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Representing The Scars: How Traumatic Past Is Mediated and

Remembered

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## Introduction

On 23<sup>rd</sup> of January 2020, the Wuhan Municipal Government declared that there would be a lockdown to contain the spread of a “new type of coronavirus”. It stated that “from January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020, all public transports, including buses, metro, ferry ships and intercity transportation will be suspended; citizens will be not allowed to go outside of Wuhan without specific reasons. The outbound exit in airports and railway stations will be closed. The time of restoring the transportation will be notified later.” <sup>1</sup>(my translation) This was the beginning of the world’s first lockdown because of Covid-19. However, being the first lockdown was not all its specificity: the lockdown was also the strictest (the residents were even not allowed to go to the supermarkets in the darkest moment during the lockdown<sup>2</sup>); the lockdown was unexpected, and the residents of Wuhan were not informed of the lockdown beforehand (by the time people were still believing that the spread of the virus “was preventable and controllable”<sup>3</sup>); the government was not prepared for the outbreak of the virus and much of the loss could have been evaded.

There were 3,869 people reported death because of the coronavirus officially, but there were more who died in their own houses and were not reported. The memory about the lockdown was immense and pungent: during the lockdown the people in Wuhan witnessed and experienced absurdity, despair and anger. The news report witnessed online was all about the outbreak and new cases being reported around residents. The threat was imminent. People were just locked up desperately in their houses, and once they were infected, they would be sent to hospital. Some were just

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2020-01/23/content\\_5471751.htm](http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2020-01/23/content_5471751.htm): under the title “Statement of Pneumonia Epidemic Control Headquarters of Wuhan Concerning the Novel Coronavirus Infection in Wuhan, No. 1”.

<sup>2</sup> On Feb. 16<sup>th</sup>, the Hubei Provincial Government declared that “all communities in cities and villages shall be under *strictest* closure management. Residents going outside will be strictly controlled, and daily necessities and medical stuff could be supplied via group buying.” (My translation)  
<http://news.cctv.com/2020/02/16/ARTIFygM8k3ZqXu5BaKzTbOq200216.shtml>

<sup>3</sup> On the press conference on Jan. 19<sup>th</sup>, Li Gang, the director in chief of WHCDC (Wuhan Center for Disease Control & Prevention) stated that “the first impression of the coronavirus was its weak infectability. We cannot exclude the possibility of limited infection from human to human; but a continuous infection from human to human is somewhat impossible.” [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020-01/19/c\\_1125480602.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020-01/19/c_1125480602.htm)

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dead without saying a proper farewell. In the hospitals there was another scene: there were no other departments but only infectious disease wards. In the early stages of the outbreak, all hospitals were crowded by those who were infected and suspected of being infected. Most of the patients could only lie in the corridors. Medical equipment was in short: medical workers even wore diapers for not wasting protective suits, and those donated from the society were managed in a chaotic way. Apart from these painstaking reports that real lives around citizens of Wuhan were under threat, the texts witnessed in the social sphere were even more heartbreaking. Wuhan people were defamed as “bat-eaters” and “virus-spreaders”, and those living in other cities yet with Wuhan on their ID cards were summoned to the police station. Moreover, the central government did not give them a place to express their emotions. Millions of posts and articles were censored out of absurd reasons (for example, a call for help was deleted because of “going against the law” or “containing extreme ideologies”); those that were not censored had created echo chambers to amplify the dooming atmosphere; in the neighborhoods, gossips about the bereft smoldered to generate fear and agony. The feeling of the end of the world persisted, as no clear date of removing the lockdown was announced until the end of March.

Those negative feelings left trauma for many of the people from Wuhan to remember. When the lockdown was lifted, the trauma haunting the social sphere still has its afterquake in shaping people’s memories of the lockdown, both the emotional impressions about the lockdown in general and certain events that happened during the lockdown. In post-covid Wuhan, people resumed their work and lives came back on track. But in the unknown corners of the city, at night perhaps, some people burned paper money, or personal belongings of the deceased<sup>4</sup> to mourn the loss of their loved ones. The wound has ceased to bleed; however, the scars are remained there.

The outbreak of Covid-19 was “the first worldwide digitally witnessed pandemic”(Erll 2020). In the case of Wuhan, the trauma was generated both from the daily experiences and from the information observed on social platforms, stated by the

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<sup>4</sup> A common practice for Chinese to mourn their gone relatives.

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authority and even rumors as well. The complexity and transmediality of traumatic experience are reflected both individually and socially. When life came back to normal, their memories of traumatic experience are not only constructed out of such experiences, but also the texts in the social sphere. In this regard, it is necessary to ask what and how those memories are remembered and forgotten. In the light of this questioning, this research tries to answer the following questions:

1. How does traumatic memories function personally and collectively? And how does the digital media change the landscape of collective trauma and the mechanism of personal remembrance?
2. In the case of the lockdown in Wuhan, both the grand narratives from the government and the narratives in the social sphere constituted the memory of people during the lockdown, which created a big fracture. How is the memory of the lockdown caught in between? And further, what is the outcome of it?

The first question concerns a modern definition of psychic trauma and the mechanism of its generation personally and collectively. As the negative part of the memory, traumatic memories cannot be “integrated into a positive individual or collective self-image.” (A. Assmann 2016: 59) Against a bigger backdrop of the collective memory, collective trauma defines a shared traumatic past that anchors the identity of a social group (Alexander 2012; Anderson 1991). Therefore, a discussion of the traumatic memories starts from the memories of individuals to the memories of a collective group. With regards to the fact that these tragic happenings leave scars on individuals’ corporeality, the traumatic memory of individuals is always in a dynamic state between the collective trauma, which is under the influence of the grand narratives (Lyotard 1984), and their personal experience of the event, directly or indirectly. To proceed our lives, we need to carry on with those scars, even though we think that we have forgotten them. This process of “working through”<sup>5</sup> (Adorno 2005: 89–104; Freud 1958: 12

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<sup>5</sup> “*Durcharbeitung*”

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(1911-1913), the Case of Schreber Papers on Technique and Other Works:145–56; Thompson 1994), moreover, takes place more than personally. The grand narratives in the social sphere can also channel the remembrance of the traumatic memory towards a political reason, i.e., the politization of memory, which will be the main concern of this chapter.

The second question focuses on the case of Wuhan, where Covid-19 was first reported. The lockdown brought traumatic memories for every citizen of Wuhan, and the memory of the coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan is in a constant shaping process. It is still a vivid memory for every of the 9 million residents of Wuhan by that time. With the grand narratives and others' traumatic stories, people in Wuhan are situated between a big fracture in between. How the lockdown is remembered and how people are working through with it are the focus of this part.

Following the logic mentioned above, this research will be divided into 2 parts. The first part will be the theoretical discussion reflecting on the traumatic memories in general, including the mechanisms of the remembrance of psychic trauma and the manipulations in the social sphere. The second part will be the analysis of the materials collected personally and in social sphere to reveal the source of the traumatic memory, how these texts were manipulated by the grand narratives and how the personal remembrance of the traumatic memories was affected by the manipulation. It will contain analysis of interviews to the residents of Wuhan by that time and the social representations of the lockdown, as well as other social texts that influenced the collective memory of the people there. Personal accounts of certain events will be analyzed emphatically to compare the discrepancies in memories to discuss how social representations influence memories empirically, which also contributes as a modest part of the collection of the memory of lockdown in China, which is not observed in the landscape, whereas similar works have been done in many other countries, especially the UK. (Adams and Kopelman 2021)

With both theoretical discussions and analyses of the interviews and social texts, the research is expected to bring up with a detailed framework of how individuals and

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the society in general mediate and remember a traumatic past and in return modify the memory both within individuals and of the society collectively. The absence of similar studies concerning the collective memory of the very first lockdown in the world resonates the significance of this research and opens for the further research concerning post-truth and modern policies to deal with collective trauma which are surely ahead.



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## Literature Review

Besides our phenomenological existence in the present, we also stretch our hands into the past and the future. George Orwell wrote in *1984* that “who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.”(2000: 16) When we cast our eyes towards the future, in present tense though, the past experiences and memories play the role as the predicament for future events. There has been a long tradition of referring to the past, if not the only way when people are making predictions towards the future, as has been shown in science-fiction novels and films. The present is the future of the past, and the future is the past yet to be. The linear passage of time presupposes that it is impossible to fully grasp every detail of what happened in the past. In contrast to history, which tries to come up with an unbiased account of the past, memories serve to compensate for the corners that the narration of history cannot reach. And further, as the more recent history was narrated by those who are still alive<sup>6</sup>, the living memories took hold of the account of history, which leads to a post-modern questioning that all histories is mediated culturally and socially. In this sense, memory studies have taken the stage to claim its significance alongside historiology.

The discussion regarding the factuality of past leads to the question of the objectivity of history. Hans Gadamer (2013: 300) used the term “effective history” to explain that the interpretation of the historical events is always conditioned by historical situations. Assmann termed memory as “mnemo-history”(2008). And history is thus “an art of memory” (Hutton 1993), a “subcategory of memory”(Burke 1997) and a “mnemonic practice”(Lotman 2019; Olick and Robbins 1998). In practical terms, James E. Young (1997) came up with the notion of “received history” with the example of the memory of the holocaust, which gave a detailed manifestation of the relationship between history and memory.

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<sup>6</sup> It is also possible to say that all histories, including the recent and the ancient, are narrated by living memories. However, the epoch that we are living now can distinguish the histories that have been done with narrating and that are being narrated.

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## Collective Memory

Memory is “the unity of the real relation between the past and the present by its formal concept, created by the procession of time and restored in awareness ideally” (my translation)<sup>7</sup> (Folkers 1993: 364). It is a mechanism of restoring past experience as a substrate for remembering in the present. In this sense, memory is by tradition an inward and mental phenomenon. However, memory also exists in the social sphere as “collective memory”, independent of individual mentality. Maurice Halbwachs was the first to use the term in 1925. As a prominent member of the Durkheimian school, he included the study of memories in the sociological studies by relating collective memory with the social framework, noting that “there exists a collective memory and social frameworks for memory; it is to the degree that our individual thought places itself in these frameworks and participates in this memory that it is capable of the act of recollection.” (Halbwachs 1992: 38)

Memory studies turned even more important when histories turn discrepant due to different narratives of different social groups. Chris Lorenz (2010) noted that when the Soviet bloc collapsed, both the temporal and the spatial construction of history have turned into new objects in academic history, which are multiple “histories”, not “the history”. Traditional academic historiology, or *Geschichtswissenschaft*, falls short in explaining the phenomenon. Memory studies “became the common denominator for anchoring the past in collective experiences of specific groups”. (*Ibid.* 69) Reversely speaking, the past is always culturally mediated (Lotman and Uspenskij 1978). Different collective memories lead to different interpretations of the same historical event, giving out different narrations of the event that are restored in different cultures, thus providing different situations for the interpretations of the forthcoming events and phenomena. For example, the different narratives of the two sides of the Taiwan Straits, by the Chinese Communist Party and by the Taiwan government, constructed different memories and understandings of how the Kuomintang (The Chinese Nationalist Party)

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<sup>7</sup> „Erinnerung ist so ihrem formalen Begriff nach die Einheit von realer, im Zeitablauf geschehener und ideeller im Bewusstsein vergegenwärtigter Beziehung zwischen dem Vergangenen und dem gegenwärtigen.“

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lost the war to communists and retreated to Taiwan. The discrepancy of memories thus constructs different identities and cultural gaps between both sides of the straits, even though the peoples have the same origin.

In this regard, collective memory shall have its own concrete place in any culture. Same as language, memory is a social reality and represents itself in concrete forms. Lotman and Uspenskij (1978) claimed that memory is series of texts and human artefacts. Jens Brockmeier (2002) coined the term “memory texts” to bridge the relationship with culture and memory<sup>8</sup>. On the cultural level, those texts forge the general landscape of the cultural sphere; whereas on the individual level, these texts functions as mnemes to help members of the society to access the cultural background. This follows the logic of Lotman’s (1990) conception of the mnemonic function of texts, along with other two functions. The mnemonic function of texts is exactly represented in the mechanism of remembering. Only in texts can memory be transmitted among individuals and serve as the “corpus” that every member of the society can refer to. Human experiences can only enter culture in the form of text, and memory is the result of the mediation of language and culture. The textuality of collective memory in return indicates that it has its own hierarchy, from the higher level of ideological and theological believes to the lower level of shared experiences of a social group. When discussing about the religious collective memory, Halbwachs (1992) presumed that the memory is constructed from a set of canonic texts. Jan Assmann (2008: 109) distinguished 3 levels of memory, namely individual memory, communicative memory and cultural memory, which accord to different timeframes respectively: those memory texts that are still communicated in the social sphere construct the communicative memory of the social sphere, whereas those dissolved as elements of the culture construct the cultural memory of it. This division corresponds to Lotman’ conception of the two tendencies of texts: integration as texts and disintegration as contexts (1988: 54). The later forges the “semiotics universe” of a culture, or *semiosphere* (Lotman

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<sup>8</sup> Brockmeier used the term “memory texts” to conceptualize texts of this kind. However, in his conception, what memory texts construct is cultural memory, not collective memory. Considering that the collective memory has its textual basis, as this research claims, memory text is used to signify all texts that construct collective memory in the society.

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1990; 2005; 2013).

In phenomenological terms, Ricoeur (2004: 124–32) conceptualized three subjects of the attribution of memories: ego, collectives and close relations. This multiple attribution leads to an asymmetry between memories that are “self-ascribed” and “other-ascribed” (*ibid.* 125). In this vein, the individual memories are prone to be changed by the collective memory in the social sphere, which paves the way toward the dynamics of memory. The phenomenological and psychoanalytic approach shows that memory is not only experienced socially as a set of texts restored in the social sphere, but also a practice of remembering. Therefore, Aleida Assmann (1993: 14) distinguished the process of remembering and memory. She takes “memory (*Gedächtnis*) as the virtual ability and organic substrate whereas remembrance (*Erinnerung*) as the current process of memorizing specific content” (my translation)<sup>9</sup>. James V. Wertsch (2002) coined the term “collective remembering” to construct a conceptual space for the reflection of individual vs. collective remembering, collective remembering vs. history and remembering vs. re-experiencing especially in the case of post-soviet Russia. In this regard, there are two levels of collective memory that needs to be taken into consideration: one is the memory of the social group, namely the memory texts functioning in the social sphere; the other is the remembrance, which every member of the society performs personally.

Both the macroscopic level of collective memory and the microscopic level of personal remembrance indicate the dynamics of collective memory. On the macro level, the memory texts construct the social reality (Berger and Luckmann 1966) that the given social group shares. In this regard, collective memory has both synchronic and diachronic aspects. Synchronically it constructs an intertextual network which begets institutions as the congregated texts start to support each other and construct a systemic structure to regulate the collective memory. Diachronically, memories transmitted in generations (Halbwachs 1992), which is well illustrated by Lotman’s “I-s/he” communication system and “I-I” communication system (1990: 20–35). The diachronic

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<sup>9</sup> „Gedächtnis als virtuelle Fähigkeit und organisches Substrat neben Erinnerung als aktuellem Vorgang des Einprägens und Rückrufens spezifischer Inhalte.“

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aspect of memory is also represented as the *Nachleben* of a social event, which was firstly introduced by J. Assmann (J. Assmann 2008) and elaborated by many scholars (Tamm 2015; Kattago 2015a; Wedepohl 2014; Didi-Huberman 2016). In this regard, the communication of memory texts is the meta-communication of the social event, and the memory texts communicated are meta-texts, as conceptualized by Anton Popovič (1976). To transmit the collective memory to the forthcoming generations, monuments<sup>10</sup> are established to provide a field for communicating such memory texts (Nora 1989). The presence of the monument in the social sphere continues to remind members of the society of the events that happened in the past, which still have its afterquakes in the present (Rigney 2008; Kattago 2015b).

From another way round, on the micro level, remembrance is the ability of the individuals to withdraw the past and bring it to the present. Besides being a personal activity, memories of individuals are communicated and exchanged in the social sphere with different accountability. The “range of relationships that speakers and writers have to the descriptions they report”, or “footing” (Potter 1996: 123), functions as the authentication process on the meta level and ascribes different accountability of respective social discourses. Footing can either be physical or discursive and is under the regulation of social relationships and cultural institutions. Moreover, these institutions can in turn shape the social reality that the members of the society share as *homo socialis*, in which “reality, events and facts as negotiable and negotiated” (Randviir 2009: 78). Therefore, remembrance, personal though, is also a social activity: every individual of the society has their own position in remembering a social event, and from their positions different memories are generated. In other words, different individuals may have different versions of the same social event, and all these memories are exchanged to forge the intertextual network of collective memory mentioned above.

Moreover, memory studies do not only focus on what people remember, it also studies what is forgotten. Lotman and Uspenskij (1978: 215–16) pointed out that forgetting functions as a way of memory selection. In the chapter of “the exercise of

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<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that the monument here has to be neither a physical thing nor genealogically related to an event. It only needs to function as the “mneme” of the past event that enables communication of memory texts.

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memory”, Ricoeur discussed about the memory that is “blocked” (2004: 69), “manipulated” (*ibid.* 80) and further “obligated” (*ibid.* 86), which incorporates the notion of forgetting in phenomenological and psychoanalytical approach. The notion of forgetting opens for the discussion of the longevity of memory. Lotman and Uspenskij (1978: 214) conceptualized 2 aspects regarding this issue: the longevity of texts in the collective memory and the longevity of codes in the collective memory. In the example of superstition, the text outlived the codes that regulate the related memory. “Every culture creates its own model of the length of its existence, of the continuity of its memory.” (*ibid.* 215)

However, on the collective level, total oblivion does not exist. These long-forgotten memory texts have the possibility of restaging in the social sphere, as A. Assmann noted, that “[w]hat is lost but not materially destroyed may be discovered by accident at a later time in attics and other obscure depots, or eventually be dug up again by more systematic archaeological search” (2008: 98). But forgetting is a common practice when it comes to individual level. The limited capacity of individuals to remember presumes that there is always something forgotten. Forgetting promises us the ability of welcoming things that are ahead and new, which introduces dynamics into our life. Forgetting is the disruption of the memory practice and the severance between certain memory texts and the individual. In this regard, the passive remembering, namely the archive (*ibid.*), is a kind of forgetting from individuals’ perspective, along with the active and passive forgetting of memory texts. Moreover, what is forgotten may not be forgotten, it may leave a trace for us to re-remember it. Those dissolved by itself in the time dimension can function as single elements in the cultural memory and regulate the behaviors the individuals.

### **Trauma and Traumatic Memories**

Quite before memory studies, psychoanalysis has already put trauma studies under a great concern. Sigmund Freud, especially in his early studies, related hysteric symptoms to traumatic memory. He wrote that “hysterical symptoms can be resolved

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if, starting from them, we are able to find the path back to the memory of a traumatic experience.” (Freud 1962: 3 (1893-1899), Early Psycho-Analytic Publications:195) He also linked the traumatic dreams to the traumatic experience in the childhood of patients (Freud 1990). However, psychoanalysis of Freud, as well as of many other psychoanalysts of his time, did not pay much attention to social trauma, or collective trauma. The trauma under concern is understood as individual symptoms damaging to one’s psychological state as a result of overwhelming stress or harm that exceeds the ability of individuals to cope with, and the studies were focusing on curing the patients. However, traumatic feelings are ontologically based on remembrance, as discussed in previous paragraphs, which leads to the question of “afterwardsness”<sup>11</sup> (cf. Leys 2000: 21). In this vein, traumatic feeling is a postponed reaction, different from other emotional reactions that phenomenologically happen in here and now. Only in the sense of understanding psychological trauma under the scope of memory studies can the afterwardsness of trauma be explained, since the trauma is in essence a kind of memory and a “deferred action” (Freud and Breuer 2001) of traumatic experiences.

Traumatic memory claims a special position among all memory studies. Lorenz wrote that “the notion of memory became the common denominator for anchoring the past in collective experiences of specific groups. Especially *traumatic* or *catastrophic* memories became the privileged window on the past since the 1980s.”<sup>12</sup> (Lorenz 2010: 69). And comparably, when Ricoeur wrote about blocked memory, he suggested that on pathological-therapeutical level “we can legitimately speak of *wounded*, even of *sick* memory”<sup>13</sup> (2004: 69). By situating trauma studies under the framework of memory studies, the phenomenon of collective trauma takes the stage and receives research interests among the academics.

Collective trauma “occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in

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<sup>11</sup> *Nachträglichkeit*. See Freud and Breuer (2001)

<sup>12</sup> Italics added by Chris Lorenz himself.

<sup>13</sup> Italics added by Paul Ricoeur himself.

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fundamental and irrevocable ways” (Alexander 2012: 6). The study of collective trauma appeared among the academics when the two world wars and the Vietnam War came to an end. Kai Erikson was one of the first authors to documentarize collective trauma in the book *Everything in Its Path* (Erikson 1976) on the 1972 flood in Buffalo Creek. The study of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder was further developed when feminism and post-colonialism entered academic circle as a new way of thinking, especially after the 90s. In 1995, a collection of works was published under the name of *Trauma: Explorations in Memories* (Caruth 1995). In this book Laura S. Brown(1995) discussed trauma from a feminist perspective; Kai Erikson (1995) wrote about the relationship between the collective and memory; and Georges Bataille (1995) accounted how the residents in Hiroshima remember the aftereffect of the explosion of atomic bomb in that area. In the next year followed a book dedicated to collective trauma, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Caruth 1996). The book starts with an account of the traditions of psychoanalysis from Freud and ends with an imperative for “traumatic awakening” (*ibid.* 112). More theoretical books were also published by that time. *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Leys 2000) also started with the approach from Freud and concludes that the concept of trauma is veering between 2 paradigms: *mimetic* and *anti-mimetic* (*ibid.* 298). And when the collective trauma marks a social group’s memory and change the identity of them, it becomes cultural trauma (Alexander 2012). It is clearly shown that when the new millennium was dawning, traumatic memory studies had received more and more concern from different disciplines.

However, events that did not happen can also cause trauma. Susie Scott (2020) used the notion of “social nothingness” to describe those that do not happen, or exist, being experienced meaningful. What is experienced, however, is not from the objective reality<sup>14</sup>, but from a reality constructed from discourses socially. This social reality, as conceptualized by Berger and Luckmann (1966), is the reality that outside of the reality of individual experience, and is both taken by individuals externally (the society as objective reality) and internally (the society as subjective reality). In this regard, trauma

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<sup>14</sup> And even further, according to Kant, we cannot have any direct knowledge from object reality (1922: 204).



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does not only from personal experience, but from what is observed on media platforms as well. Therefore, there is a need to depict the medial environment that we are all now living in.

## **Transmediality**

Peter Burke (1993: 192) pointed out that “memory is dependent upon social organizations for its circulation and on different media used” (my translation)<sup>15</sup>. And the development of media technology grants us the access to memories of more individuals. In our modern society, all the media in the social sphere has provided us a world that is rich, sometimes too rich, in information. Moreover, a medium, such as cinema, is “in continuous change and interchange” (Petho 2020: 1). All the media that extends our senses have become intertwined and can no more be separated and analyzed in respective manners. Those media have converged together to forge a transmedial environment as such. Irina O. Rajewsky (2002: 13) defined transmediality as “the unspecific phenomenon in media which can be carried out with the specifics of each media, without assuming that a single contact-making medium is important or possible”(my translation)<sup>16</sup>. And in parallel Werner Wolf termed it as a variant of “extracompositional intermediality”(2015: 461), in which relations of media transcend individual works or compositions, differentiating from the notion of “intercompositional intermediality”, in which one medium is represented in other media. Consequently, every event that happened in the social sphere (or believed to happen in the social reality) will create a set of texts in the transmedial environment. Those texts that are represented in the social sphere, or “transmedia storytelling” (Jenkins 2006), have impacts both in the present and in the future.

This convergence of media (*ibid.* 2) leads to a fundamental change of the

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<sup>15</sup> „Erinnerungen sind abhängig von der gesellschaftlichen Organisation ihrer Weitergabe und von den dabei genutzten unterschiedlichen Medien.“

<sup>16</sup> „Medienunspezifische Phänomene, die in verschiedenen Medien mit den dem jeweiligen Medium eigenen Mitteln ausgetragen werden können, ohne dass hierbei die Annahme eines kontaktgebenden Ursprungsmediums wichtig oder möglich ist.“

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functioning of remembrance, that the media converged together become organs when we are remembering something. This prosthetic memory, in Alison Landsberg (2004: 2) termed, is a “new form of memory” (*ibid.*) that more than worthy of a discussion. The transmedial environment provides every one of us a thickened reality that every social event has different versions paralleling with each other, which is to be remembered by members of the society. The evidence-based factual truth (Arendt 1961: 173) lost all its aura and has become merely one of those versions. Therefore, the texts that construct the collective memory are under this convergence and not a single medium can be identified in these texts, which means that the texts that we are trying to withdraw from the collective memory are always “tainted” by other texts from different media. The collective memory, in this regard, is constructed by various texts from different media, in which the texts present us a story with details, creating a world of narration. These “possible worlds” (Ryan 2006; 2013; Doležel 1988) overlap with each other and are remembered all in the same time. In sum, as Erll noted, memory itself is transmedial (2008).

Memories are not only mediated spatially as multiplied versions of reality, but chronologically as pre-emptive memories. The present is always premediated (Bolter and Grusin 2000; Grusin 2004) by the cultural memory of the society. Our cultural memories have already provided certain paradigms for us to discern what is happening right now, and memories of the present can set paradigms for what is coming in the future, as Erll noted, that “existent media which circulate in a given society provide schemata for future experience and its representation” (Erll 2008: 392).

### **Politization of Memory**

As the “official memory”<sup>17</sup> (Burke 1993: 299) of the society, grand narratives bring about the so-called history, in historiological terms (*Geschichtswissenschaft*). Members of the society share the same history recounted by the authority and they recognized the

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<sup>17</sup> „Offizielle Erinnerungen“

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history as the collective memory of their own. In this vein, history is a subcategory of memory (Burke 1997). But collective memory is more than just history: there are many other memory texts that accord themselves with the institutions and have the potential of functioning as the unified history of the society. In other words, they are history yet to be. Memory texts as such, along with the history, constitute the grand narratives in the social sphere (Lyotard 1984). The grand narratives, always empowered by social institutions, may exclude those heterogeneous memories and discipline (Foucault 1995) members of the society to hold the memories that the grand narratives endorse. The sublimity of the grand narratives is thus maintained, and the “pests” of the society are expelled to the margins, and there is no text for individuals to remember for recalling those events, as Foucault underscored on lepers (1988: 6).

Due to the thickened reality that we are all living in, the memory that people draw from their memory is always ambiguous (Kattago 2001) and shaped by the transmedial environment. The plasticity of memory (J. Assmann 2008) has become even more so in the transmedial environment that we all live in, since the information received is constantly shaping our remembrance of the past events. Therefore, collective memory can be politicized for certain reasons and channeled toward a direction. The maneuverer has become much easier because different versions of reality are intersected. The social institutions (official ones usually) can easily endorse the discourses that support the version that the grand narratives are trying to inculcate, whereas other heterogeneous discourses are destructed systematically<sup>18</sup> (Burke 1993: 299). Apart from adding and deleting certain texts of collective memory to manipulate it, in our modern society, *suspension* is the most widely used finesse to shape the memory. Facts are indeed to be discovered; but there are also other “facts” in parallel. In facing with these different versions of facts, the factuality of these memory texts is suspended and hallowed, with only ambiguous memory left. Our memories might be submerged by piles of texts and ambiguity is thus generated, which is the place where manipulation starts to play.

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<sup>18</sup> „Systematische Vernichtung“

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## 1. The Trauma of Our Times

Iris Chun-Ru Chang, a Chinese American journalist, chose to end her life with a pistol due to depression and melancholy<sup>19</sup>. She was the author of *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* (Chang 1997), a book accounting the atrocities of the Japanese army in Nanjing during the Second Sino-Japanese War, which made up the Chinese theatre of the wider Pacific chapter of the Second World War. She suffered a lot from the works she had done: from her own accounts of the motives of writing the book, she noted that the horrors haunted her parents, and they did not want her to forget the nightmare (*ibid.* 7-8). What's more, she was agonized by the pictures of "decapitated heads, bellies ripped open, and nude women forced by their rapists into various pornographic poses, their faces contorted into unforgettable expressions of agony and shame". (*ibid.* 10) All the gory scenes and cruel facts gnawed her mind, and finally in 2004, the torture came to an end. One year after her death, the Chinese government set up a sculpture for her in the Memorial Hall of the Victims in Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders, to commemorate her contribution to prevent the period of history from falling into oblivion.<sup>20</sup>

Chang had never experienced the War by herself. She was born in America in 1968, more than two decades after the end of World War II. The traumatic experiences of the residents of Nanjing by the end of 1937 should have had nothing to do with an American-born Chinese journalist. It should have remained a remote history to her, heard of many times but known no more than few fragments read from the newspapers and told by friends and relatives. In brief, it shall not be traumatic for her. However, all her depression and melancholy refer to the fact that the traumatic past in Nanjing did traumatize her to death. The trauma that haunted the survivors of Nanjing also haunted her.

The trauma of our times has long exceeded an individual symptom that can be

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.sfgate.com/entertainment/article/Iris-Chang-s-suicide-stunned-those-she-tried-so-2634180.php>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.mhpbooks.com/china-to-erect-statue-to-iris-chang/>

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treated as psychological or neurological disorder, and it is no more limited to the survivors of the traumatic experience, as the case of Chang shows. It has surpassed the physical borders of individuals and become a past that all members of a given social group share, although most of the members do not have personal experiences of that past. When people get wounded, they will bleed; when the wound get healed, a scar remains. The scars are constantly reminding members the social group of the past that their forefathers suffered.

### **1.1. Memory in the Limbo**

Sigmund Freud, as well as other early psychoanalysts, associate trauma with hysteria and treated it as a symptom, which was assigned to psychopathology (Freud and Breuer 2001; Bogousslavsky and Dieguez 2014; Kanaan 2016). The psychological trauma was understood as individual symptoms, which is represented in behaviors as hysteria. It damages one's psychological state as a result of overwhelming stress or harm that exceeds the ability of individuals to cope with. In the article discussing the aetiology of hysteria, Freud noted that "hysterical symptoms can be resolved if, starting from them, we are able to find the path back to the memory of a traumatic experience." (1962: 3 (1893-1899), Early Psycho-Analytic Publications:189) Under this perspective, psychic trauma, as symptoms shown in behaviors, can be treated by tracing back to the memory that traumatized the patient. In this regard, traumatic memory and the symptoms it causes follows the same causality as normal diseases. However, this direct causality between memory and psychological trauma rings too simplistic, since for normal diseases, symptoms will fade away when the disease is cured, but traumatic memories continue to haunt individuals as there is no such panacea to "cure" such ailment. Between memories and psychic trauma lies another stage through which certain symptoms concerning such trauma are shown: individuals must first remember the traumatic memories, and then the memory that is brought back from past and cause symptoms such as hysteria and agony. The agonizing factors are not from what is

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happening here and now, but from what had happened and remembered. This stage of remembrance indicates that there is a displacement between memory and the symptoms, as Ruth Leys pointed out:

There is something about trauma that troubles the Freudian project. The concept of *Nachtraeglichkeit* calls into question all the binary oppositions—inside versus outside, private versus public, fantasy versus reality, etc.—which largely govern contemporary understandings of trauma. (Leys 2000: 21)

The *Nachtraeglichkeit* (afterwardness) of trauma differs it from other kinds of emotions that is enacted “here and now”. For example, anger is felt at exactly the same time as the exciting fact appears, as William James noted, that “[t]he bodily changes follow directly the perception of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur is the emotion”. (1884: 189–90) When we look back to such issues that annoyed us long time ago, they may not infuriate us again; however, trauma is not felt by the time when certain events happen: trauma starts to haunt us after it is crystalized in our memory. In other words, trauma is based on remembering; the “exciting fact” comes from remembrance, not the phenomenological perception here and now. Therefore, psychic trauma is first and foremost a memory, not a disease in the medical or psychopathological sense of it. The traumatic experience is restored in one’s consciousness for future remembrance. By saying “feeling traumatic”, we mean that we feel painful, or even hysteric, because of traumatic memories.

However, traumatic memories differ from other kinds of memories by being negative, namely that “[i]t is extremely difficult to remember traumatic experiences of suffering and shame because they cannot be integrated into a positive individual or collective self-image.” (A. Assmann 2016: 59) Traumatic experiences cannot be restored in individuals’ memories in the same way as the other kinds of memory which construct one’s self identity. But at the same time, it cannot be let go: it is also part of the memory that one holds and was agonized by it, haunting individuals in a relatively long period of time. In other words, traumatic memories are remembered as memories kept at distance. Unlike other memories, which are enshrined in the palace of memory

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(St. Augustine), traumatic memories are kept in the limbo. In order to remember this kind of memory, an inner state of remembrance is not enough to withdraw from the remote storage. A certain mneme is required to trigger traumatic memory. By the time of such triggering, all the negative feelings and emotions will take the place of the individual's normal mentality, and symptoms of hysteria and other emotions are shown. This also explains that most of the psychologically traumatized people may behave normally unless they are encountered by certain objects, persons or situations. These objects, persons and situations function as the vehicle of the traumatic experience and refer to it. Therefore, traumatic memory is restored in our corporeality along with other kinds of memories yet maintains its special status among all other kinds of memories.

The relationship between the mneme and the memory is consolidated by the continual reference from these mnemes to the traumatic memory. The mnemes thus become scars and are left on our corporeality. And when the relationship is articulated by the bearers of the memory, it is coded again by another language (natural language, the language of art, etc.) and the double coded structure serves as the basis of a text that can be used for communication between individuals of the society. In this regard, traumatic experience is possible of surpassing the physical limit of the individuals and sympathized by others. This further enables personal trauma becoming social, which will be discussed in the following sections.

Traumatic memories being kept at distance also indicates that it can be temporally forgotten. One can be haunted by trauma; but is not doomed by it. On the positive side it helps individuals stay positive and put traumatic memory aside to sustain mental health. But on the other hand, when such memories are articulated in the social sphere as texts, they at the same time detach themselves from the intentionality of individuals and converge into the piles of texts in the social sphere. The disjunction between the individuals and their traumatic memories gives place for the grand narratives of the social sphere to manipulate and edit the memory texts shared by social groups, about which we will come back later in 1.4. What's more, out of fear, pain and shame, individuals may shy away from discussing those memories in the social sphere, which created a vacuum that a mere discussion of the memory becomes a social taboo. This

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“memory paralysis” (A. Assmann 2016: 15) has led to a wide-spread silence witnessed in the social sphere. Members of the society choose not to mention it publicly; however, in the corners of the society, such narratives are circulated. Moreover, when certain places are provided to articulate such memories, these traumatic memories, now as texts, have their own recognized place in the society, a sojourn of the social past, where people can heal their wounds.

## **1.2. Collective Memory of Trauma**

The social aspect of traumatic memory of individuals demonstrates that apart from the internal traumatic memory, such experiences can be externalized and preserved by individuals from the communication in the social sphere. In other words, when people are remembering from the past trauma, they can remember not only their own traumatic experience, but also the traumatic experience communicated between individuals. Trauma that befalls on others can also traumatize us. However, we do not experience the tragedy personally. What traumatizes us is not their traumatic experience itself, but the texts that are generated from the experience as external memory (Bloch 1998). What we have at hand are the texts that narrate the tragedy of others, which also function as the reference when we remember others’ trauma. Remembrance as such cannot fully reconstruct what happened in the past, which indicates that when remembering such events, we reconstruct the past based on the texts we receive yet fill in the untold details of these texts with our own experience. “These ways of remembering the past [...] create the imagined nature of the actor in the past which, in so far as this actor is seen as a predecessor, refers also to those living in the present.” (*ibid.* 81) This mediated memory thence construct the “out-there-ness” of the events that happen beyond our physical reach. By functioning as the “externalization devices” (Potter 1996: 151), these texts construct the fact that something is happening, or happened, over there.

Moreover, the footing of the memory texts can be replaced by power relationships existing in the social sphere, external trauma sometimes can overshadow personal trauma because of the overwhelming discursive power regulating the society. Traumatic



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memory is destructive. It may gnaw one's sanity by withdrawing the psychological wounds once and again, no matter it is personal or communicative. Those who bear traumatic memory themselves might be harmed again by the inculcation of the grand narratives (Lyotard 1984) by covering their own wounds. In this regard, personal trauma is put aside because individuals are indoctrinated by the grand narratives that personal trauma is not important, and the traumatic memory produced from the authority becomes the focus. In this sense, individuals may deny others' trauma when it goes against the narratives of the authority. Under the manipulation of the authority, personal traumas can be neglected and negated. "The past you are speaking of now goes against what I have heard from the others", thus speaks the listener. The possibility of sympathy is shut down: the grand narratives does not leave a place for those who are traumatized in the event.

However, being regarded as a text-generating traumatic memory by the authority requires more than merely being a traumatic experience. It needs to be so pungent that its social impact obliges the authority to speak out to maintain the homogeneity of the grand narratives, otherwise the collective memory of the society will disintegrate that the identification of belonging to this society will be weakened, even debacles. The produced texts will conclude the event with a definitive remark on the "coffin lid" and function as the basis for the collective memory of it.

Apart from personal trauma becoming a collective trauma, a social event may traumatize a group of people at same time, which is more commonly observed in our society. It befalls on everyone belonging to this group and construct a shared traumatic memory on them, despite each of them experience it from different positions. The trauma of times burdens the shoulders of every member of the society and gives every of them an access to the narration of the event, which is footing from macroscopic point of view. In this regard, collective trauma is more than a congregation of everyone's personal trauma: everyone's personal stories become circulated in the society and find their common traumatic experience during the process of communication and forge a network of texts narrating each other's trauma, which finally comes up with a unified, homogeneous story of *their* trauma. This procedure is catalyzed when institutions take

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place in the social sphere by providing paradigms for discourses, under the power relationships interwoven in the social sphere.

Shared traumatic past will also enhance the group identity for members of it to distinguish themselves from the others. Different from the normal memory that a group shares, traumatic memory does not reside in the integrated self of each of the group; it haunts every member of it by leaving scars on the body: not so far from the mentality yet not so close to beget insanity. In this case, scars on the psychic trauma become the common ground for communication, which is more likely to be recognized by those who bear the same memory. Under the dome of the hazes of trauma, people who used to live under the same trauma are always having more things to acknowledge that they are “part of us”, which explains the reason that the group identity constructed from traumatic memories is more solid than other kinds of shared past.

Those that did not happen can also traumatize people if it becomes texts, because the social reality around individuals is constructed by texts, rather than physical experience of reality. These texts refer to nothing in the reality yet represent a social reality that traumatize everyone. Normal memory texts will only leave an illusion by constructing a social reality out of nowhere; however, traumatic texts leave with scars that cannot erase itself during the passage of time and are remembered poignantly by those affected. This “social nothing-ness” (Scott 2020) will be further amplified by its hallowed core: there is no “real reality” to anchor the text and the discourses in the social platform have absolute control over texts as such.

Constructing out-there-ness does not require a real event being there; it only needs texts convincing members of the society that “there is something happening”. As the modern media are converging to provide us a transmedial environment to reflect on the information we receive, believing that something is happening beyond our reach constructed from different texts on different platforms is prone to the convergence of media, especially digital media, which obscures the reality (realities) that we live in. Traumatic memories are no exceptions.

In sum, traumatic collective memories are a two-folded plane in the social sphere. On the one hand it is a collective and social one: every individual of the society

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remembers the same tragic happening under a name, usually defined by the grand narratives of the social sphere and functioning as the trigger of personal traumatic memories; but on the other hand, the traumatic experience is highly private. Scars are left on everyone's corporeality and become the triggering of the traumatic memories, which are rarely communicated because they are kept in the limbo. Individuals can only come back to their own wounds in the corners, especially in our modern society, where everyone is alienated in the reality rich in information and alone in this big, big world. Every single outcry becomes a squealing gone with the wind.

### **1.3. Transmediality of Trauma**

The term "witness" used to indicate those who experience the event physically and was an enclosed circle of certain group of people. Witness is a power of observation which authorizes the account of the individuals who are related to the event. "[T]he witnesses' description is a report of the scene as perceived as opposed to being a broad formulation or interpretation of events." (Potter 1996: 165) However, the development of different media technologies makes it possible that what is happening on any corner in the society can be brought to everyone instantly and vividly via broadcasting, television, internet and social platforms. In this regard, those who are not at the scene can also "witness" the happening remotely, which means that the identity of witness becomes ambiguous, and the strict entitlement of footing the narration of the event is dismantled.

In this regard, the traumatic event can traumatize us not only indirectly, from other witnesses' accounts of their trauma through our emphatic power; but also directly by presenting to us the technologically mediated trauma. In other words, the technologically mediated trauma becomes the source of traumatic feelings, which means that psychological wounds can be transmitted. "[M]edia partake in activating the threshold operations by which trauma is approached and experienced." (Pinchevski 2019: 141) Due to the progress observed in our modern times, media can reconstruct trauma from every perspective, making receivers of the traumatic memories believe that they also have such trauma with physical experience. Modern technologies bring

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all of us together to witness what is happening and to feel what the others feel at the same time. We share the emotional brunt of every event happening in the social sphere and react to it in a group consciousness: “I belong to this group and the trauma of others is also the trauma of mine”. That is what modern technologies have brought to us: the mediated things are becoming seemingly unmediated. It is not a paradox here, as Pinchevsky pointed out:

It follows that there is no contradiction between mediation and immediacy, to the contrary: a medium makes something perceptible to the point it appears immediate, which is also the point where the medium becomes imperceptible, eclipsed by its own activity. (*ibid.* 142)

However, the fraction of the real reality and the mediated reality is also represented in traumatic memories: what is haunting the people is no more the real event, but illusions convincing people that they are traumatized and make them perform it. This phenomenon does not equal “fake trauma” that is applied to merchandise tears for benefits, but these mediated traumas can bite, in a different way. The overwhelming flood of traumatic texts swarming the social sphere, though mediated, also convey negative emotions that can affect one’s sanity. Our own traumatic memories are kept in the limbo, but others’ traumas are brought directly to our eyes and agonize us. Since they are not our own trauma, our memory finds no necessity to restore it as scars on our own body. But those traumatic memories are represented gorily *as if* we were the ones who hold such traumatic memories. In this case, these traumatic memories have no place to settle down and either stay on our lips, which continue to traumatize us, or wither and fade away, leaving no traces. The story of Chang mentioned in the beginning of the chapter speaks strongly of the first situation: she submerged herself into the sea of the memories in which thousands of traumatic happenings were witnessed at the same time. She had now place to escape from it. The traumas that do not belong to her hanged her on the rope because the devil is always whispering in her ears. But on the other hand, it can also disappear as if nothing happened: the tides of reports will wash the imprints of the last tide away and the trauma, though traumatizing its readers, and evaporates from the communicative memory of the mass. Macroscopically speaking, it

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is not the memory of anyone, which means that it leaves no trace for anyone to remember. These rootless memories will go away quickly. This paradoxical situation points to the fact that being traumatized by others' trauma requires a constant exposure of it, that the individuals are surrounded by the spectres of trauma and there is no way out. In our modern society, the development of media technology has made all of us bathed in these heart-breaking reports when a tragic event happens. It can reach everyone.

When the shades of a traumatic event overwhelm the social sphere, the representations on transmedial social spectacles and platforms will reflect times of fear and pain. Under this circumstance, what traumatizes people is no single text of someone's traumatic memory, but the trauma of the whole society. The atmosphere of trauma is constructed by the dissolved texts, in an overwhelming number witnessed in the social sphere. It is in the air. These texts correlate with each other to forge a net encompassing the society and function correspondingly. Due to the pervasive presence of media of our times, there is no place to hide from the tentacles of these traumatic memories. The choking atmosphere of trauma suffocates individuals in which each of them will perceive part of the whole collection of stories, which means that everyone has his or her own perception of the trauma that (s)he believes that everyone is under the same trauma of the times.

In times of fear, people will return to a more ancient, mythological system to comprehend what is going on, since the current sign system is not able to explain what is happening. (Lotman 1991; 1998) These mythological systems are exactly institutions already existing in the social sphere as the cultural memory of the society. These memories present themselves as novels, fictions, films, photographs, etc., as Erll noted, that "[c]ultural memory is based on communication through media" (2008: 389). Following this logic, when people are trying to look for an explanation of the events that they have never met before *personally*, they can always find modes from the past to help them understand the happenings. In other words, these traumatic events are already "premediated" (Bolter and Grusin 2000; Grusin 2004) by the cultural memory of the society in which "existent media which circulate in a given society provide

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schemata for future experience and its representation” (Erl 2008: 392). Our culture has already provided modalities for us to understand these happenings. “Nothing new under the sun” also means that everything new under the sun has been offered a place for comprehension.

However, as noted in the above sections, traumatic memory works differently from normal memories by functioning in a distance from the integrity of individuals. We resort to the previous cultural institutions to understand the new normal in our times, and the new normal will be prepared for the future. This linear logic does not apply to traumatic events. The premediated present trauma cannot renew the previous modes of understanding directly because traumatic memories are remembered in a distance. The disjuncture between the traumatic memory and the integrity of memory mechanisms of us means that the memory of the traumatic event is continuously under the modelling of the cultural institutions and rarely whitewashed by more recent happenings in the society. To be more exact, the memory of the traumatizing event is always comprehended by the ancient mythological paradigms, rather than the newly developed ones in recent times. For example, we can comprehend the rise of the terrorism as the outcome of the hegemonies clashing with each other in some areas with the conflict of ideologies and interests, however, when 911 happened in 2001, many still believe that it was an attack from the demon (Morgan 2001). This phenomenon indicates that the cultural institutions helping people to comprehend trauma have a delay in its development comparing to other institutions regulating the collective memory. In the social scale the delay represents as that we are number towards psychologically traumatic feelings. The numbness originates exactly from the limbo: those traumatic memories are not only mediated by the cultural institutions, but by us when being remembered as well.

The convergence of media in our modern times muddled the double mediated essence of traumatic memories. On the cultural institutions’ side, these institutions are brought to the modern times by commercialization of the memories: what people are resorting to may not be what the culture presents itself, but the consumer products that are manufactured by social entities. This indicates that under the times of trauma, these

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consumer products will replace the original modelling systems provided by our culture and pretend to be them, producing illusions that the traumatic memories can be mitigated by these products. However, these commercialized institutions cannot function as the mediation of trauma because they are not meant for it: they are produced because they cater for someone's interest, not someone's sorrow. When the illusions of it withers, the ghastly reality will return and traumatize individuals again. And on the individuals' side, our modern technologies bind us altogether to witness and construct a contact between everyone within the reach of the technologies. However, trauma cannot be shared. The more it is witnessed, the bigger the collective trauma is. As Pinchevski underscored, our modern technologies have "effecting impact in excess of message, and contact in excess of content"(2019: 139–40). The omnipresence of media in our daily lives weakens our ability to reflect on our own scars and be more focusing on what we read from others' traumas on different media platforms. The decay of the emphatic power does not come from the outside, but from the inside of ourselves that the conception of ourselves being and individual of the society, including our own sorrows and scars.

#### **1.4. Politization of Trauma**

In the social sphere, there are institutions functioning as the place where congregated discourses start to support each other, which finally constitute the grand narratives of the society. They function as the meta level of memory texts to authenticate accounts of social happening and can be crystalized in the social sphere and in return entrench themselves as the structure of modelling. Authority thus takes shape as being endorsed by the institutions. In this regard, authority is a constructed by a set of discourses that consecrate itself as the centralized organ of the society. As Berger and Luckmann proclaim, "[t]he institutions must and do claim authority over the individual, independently of the subjective meanings he may attach to any particular situation." (1966: 80) The authority therefore is free from the repercussions of individual discourses and discipline the discourses in the social sphere unilaterally, as Foucault

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pointed it out:

In every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality. (Foucault 1971: 8)

Collective memory is no outsider of the selection process. In order to maintain authority in the time span, certain memory texts are selected as the “official memory”<sup>21</sup> (Burke 1993: 299) of the social group to cater the need for individuals claiming that they belong to it, which means that memories can be politicized out of a political reason and channeled towards a direction. The transmedial environment in our times has changed the landscape both quantitatively and qualitatively. The introduction of digital media in our daily lives leads to the democratization of memory, that everyone has a say in the social sphere. However, the democratization of memory also foretells its own demise. Institutions in the social sphere can be present in every corner of the society where those marginalized minority used to take shelter. In a transmedial society, there is nowhere to hide. Therefore, the collective memory, which is constructed by the memory texts in the social sphere, is still dominated by the grand narratives. The dominance of the grand narratives over the collective memory leads to the manipulation of the memory, as Siobhan Kattago underscored:

The democratization of memory points to the ambiguity of the project—to the contestation and debate about whose memory and whose past are remembered or forgotten. The democratization of memory articulates the politicization of memory for national discourse. (Kattago 2001: 29)

Following this logic, the collective memory is plastic in the face of the grand narratives of the authority. This becomes even more so when it comes to traumatic memories, which cause a paralysis and silence the social sphere, as discussed in 1.1. In practical terms, there are 3 ways for the grand narratives to maneuver in the vacuumed social sphere of remembering traumatic memories:

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<sup>21</sup> „Offizielle Erinnerungen“



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1. *Deletion* of memory. Memory can be deleted by the authority for its own sake. The grand narratives in the social sphere may dismiss those memory texts as nonsense, and memory texts as such are exiled to the margins of the society, “a strange disappearance” (Foucault 1988: 6). The motives for such a deletion are the need for the perfection of the grand narratives. In order to strive for a goal set for the society, members of it need to be gathered under the grand narratives for a concerted effort of collaboration (Weber 2001). In this regard, the grand narratives shall not be questioned and challenged by the memory texts that are against the narratives. To maintain the sublimity of the grand narratives, these “heretic” memories need to be deleted from the social sphere for not polluting the general landscape of the collective memory. This “systematic destruction”<sup>22</sup> (Burke 1993: 299) is always conducted in the name of ideology, common credo, or a religious canon. Sending lepers of the madhouse is a good example here, as Foucault noted, that “[i]f the leper was removed from the world, and from the community of the Church visible, his existence was yet a constant manifestation of God, since it was a sign both of His anger and of His grace” (1988: 6).

People are the subjects of remembrance, which means that they are also the traumatized ones. On the opposite, social institutions and the grand narratives cannot sympathize the psychic trauma. If the memories are heterogeneous to the grand narratives, those traumatic memories will be deleted from the social sphere. Therefore, when the traumatic experience is remembered by others that do not experience those memories, ambiguity is thus generated because there are not more texts that they can refer to. It is worthy of noting that under the democratization of memory, deletion as such is becoming more and more impossible methodologically, because the marginalized texts are more likely to be received by the mass due to the development of digital media.

A more recent example of how the deletion of memory works is the purging of dissidents under the totalitarian regimes: the dissidents’ accounts of what was happening were dismissed as mad and untrue, and they are unfamed as the people who

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<sup>22</sup> „Systematische Vernichtung“

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are gouging the ship. This is another aspect of the deletion of memory, which happens not in the social scale but in every remembrance: the subject of remembrance, namely the individuals, spontaneously take the memory texts of those mavericks as untrue, regardless of its own authenticity. The sublime object of ideology is inculcated in every member of the society as the “reality itself which is already to be conceived as ‘ideological’—‘*ideological*’ is a social reality whose very existence implies the non-knowledge of its participants as to its essence”<sup>23</sup> (Žižek 2008: 15–16). Therefore, if the memory texts received by the inculcated individuals, they will censor the memory text by themselves (*Inoffizielle Zensur*<sup>24</sup>) and reject to remember such memory texts. But traumatic memories leave scars on the corporeality; deleting the texts communicated on the social sphere does not mean that those scars are also effaced. They remain there and are smoldering. Those that are already traumatized by the experience will be harmed again by not being given a place to heal their wounds. But macroscopically speaking, it is also the place where truthful memories of the traumatic event will be remembered.

2. *Addition* of memory. In contrast to deletion, addition of memory indicates that certain memory texts are created where there used to be none. It is the collective memory invented by the authority. Under most circumstances this tactic is used to unite another group of people. However, memories cannot be invented out of nowhere: it should be memory texts of someone first. In this regard, it is not memory being added to the collective memory of a social group, but a memory that used not to be shared by the group is selected by the authority and endorsed to the collective memory. The added memory texts are always according to the institutions advocated by the authority, which enrich the grand narratives. For example, the narratives of ethnic minorities in China are based on such endorsed memory texts. The common memory of the interactions between the states that were established by these minorities, such as Tibet, and the central government (dynasties) in China is emphasized to become the presumed

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<sup>23</sup> Italics added by Žižek himself.

<sup>24</sup> See Burke (1993: 300).

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collective memory of both the ethnic minority and the majority Han people (Rhoads and Chang 2014; Baranovitch 2001). In this sense, memory cannot be invented, but collective memory can be added with memory texts from the grand narratives.

The same inculcation of ideology (in the widest sense of it) discussed above also affects personal remembrance on the aspect of addition. When members of the society identify him/herself as part of the group, (s)he also takes the narratives as the natural ones of the society. Traces of addition are thus ignored by them, and further effaced. The example of the narrative of Chinese ethnic minorities also cuts ice here: in primary school pupils are told that there are 56 ethnic groups in China, and all of them are Chinese. In this case, the “imagined communities”(Anderson 1991) are created by the authority and “remembrance and identity formation are braided together in powerful ways” (Winter 2010: 16). Once members of the group remember the collective past, they will identify themselves as part of the group. And there is a plenty of room for authorities to manipulate memory, especially for traumatic memories, which create a vacuum after the tragic event.

3. *Replacing* memory. For those who remember the tragic event by themselves, addition of memory functions as the replacement of their own memories with the added memory. It happens when there is a need for the structure of the grand narratives, but the present collective memory of it counters the goal of the narratives. When some memory texts communicated in the social sphere function in the grand narratives yet impede the authority, these memory texts will be replaced to maintain the homogeneity of the grand narratives. In this regard, replacing is first a deletion. However, different from the “systematic destruction” mentioned above, in replacing, the original memory texts cannot be deleted totally. The narrative structure that sustains the coherence of the narratives shall be kept, whereas details are edited. However, editing details of the collective memory is dangerous, especially in the transmedial modern society: facts are always presented somewhere on random platforms and are always witnessed by people. As the old saying goes, truth will come sooner or later. The hidden details are deemed to be discovered some day, and the authority will be under challenge.

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Replacing collective memory can also be maneuvered in a more comprehensive way to cover the insufficiency of editing the details of memory: *suspending*. Facts are indeed to be discovered; but there are also other “facts” in parallel. In the last section we discussed the impact of the transmediality of media, by which the reality is always mediated. In facing with these different versions of facts, the factuality of these memory texts is suspended. When the event is remembered, the factuality of the remembrance is hallowed, with only ambiguous memory left. For example, there was a great famine in China from 1959 to 1961, during which millions of people died from starvation<sup>25</sup>. It was caused by the misjudgment of the current economic situation from the Communist Party of China, a fact that would impede the authority of the leadership. The death tolls were never denied by the Chinese government; however, the official account of the tragedy is “Three Years of Hard Times”<sup>26</sup> or “Three Years of Natural Disaster”<sup>27</sup>, which watered down the wrong decision made by the government. The reality is then hazed and suspended, and only the curious will know what exactly happened during that period.

In sum, different people have different memories towards the same tragic event. Apart from remembering by themselves, people also remember from the public and as the public. In this regard, the remembrance of the traumatic event is both a personal and a social one. Under the panopticon of the grand narratives, members of the society are remembering the event under the discipline of the grand narratives and are forced to put aside their own scars and join the great procession towards the goal chanted by the grand narratives. The power of the grand narratives overwhelms every personal remembrance that used to experience it, and provides the others and the forthcoming generation a forfeit memory that accords to the political vision of the authority. The transmedial environment that we are all living in grants us a magnificent virtual world in which everyone has a say; but it also lengthens the reach of the grand narratives to be present in every corner of the society. Our own scars are reduced to ourselves and

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<sup>25</sup> For more details of the famine, see Yang (1996), Smil (1999), and Almond (2014)

<sup>26</sup> “三年困难时期”

<sup>27</sup> “三年自然灾害”

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are subsisting under the panopticon without a presence in the social sphere, both because of the paralysis and of the manipulation. However, a silver line is still there: the scars can also function as the evidence and the trigger of those traumatic memories. They are just temporarily forgotten to evade the Big Brother's gaze. When the gaze is exorcized, the memories will come back and speak the truth. The grand narratives can only forfeit a collective trauma, but individuals can speak by themselves, via their own scars.

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## 2. Lockdown in Wuhan

Now we set our hands on the lockdown of Wuhan, the first lockdown of the world because of Covid-19. The tragic happening fell on every citizen of Wuhan indiscriminately: everyone has their own memories of the lockdown, which were intertwined to serve as the collective memory of the Wuhan people to remember. In the early stages of the outbreak, nobody knew how deadly the virus was: being infected meant being sent to a hospital directly where the relatives could not visit. Some just died there without any mental preparation. The lockdown itself, first of all, amplified the fear of the virus. Since it was the first lockdown, people did not have other experiences to resort to, not to mention that the news of the lockdown came in the early morning, which implied that the government were still trying to contain the spread of the public opinions. When people woke up in the morning, what was waiting for them was a city coming to a halt. “Something big is coming” used to be a joke to mock those who fearmonger, but now that the fear had come, for real.

The mysterious virus was not visible; it was there lurking in the atmosphere. Being infected by that time equaled death, which is still represented in some of the interviews. (Line 215-216, Interview Q; Line 139-145, Interview W) What people read from all social platforms and heard from the neighborhoods were all bad news, which constructed the opposite side of “survivorship bias”: as hundreds of thousands of piles of heartbreaking news flooded the social sphere, everything sounded bad under the dooming situation. People were surrounded by these tragic happenings and their knowledge of daily lives could not comprehend the happening around them, which gave place to the mythological system of understanding, along with many other cultural institutions to function. In this regard, everything could happen, and everything could be believed. Fact became a mere discursive practice, rather than being anchored firmly by the reality.

Moreover, the Wuhan people were forced to accept their title as heroes and reconcile with their traumatic past, as discussed in the previous chapter. They were

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coerced with the parading of victory, not having a time to cure their wounds, which further intensified the psychic trauma. Under the overwhelming repressive power from the grand narratives, the people of Wuhan had to hide their traumatic part of their memories and proceed to make their lives back to track. The spread of the virus was contained, but the lockdown meant more than that. The world used to go wrong and go against them; their conception of the world had forever been changed. Susan Sontag pointed out that “[f]eelings about evil are projected onto a disease. And the disease (so enriched with meanings) is projected onto the world.” (1978: 58) And that is exactly where semiotics comes to play.

## **2.1. The Lockdown as the Context and the Wound**

By the time when the lockdown was set, people in Wuhan had no idea what was happening around them. People who said “goodbye” to each other the last day could no longer see each other’s faces offline. Meetings scheduled after the lockdown had to be postponed for a time that nobody knew how long it would be. Wuhan came to a halt: workers woke up in the morning realized that they do not need to go to work; students to go to school; friends to meet with each other. The lives of the people in Wuhan were suddenly changed, as well as every normal thing that has long become part of their lives: breakfast restaurants<sup>28</sup>, crowded public transports in the morning and evening peaks, talking about daily newsfeeds and working with colleagues, grabbing food from supermarkets and going back home. People were well conditioned by these normal things, and they could not even imagine the life without them. But the situation beyond imagination happened. When these conditions were removed from their daily life, life itself cannot go on, as Hannah Arendt noted: “human life in so far as it is actively engaged in doing something, is always rooted in a world of men and of man-made things which it never leaves or altogether transcends.” (1998: 22) We live in this world

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<sup>28</sup> Wuhan has a strong breakfast culture. In local dialects it is called Guo Zao (过早), which literally means “to pass the morning”.

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peacefully without noticing its existence, like fish living in the water. And when the water is lifted from fishes, they suffocate.

During the lockdown, such conditions that support the daily lives of people in Wuhan were vacuumed. The “looking-glass selves” of individuals, as Charles Cooley (1983: 184) conceptualized, functions as the very basis of the communication recognizing others as “part of us”. From another way round, this looking-glass self requires the daily communication to entrench it. In other words, apart from the daily transportations and working, as well as many other conditions, the communication with others is also an important condition for us to confirm that the world goes normally as usual. If communication as such is severed, the world beyond our own mortal reach goes out of our control, and our selves in the looking-glass collapse. During the lockdown, when people were restricted to step out of their home, the world of every individual was reduced to the walls that surrounded them. And the world outside could turn into every shape that were beyond people’s imaginations.

What was left? Thanks to internet, people were still knowing what was happening outside their mortal reach. However, not being able to go outside physically means that the world outside becomes a remote and unverifiable one. In this regard, the out-there-ness that constructed the synchronic of the collective memory of the society has become a sheer discursive practice deprived of any footing that once constituted part of the footing process, since those who used to foot these daily accounts closely were all far away. Therefore, everything read from the online platforms was the world that individuals under the lockdown to believe in. Their knowledge of everyday life, namely the social reality that everyone believes had been estranged as the “day side” of it did not work, and the “night side” of it took hold, as Berger and Luckman noted, “thoughts of madness and terror” (1966: 112). Under the shadows of fear, the ancient, mythological systems came back to mediate this madness and terror. During the lockdown, a wide collection of such systems was triggered, as seen in many rumors that related the outbreak of the virus to the Chinese myths and legends, which will be further discussed in 2.2.2 and 2.5.3 from the perspectives of the grand narratives and personal remembrance respectively.



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But within the reach of individuals there is nothing left. The closest friends and families can only communicate with each other online. The loneliness that accompanied the development of the bourgeois society (Durkheim 2002) was amplified in the lockdown. The private sphere, which used to have friends and families at least, was reduced to a place of our own. We hear only echoes of ourselves when we speak; the “ghosts” on the online platforms are summoned when we look for them, but the glass reflects none because they are merely ghosts. As Kattago pointed out:

The loss of the physical presence of other people renders individuals into ghosts who long for, and at times mourn their past lives, while ghostly shadows of our corona selves converse with one another through digitally mediated séances. (Kattago 2021: 1406)

The world alienated from individuals functioned as the basis and the catalyst of the traumatic memories that followed. In the world that people had only their own, the looking-glass self could not maintain itself and debacle. Their perception of time returned to corporeality and the perception of self lacked the measurement of the collective, namely the social time, which failed to give a linear chronology of what individuals remember. Some lived with them under the lockdown; they could still recognize him/herself. Yet as the time went on, fewer and fewer new information was exchanged within the looking glass, and the self-construction process came to a still, which led to the rise of potential crisis of emotional outburst as the homogenization of memory proceeded. (Line 86-95, Interview Q)

In sum, memories of the lockdown were reduced to individuals themselves. Every individual needs to remember by his/her own as the world alienation impeded the common sense of the people (Arendt 1998: 209). This leads to an incapability of remembering what exactly happened during the lockdown since it lacks others witness and support. In other words, the lockdown that severed the daily encountering between individuals hampered the memory of individuals<sup>29</sup>. From the individual level, the need of communication was denied and transferred to internet where only “ghosts” of others

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20201113-covid-19-affecting-memory>

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reside; and from the social level, the collective memory turned into a spectacle constructed by social discourses. With the urge of remembering what happened, individuals of the society will resort to the help from the social institutions, which gives place for the grand narratives to manipulate memories.

## 2.2. The Grand Narratives of the Outbreak

Both during and after the lockdown, the grand narratives, namely the rhetoric of the central government, played an important role in shaping people's memories of the lockdown. One of the most notable emblems of the will of the grand narratives was a TV series named *Heroes in Harm's Way*<sup>30</sup>, the first Covid-themed anthology series after the lockdown sponsored by the Chinese government. Once it was launched on CCTV-1, the primary channel of the China Central Television, the series received a wide range of critics regarding on its narration of the outbreak, including discriminating the female medical workers, distorting and covering facts, and making mistakes in medical surgeries<sup>31</sup>. The TV series shed light on how the government looks the outbreak of coronavirus in Wuhan and how the government wants its people remember the outbreak.

When the coronavirus went beyond the borders and the situation in Wuhan was under control, a new column was added besides the daily reports of the Covid-19 situation in China: the daily newsfeed of the covid situation of the world, especially America. The daily report about the Covid situation beyond China switched the attention of the citizens of China from the post-lockdown period to how the other governments coped with the outbreak of coronavirus. Such daily reports are seen on different social platforms, from the official account of the CCTV news, the primary government mouthpiece, even till today. For people who experienced the lockdown in Wuhan, it is a good red herring that the trauma is put aside, and the Chinese people can enjoy such a victory over the coronavirus.

The grand narratives as such represent how the collective memory about the

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<sup>30</sup> “最美逆行者”, literally means “the most beautiful back-goers”

<sup>31</sup> <https://cn.nytimes.com/china/20200922/china-tv-women-coronavirus/dual/>

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outbreak is channeled towards a direction, and some of the memories are ditched by these narratives. By investigating these grand narratives, we can find how certain memories are kept or forgotten, for certain reasons, and most importantly, how the post-lockdown memories are built up by the grand narratives.

### **2.2.1. The TV Series**

In the TV series, which was composed of 7 units (2 episodes each, 14 in total), each of the units tells a story of the lives under the covid, including veterans, medical workers, housewives and her mother-in-law, etc. The main theme of the series was about how the people of Wuhan were living under the shadow of the coronavirus and the great work they did during the lockdown. Throughout the series the message was clear, as Xi Jinping, the Chinese President addressed to the public: “Wuhan is no doubt a heroic city, the people of Wuhan are all heroes. The Party and its people thank the people of Wuhan!” (my translation)<sup>32</sup>. In the series, the spirit of collectivism was staged in the front and the sacrifice of the people in Wuhan was stressed. The collectivism is one of the most important cultural institutions regulating behaviors of the Chinese people (Gao 2019). In Episode 1, under the situation that all hospitals were crowded, the patient who was a veteran said:

I thank the Party very much. But are we running out of ward rooms?  
I am not worthy of treatment! Don't save me, save others first, don't waste money on me!  
(Appendix 2, Figure 1)

And in Episode 12, when the volunteer was thanked by the recovered patient and asked about his name, he remembered the teachings of other volunteers that “name does not matter”. So, he turned to the patients and said: “if you would like to, you can call me ‘Uncle Rabbit’.” (Appendix 2, Figure 15 and 16) The name “Uncle Rabbit” is a pseudo-name that obliterated the personal signature of the real person. The spirit of sacrificing

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<sup>32</sup> [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2020-03/11/c\\_1125693204.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2020-03/11/c_1125693204.htm)

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for the collective is more acute in the story “Bie Lai Wu Yang”<sup>33</sup> (E3-4), in which a couple were arguing about who should go to Wuhan for assisting the overloaded medical system there. Considering the severe situation in Wuhan, the rules said that couple could not be sent to the front at the same time. Zhou Xingyan, the wife, registered to join the medical team, but her husband, Yue Lubing went to the head of the hospital to persuade him that Yue was the better choice to go with the medical team. He said:

I am 13 years older than my wife. I am experienced both in ICU and in pulmonology, if there must be a choice, it should be me rather than her. (Appendix 2, Figure 7)

And because the head of the hospital accepted Yue’s proposal and cancelled Zhou’s application, the couple had a quarrel:

Yue: “Up until now we do not know how infectious the virus is. Careless as you, what if you got infected?”

Zhou: “I am not allowing you suspecting my professions! How many years have we been working together?” (Appendix 2, Figure 7 and 8)

Then the wife turned to her mother-in-law, the mother-in-law said:

My son is a doctor. Now the country needs him, I understand [his decision of going to the front]. (Appendix 2, Figure 8)

Finally, both of the couple went to Wuhan. But behind the romantic, sacrificial story that touched the audience, the specter of death was abated: they were not going for a dating to some romantic places; they were going for a battle against a mysterious, SARS-like virus for which the whole country was not prepared. This phenomenon happened throughout the series. For example, after each episode ends, there are real shots taken at scene in the lockdown. However, only the good news was there to be

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<sup>33</sup> It is a pun in Chinese. It means “Don’t come, I am okay” with a comma in between and “Nothing bad happened after we saw each other last time” without the comma.

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watched, and the severity of the situation and the death tolls were omitted, which was exactly the thing that traumatized the people in Wuhan. The interviewees of this research also reported this phenomenon and refused to watch the series. Here is a quote:

As a person from Wuhan, we have already experienced the real thing. The things in the TV would be not true. There is no sense of watching it. It is just a propaganda for certain spirit. But we have experienced it and there is no need to watch the TV series [to comprehend the spirit].  
(Line 137-141, Interview Q)

The TV series focused only on the greatness of sacrifice of the people in Wuhan, ignoring those that traumatized them *de facto*. The series shied away from the trauma of the people and tried to use the grandness of the victory to powder the wounds that the coronavirus outbreak really inflicted onto citizens of Wuhan. Collective memory of Wuhan thus shifted from a traumatic memory to a victory over the coronavirus, however, those names that have gone with the wind were left behind.

Collectivism itself was also the source of the trauma. Collectivism in collective sense helps the society; however, collectivism in individual's sense kills. That was where the trauma deepens: people return to their cultural memory to look for explanations, however, the cultural institutions ask them to sacrifice for their people. The combat between the cultural inculcations and the human nature for survival exiles the individuals to an infertile land that their culture cannot make sense of it. In other words, they were forgotten both by the grand narratives, the TV series for example, and by their culture, which does not provide a place for them to comprehend the tragedy that befell on them. This cruelty of collectivism also manifest itself as the absence of sympathy from those who did not experience it. With such a great victory over coronavirus, why should the victors feel sorry for an individual left oblivious and absent from the showers of flowers and applause?

Moreover, when the spirit of collectivism is reiterated and interpreted by the grand narratives, it also shapes the collective memory of the people in Wuhan. The concealing of the truth that 3,869 people died during the lockdown in Wuhan<sup>34</sup>, as well as other

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<sup>34</sup> This is the official number of deaths during the lockdown.

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tragic events happened during the lockdown, also indicates that the newly generated discourses of the grand narratives need a new kernel (Lotman 1990: 73) to anchor the discourses around it. In other words, when the elements of the cultural memory are narrated within the text regarding the current situation, the narrator can produce a new kernel to replace the old one, which the narrator wants to conceal. The technique of suspending was used here, as mentioned in 1.4, that the real kernel is still there and available for everyone, however, the new kernel is paralleled with the old one. Regarding to the fact that the real kernel is a traumatic one, which is kept at a distance from the individuals of the society, the produced kernel is a victory and is recognized by the people. Therefore, the new kernel overshadows the real one easily.

But what is the new one? Throughout the series the Party is present everywhere, the pin badge of the party was worn on almost all “heroes” (E2, when the medic applied for going to the front, Appendix 2, Figure 2, 3, and 4; E10, when the police came for blazing the trail for volunteers who were transporting medical facilities to Wuhan, Appendix 2, Figure 14), the daily news of how the Party instructed the prevention policy against the pandemic (E6, Appendix 2, Figure 11), the flags of China and the Party on the meeting table (E7, Appendix 2, Figure 13), and even in daily conversations. In Episode 3, when Zhou applied for the medical team going to Wuhan, she said to Yue:

I am a party member to-be. Of course I should be active in applying [for the volunteer of the medical team] (Appendix 2, Figure 6)

And also in Episode 4, when Yue went to check the list of the applicant list of the medical team, a special shot was given to the list and there is a column stating the “political status”, where most of the applicants were “party members” or “party members to-be” (Appendix 2, Figure 9). All these examples point to a fact that the leadership of the party has replaced the tragedy of the outbreak to become the new kernel of the rhetoric, which further incorporates with the idea of collectivism to construct the new text for all members of the society to remember: it was under the leadership of the Party that we won this war against the coronavirus.

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Unlike the Spanish Flu in the last century, which “lacked a clear narrative structure of beginning, middle and end” (Kattago 2021: 1407)<sup>35</sup>, the covid-19 outbreak in Wuhan was given a clear narrative by the Chinese government and the Party. The TV series were just one of the examples showing how the new narratives are trying to overshadow the original ones. With the collectivism that is deeply rooted in every Chinese people, the whole society rolls ahead with the edited collective memory anchoring around the leadership of the Party. In this regard, memories of the covid outbreak will not wither away quickly as that of the Spanish Flu. The hard-won victory will be remembered by the people; however, it comes at a price that those traumatic memories, as well as the individuals befallen by the tragic happenings during the outbreak, disappeared in the social sphere. They were forgotten by the society as numbers, left somewhere in the archives that barely have the chance of being under sunlight again.

The victorious narration from the government and the party does not end here. The victory over the coronavirus is one thing; and the success of containing the spread of the virus comparing to other countries is another. Inwardly the Party did a great job in containing the coronavirus. Now people turned their attention beyond borders to see how other peoples faced to this unprecedented pandemic.

### **2.2.2. Daily Newsfeed of the Covid Outbreak in China and around the Globe**

Starting from the middle phase of the lockdown in Wuhan, when the outbreak was under control, a new column appeared on everyday newsfeed of the main accounts belonging to mainstream media in China on different social platforms, such as Bilibili<sup>36</sup> and Weibo<sup>37</sup>. It briefed the coronavirus situation in China about the number of cases, the place where the cases detected, and a reminder in yellow stating that “the pandemic is not over yet, don’t be careless” (Appendix 2, Figure 18 and 22). The column continues to remind people of the coronavirus situation till now. The everyday briefing functioned

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Spinney (2017: 4)

<sup>36</sup> The website used to be only for anime lovers, but it later became a comprehensive video website as YouTube.

<sup>37</sup> The Chinese Twitter.

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as the new normal for everyone under the lockdown to live with.

On February 28<sup>th</sup>, CCTV news reported the Covid situation in Korea<sup>38</sup>. It was the first time that the primary governmental mouthpiece reported the outbreak in other countries. Later other Covid-stricken countries were also reported, including Italy, Germany, Iran, etc. (Appendix 2, Figure 25 and 26). Among all the reports, those that were about America outnumbered the others and finally took the place as the representative of “the Covid situation abroad”. By the same time the Covid situation in Wuhan eased: on March 18<sup>th</sup>, it was the first time that no new case was reported in the last 24 hours<sup>39</sup>. And on March 20<sup>th</sup>, the CCTV news claimed that there were “no new cases, no suspected cases and no new suspected cases”<sup>40</sup> in Hubei Province<sup>41</sup>. In all the pictures about 0 cases, the number “0” was highlighted in each of them (Appendix 2, Figure 23 and 24), which indicated that the great war had been won. The victory, paralleled with the escalating situation abroad, had become a show with *schadenfreude* that can be witnessed in the comments below (Appendix 2, Figure 20 and 21).

China was once partly colonized by western powers. The memory of servitude to these powers constitutes an important part of the national memory in the modern times. And the Communist Party’s liberation of China is seen in a savior narrative, which is also the essential validity of the Party’s rule of China, as Isabella Jackson put it:

Significantly, historians in China never stopped stressing the significance of the nation’s interactions with foreign powers. The Chinese state-sanctioned narrative is of a “century of national humiliation” from the First Opium War of 1839–42, when China was first forced to accept the terms of an unequal treaty, to the Chinese Communist Party’s victory in 1949, when foreign imperialists were thrown out of the country. (Jackson 2014)

Therefore, this victory means more than winning over the coronavirus; it also means that the Chinese people outperformed the western people who used to colonize them and conquer them. The politics of hatred (Glaeser 2005) was maneuvered here: the

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<sup>38</sup> <https://t.bilibili.com/360945791677763874?tab=2>

<sup>39</sup> [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020-03/19/c\\_1125734798.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020-03/19/c_1125734798.htm)

<sup>40</sup> <https://t.bilibili.com/368678820169737184>

<sup>41</sup> Wuhan is the capital city of Hubei Province.



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poignant memory ended when the Communist Party stood out as the savior of the Chinese people and led them out of this misery. The victory led by the Party is reiterated once again to sustain the validity, and this one over the coronavirus is not an exception. In the last section, we have already discussed that this victory is incorporated with collectivism. Here the victory is attached a new description: the Party will once again lead the people to success in containing the virus in a way much better than the western countries, which is represented in nearly all the interviewees that this research has accessed. (Line 232-235, Interview Q; Line 105-112, Interview W; Line 126-132, Interview Shepherd)

Therefore, the achievement different from the other countries must be made clear to be seen by all the people that the government wants to rule. Comparing to other countries' rocketing numbers, the number "0" manifests the great deeds that the government has achieved, which is also the reason why that up until now the Chinese government sticks to its "dynamic zero policies"<sup>42</sup>. Failing to keep it at zero would impair the validity of the governance over its people.

Now that the collective memory has become more than just memory: it is also one of the most powerful finesses in the toolbox of the Party to assert its governance and convince its people that the Party has the confidence to weather through the hard times. But behind the flamboyant grand narratives produced by the central government, the concealed, real memory is circulating, thanks to the digital platforms that were developed by the same companies that push the grand narratives to the central stage. Those that the grand narratives shy away from also constitute the memory of the Wuhan people on the lockdown, and, in most of the cases, these memories are more vivid, and pungent.

### **2.3. Sufferings of Others: Heterogeneous Narratives in the Social Sphere**

During the lockdown in Wuhan, people witnessed other's traumatic stories via different

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<sup>42</sup> <http://www.nhc.gov.cn/xcs/yqfkdt/202112/f18f3e7f50854dbeac56a8662e38f7f6.shtml>

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social platforms, as well as second-hand accounts of the social bodies about the tragedies that befell on the city's people. Besides the official report of the corona situation, people under the lockdown could also switch the attention from perpetual inculcation from the central government to the real sufferings of the others. These memory texts of the others were not mediated by the grand narratives and brought up to the eyes of the witnesses vividly, which also composed the communicative memory of the lockdown by that time in the social sphere. Regarding to the fact that people were restricted of going outside, these texts observed from the social sphere have become the memory of them. In other words, the "out-there-ness" that was constructed by these texts was remembered as the memory of every individual since there was sheer nothingness surrounding them.

On the other hand, these memory texts were suppressed by the grand narratives of the society because they stood heterogeneously: different from the grand narratives, which focused on victory and the great leadership of the Party, the unofficial accounts of the individuals would go against the grandiose backdrop festooned by the official ones and focused on what the people there were really experiencing. Therefore, the grand narratives had the intrinsic intentionality of pushing these heterogeneous memories to the dark corners where they would not be witnessed by others. These lives "survive[d] only from the clash with a power that wished only to annihilate them or at least to obliterate them" (Foucault 2001: 163). However, thanks to (maybe not) the development of media technology, these repressed memories were still observed and remembered, and even published (in the case of Fang Fang's Wuhan diary). The discrepancy between the fanciness of the grand narratives and the realness of the tragic memory texts intensified the traumatic memories of the people.

### **2.3.1. Wuhan Diary**

On January 25<sup>th</sup>, Fang Fang, a local writer of Wuhan, posted on Weibo, about the idea of noting down the happenings during the lockdown under the title "Technology can sometimes be every bit as evil as a contagious virus" (Fang 2020: 17). She continued

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to post what she heard of and felt daily. In the 62 days from January 25<sup>th</sup> to March 24<sup>th</sup>, Fang Fang submitted 60 posts on Weibo in total, and later they were collected under the title *Wuhan Diary*<sup>43</sup>. However, the book has never been published in China and is only archived on Cai Xin, an individual press<sup>44</sup>; and by the beginning of April, Harper Collins, a renowned publisher, announced that the book will be published in English under the same title. The remarks on Fang Fang are polarized: one side believes that she posted the sufferings of normal people, making them visible and known by all; the other thinks that she is revealing the darkest part of the society and amplified it for “malicious foreign power” as evidence to challenge the validity of the Party’s rule. The extremity is also represented in the memories of people in Wuhan, as Q pointed out:

Q: She did not publish the book within Chinese borders but abroad. I do not know it was conspiracy or something else. [I do not know] that the happenings by that time were really so, or just exaggeration.

S: Then?

Q: It made people in Wuhan angry. I remember that I was among those who criticized her.

S: You were one of them?

Q: Many people forwarded the post commenting on what she did. It was basically about the fact that she did not report real happenings and did not sympathize. She was just making names out of the tragedy. And what’s more, she published the book abroad which will do no good to both China and Chinese people. It hurts the feelings of the people in Wuhan. That’s what I remember. (Line 185-197, Interview Q)

The remark of Q tells how most of the Wuhan people think of Fang Fang. Few of them read her collected posts; most of them only skimmed through them when Fang Fang posted it on Weibo. By the same time there are positive remarks from the society, as 13, another interviewee of this research, pointed out:

So far as I have read, most of her accounts were objective. As a writer you cannot always write about positive things. What we read all day long were positive. I do not believe a harmony as such. It was just impossible. Under that pressure, there should be problems. (Line 126-129, Interview 13)

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<sup>43</sup> “武汉日记”

<sup>44</sup> [http://m.app.caixin.com/m\\_topic\\_detail/1489.html](http://m.app.caixin.com/m_topic_detail/1489.html). Interestingly the archive cannot be accessed on web format. It can only be read in the format of apps on mobile phones.

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Fang Fang's daily reports gave the people in Wuhan a place to echo their own wounds. 13 also mentioned that she stayed up late at night to read Fang Fang's latest post, for she knew that they could be censored by the morning. Yan Lianke, a Chinese author, commented:

Just imagine: what could we see and hear, were there not Fang Fang's existence and record, not Fang Fang's words about her memory and feelings, not thousands of people like Fang Fang, who transferred their cry and trauma via their mobile phones?" (my translation)<sup>45</sup>.

The polarity, which manifests a great schism between the intellectuals and normal people on the one hand, revealed the lack of communication in the social sphere, which was caused by the censorship from the government. If censorship means merely the prohibition of certain texts to be circulated in the social sphere, then all kinds of censorship functions badly, especially in our modern times, otherwise Fang Fang's personal recounts would not even appear in this research. However, this is not the censorship is aiming at. The real aim of the censorship is on the meta texts following the original memory texts, namely the communication about the original text in the social sphere (Popovič 1976). Every individual can actually access the text with slight effort, but they could not talk about it in the social sphere. In this regard, Fang Fang's reflections could have been read by individuals, but the communication afterwards, namely the metacommunication of the *Wuhan Diary* is cut off. For example, the address by Yan mentioned above is rarely read by Chinese citizens because every time when it is posted, it will be detected by the censors and deleted. Therefore, the famous texts, situated in the middle of the discursive practice are isolated, which coincided with the trauma paralysis that vacuumed the social sphere, in which no one stepped out to state their traumatic memories.

This gives place for other texts entering the sphere, which further channeled the collective memory of *Wuhan Diary*. Fang Fang soon found that she was surrounded

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<sup>45</sup> <https://theinitium.com/article/20200221-mainland-coronavirus-yanlianke/>

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by malicious slandering both online and offline, which was also accounted in the book. The censorship of trauma-related meta texts in the social sphere created an imbalance between the victory and the ghastly truth led to an apathy of the people for the tragedy befalling on others, as we have discussed in 2.2.1. The texts generated by the grand narratives were flooding the social sphere, whereas the texts from individuals were censored and excluded from discursive practices. Fang Fang's *Wuhan Diary* is not a single case: during the lockdown a great amount of such posts were censored (Appendix 2, Figure 27-35, Figure 37)<sup>46</sup>. The shrinkage of the discursive space of these censored texts, in collaboration with the shrinkage of the living space under the lockdown, begot loneliness of every individual with their own personal traumas. Individuals were alienated from the society (Arendt 1998: 254) by not being able to speak out, and further alienated from other individuals, that no one heeds the call of sympathizing their traumas. In this regard, the texts manufactured by the grand narratives constructed the same out-there-ness for every individual of the society, and personal signatures were eliminated. Yan pointed out in the same speech that "[i]n the tides of our times, personal memories are always taken as redundant foams and cacophonies and forsaken by times; they will be silenced as if they never existed. When the wheels of the era roll ahead, a colossal forgetting thus befalls."<sup>47</sup> This colossal forgetting starts exactly at the point where people's memories turn homogeneous because the inaccessible out-there-ness is not constructed by the meta texts of communicative memory of that time, but the texts produced by the grand narratives afterwards, which took hold the primacy because of censorship.

During the lockdown, the shut-down channels for communicating traumatic memories forced each individual being trapped in their modest cells discursively, further than physically under the lockdown. Rather than trying to express their traumas repeatedly, the censorship of the central government finally leads to a self-censorship

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<sup>46</sup> Hereby the author of this research thanks the owner of the channel “简中赛博坟场” (Simplified Chinese Cyber-Graveyard), @WuhanCensored on Telegram, for the massive work on collecting the censored posts, pictures and incidents during the lockdown and after. The censored materials, unless specifically footnoted, were all from the archive of the channel.

<sup>47</sup> <https://theinitium.com/article/20200221-mainland-coronavirus-yanlianke/>

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in a “panopticon”, that “the crowd, a compact mass, a locus of multiple exchanges, individualities merging together, a collective effect, is abolished and replaced by a collection of separated individualities.” (Foucault 1995: 201) In other words, it was not the meta texts of traumatic memories being censored, but the intentionality of producing such texts were reined in by individuals. The self-censorship of individuals constructed a confinement room and entrenched the vacuum already existed because of the censorship and traumatic experience of expressing personal tragedies in the social sphere.

Fang Fang’s *Wuhan Diary* was a blatant dissident against the grand narratives and a thunder for the triple vacuumed social sphere. The realness of Fang Fang’s personal accounts was still under questioning; however, it stood out to break this suffocating silence that everyone in Wuhan suffered. *Wuhan Diary* and Fang Fang suffers from the pressure of the grand narratives continually and is besieged by the texts produced by the grand narratives. But under this desperate situation, a glimmer of hope still exists to counter the siege. Traumatic happenings not only left people with traumatic memories; they also left traces, wounds, and fragments of memory (these memory texts cannot stay in its wholeness because of the grinding of grand narratives) By the end of her accounts, the 60<sup>th</sup> installment of her diary and the last one, Fang Fang wrote: “I have already fought that great battle; I have completed my course; and I have stood by every truth I believe in.” (Fang 2020: 465) The battle that Fang Fang talked about is the battle against the colossal forgetting under the overwhelming narration power from the central institutions: our memories could be edited, smashed into pieces, and deleted; however, the pains are still there, the traumatic feelings are still there. Individuals can look back by fumbling the wounds and scars within his/her own corporeality, free from the overarching mantras and hymns flooding the social sphere. Our bodies remember better than we do.

### **2.3.2. Dr. Li, the Whistle Blower**

Before the outbreak, few people might know the name of Li Wenliang, an ophthalmic

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doctor of The Central Hospital of Wuhan. But now his name has become a must-know during the lockdown. On December 30<sup>th</sup>, Li messaged in a group in WeChat, warning that there was an unknown, SARS-like virus in Wuhan. By the same time there were other persons posted same warnings in respective WeChat groups. On Jan. 1<sup>st</sup>, the official accounts of the Wuhan Municipal Police Station, Ping An Wuhan<sup>48</sup>, stated that there were rumors on “new SARS” and 8 persons related were investigated by the police. The news came out on different social media platforms, such as WeChat, Weibo and Bilibili. On January 3<sup>rd</sup>, Li was summoned to the police station of his district and criticized of spreading rumors. The police station also gave him a verbal admonition and asked him to sign on the paper claiming that he would never spread such rumors, with signatures of “I can [stop spreading the rumors]” and “I understand [that spreading rumors is a crime]”<sup>49</sup>.

Li accepted a patient who had glaucoma on January 8<sup>th</sup>, but he did not realize that the patient was also coughing. The patient was on fever the next day, and the relatives of the patient also had fever the same evening. Li reported this to the hospital. The patient was then transferred to another hospital, while Li himself started coughing and got fever the next day. On January 12<sup>th</sup>, Li had a CT and was suspected of infection in his respiration system. And on February 1<sup>st</sup>, he was diagnosed of Covid-19 and died from pneumonia on 6<sup>th</sup>. What pushed the tragedy to climax was his obituary: in the evening of that day, his death took the headlines for a couple of hours; but later that evening all these news reports were deleted, and it was said that Li was still under rescue. In the early morning of February 7<sup>th</sup>, he was reported dead again. This capricious report instigated anger throughout the internet and users of Weibo swarmed to the last post of Dr. Li to express their emotions. Some of those were censored and deleted by the platform, but the post was not deleted, and people continued to comment in the below even until now<sup>50</sup>.

In the beginning, the comments were mostly about the grief and anger of the

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<sup>48</sup> “平安武汉”, literally means “safe Wuhan”.

<sup>49</sup> This also led to later revolts against the government titled “I cannot” and “I don’t understand”.

<sup>50</sup> <https://m.weibo.cn/1139098205/4467107636950632>

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government on punishing people speaking of the truth. Some contents were censored (Appendix 2, Figure 34 and 35). The censored comments were mostly on the anger towards the government and the call for freedom of speech, which related the case of Dr. Li to many incidents of the Party suppressing dissidents, like Liu Xiao Bo, the activist that called for democracy in China and died from liver cancer when he was in medical parole. The censorship of the government channeled the memory of Dr. Li in the same way as we have discussed in the previous section, that the direct and sharp memories of Dr. Li were washed away by piles of produced texts that abated the impact of his death. Moreover, the hours between the two death reports suspended people's emotional reactions towards Li's death and functioned as the prelude of the official report of the death. Therefore, when the official report came out, it did not instigate anger as the first one did.

If we take a closer look of Dr. Li's death report, the word "suspension" stood out as the main finesse that the government used to quench the anger caused by his death. What made this happening special was that the focus of the suspension was the official memory itself. Though the government's credibility was under a great challenge because of the outbreak, the news that Dr. Li was dead came from the same media that people were suspicious of, which means that no matter how the credibility of the government is impeded, people in Wuhan still needed an official tone to tell them the truth. This is the original intention of all institutions being set in the social sphere. However, in order to create ambiguity among people and diverge people's anger, Dr. Li's obituary came twice to produce different versions of the reality, and posts asking for clarification were censored. By constructing the trifold vacuum mentioned above, the central government became the only speaker in the social sphere and forced its citizens of believing one of the versions it provided. The anger towards the government was thus ebbed because of the divergence of opinions and the suspicions of conspiracy were censored. Ambiguity of memory was thus generated, but not in the sense of democratization of memory; it was under the manipulation from the government. This reluctant forgetting of details was represented as the eager of knowing what happened exactly after the lockdown has become a relatively remote past, as the interview showed.



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(Line 146-154, Interview Q)

On March 7<sup>th</sup>, the government sent a panel to investigate Dr. Li's case, and a report was published on 19<sup>th</sup><sup>51</sup> to clarify what happened on him. However, the report did not mention the two obituaries and focused only on the malfeasance of the local police station. Later, he was announced being listed as a "martyr" of the battle against the coronavirus<sup>52</sup>. When the grand narratives become the only speaker in the social sphere, the texts produced by the social institutions can both speak for the grand narratives and the dissidents that are suppressed. By being given a name "martyr", along with other heroes during the lockdown, Li's face was permanently effaced from the narratives of the society. In 2021, a film named *Chinese Doctors* was launched to sing mantra to the sacrifice of the medical workers who fought on the frontline in combatting with the coronavirus. The characters in the film were all heroes; they represented all the medical workers, both dead and alive. But it is a movie made for "all". By representing all of them also means representing none of them. The grand narratives erased every individual's face and signature and gave them the title "Chinese doctors". This empty symbol represents all those who used to fight against the coronavirus, Dr. Li included. This violence of being represented adds up to the toll of ambiguous memories by being messed up with the texts that directly refer to Dr. Li's death. The explanation from the government concealed details of his death and blocked the possibility of personal remembrance on what exactly happened by that time. In other words, when people are trying to remember Dr. Li's case, what they have at hands are only these texts produced by grand narratives.

The ambiguity entrenched by the government is represented in the comments below Dr. Li's post. Instead of being a frontline of calling for redressing Dr. Li's reputation and freedom of speech, his last post has become a cybernetic wailing wall for everyone to express their emotions, both on the traumatic memories of Wuhan and on other sorrows regarding people's personal experiences (Appendix 2, Figure 26), which is another footnote for the memories of him being ambiguous. However, as being

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<sup>51</sup> [http://www.xinhuanet.com/2020-03/19/c\\_1125737457.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/2020-03/19/c_1125737457.htm)

<sup>52</sup> [http://www.xinhuanet.com/2020-04/02/c\\_1125806371.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/2020-04/02/c_1125806371.htm)

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discussed in the previous section that our bodies remember better than we do, this traumatic feeling can also work as a triggering point to help us remember what *we* remember. The memory has been shattered into pieces, the feelings persist and still referring to the lost memories. The traumatic memories are like dreams, which we cannot grasp fully as flowers in the mirror. To remember by ourselves requires us to wake from the dreams woven by the grand narratives and to use our own wounds to explore the long-lost memory, which is below the horizon of consciousness. This trauma “awakening”, as Cathy Caruth termed (1996: 64), could be painstaking; however, it is exactly the pain of remembrance that helps us remember independently.

#### **2.4. The Mantra and the Mourning: The Great Fracture**

Qing Ming<sup>53</sup> is a traditional festival for the Chinese people to mourn the dead. On April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020, the government declared that in order to mourn the deceased during the coronavirus outbreak, a public mourning will be held nation-wide on 4<sup>th</sup>, the Qing Ming of the year<sup>54</sup>, by which time all recreational TV programs were suspended and most of the websites would turn grey, and sirens would be heard on the street for commemorating the souls. Among all the mourning ceremonies both online and offline, the one held in Wuhan on a plaza near the Yangtse River received most attention from the public<sup>55</sup>: it was the main venue of all the mourning ceremonies. But normal citizens of Wuhan were excluded from the ceremony: in order to prevent the gathering from being crowded and increase the risk of another coronavirus outbreak, only the representatives of each social sectors were allowed to enter the venue (Appendix 2, Figure 37), not to mention that the event was held before the end of the lockdown<sup>56</sup>, which was the 8<sup>th</sup>. In the middle of the plaza there was a blackboard, which read “deep condolences to the martyrs and compatriots who were deceased in fighting against

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<sup>53</sup> “清明”, it is also a solar term defining one of the 24 periods of a year. It falls on either April 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>54</sup> [http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2020-04/03/content\\_5498489.htm](http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2020-04/03/content_5498489.htm)

<sup>55</sup> [http://www.xinhuanet.com/2020-04/04/c\\_1125815093.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/2020-04/04/c_1125815093.htm)

<sup>56</sup> Before the end of the lockdown the restrictions had already been eased, that “those with appropriate purposes can go outside of their communities”.

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Covid-19”.

During the lockdown, President Xi appraised that “it was exactly the sacrifice and contribution, perseverance and the efforts of the Wuhan people that begot the positive situation of the coronavirus that we observe today.”<sup>57</sup> The Wuhan people were applauded as “heroic people”, and the city “heroic city”. However, not a single name of these heroes was mentioned in the ceremony. They were sacrificed to become sacred in the price of losing all their own signatures: surely, they can go to the temples in the honor of their ancestors. Their sacred deaths presented themselves in the price of their individualities, which were consumed by the grand narratives, leaving hallowed bodies to be consecrated in the niches of the holy temple. Their real names and bodies were somewhere else: their own stories would be remembered by their close friends and families, but not in the social sphere and remembered by most of the people. It seems as if they were born for this great sacrifice, for this great victory advocated by the grand narratives. But they were not born for that: every death represented a dimming of a life with its own stories and memory. Their death would bring agony among their families and friends: when the news came that the funeral parlors would be reopened in March 23<sup>rd</sup>, relatives and friends of the deceased queued outside of the parlors to collect their beloved ones’ ashes. (Appendix 2, Figure 31 and 32). But this post was soon censored on all platforms. The traumatic personal memories could not appear on the social networks for “including aggressive thoughts or ideologies” (Appendix 2, Figure 28, 29 and 30). These personal traumas did not even have a place to be spoken. Therefore, these traumatic memories were trapped in every one of Wuhan inside, as W’s outburst in the interview:

What else? Well, it [coronavirus] is indeed under control. But everyone is living in pain, it’s painful! From 2020, a fifth of my time is under quarantine, I am locked up in a cell, in every of its sense. It is painful, really painful, I feel bad.

It is painful to me. Is this a life that humankind shall live? You know what? As a person from Wuhan, I am really afraid of it [coronavirus], really afraid! In Wuhan, among the friends of your friends, there must be someone who was infected. One of my elder sister’s high school classmates

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<sup>57</sup> [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2020-03/10/c\\_1125692140.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2020-03/10/c_1125692140.htm).

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was infected, and he was in Fang Cang<sup>58</sup>. He was preparing for his master studies and was interviewed by journalists on TV. It is so close to me. I am afraid until now. I will still shiver when I remember those days under the lockdown. You will never know what would happen tomorrow.

I am really afraid. You know what? The impact and harm that it gave me is unerasable. Even 10 years after, when it finally disappears, or even when I am in nursing houses at 80, I will still wear a mask and speak to those young people about the things that happened before their birth. It is scary, you know? (Line 114-127, Interview W)

An emotional outburst as such was not allowed by that time. But it haunts on every people under the lockdown even until now. If we combine the two angles of narratives together, we will find that the trauma forbidden of speaking out and the mantra sung in the social sphere has created a fracture between the collective memory and the personal memories. The fracture has become more acute if we set our eyes on individuals: In the early stages of the outbreak there were two doctors pointing out that the virus is airborne and highly contagious. One is Dr. Li Wenliang, whom we discussed about in the previous paragraphs. The other is Zhong Nanshan, who confirmed the information days before the lockdown. But their situations are extremely different: On August 11<sup>th</sup>, Xi Jinping signed on an order that Zhong would be awarded “Medal of the Republic”, one of the two highest decorations for Chinese nationals in China<sup>59</sup>. On September the 8<sup>th</sup> the ceremony was held in the Great Hall of the People, the main venue for legislative and ceremonial activities for the central government. With flowers and applause, Zhong had become the official hero of the country.

But Li was a hero of other kind. He did not receive the honor from the authority. In fact, he was still bearing the name of “rumor spreader” by the very end of his life. As mentioned above, his name was rehabilitated after his death. When his reputation was restored in March, numbers of netizens gathering under his last post on Weibo to express their anxiety and anger (Zhou and Zhong 2021) reached a peak. Moreover, the government is reluctant to mention Li because his punishment showed a malfunction of the government agencies. Even though his reputation is rehabilitated, and he is

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<sup>58</sup> The makeshift hospital to house those with slight symptoms.

<sup>59</sup> [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2020-08/11/c\\_1126354831.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2020-08/11/c_1126354831.htm)

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recognized posthumously as a “martyr” of the outbreak, the censorship of the government on those who challenge the grand narratives created ambiguity of the memory of Dr. Li, as discussed above. Therefore, the memory of him, for every Wuhan people, is vivid personally (that everyone remembers him as the first one warning the danger of the virus) and ambiguous (that talking about him publicly is not allowed and the grand narratives gave him the name as “martyr”).

In this regard, Li, as the public hero of the Wuhan people, was torn into two parts. The problem is not that he is not remembered; it lies at the fact that remembering his *real existence* does not matter anymore. When people are remembering him and trying to retrieve some social discourses to support his/her own memory, they find nothing but a title. The pungent memory of him being reported dead twice and the punishment he received from the government agencies has become a remote, intangible mist that is vulnerable of any blast of wind.

The difference between the two persons pointing to the same evidence-based factual truth (Arendt 1961: 173) sheds light on the dilemma of truthful discourses in our modern days: the past is politicized to serve for political reasons and the fracture between the personal remembrance and the collective memory in the social sphere. As with the heterogeneous traumatic memories were censored, the fracture between personal remembrance of the traumatic past and the politicized shared trauma that the grand narratives endorse cannot be bridged anymore, which means that there are two versions of collective memory in parallel: the first one is advocated by the authority, and the other is constructed secretly by the communication in the corners of the social sphere. The latter version of the collective memory is reduced to a footing network constructed upon the “who-know-who” relationships, and the memory of the lockdown, if we only focus on personal memories, is reduced to acquaintance network, as W mentioned on the infected around her in the interview that “among the friends of your friends, there must be someone who was infected.”

However, a fracture is not the whole story. As we discussed in 2.3.2, grand narratives will take the place to pretend to speak for individuals in their positions when individuals themselves could not speak because either of the traumatic paralysis or the

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government censorship. The violence of being represented indicates that the official memory, namely the history, breaches into the individual sphere and demolish their own stories and signatures. And in the social sphere, with only the mantra left and the mourning kept unseen, history, which is always a “received one” as the negotiation between the individuals and the grand narratives (Gadamer 2013), became dictated only by the grand narratives because they took the place to speak for all.

Moreover, under the inculcation of the grand narratives, individuals can also speak in grand narratives’ tone, as D observed and mentioned in her interview:

My impression on Dr. Li? It could be a bad one from my perspectives: he is still being called as “the whistle blower”. His name, Li Wen Liang, withered in front of the name of “whistle blower”. Many people use the word “whistle blower” to speak of greatness, rather than the true stories happening on him. (Line 59-62, Interview D)

If the violence of being represented is the grand narratives in the disguise of personal narratives, personal narratives in the tone of grand narratives are the opposite. It originates from the imprint of the dominance of the grand narratives, which assumes the “permanent visibility that assures the automatic function of power” (Foucault 1995: 201). Therefore, once individuals participate in the discursive activities in the social sphere, no matter the grand narratives are regulating the discourses or not, the consciousness of “being gazed at” always presents itself among all the participants. And when this gazing is internalized and integrated as the self of individuals, the grand narratives will also be incorporated into the discursive behaviors of individuals. In such behaviors, the imagined grand narratives are always functioning and supervising the conducts of individuals. And on the memory level, the great schism between the grand narratives and the personal traumatic behaviors is merged by accepting the gaze from the grand narratives. In this regard, the personal memories under the lockdown were also tangled with the grand narratives, as discussed in 1.4. However, this part of personal memories cannot be shared by other individuals. The hallowed narratives from personal accounts lack the realness that is assumed in communication. Therefore, it will be estranged when memory texts are exchanged during communication. In other words,

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memories as such cannot be sympathized by others, and further, in the case of traumatic memories, the estrangement will turn into rejection, as D put it on the case of Dr. Li, “it’s bad”.

To conclude, in the fracture between the mantra and the mourning there are personal narratives in the disguise of grand narratives, and grand narratives in the disguise of personal narratives, both of which try to merge the great fracture in the between. The two were intertwined yet heterogeneous. However, the grand narratives always win over because they dominate the social sphere. Therefore, the traumatic memory of the lockdown is strangled between the victory that the grand narratives conceive and the absence of a concrete place to express the personal emotions. The smoldering wounds will continue to haunt every night that the city weathers, until an unknown future when all the suppressed stories are told.

## **2.5. A Speck of Dust of the Era: Group Images under the Lockdown**

No matter how the memory texts are exchanged and influence in the social sphere, individuals are the subjects of memories, no matter the memory being the personal ones or the collective ones. In a tragic event such as the lockdown in Wuhan, it is the individuals, rather than the central government, hold the traumatic memories of the 76 days under the lockdown. Their memories are indeed interwoven with the grand narratives consecrated in the altar of the society and no more inseparable from them; however, they are the people who remember.

Fang Fang wrote in *Wuhan Diary* that “[o]ne speck of dust from an entire era may not seem like much, but when it falls on your head it’s like a mountain crashing on you.” (2020: 85) When the lockdown fell on every individual of Wuhan equally, everyone had their own personal stories and memories. Their traumatic memories were still kept in their corporeality when the grand narratives began to cloud the social sphere. The scars are just there, no matter how the grand narratives try to wash it off. Even if the triggering tools are off from the social sphere, individuals can still re-remember what happened even though they believe that they have already forgotten, as the case of Dr.

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Li's double death shows. (Appendix 2, Figure 33) Therefore, after investigating from the aspects of grand narratives and others' narratives, we reach our final destination to scrutinize memories of individuals, namely their own narrations of the happening. After all, it was exactly what they remember constitutes the collective memory of the lockdown; they, are the subjects of remembrance.

### **2.5.1. The Magic Blackbox**

In 2.1 we discussed that because of being restricted of going outside, the out-there-ness had become a sheer discursive practice. The social reality, which was also what would be remembered, had become totally constructed by the texts communicated in the social sphere. But if we withdraw our focus of investigation from the construction of the social reality in the lockdown to the subjects of remembrance, namely the individuals, a hint of mediation appears: the texts were not directly transmitted from one individual to another; they were all mediated by certain devices, namely the digital ones that function as a condition of our modern life. For most of the people living in our times, mobile phones have become an inseparable part of them. It went the same with the people under the lockdown. For them, their only way of confirming that the world still went on was to check their mobile phones about what was happening beyond their reach. All the information was presented to the eyes by the magic blackbox that help people know the incidents happening around them yet unavailable to their own.

But tragic happenings were also brought to sight directly. The introduction of digital media enables the inauthentic memories of others being transferred to every of the audience without losing most of its details, which also means that the traumatic memory of others is brought to the eyes of the people under the lockdown. For those who suffered from it and had personal traumas, other's traumatic memories echoed with their own experiences and resonated with their wounds; however, audience of the traumatic memories were far more than merely the already traumatized ones: there were also hundreds of thousands of normal citizens under a state of unrest urging to know what was happening outside their walls. These traumatic texts reached all of them



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indiscriminately and traumatized those lonely in their cells. In *Wuhan Diary*, Fang Fang mentioned about a girl chasing after a funeral car with a crying “mom” (2020: 58) The video<sup>60</sup> went viral and was watched by all citizens of Wuhan. It traumatized all its viewers at the same time, both the people at the scene and the people behind the screens. But on the other side of the internet, there was necessary information on social platforms for people to know things beyond their mortal reach. In the interview, 13, expressed her dilemma as such:

But there was silence at nights, and I could not refrain myself from watching my phones. On the one hand my rational self told me that I should stay away from mobile phones because it would escalate my anxiety. But on another hand, I could not hold myself. It was contradictory. (Line 57-61, Interview 13)

The need for certain information and the submersion of traumatic contents from social media is hard to balance. The flow of information in our modern times also indicates that we are usually not prepared to encounter traumatic memories of others and be traumatized by them. Under a dooming situation such as lockdown, people cannot just refrain themselves from following the flow because that was the only way of receiving information, as Ytre-Arne and Moe noted, that “[t]here is a human impulse to stay in the information flow in the face of an uncertain world situation, and it is difficult to stop even though one ends up feeling worse.” (2021: 3) This “doomscrolling” under the lockdown is defined as such:

Doomscrolling, in this sense, is defined as “the combination of (1) the content of dark unsettling news, (2) monitorial news use patterns centered on the smartphone, and (3) attention economy news streams, creating emotional drain through a flow which users find hard to get out of.” (*ibid.* 10)

Dismantling the word is easy: doom refers to the dooming situation from which individuals suffer and scrolling refers to the consciousness of the traumatic feeling yet not being able to distract themselves from their devices. Individuals are absorbed by

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<sup>60</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5THl0qjA9z0>

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the magic blackbox in their hands and continually exposed to the tragic events happening in the social sphere: once they join the flow of information in the cyberspace, the rich information concentrated in the small screen captures individuals. They cannot escape. In Wuhan, being the first lockdown in the world also indicates that the information of it was resonated within the city and deepened the dooming atmosphere. Nearly all interviewees reported the feeling of stress and fear in this research, especially young people, who could not survive without their mobiles. People stayed up late, kept themselves updated to the latest news of the outbreak and watched numbers of the infected rise. 13 also reported of reading Fang Fang's *Wuhan Diary* every night when it was silence around her.

The reason lies in the democratization of memory assumed by the introduction of digital media. Democratization indicates that every individual could have a say in the social sphere, as discussed in 1.4; yet further it includes every member of the society to participate in the social event. The memories of others are no more remote things that do not affect our own lives, but an instant happening that everyone has a credit. The random relationship between individuals, though they do not know each other at all, is augmented by the mobile phone they hold in their hands. Therefore, the digital media, especially the media technologies of mobile phones, change the position of the observer from merely observation to participation in the flow of information. For traumatic memories of others, the little magic black box had become the locus of trauma, as Pinchevsky underscored, "[t]he shift in the status of mediated violence from obnoxious to noxious can now be seen as consistent with the shift in the observer's attitude from other-gazing to self-preserving, from pity through media to trauma by media." (2019: 86)

The convergence of media also has also affected the process of remembrance. In different interviews the interviewees of this research expressed that they could not remember the things they want to express clearly and would like to send the exact details later, either things kept in their mobile phones or information online. These magic blackboxes were not only the locus of trauma, but also an important tool for remembering their own traumatic memory. In the former case that related triggering

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was kept in the mobile phones, the memory kept in the bardo is concretized in the devices in a secret corner, as W reported, that she has more than 3,800 posts kept secretly in her account, not available to others (Line 155, Interview W). This kind of remembrance is still within the private sphere and will not be interfered by the institutions in the society; however, the latter case is more complicated. Remembrance of some poignant happenings requires accessing the texts once again to compensate for forgetting some of the details in one's own memory. If these texts are censored and not visible in the social sphere, the access will end to nowhere and the memory of such happenings will be hazed. The memory of Dr. Li being reported dead is a good example. Even though people remember Li as the whistle blower of the outbreak, however, many stories happened on him were forgotten by people in Wuhan because related texts were already deleted from the social sphere. When people try to remember more details of Li and search it either online or in the archives, they will find nothing. The denial of accessing such memories leads to less intentionality of accessing them, and finally the memory will become mere remembrance in the individual level, nowhere to be found in the society.

From both cases we find that the mobile phones are the center of the traumatic experience during the lockdown and the main triggering tool of the traumatic memory for individuals. The magic blackbox that nearly all of us possess functions not merely as a tool for communication in the social sphere, but more of a perceiving and expressing organ that connects all individuals of the society anonymously and makes a single tragic happening available for all to remember. However, the linkage between different individuals needs a further investigation: different individuals have different positions towards an event in the social sphere. The same logic goes with the lockdown in Wuhan, which contradicts the random connection that the digital media assume. In other words, the lockdown restricted the people in Wuhan from going outside their homes, yet the internet was not limited by the spread of the virus. Erll noted that the outbreak of the coronavirus was “the first worldwide digitally witnessed pandemic”(2020), which means that once individuals have the access to the memory texts of the happening, the memory of the event will turn homogeneous when it is

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communicated in the social sphere.

However, this is not the case in Wuhan. When the tragic events happened, the people under the dome and the people outside it were positioned differently in the discursive practice of the virus outbreak, which led to a discursive “fortress” that only those people under the lockdown had access to it. This fortress of exclusive discourses indicates that people outside of the lockdown were not admitted of participating in the memory of the lockdown: they were merely observers. A new question thus appears: what excluded these outside the lockdown of participation?

### **2.5.2. “We Are Wuhanese”**

On January 20<sup>th</sup>, a passenger to Chengdu, a city in the South-east of China, reported of having fever after a 10-minute stay in Wuhan when the train stopped at the railway station<sup>61</sup>. Later that day a rumor went viral online that “a person was infected of coronavirus only by staying in Wuhan for 10 minutes”. Even though the government refuted the rumor quickly, Wuhan had already become “a city of virus” in the public discourses. Every people from Wuhan, no matter they were in Wuhan or not, had become “virus takers” and were despised in other cities. The situation was escalated when the lockdown was officially set. The society had been divided into two: under the dome people of Wuhan were suffering from the spread of the coronavirus; and outside the dome, the rest people were watching how the situation went on online. Those who were not under the dome did not experience the lockdown directly: the memory of the lockdown came from others’ accounts, which means that two intrinsically different social realities were paralleled in the social sphere: on the one hand was the social reality constructed by the shared experience of the Wuhan people on the basis that “we are all under the dome”; and on the other was the reality constructed by all the discourses on the lockdown of Wuhan, including all the news report, rumors, and memory texts generated and circulated in the social sphere. Therefore, memories inside

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<sup>61</sup> [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020-01/28/c\\_1125507084.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020-01/28/c_1125507084.htm)

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and outside the dome were discrepant to each other.

As discussed in 1.2, the shared memory constructs the identity of a social group. The memory under the lockdown thus created a new identity excluding those who did not share these memories, which further led to antagonism between the people of Wuhan and of other regions, as Q reported:

Q: By the time of the outbreak some netizens cursed people of Wuhan for they eat bats. Was Wuhan under battalion online by that time? I was once retaliating those curses on Weibo.

S: When I was back [in Tallinn] my neighbor asked me whether we eat bats for real. I was embarrassed. I said that I don't know how does the bat taste. I only represent myself; I don't eat bats.

Q: Who would be willing to get infected? We were all suffering from the virus, why did they curse Wuhan people? Have we made clear of the origin of the virus? (Line 209-217, Interview Q)

This new identity did not last long. It soon vanished when the lockdown was lifted on April 8<sup>th</sup>, and the discursive bulwark was effaced by the reunited social discourses. Yet a question remained unsolved: how can these memory texts distinguished themselves from the other texts that forged this makeshift identity?

The subtitle of *Wuhan Diary* sheds light on the discussion: “dispatches from a quarantined city”. It was exactly this authentication statement that made the book the cusp of public discourses. Being in the lockdown means more than under the lockdown physically; it also indicates a special footing position where the lockdown endorsed and further validated such memory texts to bear the signature of “dispatches from a quarantined city”. The lockdown was not only set physically around Wuhan, but also on every footing practice that authenticated the memory texts of the lockdown. In this regard, the fortress of discourses was also part of the lockdown and disappeared when the lockdown was lifted. The special signature of being under the lockdown, in the same way, withered as the communication in the social sphere proceeded and had become memories only for those who were under the dome.

The role of the grand narratives could not be neglected in the process of constructing the discursive fortress. By addressing to the public that Wuhan is a heroic

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city, and its people are all heroes, the grand narratives had separated them from the rest Chinese citizens and give them a heroic title, which means that in the discursive practices, these people from Wuhan were special, different from others and deprived of participating the discursive practice in a normal way. Such division endorsed the discursive fortress that was already existing because of the spread of the coronavirus: now that the whole society knew that people from Wuhan were special, both in a sacred way (heroic city and heroic people) and in a terrifying way (people in Wuhan are all virus takers, as was exemplified by every Wuhan people was despised, no matter they were in Wuhan or not). Therefore, people in the same fortress shared the identity and excluded those who were outside it. When the lockdown was finally lifted by April 8<sup>th</sup> and the city was no more a quarantined city, such special footing was removed, and the grand narratives also stopped to maintain the rhetoric of the heroic city. Only several representatives were selected to receive the title, which has already been discussed in previous chapters.

Social discourses against the grand narratives can also fortify the makeshift identity. Later in the same interview Q noted that “[b]y the time when the lockdown was announced, we felt that we were forsaken.” (Line 240-241, Interview Q) Thence, all the forsaken ones gathered as brothers and sisters and helped each other, negating the statement from the grand narratives. On Feb. 10<sup>th</sup>, the Municipal Government said at the press conference that by 11<sup>th</sup>, all suspected cases would be tested and there would be no more people fallen ill yet not diagnosed<sup>62</sup>, although there were still many people with Covid symptoms waiting in the lines. The government would later shut down the channel of reporting symptoms of being affected on Weibo. By the time of lockdown, the reporting channels on social platforms were the only way for those infected to ask for help, since all the medical facilities were overrun. The news instantly raised social concern and many public figures appealed that the managers of those social platforms should not give in to political pressure. However, the calls were all censored and deleted, and all channels were closed at the midnight of 10<sup>th</sup>. People were all outraged and in

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<sup>62</sup> <https://news.ifeng.com/c/7u0BsIyhl4a>.

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despair. Posts flooded the social platforms; some of the posts were just expressing the anger, others were reports of the symptoms suspected of being infected by the virus. On the next morning protests were observed both online and offline, and the voice of the people soon echoed. On 11<sup>th</sup>, the main leaders of the municipal government were summoned by the supervision panel missioned by the central government. And on 13<sup>th</sup>, the main leader committee of the government were changed, with a press conference stating that “the number of the infected was not clear yet”. The channels were reopened and those who were infected regained their platform to report their symptoms.

By rejecting the grand narratives, the memory of rebellion united every individual in the fortress; they recognized each other as comrade in arms (fighting both the violence of the grand narratives and the coronavirus). In *Wuhan Diary*, Fang Fang used the word “Wuhanese” rather than “Wuhan people” or “people of Wuhan”. The word “Wuhanese” detaches itself from being listed among other peoples and claims its specialty by antagonizing the name given by the grand narratives. Therefore, the makeshift identity posited itself as dissident of the grand narratives. The lockdown, in this regard, protected the dissident, otherwise it would have been washed off by the grand narratives. In other words, the lockdown both constructed the discursive practice and created a space for special discourses setting grand narratives as the opposition. It should be noted that the off-washing of grand narratives does not equal to censorship. Censorship cannot suppress the memories of dissidents. However, the grand narratives can corner the dissidents to the unseen; they would be seen as “words of the mad” and put into oblivion, as Foucault noted, “[o]nly oblivion can suppress them” (1988: 67). In sum, the special memory of being “Wuhanese” for 76 days under the lockdown constructed a makeshift identity for the people of Wuhan, and it has become a place for sheltering those heterogeneous memories from the overwhelming power both from the heaviness of the time and the grand narratives. However, since the identity was constructed from the antagonism to the grand narratives, it soon vanished when the lockdown was lifted, both in the real world and in the discursive place.

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### 2.5.3. Preemptive Memories

In 2.3 we discussed that the already existing cultural institutions of Chinese people affected their memories of the lockdown under the channeling of the central government. However, cultural institutions can function directly to individuals and bypass the invoking from the grand narratives, once the individuals acquire these institutions as their modality for cognition. For example, many would depict the outbreak of Covid-19 as the outbreak of zombie virus in some movies, especially *Resident Evil* series<sup>63</sup>, as Mazzucchelli and Panico pointed out:

This time, however, these images are also injected with something more, coming perhaps from a subconscious imagery defined by sci-fi B-movies and other cultural visions of post-apocalyptic futures, made of empty cities with solitary figures wandering on desolated scenarios. They are suspended between the refiguration of recognized fictional and narrative tropes and the prefiguration of future ways of recounting the current pandemic, lost somewhere between past, present, and future. (Mazzucchelli and Panico 2021: 1415)

The modalities provided by the cultural institutions gave people under the lockdown paradigms to comprehend what was happening around them. These premediating paradigms instructed the people what to do under such circumstances. For example, Albert Camus' book *The Plague* was the most popular literature for people under lockdown, both in China and the globe<sup>64</sup>. These texts do not need to fully explain the present; they only provide possible scenarios for the posterity to mirror what is happening around them, as Grusin pointed out:

Unlike prediction, premediation is not chiefly about getting the future right. Premediation is not like a weather forecast, which aims to predict correctly the weather for tomorrow or the weekend or the week ahead. In fact, it is precisely the proliferation of future scenarios that enables premediation to generate and maintain a low level of anxiety in order to prevent the possibility of a traumatic future. (Grusin 2004: 28–29)

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<sup>63</sup> <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/3048599/coronavirus-wont-turn-you-zombie-malaysia-says>

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/mar/05/publishers-report-sales-boom-in-novels-about-fictional-epidemics-camus-the-plague-dean-koontz>



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These texts that function as the cultural paradigms are all about an “eternal crisis” (Mazzucchelli and Panico 2021: 1415) that will happen in the past future. These texts do not function in its totality and details. During the lockdown, they did not present themselves as single texts and communicated in the society. Instead, they functioned as dissolved texts in the culture as the context for people to understand the communicated texts, as Lotman noted (1988). For example, the lockdown was set exactly the day of Chinese lunar new year, and later there were rumors that by setting off fireworks could dispel the coronavirus. The activity is a common practice for Chinese people celebrating the upcoming spring: it is believed that setting off fireworks can ward off evil spirits, which can date back to ancient times when a man-eating monster called “Nian”<sup>65</sup> harassed the people and made them to seek refuge in the deep mountains<sup>66</sup>. Regarding to the escalation of the air conditions in big cities of China, the government banned this activity in most of the urban regions. However, during the lockdown, the virus was also haunting the city, and the scene of using fireworks to scare away the monster had its reminiscence in the present that the virus took the place of the monster.

However, these paradigms reified in the social sphere (in Berger and Luckmann’s (1966: 106–7) terms) could also misfire. In *Resident Evil* series, the T-Virus, which turned humankind into walking-dead, was manufactured by a company. This cognitive pattern also reflected in the way people comprehending the Covid-19 that it should be manufactured by some anti-human laboratories. The absence of the part of the paradigm led to conspiracies nowadays that whether the virus was man-made in the social sphere. And Wuhan, coincidentally, is the location of the first BSL-4 laboratory on virology in mainland China. Even though there is no evidence to show that the virus was man-made, the paradigm given by *Resident Evil* series, along with many other texts in the same tone, put the laboratory on the place of the manufacturer of the virus.

From the discussion above, we can find that for the modalities of cultural memories, the paradigms are like grammars, in which certain blanks need to be filled. These grammaticalized structures (Lotman and Uspenskij 1978: 219) shape how people

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<sup>65</sup> It is also the word for “year” in Chinese.

<sup>66</sup> For more details of the myth of the monster, see Yuan (2006: 168)

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comprehend the surrounding happenings, which is a two-way sword that both augments and hinders our perception of the present. As the eternal crisis will never be solved, people will carry on towards the next crisis with these cultural institutions.

The dynamic side of these cultural institutions, however, cannot be neglected. In practical terms, previous communicative memories also affected how people react to the outbreak. It depends on individual memory of the previous communicative memories. During the lockdown in Wuhan, many referred to the outbreak of SARS in 2003 (Line 37-42, Interview Shepherd; Line 78, Interview 13). The covid-19 was once called SARS-2. It was the buzzword of that time; but it did not leave a significant trace in the memories because it was not taken by the grand narratives for their use, which has been discussed in 2.2.1. Yet those who still remembered what happened during SARS would react to the outbreak of Covid according to his/her own experiences. This lowest level of memory text did not enter the memory of the collective, but when it is communicated and exchanged under certain needs, which in our case here are the outbreak of Covid-19, it will become new cultural institutions. Moreover, what was happening during the lockdown also prepared for what is coming, as the outbreak of SARS gave people knowledge of how to cope with this Covid outbreak. The idea of building Fang Cang<sup>67</sup>, the mobile cabin hospital to accommodate those with slight symptoms yet infectious, came from the hospital of the same kind build in Xiao Tang Shan, Beijing, to contain the spread of SARS. By that time the idea of hospitals as such did not enter the cultural sphere as an element of related institutions, but the outbreak of Covid pushed the idea to the front stage. The memory of this outbreak, for the people in Wuhan, also projects itself for the future crisis to come.

#### **2.5.4. Does Fact Still Matter?**

When all myths, others' experiences, inculcations from the grand narratives and hearsay in the corners merge, we are confused by a nebula of discourses, and our memories

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<sup>67</sup> Literally it means "portable cabin".

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become a melting pot. These pre-emptive memories, when paralleled with the real reality that we are living in, has complicated the reality itself. The complicity will be even more entrenched if the account of the reality falls to political reasons. It seems that the fact, which used to have only one version, has become merely the fact that people would believe in. Different memories from different individuals coexist in the social sphere, some of them refer to one “fact” yet others contradict with each other. The choice of the reality to believe in, in turn, accords to the modalities provided by the inculcations of the individual’s cultural institutions. If the individual believes that China is a robust country and is not willing to conquer the world, the Chinese government’s insistence that the virus came from the nature will cater to his paradigms and become the reality of this individual. Yet if another person understands the Chinese government is a rogue state with its iron fist suppressing its people, the idea that the virus was manufactured in laboratories in China would ring the bell. Some conspiracists who accept the idea that China will outplay America even believe that it was the American athletes who took part in the Military World Games held in Wuhan in October 2019 that carried the virus from America. The link between the World Games and the outbreak of the virus does not even need to be clarified; only by placing the two elements, “American athletes attending the Military World Games in October” and “the Covid-19 outbreak in Wuhan” would beget tons of texts of conspiracy, as Q mentioned in her interview. (Line 221-222, Interview Q) The development of digital media has brought all these discursive reality to the social level and complicated the reality that we all reside in. As the reality around us becomes more and more complicated, a question appears: does fact still matter?

When the news of Dr. Li’s death came in the evening of that day, everyone in Wuhan burst into tears and anger. Fang Fang wrote that “during this dark, heavy night, Li Wenliang will be our light.” (2020: 87) And when the second obituary in the midnight came out, the tears and anger were suspended and mediated, as D noted: “I believe that it’s obvious: the media did this [suspension] deliberately. And there were also no more follow-ups. [...] It must be forgotten.” (Line 76-78, Interview D) But if we come to a closer look of the tragic happening, an important part was omitted in all the narratives,

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including the discussion on the suspension of memories above: when did Dr. Li *really* die?

The fact does not matter anymore. For those who still believe in the government, Li died in the early morning of Feb. 7<sup>th</sup>, after hours of ECMO treatment, since it was what the official media said. For those who hold doubt towards the government, Li died in the evening of 6<sup>th</sup>. The following news reports were merely for suspending the anger of the citizens, and the later treatments the abuse of a dead body. In all the discussions, the fact on when Dr. Li died became secondary. The primary question is what memory people choose to remember. The pre-emptive memories of every individual have created a subjectively informative world for them, namely the “echo chamber”, to filter the information that does not accord to the modalities. The problem has been even amplified by the digital media: truth has been buried in tons of messages and no more “crystal clear”. This “truth decay” (Kavanagh and Rich 2018) foresees an era of “post truth” which was the word of the year in 2016<sup>68</sup>.

But fact still matters. It is the thing that anchors our existence in the world: there is only one world that we all live in. In the places where the discourses construct for us, there are humans in flesh and bones with their own memories, same as everyone else living on the earth. For people in Wuhan, their traumatic memories came from the single fact of what happened during the lockdown. The obscurement from the social sphere did not hinder the fact that there was only one version of reality. During the lockdown, the only fact was what happened to everyone in Wuhan respectively, which was a piece of the whole puzzle of the collective memory. In order to work through the traumatic memory of the lockdown, this fact shall be recognized as the basis that the looking glass self reflects other’s trauma. Furthermore, a truthful remembrance of the past will benefit the crisis yet to come. As the presence between the past and the future, memory maintains our existence here and now and projects itself to the future. Only by agreeing on the fact there is only one fact, we remember the same traumatic past that made us stronger.

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<sup>68</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/nov/15/post-truth-named-word-of-the-year-by-oxford-dictionaries>

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## Conclusions

When the wounds stop bleeding, they turn into scars. The traumatic memories reside both in individuals and in the collective. Individually, traumatic memories are kept in the limbo of our corporeality and retrieved only when certain triggers appear. The disjunction between the traumatic memory and the integrity of an individual creates a vacuum in personal remembrance of the tragic happening, which gives place for the grand narratives in the social sphere to define a collective trauma. Collectively, a tragic event befalls on a given social group will forge an exclusive identification for everyone that experiences the event. However, the development of mass media, especially the digital media leads to the democratization of memory, which blurs the definition of witness. All the happenings in the social sphere are brought to the eyes of everyone in the society, which makes all of them witnesses of the event. The media that function as the channel of individuals receiving information present all the tragic happenings seemingly in an unmediated way and traumatize all the members. Moreover, the mythologies, folklores and the cultural patterns can also affect the memories of the happening and premeditate the contents that are remembered. All these cultural paradigms, along with the narratives of the authority, forge the grand narratives of the social sphere and are mingled with the personal remembrance of the event to construct the collective memory of the traumatic past. In this regard, traumatic memories, however individual or collective, can be politicized towards a certain goal and are manipulated by the authorities. The trauma paralysis and the politization of the traumatic memory have vacuumed the social sphere in which only the grand narratives endorsed by the authorities are the actors.

On April 8<sup>th</sup>. The lockdown was lifted. Citizens of Wuhan can finally enjoy the good sunshine of late spring. But some of them were lost in the spring forever. The lockdown was both the source and the catalyst of the traumatic memory. During the lockdown, every citizen of Wuhan was alienated into their modest shelters; the loneliness that defined every living mind in the modern society was amplified by the

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physical severance, which turned every face into ghostly beings that were easy to disperse. Moreover, those tragic happenings were witnessed by the Wuhan people and constructed the social reality that they shared. These traumatic memories from the reality beyond mortal reach were intertwined with the experience of the individuals and fell under the trauma paralysis discussed above. On the social level, the authority endorsed the grand narratives to produce a series of texts circulated in the social sphere to inculcate another version of the lockdown, trying to efface the tragic ones that were remembered by individuals. Besides that, those heterogeneous narratives of the lockdown were isolated by the censorship from the authority, which intensified the vacuum produced by the paralysis. In this regard, the memories of the lockdown were caught in between: on the one hand the personal memories were still aching; yet on the other hand the mantras sung in the social sphere were trying to powder every tragic happening.

By the time when this research is concluded, Shanghai is under the same lockdown as Wuhan experienced 2 years ago. It seems that a lot has changed in 2 years; it seems that nothing has changed in two years. In two years, many vaccines were developed to battle the spread of the virus, and the world is on its track of recovering; in two years, there are still people trapped in their modest shelters and are not allowed to express their traumas on social platforms<sup>69</sup>. We all have experienced it, in Wuhan, in Xi'an, in Shanghai, in New York, in New Delhi, in Bergamo, in the world that we all live. Some of the outbreak left traumatic memories waiting to be healed; most of the outbreaks are already forgotten. No matter it is forgotten or not, something is left on our corporeality, the scars, as the title of the research says. They are kept at distance in order that we can proceed with our normal lives, but when the nights are back, all the nightmares will haunt us and keep us awake all night long.

Traumatic past is first of all remembered as memories, both personally and collectively. For people in Wuhan, the two years passed in a flash. The nucleic test that

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<sup>69</sup> A citizen in Shanghai made a video collecting the heart-breaking voices during the lockdown under the title "Voices of April". It was soon censored on all media platforms in China. It is a remarkable event that the censorship in China is still strict. Link: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38\\_thLXNHY8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38_thLXNHY8)

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is required to take every 48 hours<sup>70</sup> are forever reminding them of the traumatic past that is already rarely discussed in the social sphere. However, every of them remembers the lockdown with their own versions of the traumatic experiences that traumatized them 2 years ago. These personal memories are the mixture of the personal experiences under the lockdown by themselves and those that were experienced by others. Different memories from themselves and from the others were intertwined to construct the basic elements that is remembered. However, they are remembered differently. While being restricted from going outside of their houses, Wuhan people were witnessing tragic happenings in the places that they used to be familiar with via the mobile phones. Those traumatizing reports were brought to our eyes all in a sudden that none would prepare to stomach. The digital media forced every people in Wuhan to witness what was happening *out there* and they did not have a single method to verify its authenticity. The suspension of the truthfulness of a social event manifests the very essence of the transmedial environment that we are all living in right now, that everything happens *so true*, especially when it comes to traumatic events. The seemingly unmediated information online has penetrated their memories and becomes more poignant than the memories of their own, whereas their own traumatic memories are kept at bay. The collective remembrance of the same social event, therefore, became the basis of the collective memory of the lockdown.

Collective memory is constructed by texts communicated in the social sphere. When the traumatic experiences are communicated, a collective trauma is generated and then forges the grand narratives of the times. However, in the case of Wuhan, the grand narratives are always trying to efface what we remember in the social sphere both culturally and politically. On the cultural level, voices of individuals were easily submerged by the choirs of the collective: collectivism is extremely productive on the collective level, but it can kill on the individual level. On the political level, the century-long colonial history makes Chinese people urge for narratives to testify their great achievements after the establishment of PRC in nearly all fields of a modern life. All

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<sup>70</sup> As of the end of April 2022, all citizens of Wuhan are required to present a negative nucleic test taken in 72 hours to take on a public transportation and go to public places.

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these cultural paradigms, once maneuvered by the authority, are easily politicized by the grand narratives to channel towards a great victory that the Chinese government is now boasting on. Moreover, out of shame, agony and fear, we are reluctant to remember our traumatic past, which forges a traumatic paralysis when the social sphere resumes its own track, giving place to the texts manufactured by the grand narratives about the traumatic past. In other words, people are easy to accept the forfeit memories that the grand narratives are presenting to them. These texts are trying to replace people's own memories and function as the shared traumatic past. The so-called collective trauma has become a farce where only the grand narratives are playing a role. The silenced social sphere has become a great one-man show that members of the society can only witness. Some of them joined the show.

But there is still hope. The scars are still on the corporeality, which means that it cannot be changed or covered. No matter how the grand narratives are preaching their version of collective memory in the social sphere, people can still maintain their own memories in the deepest places of their hearts. Moreover, even the memory has been blurred by the inculcation of the grand narratives, the scars on our bodies keep reminding us of the hazed traumatic past that might be forgotten. The represented scars are deceptive, yet the scars on the bodies are real. Our bodies remember better than us. Therefore, the effort that shall be made is the brave negation of the phony representations from the grand narratives and speaking of people's own versions of trauma. Only by speaking out the real experiences of the lockdown can people in Wuhan recognize each other's real trauma and sympathize it, thus constructing the real versions of the collective trauma that fortifies the people in real sense, and dispersing the phony collective trauma forfeited by the grand narratives.

Do not forget that the covid-19 is also called SARS-2. In 2003 there was SARS-1 rampaging on the same land. There were the same tragic happenings, though there was no lockdown two decades ago. However, it was not remembered clearly because all the narratives of the outbreak were powdered as the mantras and hymns on how the medical workers fought on the frontline and how the government contained the spread of the virus, and the outbreak ceased in the same summer. It was the grand narratives that set



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the coffin lid of the outbreak of SARS-1 and homogenized everyone's memory of the outbreak, which dissolved as a remote past that few would remember it again. But this SARS-2 lasts longer, it is still haunting the world with hundreds of thousands of new cases reported every day, and the Chinese government is providing the same clear narratives for the outbreak to suspend the traumatic memories that everyone holds in their owns. In the speech in commemoration of the race massacre in Tulsa, Oklahoma, American President Joe Biden addressed to the public that "I come here to help fill the silence, because in silence, wounds deepen. [...] And only—as painful as it is, only in remembrance do wounds heal. We just have to choose to remember."<sup>71</sup> Against the overwhelming power of the grand narratives, individuals need to step out to speak of their own to reject the names and titles given by the grand narratives and become a human in flesh and bones.

In the conclusive part of the lecture by Yan Lianke, he spoke to the fellow students in Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, reflecting on Fang Fang's *Wuhan Diary*:

In the predictable future, when mantras are heard and proses written about this great country's victory over coronavirus, I hope that we are not writers of those hallowed hymns, but concrete people with respective memories. When the great performance is on, I hope that we are not the performers, reciters, or those who hail to the performance, but those who are watching the performance silently, grinding teeth and shedding tears in the farthest place. [...] After Auschwitz, it is brutal to write poems; but not speaking and remembering are more brutal, and horrific. (my translation)<sup>72</sup>

The hope lies in those who are watching the great performance with tears. Tears mean that the scars on the bodies are aching. Tears mean that the traumatic past is remembered independently, without the interference of the grand narratives abounding the social sphere. It is exactly the personal accounts of every individual of the society that is the most vivid, precious history that we can poster to our next generations. In the case of Dr. Li, it is reassuring that most of the interviewees do remember some facts, even

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<sup>71</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/06/02/remarks-by-president-biden-commemorating-the-100th-anniversary-of-the-tulsa-race-massacre/>

<sup>72</sup> <https://theinitium.com/article/20200221-mainland-coronavirus-yanlianke/>

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minor ones, that made him a human, rather than those that made him a hero (Line 157-164, Interview Q; Line 76-84, Interview W; Line 63-68, Interview D; Line 95-101, Interview 13). To remember that every of us is a humankind in flesh and bones matters way more than remembering what is represented in the society.

We all have scars because of the lockdown. Under the lockdown, the daily encountering with our beloved ones became merely ghostly faces that are so fragile; a blackout would instantly remind us how lonely we are. After the lockdown, we are even more lonely because the mantras sung in the social sphere separate us that we can no longer recognize others' faces. But if we speak out our own traumatic experiences and show our real scars, we will be recognized and sympathized. The long-lost human linkage between individuals will come back and bind us together again, irrespective of how the grand narratives are preaching in the social sphere. When *we* remember, we are never alone.

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## **Appendices**

### **1. Timeline of the Lockdown**

### **2. List of Materials**

### **3. The Interviews**

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## *Appendix 1, Timeline of the Lockdown*<sup>73</sup>

### **December:**

8<sup>th</sup>: The first reported case of pneumonia with “unknown reason”.

30<sup>th</sup>: Dr. Li Wenliang warned his friends in a WeChat group that there was a mysterious virus.

31<sup>st</sup>: A panel from National Health Commission of PRC (NHC onward) arrived in Wuhan, confirmed that there was no case of showing that the virus was transmissible. Ai Fen, a medical worker, presented a sample of the infected cases to the hospital. Later she was warned that “do not wreak havoc among the public”.

### **January:**

1<sup>st</sup>: “Ping An Wuhan” reported that 8 “rumor spreaders” were punished.

3<sup>rd</sup>: The Wuhan Center for Disease Control and Prevention (WHCDC onward) reported 44 cases of pneumonia with “unknown reason”.

Li signed the admonition paper.

9<sup>th</sup>: Li started to cough.

10<sup>th</sup>: The NHC announced that the disease was “preventable and controllable”.

12<sup>th</sup>: Li had a CT and was suspected of lung infection.

17<sup>th</sup>: The WHCDC announced that there were no new cases from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup>.

18<sup>th</sup>: Another panel were commissioned to Wuhan, including Zhong Nanshan.

20<sup>th</sup>: Zhong confirmed that the virus was infectious.

22<sup>nd</sup>: The Hubei Provincial Government called for all citizens to wear masks.

23<sup>rd</sup>: The lockdown started on the morning at 10 am.

25<sup>th</sup>: Fang Fang started to post Wuhan Diary on Weibo.

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<sup>73</sup> The information was collected by the author of this research from various news websites and government websites in China for better understanding of the research, including but not limited to:  
National Health Commission of PRC: <http://www.nhc.gov.cn/>  
Cai Xin (an independent news press): <https://www.caixinglobal.com/>  
The Chinese Government and Wuhan Municipal Government: [www.gov.cn](http://www.gov.cn), <http://www.wuhan.gov.cn>  
Xin Hua news (the official mouthpiece): <http://news.cn/>  
Wuhan Center for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.whcdc.org/>

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## February:

1<sup>st</sup>: Li confirmed that he was infected by the virus.

6<sup>th</sup>: Li died the first time

7<sup>th</sup>: The Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI onward) sent a panel to investigate the case of Dr. Li Wenliang.

Li died the second time.

10<sup>th</sup>: The Secretary of Municipal Party Committee of Wuhan announced that the suspected cases were all cleared and shut down the channel for citizens calling for help.

11<sup>th</sup>: The leaders of Wuhan municipal government were summoned by the central department.

12<sup>th</sup>: Out of the unease from the society the channel was reopened.

15<sup>th</sup>: Fang Fang was under suspicion and attack from the society.

16<sup>th</sup>: The provincial government tightened the control of the lockdown.

19<sup>th</sup>: The leaders of the municipal government were changed.

The Virology Center in Wuhan announced that “we have a clear conscience of the outbreak”.

20<sup>th</sup>: Cai Xin reported that there were 12 deaths in a social welfare institute for the elders.

21<sup>st</sup>: The Wuhan Civil Affairs Bureau refuted the death report by Cai Xin, that on 19<sup>th</sup> there were only 1 death and 12 cases in total.

Official tone: “transmitting rumors will be charged with a sentence up to 7 years”

25<sup>th</sup>: NHC announced that “the strictest control shall be applied to Hubei Province”.

## March:

1<sup>st</sup>: The *Provisions on Ecological Governance of Network Information Content* started to apply.

4<sup>th</sup>: The mayor of Wuhan said that Wuhan people should “thank the party”.

5<sup>th</sup>: Li Wenliang was awarded as “the pioneer in combatting the virus”.

A leader of the municipal government visited a community, and a person was shouting

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“fake, it’s all fake” on his balcony.

8<sup>th</sup>: A lecture was provided by Hubei Provincial Government on “positive energy” for writers.

10<sup>th</sup>: President Xi Jinping visited Wuhan.

The article by *Ren Wu*, a monthly magazine on famous people, “The whistle giver”, was censored on all platforms. The article was the conversation with Ai Fen (see December 31<sup>st</sup>).

11<sup>th</sup>: President Xi announced that “the Party and the country thank Wuhan people”. WHO defined Covid-19 as “pandemic”.

13<sup>th</sup>: The spokesperson of the Chinese Government, Zhao Lijian, pointed out that the virus might be taken by the American athletes in the Military World Games held in Wuhan in October 2019.

Zhong Nanshan and his colleagues diagnosed 2 covid cases. After the diagnosis, Zhong was offered flowers and a song dedicated to him.

17<sup>th</sup>: Medical teams started to leave Wuhan.

19<sup>th</sup>: The result of the investigation on Li’s case came out. Related personals in the police station were warned.

20<sup>th</sup>: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and NHC said that they were “willing to share their experiences on containing the virus”.

Comments related to Li were censored.

The medical teams postponed their leave.

23<sup>rd</sup>: The funeral parlors were reopened for people to collect ashes.

24<sup>th</sup>: The government announced that the lockdown would be lifted on April 8<sup>th</sup>.

25<sup>th</sup>: Fang Fang wrote the last post of Wuhan Diary

## **April:**

2<sup>nd</sup>: Li was awarded as “martyr”.

3<sup>rd</sup>: The government announced that on 4<sup>th</sup> there would be a public mourning nationwide.

Zhong Nanshan said that “no one would predict whether the outbreak would come

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back every year.”

4<sup>th</sup>: The public mourning.

8<sup>th</sup>: The lockdown was lifted.

12<sup>th</sup>: Zhong said the battle against the virus in China “entered the second phase”.

27<sup>th</sup>: “6 Zeros” (zero new case, zero death, zero current cases, zero intensive cases, zero new suspected cases, zero suspected cases)

**1. TV Series *Heroes in Harm's Way***

Episode 1:



Figure 1. The veteran refusing the medical treatment.

Dialogue:

Veteran: But we are running out of ward rooms? I am not worthy of treatment! Don't save me, save others first, don't waste money on me!

Episode 2:



Figure 2 and 3. Pin badge of the Chinese Communist Party on medical workers.



Figure 4. The Party pin badge

Episode 3:



Figure 5. The director explaining her responsibility of going to Wuhan

Dialogue:

“I am the director of pulmonology department, it’s my responsibility (to go to Wuhan).”



Figure 6. The wife, Zhou, explaining her idea of going to Wuhan

Dialogue:

“I am a Party member to-be. I shall be active in taking part in the medical team.”



Figure 7. The husband, Yue, requesting to go to Wuhan, replacing his wife



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Dialogue:

“It should be me [instead of my wife]”

Later the couple had a quarrel, when Zhou found that she was replaced by her husband:

Yue: “Up until now we do not know how infectious the virus is. Careless as you, what if you got infected?”

Zhou: “I am not allowing you suspecting my professions! How many years have we been working together?”

Then Zhou turned to her mother-in-law:



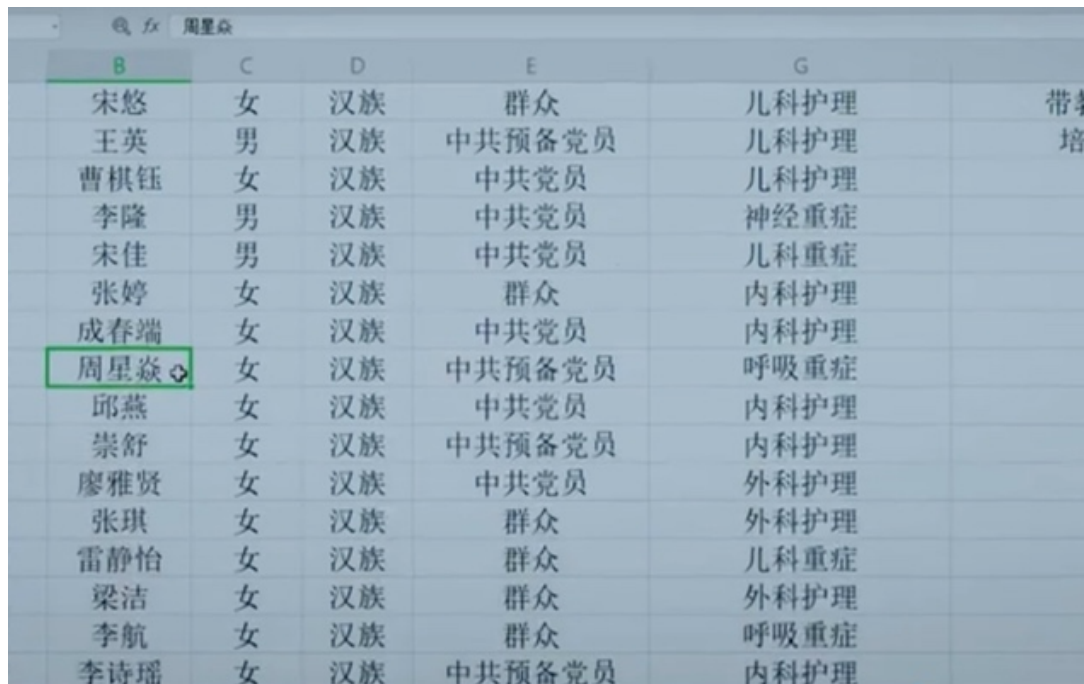
Figure 8. The mother-in-law's answer to Zhou

Dialogue:

Mother-in-law: “Now the country needs him.”

Episode 4:

The wife came to the medical team too.



A screenshot of a spreadsheet titled '周星焱' (Zhou Xingyan). The spreadsheet lists medical workers with columns for name, gender, ethnicity, political status, and specialty. The row for '周星焱' (Zhou Xingyan) is highlighted with a green box.

B	C	D	E	G
宋悠	女	汉族	群众	儿科护理
王英	男	汉族	中共预备党员	儿科护理
曹棋钰	女	汉族	中共党员	儿科护理
李隆	男	汉族	中共党员	神经重症
宋佳	男	汉族	中共党员	儿科重症
张婷	女	汉族	群众	内科护理
成春端	女	汉族	中共党员	内科护理
周星焱	女	汉族	中共预备党员	呼吸重症
邱燕	女	汉族	中共党员	内科护理
崇舒	女	汉族	中共预备党员	内科护理
廖雅贤	女	汉族	中共党员	外科护理
张琪	女	汉族	群众	外科护理
雷静怡	女	汉族	群众	儿科重症
梁洁	女	汉族	群众	外科护理
李航	女	汉族	群众	呼吸重症
李诗瑶	女	汉族	中共预备党员	内科护理

Figure 9. The list of the medical workers

The fourth column (column E) stated the “political status” of the registrar. Most on the list were “Party member” (中共党员) or “Party member to-be” (中共预备党员).



Figure 10. The backwall of the nurse station with banner “pioneer working place for party members”

---

Yue finally realized that his wife was also in the hospital and telephoned the Nurse Station. He said: Bie Lai Wu Yang<sup>74</sup>, which is also the title of episode 3 and 4. It is a pun in Chinese. It means both “Don’t come, I am okay” and “Nothing bad happened after we saw each other last time”

Episode 6.



Figure 11. The wife and her mother-in-law had a quarrel and reconciled. When the two reconciled, a news reporting how the government is coping with the coronavirus situation appeared on the TV and the sound is played along with the music setting off for the reconciliation.<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> 别来无恙

<sup>75</sup> The news link: [http://service.shanghai.gov.cn/SHVideo/videoshow\\_476059CD5063DDEC\\_0.html](http://service.shanghai.gov.cn/SHVideo/videoshow_476059CD5063DDEC_0.html)



Figure 12. The wife and her mother-in-law in their own houses

The two were infected by Covid and wanted to flee to Chong Qing because the medical system in Wuhan was overcrowded. Later they decided not to go because of the responsibility they felt.

Episode 7.



Figure 13. The flags of the Party and China on the table of Service Centre.



Episode 10.



Figure 14. The Party's pin badge on uniforms in this episode.

Episode 12.



Figure 15 and 16. The teachings of a volunteer and the hero's words

When the volunteer (right) was thanked by the recovered patient, he remembered the teachings of another volunteer that “name does not matter” (left), and he said, “if you would like to, you can call me ‘Uncle Rabbit’.”

## 2. Daily Newsfeed



<https://t.bilibili.com/636158564404035589?tab=2>

Figure 17. The situation in America on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2022 from CCTV News.



<https://t.bilibili.com/635438023521075203>

Figure 18. The coronavirus situation in China on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

The Chinese in yellow reads: “the pandemic is not over yet, don’t be careless”.



<https://t.bilibili.com/635421543731560456>

Figure 19. The first report on the situation in America on March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020



<https://t.bilibili.com/373445082811291877>

Figure 20 and 21. The news and comments of the coronavirus situation in America on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020

Translation:

Left: The Covid cases in America has exceeded 200 thousand: according to John Hopkins University, up to April 1<sup>st</sup>, there are 203,608 Covid cases in America, with the death toll reaching 4,476. (April 02, 2020)

Right: Comments (from up to down):

“Trump: Just this? I thought it would be 2 million. Good job!”

---

“‘Just this’.”

“Ah there is no comment here.”

“[doge]”

“No problem, Trump said that if the death toll is under 100 thousand, it’s a victory for America.”

“America only knows what will happen if 3,000 people died from Covid in China”

“[doge]”

“Death toll only under 100 thousand? [emoji of surprise]”



<https://t.bilibili.com/616138317322941374>

Figure 22. Report of the situation on January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022, when the recurrence of Covid outbreak appeared in Tian Jin.





央视新闻

2020-03-20 06:22

【0和春天都让大家久等了】0新增确诊病例，0现有疑似病例，0新增疑似病例！3月19日，湖北多地无新增病例。春分已至，好消息陆续传来，希望就在前方！期待更多地区病例清零，迎接春天！一起踏青！



109

50

8727

按热度排序

按时间排序

<https://t.bilibili.com/368678820169737184>

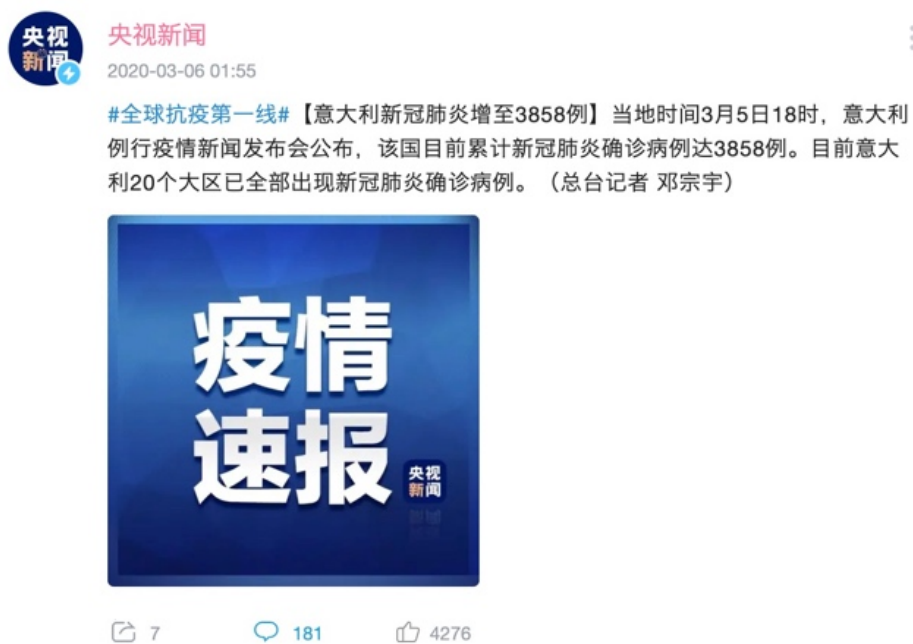
Figure 23. The images of “zero”

Translation: Both the zero and the spring are long waited! Zero new cases, zero suspected cases, zero new suspected cases. On March 19th, no new cases were reported in many places of Hubei Province. The Spring Equinox has come, good news come continually, and the hope is ahead! We hope that more “zero” is reported and let’s welcome the spring!



<https://t.bilibili.com/367893240587629470>

Figure 24. “Zero” in new case and new suspected cases on March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020



<https://t.bilibili.com/363414981260845922>

Figure 25. The coronavirus outbreak report of Italy on March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020

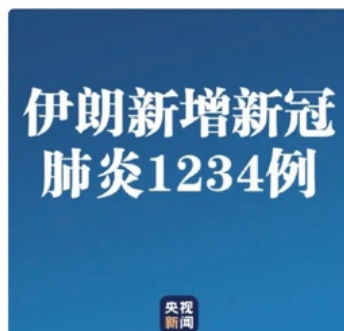


央视新闻

2020-03-06 12:55

【伊朗新增新冠肺炎1234例 累计确诊4747例】根据伊朗卫生部最新消息，当地时间6日，伊朗新增新冠肺炎确诊病例1234例，新增死亡17例。截至当天中午，伊朗累计确诊新冠肺炎病例4747例，其中913例康复，124例死亡。(总台记者李健南 倪紫慧)

#全球抗疫第一线#



14

311

4480

<https://t.bilibili.com/363584954595429811>

Figure 26. Report of Iran on March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020

3. Censored Materials

Yan Lian Ke’s speech on Fang Fang:

<https://theinitium.com/article/20200221-mainland-coronavirus-yanlianke/>



<https://m.zcool.com.cn/work/ZNDI5Nzg5ODg=.html><sup>76</sup>

Figure 27. Censored post depicting the tragic events happened during the lockdown  
Translation of the post: “Lights shall not be betrayed; tragedies shall be remembered”



Figure 28, 29, and 30. Deleted Covid Diaries on Douban

<sup>76</sup> Censored. The works were alternatively archived in: <https://www.behance.net/gallery/93184569/>

The reason of being deleted (the right): includes aggressive thoughts or ideologies.

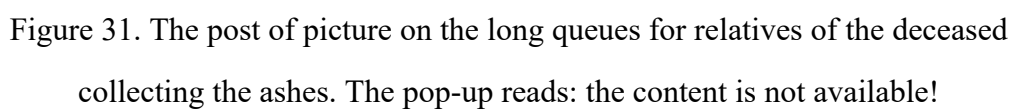




Figure 32. Queues for collecting ashes under the “Core Socialist Values”  
Core Socialist Values: Prosperity, democracy, civility, harmony; freedom, equality, justice, rule of law; patriotism, dedication, integrity and friendship.

### Li Wen Liang and related materials

Li’s last post: <https://m.weibo.cn/1139098205/4467107636950632>



Figure 33. The report of Li’s first death by the evening of 6<sup>th</sup>. Screen shot of the official account of Global Times, an official throat, on Weibo.





Figure 34 and 35. Censored posts on Li's death.

Translation:

Left: Should you give us an explanation? And the forwarded message: An explanation? This is the explanation. (With the screenshot of the former one being censored)

Right: My dear readers, what are doing? Do you know how many people would like to use their own lives to trade an unfamiliar doctor's life? Are you "being united tightly"? Are you "being instructed"? Are you afraid that your banality and stupidity know by all? Can you go to sleep?



Figure 36. A Screenshot taken on June 6<sup>th</sup> on the comments below Dr. Li's last post<sup>77</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Translation from top to down: 1. Dr. Li, I fell asleep and woke up again, what happened to me? 2. I felt like I

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## Public Mourning April 4<sup>th</sup>



Figure 37. “Only the organized were permitted of entry, those who came by themselves were rejected of entering.”

---

lost everything; 3. I cannot go to sleep; 4. It is time for Gaokao. 4 years ago, I was asleep as this time, and she did not know that I had a hard time during my 4 years in university. She would never even know that I am now on the verge of collapse: I was in full expectations but...



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### *Appendix 3, The Interviews*

The author of this research interviewed 5 people in total, all the five were in the lockdown with different backgrounds, which are briefed in the beginning of the interviews. In the interviews, “S” stands for the author of the research. All private information is replaced with X and pseudonyms are used to respect the privacy of the interviewees. The author is responsible for the interviews in both languages. During the interview, six questions were prepared for the interviewees, focusing on different aspects of the experience under the lockdown:

1. Did you live alone or with friends or families? How was it?
2. Were there times that you threw away your mobile phone and felt that the world became better?
3. Did you watch the TV series *Hero in Harm's Way*? Do you think it represents what happened in reality?
4. About Dr. Li: How much still do you remember about him?
5. Is Fang Fang “the one who rock the boat” or a “speaker for the mass”?
6. Do you think China’s methods in battling the covid is a success comparing to other countries?

The original interviews were taken in Chinese. The English versions of the interviews are translated by the author of this research and the author takes the responsibility of the authenticity of the interviews and the translations. All the interviews received the permission of the interviewees for publication as the appendices of this research. In order to locate the quote from the interviews conveniently, the interviews will be lined. Those that are referred in the main body of the thesis is marked after the quote in the form (line X, Interview [Name]). And those that are worthy of attention in the interviews are **bolded**.

---

1 **1. Interview with Q**

2  
3 *Q, female, 24 years old, is a master student studying politics in mainland China,*  
4 *specializing on international relationships.*

5  
6 S: So, let's begin. My first question is, were you in Wuhan when it was lockdown,  
7 starting from Jan. 23rd, 2020?

8 Q: Yes I was.

9 S: And suddenly you found that there was no place to go. During the lockdown you  
10 lived alone, or with friends or families?

11 Q: I was living with a big family.

12 S: A big family? Your father, mother and?

13 Q: My father, mother, two little kids, me and my younger brother, and brothers and  
14 sisters of my mother. Three families were living there in Huangpi<sup>78</sup>.

15 S: 3 families under the same roof?

16 Q: Yes, in Huangpi, a big house.

17 S: It means that you were coming back to celebrate the Lunar New Year.

18 Q: Yes.

19 S: It was the evening of Lunar New Year. You received the news of the lockdown and  
20 could not come out?

21 Q: It was not so. Our plan was to go back to village on the morning of 23<sup>rd</sup>. It was our  
22 family's tradition to go back before the new year and celebrate it together. We will  
23 stay there for a couple of days and go back to the downtown later.

24 It was 22<sup>nd</sup> at night. I stayed up late at 2 am and read the news that there would be a  
25 lockdown. I was thinking about the definition of lockdown, whether it be a strict one  
26 or a loose one; and whether we were allowed to go out of the city or the downtown  
27 areas. My parents were asleep, but I was frightened. I have never seen such a case. **It**  
28 **felt like a zombie movie.** By that time one of my friends was also staying up later and

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<sup>78</sup> A rural district of Wuhan.

---

29 we were discussing about this. We did not know whether we should go. Because  
30 according to the regulations of the government, we would be better to stay at home,  
31 and we were all in Huangpi and did not leave Wuhan.

32 Another consideration was the lockdown. We could not have reunion dinner if the  
33 lockdown was set. I was struggling thinking for a long time. While my parents were  
34 still sleeping, I went downstairs to buy instant noodles and hams in a convenience  
35 store. I could not go to sleep. On the early morning of that day, I started to sort out all  
36 the luggage. If we go, then go earlier. At 6 am my parents woke up. I told them the  
37 news and let them decide. They did not believe it be that serious. We also contacted  
38 other families and they said that they were going. So we arrived in Huangpi that  
39 morning later, and the lockdown was not set yet by that time.

40 S: I remember the strictest lockdown came in February. In the beginning of the  
41 lockdown we could go to supermarkets. But after Feb. 9<sup>th</sup>, we were forbidden of going  
42 outside of the community and only able to buy things via group-buying.

43 Q: Yes. Another point was that things were out of stock in the supermarkets. There  
44 was nothing to buy, and the transportations were shut down. It would be hard for  
45 those families without a car.

46 S: In retrospect, it was my father driving me to a Walmart nearby to buy daily  
47 necessities.

48 Q: I was travelling in Kunming<sup>79</sup> before the Lunar New Year. I had just finished the  
49 examination for my master's degree and went to the city. It was 29<sup>th</sup> or 30<sup>th</sup> of  
50 December. My mother called me to ask me not going back. I asked for the reason and  
51 she said that there was a mysterious virus in Wuhan, causing pneumonia. I did not  
52 take it seriously and said that there would be a great gathering for the new year. If it  
53 was cancelled, then there was really something serious. But the gathering was not  
54 cancelled, and I thought it nothing big. So I came back to Wuhan. Otherwise I should  
55 have spent the Lunar New Year in Kunming.

56 S: The government did not reveal to its people. All the hearsay came from the

---

<sup>79</sup> A southern city of China.

---

57 neighborhoods, for example, the case of Dr. Li. So your mother heard of the “rumors”  
58 of Li.

59 Q: Yes. There was news about it.

60 S: From “Ping An Wuhan”. On 2<sup>nd</sup> January there were news on the rumors spread by  
61 Li, then he was summoned by the police station.

62 Q: But before that there were already news about it.

63 S: Tons of hearsay. It was the first question and it went well. We will be having a  
64 special question on Dr. Li. We are now focusing on your personal experience under  
65 the lockdown. So the 3 families you mentioned were living together all through the  
66 lockdown?

67 Q: Yes. On personal experiences? In fact my mental state changed a lot. Before the  
68 lockdown I was just feeling a little bit weird. And most of the people were thinking  
69 that since the government said nothing about it, it was okay. There was a turning point  
70 for me, on 13<sup>th</sup> maybe, should I check the exact date?

71 S: It would be way better.

72 Q: Okay, I will check it. After coming back to Wuhan I continued my work as an  
73 assistant teacher for an institution. But one day news came that the classes had to stop.  
74 Ah it was 20<sup>th</sup> January. I can send you screenshots of it. I received the notice from the  
75 institution that the courses will be online. By that time I felt that something serious  
76 really happened. I went back home I bought disinfection alcohol and thermometer.  
77 My mother did not take it seriously and said the I was over-reacting. I felt wronged. I  
78 had some foresights though. These things should be prepared with precaution. I began  
79 to believe that things were real by 20<sup>th</sup>, but I still did not think it was that severe until  
80 the lockdown was set on 23<sup>rd</sup>. Later when we were living in Huangpi we felt good,  
81 because in the downtown we were living in Hankou<sup>80</sup>.

82 S: It was the epicenter.

83 Q: Jinyintan Hospital<sup>81</sup> was exactly by the other side of the street. I can see it by now

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<sup>80</sup> The epicenter of the outbreak.

<sup>81</sup> The only hospital in Wuhan specializing on infectious diseases. The hospital was one of the most covid-stricken hospitals under the outbreak.

---

84 through the window. When I was in the home in Huangpi I felt that it was by luck,  
85 that I saw the news. If I missed the news we would have spent the lockdown in the  
86 downtown areas. When we 3 families lived together, we found it really precious  
87 because they are families that you would see once a year or even longer; but staying  
88 together for a long time also has shortcomings. I heard from many friends that people  
89 were all anxious under the lockdown and it was easy to quarrel with each other. There  
90 were frictions between different families. In the mid of March there was news that  
91 people with jobs could apply for a permission of going back to work. I applied for it  
92 because I missed my home. After spending months living in big families, I felt it  
93 would be better to live alone. But one advantage of living in rural areas was that we  
94 were not restricted of staying at home. We could have a walk in the village, though  
95 the village was locked down.

96 S: There was moving space, better than those living in the cities.

97 Q: Yes. We could also go fishing. We have a pond in the backyard. We even planted a  
98 tree.

99 S: That's good.

100 Q: In commemoration for the lockdown.

101 S: That was a good life, much better than mine. I was fed up with it.

102 Q: It was not that dooming in the villages. But there was no group buying.

103 S: Then how did you cope with the need for daily necessities?

104 Q: In the beginning we had storage for the Lunar New Year. When it was running out  
105 we began to eat vegetables grown by the villagers. But there was no meat. Sometimes  
106 we pledged the village managers to drive to the gas station nearby and buy only hams  
107 and instant noodles. Hams were even precious. Only kids could eat them. They were  
108 tasty.

109 S: So you could only have vegetables.

110 Q: Yes, the cat in our house was also running out of food. The delivery was down. We  
111 managed to contact individual resellers and have some deliveries.

112 S: Okay, let's move on to the next question. The first two were connected: under the  
113 lockdown we observed many absurdities, like Li Wenliang, like the Red Cross. Did

---

114 you feel that I would be living in a good mental state if putting the mobile phone  
115 aside? In your case you also mentioned that you went fishing and planting trees.

116 Q: Yes. There were plenty of emotional things online. If I were not watching mobile  
117 phones, I would be playing Mahjong with others. We were relaxed. But if I opened  
118 my mobile phone and read Weibo, I wanted to cry and was angry. Those cursing  
119 Wuhan, those on Li, etc. It was sad. **But yes, if not mobile phone, I would be just in  
120 the village and did not sympathize them.**

121 S: It was in the evening that he was reported death. Then the news said that he was  
122 still under rescue. In the midnight he was reported death again.

123 Q: Yes, we did hope that he could be rescued. But he died at last. We could do  
124 nothing about it. He was the first one reporting but he was wronged. We could thank  
125 him but he died.

126 S: Indeed it was painful. Without the mobile phones we were living happily. But on  
127 Weibo we turned angry.

128 Q: Yeah, including the case of Wuhan Diary.

129 S: We will be coming to it soon. The third question concerns a TV series called  
130 *Heroes in Harm's Way*. Did you watch it?

131 Q: No.

132 S: Could you explain why? I have never met one Wuhan people who watched it.

133 Q: Really? None? When was it released?

134 S: September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

135 Q: Before that was there a film also on Wuhan?

136 S: Yes, it was a documentary.

137 Q: I did not watch the series. I know it but it was not popular. And on the other hand  
138 as a person from Wuhan, we have already experienced the real thing. The things in the  
139 TV would be not true. There is no sense of watching it. It is just a propaganda for  
140 certain spirit. But we have experienced it and there is no need to watch the TV series  
141 [to comprehend the spirit]

142 S: Ok, so you think that the series serves for a reason rather than telling the truth?

143 Q: Yes.

---

144 S: Ok, the fourth question. We mentioned it several times about Dr. Li Wenliang.  
145 How much do you still remember him?

146 Q: It is a long time. My first impression on him was that there were rumors online. I  
147 did not know they were from Li. I only knew they were from a doctor. Later the  
148 ceremony of passing the year was not cancelled, and I started to think that it was  
149 really a rumor. But on the other hand, I felt it unnecessary for a doctor. A doctor has  
150 his professions. It could be a misunderstanding or something. Also I felt that the  
151 government was hiding something. And there were screenshots posted online on him  
152 warning his fellows about the virus. He did not want his fellow friends and families  
153 getting harmed. And the news said that he was spreading rumors and summoned.

154 Q: Later it was the outbreak, and there were many complaining for him on Weibo.  
155 Yes, and he has a Weibo account.

156 S: His Weibo is a holy place now.

157 Q: **Yes, I remember. He continued to share his life. He was also one of those**  
158 **fighting on the frontline. Many came to support him. I was one of them. Also his**  
159 **wife's account became popular.**

160 S: Yes.

161 Q: Or he was posting on his wife's account? I am not sure.

162 S: His own account ended by his post on being tested positive.

163 Q: Yes. But he was quite positive towards life by that time.

164 S: Yes.

165 Q: He was also watching the news from the frontline. But we did not expect him  
166 infected. Though it was dangerous, we really did hope he be safe. But he was infected  
167 and news was abound. Then he died. His wife did post some response to the news. His  
168 name also appeared on some media after the peak of the outbreak. There was even a  
169 documentary about him. What was that name? *Our Examples*, something like that.

170 S: He was in one of those documentaries.

171 Q: I am not sure. In any case he was referred to as a hero. He became symbolic. This  
172 is all what I remembered. **But please tell me what happened later!**

173 S: The central government commissioned a panel to investigate this one day after his

---

174 death. Two weeks later the result came out as the malfunction of the police station. It  
175 was the end of the story. In Qingming Festival, his grave was forbidden of visiting  
176 because of the lockdown, and his last post became popular, with comments even until  
177 now.

178 Q: I remember he attached a doge emoji on his post. He was positive towards life.

179 S: Okay cool. That's all about Li. My next question concerns *Wuhan Diary*, which  
180 you also mentioned. I believe you also know that the book is not published in China  
181 mainland.

182 Q: Yes, I was following it. But I did not have an in-depth understanding of the book  
183 and the author. I only saw comments on her.

184 S: What have you seen?

185 **Q: She did not publish the book within Chinese borders but abroad. I do not**  
186 **know it was conspiracy or something else. [I do not know] that the happenings**  
187 **by that time were really so, or just exaggeration.**

188 **S: Then?**

189 **Q: It made people in Wuhan angry. I remember that I was among those who**  
190 **criticized her.**

191 **S: You were one of them?**

192 **Q: Many people forwarded the post commenting on what she did. It was**  
193 **basically about the fact that she did not report real happenings and did not**  
194 **sympathize those. She was just making names out of the tragedy. And what's**  
195 **more, she published the book abroad which will do no good to both China and**  
196 **Chinese people. It hurts the feelings of the people in Wuhan. That's what I**  
197 **remember.**

198 S: What else do you remember?

199 Q: Not much.

200 S: There was an open letter from a student on senior high to Fang Fang, do you  
201 remember?

202 Q: Not quite.

203 S: Ok it is not a problem.



---

204 Q: Please brief it to me.

205 S: When Fang Fang was under the flashlight and the book was published overseas, an  
206 open letter was online.

207 Q: I found it.

208 **Q: By the time of the outbreak some netizens cursed people of Wuhan for they**  
209 **eating bats. Was Wuhan under battalion online by that time? I was once**  
210 **retaliating those curses on Weibo.**

211 **S: When I was back [in Tallinn] my neighbor asked me whether we eat bats for**  
212 **real. I was embarrassed. I said that I don't know how does the bat taste. I only**  
213 **represent myself; I don't eat bats.**

214 **Q: Who would be willing to get infected? We were all suffering from the virus,**  
215 **why did they curse Wuhan people? Have we made clear of the origin of the**  
216 **virus?**

217 S: It is hard. On the one hand there are many variants. On the other hand, in the  
218 beginning of the outbreak, on 1<sup>st</sup>, January, the Huanan Marker was already  
219 disinfected. It is hard to get evidence.

220 Q: But there are rumors. We all do not know which one is true. But it coincided with  
221 the Military World Games, didn't it?

222 S: We hope it be a coincidence. Okay, this is the last question: do you think that China  
223 succeeded in combatting with the virus, comparing to other countries?

224 Q: Succeeded, or a Success?

225 S: Comparing to other countries. I did not say it was the end or still going on. I mean,  
226 comparing to other countries.

227 Q: It is a success. The details? That's my opinion.

228 S: I am eager to hear that.

229 Q: I think that on the one hand it links to the collectivism and the bond between  
230 family and the country. People will not hold negative feelings against the collective  
231 management concerning the outbreak of virus, which made the management easier.  
232 On the other hand nobody dared to go outside in the early stage of the outbreak. Also,  
233 **we are led by the Communist Party and the Party indeed functioned greatly.**

---

234 Wuhan could not stand with the outbreak alone and the orders from the central  
235 government were indeed more reasonable. The function of the Party was immense.  
236 Moreover, the sympathies we received outside of Wuhan were also important. I was  
237 frightened in the beginning of the outbreak, even though I was in Huangpi. I can tell  
238 from the posts of my friends. We were all frightened.

239 **By the time when the lockdown was announced, we felt that we were forsaken,**  
240 **rather than being saved.** We did not know certain policies. We felt as if we were  
241 forsaken by the world. It was chaotic for a couple of days after the lockdown. We all  
242 did not know what to do. We grabbed everything in the supermarkets. It was scary.  
243 Under a collective management, including the announcement from the government,  
244 we were reassured. They updated what they were doing, and there were many warm-  
245 hearted people wanting to donate for us. All these positive energies made us feel that  
246 we were not forsaken, we could be saved. Those fighting on the frontline were  
247 protecting us, protecting the country, and we should cooperate. I believe many would  
248 agree with me.

249 Q: This is our country. Comparing to other countries I believe that those countries  
250 were boasting freedom. Our freedom is different from theirs. We have the freedom  
251 under a reasonable framework, whereas their freedom is an absolute one, relatively.  
252 When their freedom is under threat, it is of course hard to govern, considering some  
253 other complex factors. The policies made by the government were of course  
254 concerning their pursuit of freedom and were loose, at least in certain periods. I do not  
255 know about the details in different countries respectively. They do not wear masks.  
256 Behaviors are different [comparing to Chinese] and the governments are taking  
257 different policies [comparing to the Chinese government]. They do not have forceful  
258 managements. Statistics also tell the same thing, including the death rates. Let me  
259 think, what else?

260 S: Take your time.

261 Q: Yes, another one is the medical facilities. In the peak of the outbreak, we tried or  
262 best to save those infected, and they did not need to pay for the treatment. Some  
263 countries might not have the medical resources and people were just being infected

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264 and staying at their homes. There was indeed same problem in Wuhan by that time  
265 when medical recourses were running short. But if the resources were abounded, we  
266 would try our best. Some other countries were not doing it that way. **Which country**  
267 **talked about herd immunity? Was it UK?**

268 S: Yes, the UK.

269 Q: It was ridiculous. It did make some sense, but anti-human somehow.

270 S: Yes.

271 Q: A democracy that cannot guarantee its citizens to live. In this regard we are  
272 successful, from the perspective of people-oriented ideas.

273 S: There are no more questions. What else you would like to add?

274 Q: Are there some points interesting to you? I can elaborate.

275 S: I am more focusing on what you remember. There is no need to emphasize on  
276 something. What else?

277 Q: It suddenly came to me that my university went popular. I felt honorable by that  
278 time. The dormitories were used as Fang Cang. It was 10<sup>th</sup> February. Our teachers  
279 went there to prepare.

280 S: Yes, 10<sup>th</sup> February. A list of universities and schools were used as Fang Cang, yes.

281 Q: Many donated to my university. Nurses and doctors of the uni-hospital were  
282 fighting on the frontline. A medical student from my university died in the front. Was  
283 she nurse?

284 S: I also had such impressions. What else?

285 Q: Nope.

286 S: Ok so this interview is over. Thank you very much! According to social work you  
287 will also receive a pack of milk or dolls or something. Unfortunately it is online and it  
288 turns impossible.

289 Q: It does not matter.

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## 2. Interview with W

*W, female, 20 years old, is a bachelor student studying Croatian Philology in mainland China. She was under self-isolation after the Winter Olympics in China, when this interview was taken.*

S: Okay let's start. First question, were you living alone or with friends or families under the lockdown?

W: With families.

S: And details?

W: With my father and mother.

S: How did you feel generally?

W: How did I feel... Is that an open question? Let me think about it. Generally speaking it was okay. I was just feeling not that well mentally. Physically everything was fine. We did not need to worry about daily necessities, and living in our own home was fine. But because of not being allowed to go outside and have a walk in the community, our mental states were affected. It was painful though. But basic lives were secured and there was no blackout or something. And food was sufficient. The main problem, I believe, was the mental states. We were frightened of getting infected. We had nothing to do; after dinner we were just lying on our beds and started to worry about the situation. But apart from that everything was alright.

S: So your life was not affected massively?

W: No. Things could be a little more expensive, but basically there were not shortages of the things we wanted.

S: According to what you have said, you mean that life itself had not changed a lot, but emotionally it would be different. Can you specify wherefrom was the change?

W: You mean what changed our emotions? One thing was the internet. In the early phases of the lockdown, many cursed Wuhan for spreading the virus. I was one of them cursing back on Weibo.

S: So you were one of them?

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31 W: Yes. I was in emotional ups and downs by that time. It was easy for me to get angry.  
32 Days later it turned better. But still in a low mood. Nothing could cheer you up, I just  
33 could not laugh. In Friends<sup>82</sup> people started to support Wuhan people, I sometimes  
34 commented negative things below. I started to influence others with my negative  
35 mentality. I did not know why but I was just down. And the feeling came from online.  
36 I was living with families and had no contact with outside world. The only place you  
37 could breathe the air was the balcony. It was winter and it was chilling. Quite opposite  
38 my balcony there were people being infected and transported to hospital. Then I was  
39 not allowed to go to the balcony. I was long in a restricted area and the things online  
40 affected me a lot. My father even planned to drive his car to break through the lockdown,  
41 but we did not do it.

42 S: Hereby we come to the second question. You also mentioned that most of the  
43 negative feelings came from online, right? No matter the curses in the early stages or  
44 the people supporting Wuhan. Did you feel that your life would be way better if you  
45 put your mobile phone aside?

46 W: Let me remember. You mean doing other things?

47 S: I mean staying away from the screen and not surfing online.

48 W: I was surfing online all the time and I was highly exposed to the contents online.

49 S: So you did not cut off the information.

50 W: I did. Before going to sleep I put my phone away. But the worry haunted me and I  
51 could not go to sleep. I did not watch my phone but I just could not sleep.

52 S: Then where was the worry from?

53 W: Many. It sounds abstract but I think it came from the fear of the unknown, **yet I still**  
54 **held hope for future life.** I am a little reluctant to say but by that time I was in love. I  
55 thought that I could go back to Beijing to meet my boyfriend before the Valentine's Day.  
56 I did have plans. My worry was that I did not know what the virus was, including the  
57 fear of being infected. There were certain symptoms of the infection, and I was  
58 extremely down by that time, which begot many symptoms, same as those of infection.

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<sup>82</sup> A place for friends on WeChat to share their lives, like Instagram.

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59 It worried me whether I was infected. There was nothing to distract me and I was  
60 thinking about the infection all day long. If I was not mistaking, there would be a live  
61 from Marilyn Manson in Hong Kong. I planned to go to that performance. I was a  
62 freshman in university by that time and still got hope. I even planned to go to Macau.  
63 But all these were cancelled. **Thence I do hope that the outbreak be under control**  
64 **and life come back to track, that I could live my normal live.**

65 **S: So you were worrying about the uncertainty of life going back to track.**

66 W: Yes.

67 S: Now comes the third question. It is about a TV series named *Heroes in Harm's Way*.  
68 Have you watched it?

69 W: No.

70 S: Could you explain why? Or you just do not care.

71 W: I do not know about it.

72 S: So you do not care.

73 W: No.

74 S: Ok let us skip it. The next question is about Dr. Li Wenliang. How much do you still  
75 remember him?

76 W: It is weird but I remember two points. The first was that I went to a live in Wuhan  
77 by the end of 2020, and one of the sections was changed to a chapter commemorating  
78 him. The second was that his account on Weibo is following a blogger, whom I was  
79 following. **He was a normal person as you and me.** I do not remember about the  
80 details but I remember he forwarded a ballot post for winning a mobile phone. All these  
81 sound weird. I did not remember which hospital he was working in but I do remember  
82 he was punished by the authority for spreading rumors. It was December and I saw a  
83 paper indicating his punishment and an official announcement. He has a daughter, quite  
84 young.

85 S: So what you remember is all his details of his life, as well as other information you  
86 observed on other platforms, then you got to know what happened on him, is that right?

87 W: Yes.

88 S: Okay. Let us move onto next question. It is also about a person. Do you still

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89 remember Fang Fang?

90 W: Yes, I know. I did not read her writings, but I know she wrote *Wuhan Diary*. But I  
91 did not read it. I remember it clearly that she was under great debate. The group chat of  
92 my classmates of senior high was also debating about it. By that time I was extremely  
93 down so I did not read them. I refused to receive it.

94 S: So you were not reading her posts on Weibo and the book later published.

95 W: I did not read them.

96 S: Her book was not published in China but published overseas quickly. Do you know  
97 about that?

98 W: Yes.

99 S: You have your own ideas or?

100 W: I do not want to comment.

101 S: Now we come to the last question. Do you believe that comparing to other countries,  
102 China's policies against the virus are a success?

103 W: I think it is a success.

104 S: In details?

105 W: How to put it? By giving out part of personal rights the society was stabilized. At  
106 least comparing to other countries, China's new cases were under control, except the  
107 beginning of the outbreak. It was under control in a larger scale. It was extremely  
108 serious in the beginning, and relatively serious now. But most of the time it was under  
109 control and we were relatively safe.

110 S: You mean that comparing to other countries China did a good job in containing the  
111 virus.

112 W: Yes.

113 S: Okay the questions are over. What else would you like to add?

114 W: What else? Well, it [coronavirus] is indeed under control. But everyone is living in  
115 pain, it's painful! From 2020, a fifth of my time is under quarantine, I am locked up in  
116 a cell, in every of its sense. It is painful, really painful, I feel bad.

117 **It is painful to me. Is this a life that humankind shall live? You know what? As a**  
118 **person from Wuhan, I am really afraid of it [coronavirus], really afraid! In Wuhan,**

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119 among the friends of your friends, there must be someone who was infected. One  
120 of my elder sister's high school classmates was infected, and he was in Fang Cang.  
121 He was preparing for his master studies and was interviewed by journalists on TV.  
122 It is so close to me. I am afraid until now. I will still shiver when I remember those  
123 days under the lockdown. You will never know what would happen tomorrow.  
124 I am really afraid. You know what? The impact and harm that it gave me is  
125 unerasable. Even 10 years after, when it finally disappears, or even when I am in  
126 nursing houses at 80, I will still wear a mask and speak to those young people about  
127 the things that happened before their birth. It is scary, you know?

128 Some said that the virus is not that fatal. I was a volunteer of the Winter Olympics. It  
129 was actually dangerous, and I was in self-isolation for 21 days. Because I was dangerous.  
130 The Olympic village is a dangerous place for accommodating the foreigners. There  
131 were positive cases, including the one that I served as the translator. I was frightened. I  
132 pondered over it before coming to volunteer because I was just afraid. I was really afraid.  
133 In the building behind the place where I live there was one infected and transported [to  
134 the hospital]. My father allowed me going to the balcony no more. I was continuously  
135 under the fear of the virus. In the past two years 20 percent of the time was I under self-  
136 isolation. But 100 percent of the time was I in fear. I do not know what the others think  
137 but for me, as a person from Wuhan, it is my lifetime nightmare. I cannot get over with  
138 it all my life. It pains, it is forever there, you know?

139 When I was in Winter Olympics, I was always wearing protective suit with N95 masks.  
140 In any situation I was wearing them correctly, no matter how long it took. It felt like  
141 reading a thriller novel, you wrapped yourself in your bed, though it may not protect  
142 you, you will feel better. The one I was serving did not like me. He thought that it cut  
143 off communication between us. But I was afraid. There were positive cases in his group.  
144 Another volunteer was from Nan Chang<sup>83</sup>. He did not care. He did not even disinfect  
145 himself.

146 S: Do you believe the difference comes from the fact that you are from Wuhan and he

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<sup>83</sup> The capital city of Jiang Xi Province, adjacent to Hubei.



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147 is from other places?

148 W: Partly. It should be part of the reasons. Were he from Wuhan he could not be as silly

149 as such.

150 S: Okay I got it. What else would you like to add?

151 W: Let me think of it. It is painful. I do not want to live.

152 S: Stay strong.

153 W: What else would you like to know? For example my posts on Weibo by that time?

154 S: I will check it by myself.

155 W: You cannot. There are more than 3,800 posts and you can only see those in the past

156 half year.

157 S: Okay. And I think that is the end of the interview. We can discuss more about it later.

158 W: Okay.

159

160 **Illustrations from W<sup>84</sup>**



161

162 Figure 38, shot from W's balcony. Medical workers at the entrance of the community.

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<sup>84</sup> The usage of the 2 figures is under the permission of W.



163

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Figure 39, Volunteers downstairs delivering vegetables for residents of the building.

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### 3. Interview with D

*D, female, 29 years old, is a free-lancer. Her main expertise is on translation between English and Chinese. Her grandmother died from Covid-19 under the lockdown.*

S: Okay the recording starts. There is no problem with the devices. My first question is, whether you lived alone, or with families?

D: I was living with my families, my mom, and a cat.

S: Please brief your personal experience under the 76-day lockdown.

D: My personal experience? A brief one?

S: It could be not that brief.

D: I am speaking from now and to be honest I did not pay much attention to personal experiences, and the reflection could be not that precise. But what impressed me was that I was angry when the lockdown was announced, and later it became worries and unease. My mother was working in a hospital, and it made me worry about her safety. Friends on WeChat not chatting for centuries came to me to ask about the situation, which surprised me. Later I turned to accept that the lockdown would not be lifted in few days so I took part in some works in the community, managing group-buying or something.

By that time people in the community were helpful, and everyone got acquainted. For years we have been living here and we have not been familiar, and suddenly we were all helping each other. Then it was the end of the lockdown. During the lockdown I had the feeling of having no choice but accepting it. Not to mention that my grandmother passed away. There were many tragedies under the lockdown, reported by news. I felt it cruel. **Up until now when my mother goes to buy cat food, she buys them in piles, out of the fear of the lockdown. It is imported cat food, 30 Yuan each. Human food was easy to buy, but cat food was hard under the lockdown, not to mention when the cat is hungry or at ill. Even though the delivery is not restricted now, she has the tendency of storing them. She never makes it clear that this is because of the fear of the lockdown, but the emotion of “the unease when lacking it” is kept.**

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31 S: Okay, the second question. Under the lockdown did you feel that life would be much  
32 easier when you put mobile phones aside, since mobile phones are the only source of  
33 information?

34 D: I did not think about it, but I will reflect it for now. In my memory I did not stop  
35 using phones or have the idea of putting them away. **Because I need the live news to**  
36 **know about the outbreak.** My mother needed to go to hospitals for work so I was  
37 concerning the issue. And by the same time there were many memes of joking or  
38 recreating regarding the outbreak, for example, a man fishing in his tank. These memes  
39 might turn my attention from melancholic situation to a brighter place.

40 And also I mentioned that my friends were always chatting with me. So I used phones  
41 quite often and did not have the intentionality of stop using it. It was not a burden, but  
42 a well-needed source of information.

43 S: Got it. Let us move onto the next. There was a TV series named *Heroes in Harm's*  
44 *Way*. [laugh] You can start to laugh now. I also want to. So have you seen it? And do  
45 you think that it tells the truth?

46 D: I did not watch it so I don't know. But I am rejective towards it, because I assume  
47 that it cannot. It belongs to "main melody", and so-called "main melody", or grand  
48 narratives in terminology, is always covering individual tragedies. So I refuse to watch  
49 it. I assume it cannot, and I cannot tell you exactly whether or not.

50 S: I can tell you it doesn't. I was also rejective since we had same experience. But for  
51 the sake of my thesis I have to.

52 D: "The most beautiful"<sup>85</sup>, it indicates that it is not something good. The title reminds  
53 me of the "most beautiful female teacher in the mountains", what is it?<sup>86</sup>

54 S: Yes.

55 D: So everybody knows it. **It was with an insidious intent.** Please include this in the  
56 interview transcript, do not edit it.

57 S: Insidious intent, cool. Okay, next question, it is about Dr. Li Wenliang. How much

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<sup>85</sup> The name of the TV series is literally translated as "the most beautiful back-goers".

<sup>86</sup> D was referring to a trafficked woman working as a teacher in the villages, in which a man bought her as his wife. She was nominated as the "most beautiful female teacher in the mountains" and her past of being trafficked became public.



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58 do you still remember him?

59 D: My impression on Dr. Li? It could be a bad one from my perspectives: **he is still**  
60 **being called as “the Whistle Blower”. His name, Li Wen Liang, withered in front**  
61 **of the name of “whistle blower”. Many people use the words “whistle blower” to**  
62 **speak of greatness, rather than the true stories happening on him.** But I am different.  
63 He worked in the Central Hospital, where one of my mother’s colleagues was working.  
64 He warned the public in early stages of the outbreak and was punished for spreading  
65 rumors. The news was suppressed by the government. A colleague of my mother also  
66 experienced the similar things. It was impressive. Another thing that I remember was  
67 his wife. I did not follow the news but I do remember that his family was traumatized.  
68 He has a wife and a child.

69 S: Do you remember that he died twice?

70 D: Yes, politics played over emotions. Push the emotions to the climax and say that he  
71 is still under rescue. And he died again.

72 S: Yes. How do I put it? No matter the series or the story of Dr. Li, I felt extremely  
73 traumatic when writing about it.

74 D: Is there somebody remembering his story of dying twice initiatively?

75 S: No. They remember it after me mentioning it.

76 D: I believe that it’s obvious: **the media did this deliberately. There were no follow-**  
77 **ups.** Neither his story nor his family has follow-ups. **It must be forgotten.** It is cruel. I  
78 just remember it.

79 S: I will write about it. The next question is about Fang Fang’s *Wuhan Diary*. She did  
80 not publish her book in China but overseas. The remarks on it from the society are  
81 extremized. Some believe that she is a traitor and gives western powers evidence to  
82 criticize China, whereas others believe that she speaks for the mass. How do you think  
83 of it?

84 D: First of all I never read it, either in Chinese or in English. I do not know what she  
85 writes. I did read many remarks on her, but I refuse to read them.

86 S: Okay, here comes the final question. And you can add something if you want. My  
87 last question is, do you think China succeeded in containing the spread of the

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coronavirus, comparing to other countries?

D: China versus the West, what do you mean by “West”?

S: I didn’t say so. I mean comparing to other countries.

D: China and non-China, okay. I was in Wuhan by that time and all what I could read were the news from the official tones. According to this I think that in 2020, at least in the first half of 2020, China “cruelly” contained the spread of the coronavirus successfully, despite that the policies were infuriating. Of course there were mismanagements and malfunctioning. But it contained the outbreak effectively. If we compare this to other countries, those that were affected earlier, including America, managed it much slower. They did it underwhelmingly. I mean, containing the spread of the virus.

But from other perspectives, for example, after 2020, a year had passed since the outbreak. China is still pertaining to its “zero policy”, well actually till yesterday it remained so; yesterday the government said that the government should not insist on its “zero policy”. This “zero policy” is unreasonable. It is awful.

For example, nucleic acid testing is required for everyone. There are millions of people in Wuhan, and the governance cannot cover all the management in all aspects, which caused a great fracture in between. There are so many things unreasonable, for example, locking down a community or shutting down the restaurants. People become sensitive of the infection. Once there is news that there are new cases, the restaurants of the whole street will close by themselves. Lives are less convenient, too. It makes me sick. But the UK just declared that they would open the borders, whereas we are not allowed to go outside China for 2 years.

It makes me curious and confused: this absolute openness versus our “zero policy”: which one is better? What exactly does the spread of the virus look like? Is it really like what the Chinese government says that it is serious, and one single case would lockdown the whole district, or the so-called “herd immunity”, and thousands of cases do not matter? I am confused.

And about the vaccination. There is also a big difference. China has a big population. Even 85% is a big number of vaccines. But take Israel, as an example. The vaccination

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118 rate in Israel is 96% or something, and almost everyone receives their first dose. Now  
119 that different countries have different policies after vaccination. People in America were  
120 parading that vaccination is government conspiring for cyborgs or something else. I  
121 myself, as a family of a medical worker, believe in this and I think that China did a great  
122 job in forceful vaccination.

123 But the forceful vaccination, of course, goes against what the Western bloc calls human  
124 rights. However, forceful vaccination is a good thing to me. Ah it's not forceful  
125 vaccination, I need to add something.

126 The office will call your phones incessantly. One of my friends had this experience.  
127 People from the management office will just go to your doors and ask you to get  
128 vaccinated every day. I delayed my vaccination for months because I was suspicious  
129 and wanted to see others' reactions. But they continued to call me every day, not to  
130 mention that you will not have a green pass, which means that you cannot go into the  
131 shopping malls or take public transport. It is an indirect forceful vaccination. **The**  
132 **government is alarming you that the outbreak hasn't ended, the street slogans, for**  
133 **example, or the well-equipped medical workers in the exit of your community. You**  
134 **need to scan your green pass everywhere. Most of the people on the streets were**  
135 **still wearing masks, though the city has been free from new cases for a long time.**

136 S: Ok, I have finished asking the questions I prepared. Do you have something else to  
137 share? Or something that I did not mention, but you are eager to say.

138 D: I am thinking of something that made me angry. In the very beginning of the outbreak,  
139 in February or March, when medical resources were in short, there were many scandals  
140 about bureaucracy. **I was also interested. The sad thing was that I believed in it**  
141 **instantly, I did not think that those officials would refuse them.** But on the other had  
142 I want to know how many of those scandals were true, with evidence. And whether  
143 were there follow-ups. This manifests a big gap between the officials and normal people.  
144 There were no follow-ups usually. But it impressed me that there was news that once  
145 there were new medical materials, they would be provided to officials.

146 S: I have a list of all the happenings during the lockdown at hand and I followed nearly  
147 all of them. Which one would you like to know?

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148 D: About the distribution of medical resources.

149 S: Ok, I will start from the Red Cross. [laugh] you started to laugh, you know what I  
150 am to talk about. It was January 29<sup>th</sup>, when all the hospitals, including the hospital where  
151 your mother was working in, the Zhong Nan Hospital, the Central Hospital, were calling  
152 for help, that all medical equipment was in short urgently and wanted to receive  
153 donations from the society. And the Red Cross of Hubei Province published the  
154 distribution, the hospital where your mother was working received only more than 300  
155 surgical masks, whereas more than 30,000 masks went to private hospitals. And the  
156 bank statement indicating financial donations was a forfeit. The second day, on January  
157 30<sup>th</sup>, a doctor posted on Weibo and other social platforms that the medical equipment  
158 was not in short, but there was nothing to protect them. 350 tons of vegetables donated  
159 by Shandong Province appeared on the shelves of supermarkets for selling. And the  
160 Red Cross stated that they never received such donation. On the same day, the  
161 Municipal Commercial Bureau announced that the vegetables were hard to keep and  
162 via supermarkets they could be delivered to citizens. All the money would be used to  
163 contain the virus.

164 D: So they donated it?

165 S: There were no follow-ups. On January 31<sup>st</sup>, the medical workers of a hospital went  
166 to the storehouse of the Red Cross to receive medical equipment but were refused, for  
167 the process of application was so complicated.

168 On the same day the Red Cross replied that it did not have the right to distribute these  
169 materials. The rights belonged to Wuhan Municipal Health Commission. On the first  
170 day of February, a reporter went to the headquarter of the Red Cross and was expelled  
171 by the safeguards. And a car with the number plate “鄂A0260W”<sup>87</sup> claimed that it was  
172 the car for a leader, transporting masks for him.

173 D: This is what I remembered!

174 S: This was the news on February 1<sup>st</sup>. It has follow-ups. The leader was investigated.  
175 You know that in the mid of February the leader group in Wuhan and Hubei was

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<sup>87</sup> It refers to Hubei Province.



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176 changed.

177 D: Where did the 4 men go? They were famed as “Fantastic 4”, no? Or just they changed  
178 a place to be officials.

179 S: They went to other places to be officials. Okay that’s the end of the interview. We  
180 can have some chats later.

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#### 4. Interview with Shepherd

*Shepherd, male, 26 years old, is a student of anthropology in mainland China. He was in Shen Zhen, which was under another lockdown when this interview took place.*

S: Ok so let's start. The first question is about the lockdown itself. Did you live alone or with friends or families?

Shepherd: With families.

S: In details?

Shepherd: I was living in two places, both with families. The first one was the rural house with my grandmother and my father.

And later I was preparing for the interview of master application and needed some materials. For a better environment I was living with my uncle.

S: So you were living with them?

Shepherd: My uncle, my aunt, my brother and sister-in-law, as well as my niece.

S: Can you describe the experience living with them under the lockdown?

Shepherd: Family relationships are important. My relationship with my father is not that good. We had to live under the same roof by that time. We had conflicts. It was the time of the result of the master examination<sup>88</sup>. It was 20<sup>th</sup> of January I believe. It coincided with the day that Zhong Nanshan said that the virus is infectious. The dooming atmosphere and the pressure of the examination deepened the pressure between me and my father. I forgot the exact date when I moved to my uncle's. If you need it I can check it up.

The situation was better, because the relationship was not that intense. I was preparing for the interview and there were not many situations for communication. I am of this kind, closing myself to do something all day long. So the lockdown did not affect me that much. There were two phases: the first one was that I was living in the rural house. The outbreak was just reported and there was fear. It was impressive that numbers of

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<sup>88</sup> In China, bachelor students need to take an examination first for applying a master degree; those that score higher than the line are introduced to an interview, which leads to the final list of enrolled students.

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new cases and even deaths were rising, that the medical system was collapsing, that the medical workers burst into tears. All of them intensified that unease and fear. I closed my door every day. We all did not know whether the virus could pass through the door. It was intangible and haunting the city. Even at home I was worrying about whether I would get infected via nose and mouth. This was the time of most fear. But later, maybe the later stages of the lockdown. I forget how long Wuhan in lockdown was. Two months, or three? We became numb towards the new cases. There were reports every day. Let it be.

**In my own words, I was not that afraid of it. Quite before the news confirming that the virus was infectious and its explosion, the elders in my family did not realize its severity. But I read the news online and felt that it would be serious, even reaching the severity of the SARS outbreak in 2003.** Before the real outbreak I was wearing masks. The elders in my family were not taking care. Later when it became severe, everyone was taking it seriously.

When the lockdown was lifted, we were all cautious of the virus. But me in turn, was reassured and just protected myself in the correct way. It became nothing serious. There were still restrictions after the lockdown. I remember that you need a verification report from the community you live that you were working. Only those with jobs were allowed to go outside. I was a student. How did I make it? It was a little more complicated than those with jobs. I was telling them that I was going outside to meet my tutor, something like that. And it came with restrictions. I should come back in 2 or 4 hours. I forgot the details. But I was planning to meet friends and even went to internet bars. I was calmed. I may be talking too much.

S: This is what I want. I want to see how you remember the whole thing.

Shepherd: Okay I will go by myself.

S: You also mentioned that there was fear in the early stages of the lockdown. You could not verify it by yourself because of the restrictions. But you knew what was happening from the news online. Like what you had said, the day your score came out coincided with the day when Zhong said that the virus is infectious. Think of it, the information that made you fear, made you take it seriously was all from online. Did you feel that

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59 your life would be much better by putting your mobile phone aside, free from the  
60 information ridiculous, painful, absurd?

61 Shepherd: I did not try so. I used my PC and phones every day.

62 S: It does not matter. Here comes the next question. Do you know that there is a TV  
63 series called *Heroes in Harm's Way*? Did you watch it?

64 Shepherd: No.

65 S: Do you believe that it can represent the truth?

66 Shepherd: Of course it cannot. The official tones shall hold certain rhetoric and cannot  
67 tell the truth. By that time there was Fang Fang's *Wuhan Diary*, and there were many  
68 tragic happenings under the lockdown. Let me think. Let us take the deliveryman as an  
69 example, they volunteered to transport the medical resources or those with needs. The  
70 stories of little men. Official tones cannot include this. It will attach its political goals  
71 in it.

72 S: I did mention it in my thesis that the marginalized narratives were effaced under the  
73 pressure of grand narratives.

74 Shepherd: The political propaganda is not merely grand narratives. It will also include  
75 some minor issues. But they all serve for the grand narratives. It cannot go against it.

76 S: I also mentioned that those effaced were not only the personal narratives in the  
77 corners, but also some famous ones. For example, the case of Dr. Li Wenliang. How  
78 much do you still remember him?

79 Shepherd: My first impression was that he was wronged as the "whistle-provider". He  
80 pointed out first that there was a virus spreading because he worked in hospital. He  
81 found it serious. I remember he first warned those around him, and people were all  
82 alerted. But the government thought that he was spreading rumors. Was he summoned  
83 to the police station?

84 S: Yes he was.

85 Shepherd: Later he was infected and died. Many came to mourn him, even now in 2022.  
86 I remember some analogize it as an incident in Paris, but I cannot remember it precisely.

87 S: In fact the "whistle-provider" is Ai Fen, the one who provided the samples of the

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88 coronavirus. *Ren Wu*<sup>89</sup>, a monthly journal, had an interview with her and it was censored.  
89 Then there was a carnival online, transmitting the interview in different languages, even  
90 in morse code. It was carnivorous, but I did not discuss it this time.

91 Shepherd: I was reading Agamben by that time. I wrote an article about the outbreak of  
92 the coronavirus. And I also mentioned Li, in capital letters LWL [to keep away  
93 censorship]. I also mentioned her. But I cannot remember it exactly, I need to check it  
94 up.

95 S: It does not matter. Let's continue. How much do you remember his death?

96 Shepherd: I am not confident with my remembrance. And I do not care the online news  
97 that much. **On the one hand I do not want to be affected by the recreational news**  
98 **online; on the other hand there are many negative information. It is like a**  
99 **psychological defense system, defending me from reading it and I was reluctant to**  
100 **pay much attention to it. The death of Li could be in the same way.**

101 S: Do you remember that he died twice?

102 Shepherd: Yes there was such a thing. I remember public opinions were changes several  
103 times and his death was one of them.

104 S: There were two. The first one was his last post saying that he was infected, and the  
105 second one was his death.

106 Ok let us pass. The next question is about Fang Fang. You also mentioned her earlier.  
107 The public opinion towards her is polarized. Some believe that she speaks for the mass  
108 and the others think that she is providing evidence for the West to attack China;s policies.  
109 What do you think of her?

110 Shepherd: In fact I did not read the diary but the file is in my phone. The text was  
111 censored. My ideas? I did not pay much attention so it was not impressive to me. From  
112 my perspective it counters against the grand narratives. In other words, she was the one  
113 that narrated those belonging to our daily lives, free from the grand narratives, to the  
114 mass. She is a famous writer. So I hold positive remarks. One of my colleagues, from  
115 Xiang Yang<sup>90</sup> does not like it. When we were having lectures online, I remember it was

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<sup>89</sup> It means "persons", or "somebodies"

<sup>90</sup> Another city in Hubei Province.

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116 political anthropology, our teacher mentioned it. And my colleague did not think that  
117 Fang Fang was doing the right thing.

118 Basically he thinks that Wuhan did its best under that circumstance, and *Wuhan Diary*  
119 would cause negative effects. I forgot what exactly he said but he did not like it. He is  
120 a supporter of grand narratives, reading things such as “world system theory” and  
121 learning sociology. My teacher did not agree and said how can you believe so. They are  
122 shattered memories and I cannot express them thoroughly.

123 S: They are the most precious. You can look through it. Cool, here comes the last  
124 question. Do you think that China’s effort of containing the virus is a success? Or,  
125 succeeded?

126 Shepherd: Regarding to the situation in China right now, I think it is successful. The  
127 policies of China to contain the virus are actually strict, too strict, with serious  
128 influences. Not only economically, but also in daily lives. It makes people’s lives less  
129 easy and set a halt to the society. I might be exaggerating but the impacts are immense.  
130 I study anthropology. The pandemic affected my discipline deeply, because we need  
131 field work. Because of the pandemic, many classmates, including me, could not proceed  
132 with our own topics and changed topic many times.

133 Many had plans to go abroad but gave up because of it. In our department only one  
134 went to Spain; all the others were in China. Ideally it would be better to have field works  
135 in a foreign place. But most of us ended up with a research in Beijing, or in their  
136 hometowns.

137 But now we are having the outbreak again. Those were in Beijing cannot come back. I  
138 have already lowered my standards by staying at school, but I cannot enter the campus  
139 because of the outbreak. I cannot even take railways. The influence on daily life leads  
140 to a change in public opinions online.

141 When it comes to the remarks on the covid situation in China, we compare it with that  
142 of abroad. **Of course it is the result of governmental propaganda. We always say**  
143 **that in America, there are more than a million cases with death tolls rising. In**  
144 **Europe we say that the UK is proposing a “herd immunity”,** without an outcome.  
145 In return there is a sharp comparison. There is outbreak in China but it was under control

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much better than foreign countries. Under the comparison people would say that China controlled the spread of the virus way better than others. It is under control, and it is not costly because of the free nucleic test. But there was a change in public opinions. I am in Shenzhen now and there are many showing their unrest against the strict control. For example, I watched a video online. In Shangsha Streets of Futian District, the most infected district in Shenzhen, there is outbreak since the beginning of the Lunar New Year. Let me think when. It was around the beginning of March and the previous outbreak was basically under control. However because of some people from Hongkong smuggling into Shenzhen, as is known by the public, the situation escalated. Of course the official news will not talk about it. The information was transmitted one by one. The news will only say that those that reported the smuggling will have a reward of 100 thousand or 150 thousand, even 500 thousand. But we do know that there was smuggling. In WeChat groups even offline when people were chatting with each other they also mentioned this. There were in total 300 people smuggling in, in Futian. then the place has become the most infected place in Shenzhen. It was under quarantine since the beginning of March, maybe earlier and even till now. The whole city was free from one-week quarantine just from today. But the district was still under lockdown. The video that I watched was about people shouting to medical workers in the community. People were sitting on emptied streets surrounded by plastic fences and shouted, “we cannot tolerate any more”. People started to realize that the “0” policy is not feasible, even a dynamic one. Under this circumstance, the policy will just not work. The strict control has affected all of us, and people start to be unsatisfied. What is interesting is that people are using obscure words to express their dissatisfaction. They are self-censoring themselves, and we can decipher it. So there was a change in public opinions. In the first stage, people were saying that the virus was controlled in a much better way than that of foreign countries. But people started to realize that the zero policy does not work with strict lockdowns once and again. People cannot tolerate this anymore and express their dissatisfaction with a self-censorship. And it affected me, too. It suddenly came to me days ago that I am also under the influence of this grand narratives, even though I study humanities and can be critical to it.

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176 I was living in my sister's house because of my field work. There were new cases  
177 every day, so my daily commotion was dangerous: I was in sojourn in a relative  
178 but she is not my family. I needed to take care of the etiquettes. Thinking in others'  
179 position I could understand that it was dangerous and I could not affect others'  
180 normal lives.

181 And news came to me that one of my closest friends was infected in Belgium. One  
182 day he called me about this and I was surprised that he was describing it like a  
183 cold. In Belgium people were just staying at home if infected, without going to the  
184 hospitals and taking pills. There was no control regarding to this.

185 Of course I knew that foreign countries were open to the pandemic, but it still  
186 influenced me since I started to realize the fracture between different worlds  
187 regarding to the pandemic. I reflected myself that in Shenzhen there are 2-digit  
188 new cases every day and as a remote relative coming in and out, I was dangerous  
189 to my sister's. They were indeed not in a very friendly position. After knowing the  
190 case of my friend, I realized that I was under the grand narratives. People were  
191 just taking it as a normal cold and did not put much emphasis on it. But in China  
192 the situation is quite different and I am affected.

193 S: Ok what else would you like to share?

194 Shepherd: I can add something. Before the government there is a choice. In the  
195 beginning of the outbreak it was severe. It was a virus that we have never met before.  
196 It was an emergent public crisis.

197 But in retrospect, we were indeed traumatized by the great loss under the lockdown and  
198 we were angry to what the government had done. The society were not prepared and  
199 medical resources were in short. But on and on we realized that the pandemic was not  
200 that scary. The choice was therefore ahead: the government can maintain its zero policy  
201 and put it under strict control with channeling the public opinions, as we are observing  
202 right now.

203 But the second is that it can declare that the virus is not that scary. It is infectious indeed  
204 but it is not that fatal. It may have sequelae but the government could say that we can  
205 live with the virus and we cannot let it affect our daily lives. But we chose the first,



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206 maybe out of political reasons.

207 S: Okay I have finished all the questions. Do you have something else to add? Or if

208 something comes to you suddenly later you can text me.

209 Shepherd: Okay, I will text you later.

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1 **5. Interview with 13**

2  
3 *13, female, 42 years old, is a teacher in German. She worked remotely under the*  
4 *lockdown.*

5  
6 S: Ok, so we shall begin. My first question is, were you living alone or with friends or  
7 families?

8 13: I was living with my parents, a dog and a turtle. The turtle was hibernating.

9 S: The lockdown lasted for 76 days. From 23<sup>rd</sup> January to 8<sup>th</sup> April. So your family did  
10 not go outside of your house in these days.

11 13: It was so. I was working till 21<sup>st</sup> January and the lockdown was 23<sup>rd</sup>.

12 S: Yes, it was 23<sup>rd</sup>.

13 13: And I remember that my last working day was 21<sup>st</sup>. I also went to a shopping mall  
14 where I worked and bought masks. There was unease in the air but I was awkward  
15 smelling it. I went to the pharmacy first and bought some cheap masks. There was a  
16 long queue and I decided to come back when I finished working. But it turned out to be  
17 more crowded than that in the morning. I remembered finishing working by 4 pm. And  
18 I did not go out since then. We prepared a lot of things for the Lunar New Year so there  
19 was no need of buying daily necessities during the lockdown. But sometimes I went  
20 outside to get the items I bought via group buying. I did not go to the streets.

21 S: So you mean that apart from going downstairs to get the items of group-buying, you  
22 stayed at home.

23 13: Yes. There was an interesting time point, **when Xi Jinping came to Wuhan,**  
24 **around 8<sup>th</sup> of March.** You can check it up.

25 S: I do.

26 13: **After his visit, the atmosphere was eased.** I could feel it by it being much easier  
27 to buy fresh vegetable. And I went out more frequently. My families stayed at home  
28 during the whole lockdown; they did not even go downstairs. I went out to buy fresh  
29 vegetables 2 or 3 times a week after his visit. The atmosphere was much better.

30 S: I just checked it that Xi came to Wuhan on March the 10<sup>th</sup>. What motivated you of

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31 daring to go outside? Was it Xi's visit, or just to buy vegetables?

32 13: To buy vegetables.

33 S: Ok.

34 13: Of course Xi's visit was a signal that he said Wuhan people love eating fish, and we  
35 got fish. Those market shelves filled by fresh vegetables and meat motivated me of  
36 going outside, because I felt safer.

37 S: So you think it is a turning point. It is okay. So it sounds like the general experience  
38 under the lockdown, though being restricted at home, was okay for you. Was that so?

39 13: I did not feel well inside. Daily needs were guaranteed. On the one hand we did  
40 prepare for the Lunar New Year. On the other it was winter and things could be stored.  
41 Internet, electricity and water were all there. We could maintain our daily lives, yet still  
42 felt pressure inside, out of fear.

43 S: So now we can jump to the second question. You also mentioned that during the  
44 lockdown you did not go outside. Therefore, the only source of information was internet,  
45 especially the mobile phones in our hands. We read many negative reports, including  
46 the sacrifice of the medical workers and the Red Cross. Did you have the idea that if  
47 you put your mobile phone away, life would be much better?

48 13: I checked Weibo regularly every day. You know that there was censorship. I relied  
49 more on WeChat. I have to mention Fang Fang's *Wuhan Diary*.

50 S: We will talk about it in the fifth question.

51 13: Okay. I think it was terrible. I was uneasy after reading them online. My life would  
52 be better were it not mobile phones.

53 S: So when you remember it you believe so. Under the lockdown you did not put your  
54 phone away.

55 13: I had this feeling by that time. I had piles of work, even under the lockdown. My  
56 students were preparing for TestDaF in March and I had courses to teach. Normal  
57 remote teachings made me working from 9 am to 6 pm. It was a normal state. **But there**  
58 **was silence at nights, and I could not refrain myself from watching my phones. On**  
59 **the one hand my rational self told me that I should stay away from mobile phones**  
60 **because it would escalate my anxiety. But on another hand I could not hold myself.**

---

61 **It was contradictory.**

62 S: You are approaching what I argued in my thesis. You will have a copy of it, including  
63 the appendices.

64 13: Ok I am looking forward to it.

65 S: Ok, now that we move on to the next topic. The third question is, have you watch the  
66 TV series *Heroes in Harm's Way*? Do you believe that it tells the truth?

67 13: I did not watch the series but I did watch a movie of the same topic. There was a  
68 movie named *Chinese Doctors*. **The Wuhan dialect of the film was not standard.** On  
69 the other hand I think that it is creating conflicts for the plot's sake. We all did not know  
70 what exactly happened in Jinyintan Hospital. I do not know about the whole things in  
71 general. I even do not know how it came, why it was in Wuhan. Wuhan is quite a  
72 conservative city when it comes to food, unlike Guangzhou. But who knows what those  
73 foreigners eat from all over China? So it is weird to me. I did not watch the series. But  
74 I shall put a question mark here that it cannot represent the truth.

75 S: Ok here comes the fourth. It is about Dr. Li Wenliang. It is an open question. How  
76 much do you still remember him?

77 13: I did not know much of him before. I was informed by one of my students on the  
78 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2019. He told me that there was a new SARS in Wuhan and asked me  
79 to prepare for it, because one of his professors told him so. I was not believing by that  
80 time that how the rumors as such were spread, since the official tone dismissed them.  
81 Then it was out of control.

82 I did not know about Li by that time, until on Weibo it was said that Li was under rescue.  
83 Then there was a memorial concert and Ma Yoyo was playing cello. Since then I got to  
84 know about Li. I believe that his death is a breakthrough of public grievance. There  
85 were people singing outside or just shouting. It made me uncomfortable. And it  
86 coincided with the death of Coby Bryant. Believes of people were collapsing and it was  
87 cold. **The numbers were rising. Without mobile phones I was okay, but picking it  
88 up made me anxious.**

89 S: Ok, so your memory of Dr. Li was not updated in time. Only in retrospect you got to  
90 know more about what happened on him.

---

91 13: Yes. More from foreign media. I started to know him when Ma Yoyo played in the  
92 concert, rather than knowing him first.

93 S: Ok, interesting, very interesting. Everyone has their own position towards a certain  
94 happening in the society.

95 13: Different opinions were abounded on Weibo. I was still working, though online. My  
96 students had different source of information and sometimes they shared it to me. The  
97 sister-in-law of teacher X, my colleague, was working with Dr. Li in the same hospital  
98 and she mentioned on Weibo that Li was already dead. But he was symbolic and the  
99 government was trying to save him, which made sense no more. He lost his breath  
100 already yet still under ECMO. It was unnecessary. Li's department was highly infected.  
101 He was not rescued as a human. I knew it by that time.

102 S: It is a symbolic event. In the evening of 6<sup>th</sup> February, he was reported death. And an  
103 hour later the news was deleted and it was said that he was still under rescue. In the  
104 early morning of the next day he was reported dead again. He died twice.

105 13: The second time I did hope that he could survive, despite the high death rate. But I  
106 knew more from teacher X. I think it's too much. And I realized his energy just from  
107 the concert which Ma Yoyo played in. Ma is one of my favorite celloist.

108 S: Who does not like him?

109 13: There are fans of Gautier Capuçon.

110 S: Well I prefer du Pré. I like Ma just because he has a cello from her.

111 13: But the records are far different from live. They are two things. You can feel the  
112 anima live. Let us continue.

113 S: It is the fifth question, concerning Fang Fang's *Wuhan Diary*. You read them from  
114 WeChat?

115 13: From a public account on WeChat. The account was always censored. It felt like a  
116 guerrilla. I stayed up late to 2am just wanting to read it fresh. Otherwise it would be  
117 censored. I don't understand, why people think that she is a traitor?

118 **S: I came up with the question because just as you had said, her writings were**  
119 **always censored. The original texts were posted by her on Weibo, and forwarded**  
120 **to WeChat.**

---

121 13: yes.

122 S: And read by WeChat users. For every three days there was one or two posts censored.

123 13: There are two groups of people around me. One group is for Fang Fang. Most of

124 them are in their 60s or 70s. The other group hates her, thinking that she is a traitor,

125 especially she published her book in America. Two years had passed and they are still

126 cursing her on Weibo. **So far as I have read, most of her accounts were objective. As**

127 **a writer you cannot always write about positive things. What we read all day long**

128 **were positive. I do not believe a harmony as such. It was just impossible. Under**

129 **that pressure, there should be problems.**

130 S: So you read every of them, or just read them when it came to you?

131 13: I almost read them all. I was waiting for the updates and went to sleep after reading

132 it. But it kept me awake. So I slept badly by that time. I mentioned before that I had

133 work, and I read Fang Fang at night. I slept badly for staying up late, waiting for Fang

134 Fang.

135 But to be honest, I do not believe what she wrote really matters a national reputation.

136 She is just reporting the truth. The biggest argument was the piles of mobile phones of

137 the deceased. But she did not post the picture. Everyone was suspicious. And someone

138 attacked her for publishing the book overseas and impinged national reputation, and for

139 buying a mansion. But for a successful writer, why can't she buy a mansion?

140 I do not think it matters. I believe in her. When the lockdown was lifted in April, 2020,

141 there was public mourning and photos of the queue collecting ashes. If we calculate the

142 queue we can deduct how many died under the lockdown. We were running out of

143 medical resources and we all knew it. I do not think it matters that she wrote about it.

144 S: Yes, in a situation lacking communication, extremized opinions are generated easily.

145 13: Yes, there were many rumors, some of which ring ridiculous. I can understand that

146 the government wanted to stabilize the situation with a rational manner. But there were

147 also irrational people. We were all afraid.

148 S: Yes.

149 S: A German friend of my friend asked me when they were in lockdown, why we were

150 not going outside. **I replied that there was virus outside. He could not understand**

---

151 **it and believe that we were controlled by the Chinese government. I said that there**  
152 **was no need of a governmental control, but we were reluctant of going outside.**

153 S: Yes.

154 13: I can understand that rumors will spring out when there are problems in the society.  
155 But it was too much for banning Fang Fang's account. But I can understand. We have  
156 a group for sharing information on concerts. During the lockdown we were chatting  
157 about it, no matter we knew each other or not. We were just discussing the lockdown  
158 and the group was banned. I did not know it until being informed by my friend that I  
159 would be invited to the new group. I said that I can text in the group. He said that yes  
160 you can text but you cannot see others' information. Until that time I realized that the  
161 group was banned. You can only see yours.

162 S: Welcome to a solo WeChat. Okay. Here comes the last question. Do you think that  
163 comparing to other countries, China succeeded in containing the spread of the virus?  
164 Or, is successful in it?

165 13: It is too early to say so.

166 S: Comparing to other countries, that is the point.

167 13: Different countries have different situations. It is hard to define a success, because  
168 it comes with a sacrifice. On the one hand I feel safe, nucleic tests are implemented  
169 several rounds and people are wearing masks, especially Wuhan, right? The resources  
170 are distributed in a good way and several resurgences were quenched within half a  
171 month. But there is a sacrifice. I do not have economic pressure. But for those who do,  
172 for those that are living with low quality, how to define a success? There is a balance to  
173 consider and I do not think that we can take the position as victorious. Even other  
174 countries have hundreds of thousands of cases and many died, we cannot say that China  
175 is victorious, and those countries can copy what we have done. It is not so. We need to  
176 believe that not only we have wisdom, they also do.

177 S: I am satisfied with this answer.

178 13: Do you think it a faked one?

179 S: Of course not. If you read the official tones in China and the outbound propagandas,  
180 you will find that there is always this victorious rhetoric.

---

181 13: Well indeed. You have to reassure your people. Your governance obliges you to  
182 come up with something to stabilize the situation.

183 S: We have finished the questions. If there is something flashing in your head regarding  
184 the lockdown, you can add something if you want.

185 **13: First of all I do not want lockdown again. The ups and downs of mentality, the**  
186 **fear of the unknown, nobody likes it.**

187 Days were hard to pass but they fled in retrospect. I can understand that the country did  
188 a lot to maintain our lives, but I am angry towards the low efficiency and bureaucracy.  
189 I never see those that are called “heroes in harm’s way”, at least around me. I am not  
190 satisfied. But of course we were well protected under the lockdown. Our lives were  
191 safeguarded. Without a normal life everything would be nonsense. So basically just  
192 staying at home during the lockdown. If nothing happened then you were safe, but if  
193 you were infected, it was another story. In the dawn of the lockdown being lifter, we  
194 could go downstairs and have a walk in the community. **In April we had a**  
195 **comprehensive nucleic test. Many questioned that it was unnecessary, but we did**  
196 **it and felt safe. By that time we realized that many had passed away. What a pity!**

197 S: Okay, what else?

198 13: Hopefully no.

199 S: Okay, I will turn off the record. Thank you very much!

200 13: Okay.



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## Summary in Estonian (Kokkuvõte)

### **Armistumisest: kuidas traumaatilist minevikku vahendatakse ja mäletatakse**

Sellel uurimistööl on kaks osa. Esimene käsitleb individuaalset psüühilist traumat: traumaatiline mälu toimib teistest mälestustest erinevalt. Trauma mäletamiseks on vaja teatud vallandavaid tegureid. Hirmu, valu ja häbi tõttu välditakse trauma avalikku arutamist, mis toob aga kaasa “mälu paralüüsi” (A. Assmann 2016: 15). Kui mõni sündmus tekitab inimgrupis kollektiivse trauma, loob iga inimene traumamälust oma versiooni, kuid paralüüsi tõttu neist omavahel ei räägita. See annab võimaluse nn suurtel narratiividel toimida ühiskonnas ainsa versioonina ja manipuleerida traumaatilise sündmuse kollektiivse mälu. Digimeedia areng intensiivistab suurte narratiivide toimimist ning võimaldab ühtlasi traumamälu politiseerimist.

Magistritöö teine osa keskendub Covid-19 viiruse levikust tingitud Wuhani laussulgemise juhtumile ja arutab selle kollektiivset mäletamist, sealhulgas seda, kuidas võimud seda mälestust ümber tõlgendavad. Sellel osal on 4 aspekti: 1. Laussulgemine ise kui traumamälu. Isolatsioonis viibides tajutakse kõike väljaspool toimuvat reaalsusena. Kuna pandeemiaga seotud traagilised sündmused toodi üksikisikute meedia vahendusel reaalsust, mõjusid need nii tõelistena, et varjutasid kergesti isiklikud kogemused. 2. Ühiskonna suured narratiivid. Ametivõimude koostatud ametlikud narratiivid ühendati Hiina kultuurimälu ja neid kasutati üksikisikute traumeerivate mälestuste katmiseks. 3. Traumaatilised diskursused ühiskonnas. Digimeedias levisid sotsiaalsed narratiivid, mis läksid suurte narratiividega vastuollu ja mida võimud seetõttu tsenseerisid. See mälukonflikt põhjustas ka laussulgemiste kollektiivse mälu lõhenemist. 4. Isiklikud mälestused laussulgemisest. See on kõige olulisem aspekt. Individuaalse mäletamise viis määratleb sündmuse säilimise viisi ka kollektiivses mälus. See on ainus lootus, et laussulgemise ajal toimunut jäädakse mäletama tõepäraselt.

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