value buildings are constructed and outlying villages are subsumed into urban conglomerations. Urbanization brings jobs to people with a wide range of skill sets from CEOs and managers to secretaries and clerks, as well as to cooks and cleaners. Villages have a hard time supporting artists and musicians, but in big cities, if they can achieve success, they might find themselves in concert halls and art galleries and paid handsomely for their skills. The trade-off is that the agriculture that supports these urban centres becomes more specialized, located further away, and reliant on a complex logistical system.

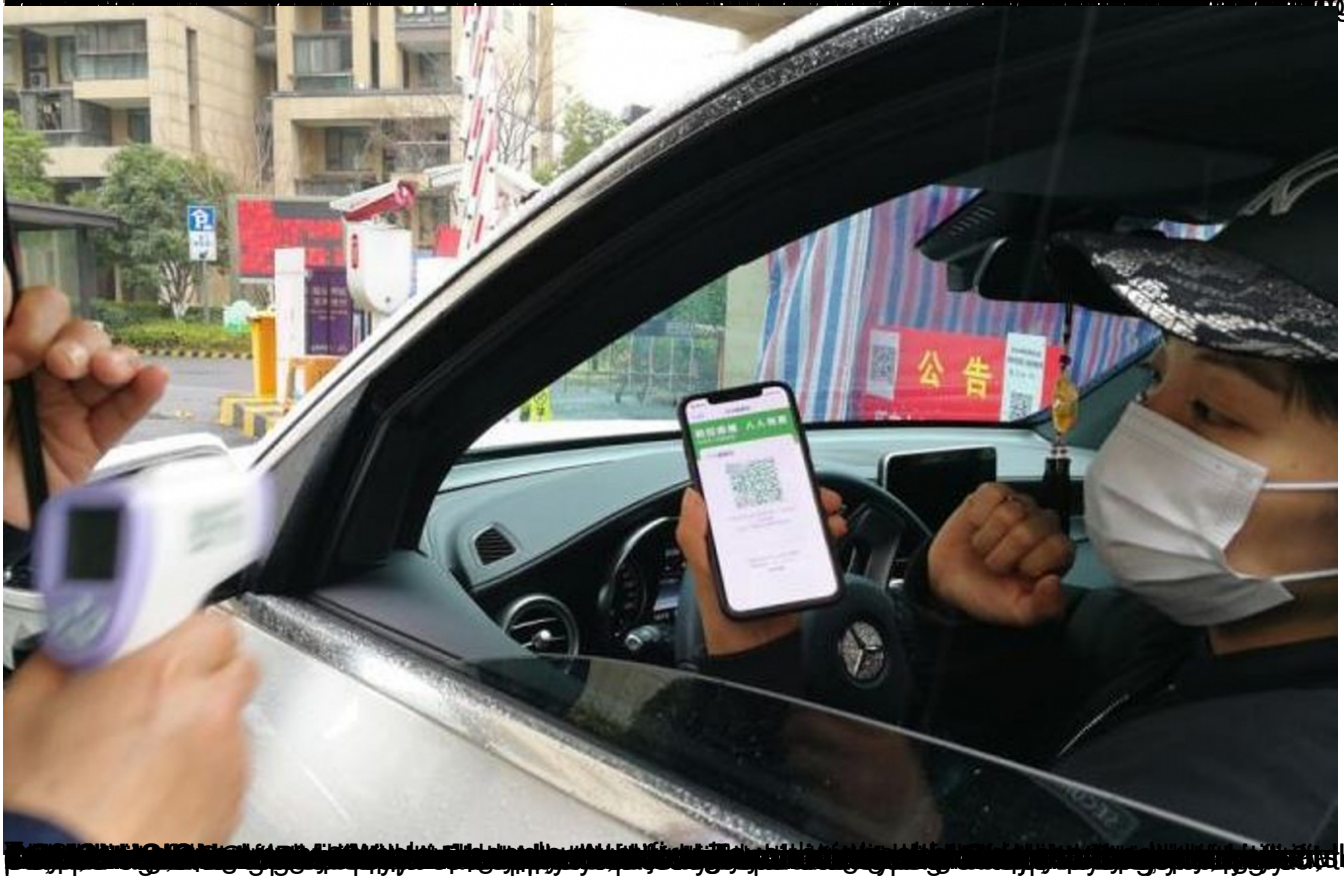# COVER STORY: Cities In Crisis

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