

The Past 60-plus Days in China: Covid-19 Perspectives from a Wuhan-native

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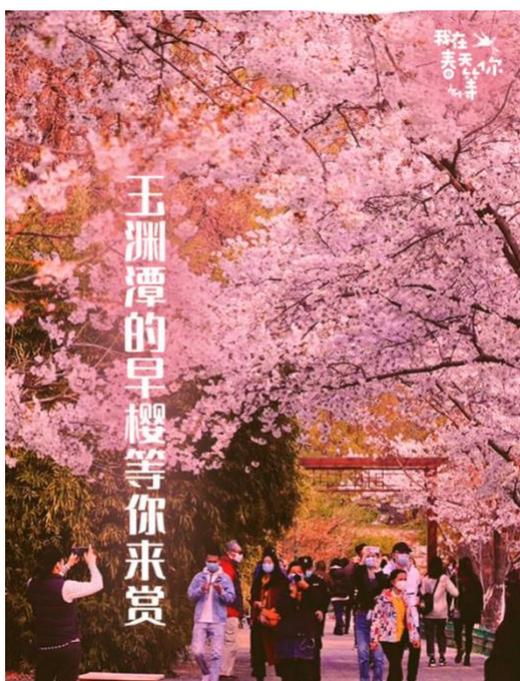
With the arrival of April, the weather in Beijing becomes particularly warm, and people in masks rush to the park enjoying the spring. Meanwhile in my hometown, Wuhan, after two months of extremely tough days this spring stands to be especially precious. The cities around Wuhan have begun to end the isolation, and Wuhan will lift the blockade and resume normal life on 8th April, a week later.

The coronavirus pandemic has affected and changed our lives, and it is affecting and changing the lives of people in a larger area of the world at this time. Looking back at the 60-plus days from the perspective of a person who comes from Wuhan and lives in Beijing may give those who are experiencing the worst of the epidemic some insight into the real-life scenes in Wuhan and Beijing, China.

People going to the park to enjoying the spring in Beijing (photo from Weibo 'China Network')

Several shopping malls were open in Wuhan on March 30, and people went shopping in an orderly way.

In early January, when the novel coronavirus was already spreading, China was welcoming the most important traditional festival, the Spring Festival. The Spring Festival travel rush followed, with a total number of 3 billion trips. As an important transportation hub in China, my hometown of Wuhan, and many of my relatives and friends there, were about to face a severe challenge that they have never experienced before. However, many of them didn't take it seriously, nor were aware of it...just as the





situation was in America or Britain several weeks ago. By mid- January, the situation had become worse and with an instinctive sensitiveness to the outbreak, I refunded my train ticket back to Wuhan and stayed in Beijing. At the same time I repeatedly reminded my family and friends to take precautions, go out less and not to gather in groups. Yet they hardly listened and continued to visit friends and relatives, gathering and immersing themselves in the festive joy, as did many other people. I felt very frustrated at one point.

By 20th January, with the rapid spread of outbreak and more and more infections and deaths, people in Wuhan began to realize the seriousness of the virus, and consciously went out less and with the use of more protective wear. The days leading up to 23rd January, when Wuhan announced lockdown of the city and took strict quarantine measures, my relatives and friends in the area started to become seriously worried.

The meme (pictured) vividly reflects my family's attitudes and thoughts towards COVID-19 in those initial days. Among those who accepted my daily nagging and advice were my parents, who lived in a rural suburb and did not attend higher education, nor have basic scientific literacy. Instead, some of my relatives and friends who do have years of education, and who live in the city, experienced more difficulty



in taking my initial advice. Interestingly, however, the latter was able to perform better in action after accepting the suggestion about self- protection and isolation.

February soon followed, when Wuhan and the entire Hubei province (and indeed all of China) entered into the toughest period yet.

In the first three weeks of February the number of infections had soared and the death toll had climbed quickly. Among those affected were some of my friends and their family members. People suddenly fell into a panic and the whole city suffered a serious medical run. Infected people flocked to hospitals, and the situation became even worse from the strain on the health system within such a short period of time. Wuhan was the worst-hit area.

At the same time, we also got into a serious *infodemic*¹. The panic caused by so many unknowns about the virus and how to prevent and control it, as well as the urgent need for information and intense attention, led to the spread of false news and rumours. The government and scientists had made great efforts on information release and science communication, as well as refuting the rumours and responding to the concerns of public. During this period I followed new of the epidemic on a daily basis, communicated with my relatives and friends in Wuhan by video calls, and tried to purchase supplies of masks (which were in short supply) and send them to my relatives and friends. There they experienced an initial shortages of protective materials and food stocks, which gradually eased and returned to normal, thanks to the support and supplies from all over the country, especially medical aid².

In March positive signs finally started to show in epidemic prevention and control, with many areas outside Hubei province entering an orderly resumption of production. In fact, from 23rd February onwards, my colleagues and I in Beijing have returned to work, and the commuter traffic has gradually



¹ WHO. Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) Situation Report-13 [EB/OL]. WHO. (2020-02-04) . <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200202-sitrep-13-ncov-v3.pdf>.

² Zhang Wenfang, Li Shengnan and Wang Xiao. By the numbers: Medics aiding Hubei amid COVID-19 epidemic. (2020-04-01) <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202004/01/WS5e83e73aa3101282172837a3.html>



becoming heavy again. The outbreak prevention and control in China has entered a new stage, with the focus shifting to the prevention of imported cases.

Looking backwards, the epidemic has

allowed us to adjust our attitudes and ways of living, whether passively or actively. The Spring Festival is supposed to be a wonderful time for Chinese people to visit friends and relatives, gather together, or go on holiday. But in the face of the outbreak, everyone quickly accepted home-quarantine.

From the incomprehension and reluctance in January, to the calm acceptance and active cooperation in February, to the conscious awareness and active isolation in March, many people began to actively seek fun and value in isolation life, and faced the epidemic optimistically and positively. Many of my friends and family members spent their time practicing their cooking, reading and writing, exercising, and many rushed to the front lines to volunteer or donate supplies. Even infected people and health workers danced optimistically in makeshift hospitals.

Meanwhile, the pandemic has made us develop a deeper understanding of our community with our shared future. In response to the outbreak, China quickly chose the strictest isolation measures and got a positive response from everyone...even if this once was questioned and mocked by some countries. However, it is proved the most effective way to curb the spread of the virus and a massive infection. The efforts and responsibility of every single person, as well as the national effort, have brought this epidemic under control in China. In the face of the pandemic, every person, every city, and every country has become a member of the global community and we all shoulder the responsibility.

Nowadays the virus is still raging around the world. Fighting COVID-19, we are all together, and we should all be together. That's what I want to say the most now.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

LI Honglin is an associate researcher from China Research Institute for Science Popularization and got her Ph.D. in philosophy of science and technology from Tsinghua University. Her research interest is in scientists' participation in science communication, popular science periodical and the theoretical and empirical studies on public scientific literacy.