

## B. Proceedings

### **Conference-Roundtable—Coronavirus and International Affairs: Interventions**

Interventions are short essays and other writings prepared by Conference-Roundtable participants and contributors in the lead up to the event. They form an integral part of the Conference-RoundTable proceedings and were written with two principal objectives. The first was to develop a contemporaneous record of various aspects of the pandemic at a time when COVID-19's scope and effects were only becoming known. They were, in this sense, meant to bear witness to the events as they unfolded. The second was to supplement the oral presentations and discussions during the Roundtable event. The interventions were to provide foundational materials and background to inform the final discussions held during the course of the April 2020 videoconference portion of the Conference Roundtable events.

### **We did not Start the Fire, it has Always been Burning Since the World Began Turning**

**GAO Shan<sup>1</sup>**

13 April 2020

It is an understatement that I experienced the mixed feelings that so often associate with current challenging times when I received the invitation to contribute to this event. This is particularly true when I am a Wuhaner who lives outside China in the U.S. and was in the US Midwest when the nightmare unfolded after January and then spread into every corner of the world.

The readers will find these complex issues broadly and ably addressed by serious thinkers that I have the greatest respect. I hope what I shared here with you today will add some value to what they can offer.

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The historical event of Covid-19 demands presence and attention from every human being on the planet. After all, the destructive power of the virus expressed so clearly and so effectively cross the border, race, culture, religion, and ideology. Any assessment of the impact and legacy of the Covid-19 pandemic will be a monumental project that continuing demand questions and answers from generations from now on. A degree of humility, caution, and reflection is in order. Of equal if not more important, we must recognize our limitations and our flaws in front of such power. Perhaps, the most respectful thing we or I can do to those lost lives in this crisis is to reflect and to change, so my or our loved ones can live a protected life, away from harm.

In developing my thoughts and reflection toward this crisis, here are some questions and thoughts:

### **Q and A**

#### **Tell us about your life after the Covid-19 outbreak.**

I am a Wuhaner currently living in the U.S., the State of Minnesota. My family and friends live and work in Wuhan, a city of a 10 million population that I called home, also the origin of the virus outbreak. So far, My family and friends are fine and healthy. I am considering my self lucky, and I am grateful that no one I know so far has been infected by the virus.

Right now, the U.S. is in the middle of this health crisis. By April 12<sup>th</sup>, the State I live, Minnesota has reported confirmed cases of 1621, and we are experiencing the highest increasing cases (194) today and expecting more to come in the coming days. Comparatively, this number is much lower than many other states, including our neighboring State, Wisconsin 2885. Minnesota has been under Stay at Home order since March and believed to continue until May 4<sup>th</sup>.

Since January, I've been in close contact with my family and friends in Wuhan to understand the development of the Covid-19 outbreak. Obviously, pouring concerns of the well being of family and friends went to an opposite direction when the virus being contained in Wuhan by early April. Still, they started to spread crazy in the U.S. since Mid-March.

I am right now working from home, like most Americans who are lucky to have a job, try to spend about half an hour in the park or patio to stretch my body or take some walk to feel the nature. It is not ideal and not normal, but this is better than many others who are less fortunate.

### **What it is like to be a Wuhaner live outside Wuhan during the Covid-19 pandemic**

Yes. As a Wuhaner lives in the U.S., 18 thousand miles away from my home and family, it is an understatement that the past four months have been difficult, for obvious reasons. Like most of the people right now, I have been through stages of an emotional roller-coaster.

However, what singles out Wuhaner from others for this Covid-19 pandemic experience most was the prolonged excruciating experience about human tragedy and crisis. If we consider the pandemic as sports events, most people only experience half of the game, Wuhaner lives in a foreign country are experiencing the full game.

We are part of this crisis from the beginning of January, and we live through the shock, anger, sadness and regret through words, voice, and pictures of our family and friends. It is regretful to see familiar views of the beloved city landscape be part of global tragedy as unthinkable unfolding in front of yourself. A wave of powerless painfully consumed your daily life since January when the rest of the world are comfortable carrying on with their routines that we might not be able to return for a very very long time. For a very long time, tragedy in Wuhan has seen through the lens of news in foreign countries, as always, it has been constructed and consumed as a faraway and unbothered event, offered to spectate. But now, we are experiencing the same tragedy again, in a foreign country, in the same fashion, same manner, same mistakes that Wuhan occurred, months ago. It is painful already to see Wuhaners are dying in such a large number, and doctors and health care workers are exhausted and frustrated from the crisis for just one time. It is even more crazy to have to live through this again.

**Tell us your observation of virus outbreak as a Wuhaner in U.S.**

I first read about the virus in late December from the Internet. Everyone in China was in the mood of preparing Chinese Lunar New Year and content with the conclusion of first-round Trade Deal with the U.S. American media was busy with Democratic Presidential Nomination.

The local administration's initial reaction was mild and careful. The cases was low, the contagious was not severe, and the spread is contained. Questions and doubts followed this reaction before the lockdown.

Many people left the city before the effective of lockdown on January 23rd. No one knows that will last for next 76 days, many won't survive it, and it spread into the globe.

City life deteriorated progressively. Initially, people are curious, singing, and cheering for the city. That optimism soon replaced by horrible news people get sick and die so fast. The hospital was overwhelmed. People wait for hours to see a doctor but then refused for lack of hospital beds. Dead bodies lie on floors without anyone to move it. There are cases of family infection, sometimes all family dead except young kids.

U.S. soon closed its border to China in January. There were no enhanced measures to people traveling from elsewhere, even when later a similar number of cases reported in Europe. Chinese oversea read terrible news from friends and family and western reports. Self-organized Chinese starting to send PPE back home in February.

It took a while, but ultimately, central government sent out medical staff from around the country to Wuhan for helping. Tent hospitals and special care facility built overnight to help the sick. Similar enhanced measures done nationwide in February. Lockdown becomes a norm in the whole China.

Rumors about Bat soup or bioweapon circulated in western media in February. Western media taken it as an unbothered event for political and social commentary. I am starting to warn my colleagues about the virus and the necessity

of stock up a few supplies. There was no mask available in the Market during February in Minneapolis. I am saddened by the events in Wuhan and wondered when the last normal weekend in the U.S.. WTO refused to say this could be a global pandemic. U.S. stock price was very high and the market was excellent, too good to be true considering how bad the virus spread in China.

The U.S. media was denominated by the Democratic presidential nomination for the whole of February. There are increased concerns for the spread of the virus on the Cruise ship and Europe. The Whitehouse denied the severity of the outbreak, the same happened to U.K. The virus started to spread in Europe, and Italy hit hard after many believed the virus only affects countries with less transparent political systems, such as Iran. New York Fashion Week continues, and nothing really changed by February.

The virus ultimately comes by the mid of March with the large number of confirmed cases in C.A., WA. It was unbelievable that N.Y. remained extremely low cases by early March. U.S. media started to focus on virus outbreak, complaints about lack of PPE, and lack of medical resources begin to emerge. Many public events canceled. By Mid-March, WTO still plays down the severity of the virus, many fortunes 500 companies, like the one I worked for, refer to WTO advisory for the virus. No one believes it will be a lockdown. The U.S. Market was great by March.

We are now in the global pandemic by the last two weeks of March. The lockdown happened, the market crash happened, the unemployment happened, the sudden death happened. Everything happened in Wuhan repeat again in the U.S. We did not start the fire, but the fire keeps spreading as the world is burning.

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*Interventions*

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*We Did Not Start the Fire*