

## **2020 Wuhan COVID-19 Lockdown Oral Histories**

### **Donghu Interview**

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Virtual Meeting

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## Donghu Interview

**ROBERT BROWNING:** Hello, my name is Robert Browning, working in conjunction with the Reuther Library at Wayne State University. Today's date is July 9, 2021. This interview is with Donghu, which is a pseudonym, about his experience of living through the COVID lockdown in Wuhan, China in early 2020. Donghu is located in Beijing at the moment. This interview is being recorded remotely and will be housed at the Reuther Library, which is part of Wayne State University.

The Reuther Library will keep administrative information about this oral history project such as interview releases and deeds of gift in its case files. Case files are in a locked nonpublic area of the building accessible only to the Reuther Library staff. [00:01:01] In the event of a criminal investigation or legal discovery proceedings, the Reuther Library could be compelled to turn over holdings and case files that are otherwise closed to the public, including the case files for this oral history project.

All right, so we begin with the first question and that is, are you associated with Wayne State University in any way?

**DONGHU:** No, I'm not.

**BROWNING:** Okay. Are you originally from Wuhan?

**DONGHU:** Yes, I'm originally from Wuhan.

**BROWNING:** Where are in Wuhan are you from? Which district?

**DONGHU:** Wuchang District. I was born in Wuchang District and, for most of my lifetime, I stayed in Wuchang District.

**BROWNING:** Okay, and what do you do for a living?

**DONGHU:** You can say I'm a freelancer right now.

**BROWNING:** Freelance writer?

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**DONGHU:** Yeah, yeah. Freelance writer.

**BROWNING:** Okay. [00:01:57] So I want to go back to maybe early 2019, or early 2020, around December or January. When did you first hear of the Coronavirus?

**DONGHU:** Sorry?

**BROWNING:** When did you first hear or know about the Coronavirus? COVID?

**DONGHU:** Oh yeah, I know. I remember the exact time I know the exact name of COVID-19, Coronavirus. I think it's in the middle of January last year, I mean, 2020. Yeah, but before that, I was in Toronto in December of 2019. [00:03:00] I received a message from my friends who were in Wuhan at the time. The date was December 13, 2019. And the information is about, you can say, an unnamed virus which was spreading in Wuhan at that time, but nobody gave the virus an exact name. Of course, you know, just twenty days later we know that is COVID-19. So if you asked me when I heard about COVID-19, I would say it was maybe around the fifteenth of January to the eighteenth of January last year, but the first time I know there was a virus is the end of December of 2019. [00:04:06]

**BROWNING:** And just to kind of ask a couple follow up questions about that, so you were not in China at that time?

**DONGHU:** Yes, I was not in China.

**BROWNING:** You were in—

**DONGHU:** Yeah, I was in Toronto.

**BROWNING:** Toronto, Canada. Okay. And what were you doing in Toronto, Canada?

**DONGHU:** I was a freelance writer.

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**BROWNING:** Okay, and so how did you feel about the news when you first heard it? Like, when you first heard about the Coronavirus or COVID, what did you think? Do you remember?

[00:05:00]

**DONGHU:** Yeah, yeah, I remember. The first feeling was I was pretty shocked because it was very easy for me to connect the Coronavirus to the *feidian*—how do you say in English? I don't know. Just another virus—

**BROWNING:** Like pneumonia?

**DONGHU:** No, in 2003 in China.

**BROWNING:** Oh, SARS.

**DONGHU:** Yeah, yeah. Sorry.

**BROWNING:** It's okay.

**DONGHU:** Yeah, yeah, SARS. You know, I was even in Wuhan during 2003 and Wuhan was not the most affected city during the SARS period. But I still remember the whole panic in our community in our city. [00:06:00] So I think maybe the second wave of SARS will come. So just the first and general feeling for me is shock, but I have to say I was not that shocked because the general media response or the people in my family, my friends around me, they kind of just believe, or do not. Most of us think that there was a virus, which is pretty bad, but we have no idea at all about just how the situation will go. Just a shocking feeling, but no very specific feeling besides that. [00:07:07] It's just maybe, like, Okay, there is a virus outside, in our city or in our country, but we have to take care. But how to protect ourselves, we have no idea. Maybe we just don't go out as often as before. Even at that time, my family, even me, we don't have a feeling that we have to wear a mask, especially my father.

**BROWNING:** Right. So it was just kind of a feeling of uncertain how serious it was.

**DONGHU:** Yeah, yeah, but I was still a bit scared.

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**BROWNING:** So, as I remember, you arrived in China before the lockdown, right? [00:08:00]

**DONGHU:** Yeah, I arrived in China—actually, I just took a flight from Toronto to Shanghai. I remember I arrived in Shanghai on January fifteenth and I took a train from Shanghai to Wuhan on the eighteenth of January. Three days later.

**BROWNING:** Okay, so you arrived at a unique time, just before the lockdown began.

**DONGHU:** Exactly, exactly.

**BROWNING:** So could you tell me what was going on around you in your situation the days before the lockdown?

**DONGHU:** Oh yeah. I have a very, very clear memory because it was just five days [before the lockdown]. Just misinformation—everybody around me in Wuhan, we were talking about the virus, but we don't know how serious the situation was. [00:09:07] But my wife (redacted) told me she was more nervous than me. She told me, If you want to go outside, you have to wear a mask. But, in my life, I have no experience of wearing a mask on the street, so I think it's okay. I just go directly to my destination, maybe by taxi or come back quickly. It's okay. So from the eighteenth to the twenty-third, five days before the lockdown—actually, I went to Prison Bar, during that time. Now I think it's very, very—how can I say? It's just very, very surreal. [00:10:04] And daily life has not changed that much. But you can feel everybody was a little bit scared on the streets because everybody walked, maybe, more quickly than before. And I got a very, very strong feeling that when I was on the subway. You know, the number of people on the subway was much, much lower than normal in Wuhan.

**BROWNING:** Right.

**DONGHU:** Yeah, but I can remember very clearly. I went to Prison Bar on the twentieth of January and I didn't wear a mask, but some people were wearing masks. [00:11:01] That night I took the subway from Jiedaokou to Guanggu, at maybe around seven o'clock or half past seven,

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and just either on the street or on the subway, nobody talked. That was very impressive. But, you know, you lived in Wuhan for many years. Wuhan is a very noisy city.

**BROWNING:** Yeah.

**DONGHU:** Yeah, but during that day it was very, very quiet. Nobody talked.

**BROWNING:** So it was just odd to you, or did it make you nervous or anything?

**DONGHU:** It makes me a little bit nervous, but I still think I could go outside.

**BROWNING:** Right.

**DONGHU:** Yeah, but the next day, I mean, on the twenty-first, things totally changed because Zhong Nanshan, Dr. Zhong, said the virus—how can I say in English, *renchuanren*? [00:12:07] It can go to one person to another person.

**BROWNING:** Right, it spreads from one person to another person.

**DONGHU:** Yeah, it could spread from one person to another. You know, Zhong Nanshan was a very, very important person during the SARS knockdown and if he said that, everybody believed [it], actually. And so I have a very, very strong experience of the change from the twenty-first. The night before I was hanging out with (redacted) and we had a beer in the bar. Even the bar is not very crowded, just maybe five or six people there. One reason is the virus. The other reason is the winter vacation—*han jia*. [00:13:00] But when I go back home and wake up, I remember—I lived on the tenth floor and I looked down towards my neighborhood. My neighborhood is a very, very old-fashioned neighborhood. Usually, it was very, very crowded and noisy on the streets in my community, in my neighborhood. But that morning it's very empty. Empty and quiet.

**BROWNING:** So that was the twenty-first you say?

**DONGHU:** Yeah, yeah. The twenty-first. I remember it was the twenty-first.

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**BROWNING:** And, at this time, were you with your wife or were you with your parents? Or both?

**DONGHU:** I was with my parents and my wife was with her parents. [00:14:00]

**BROWNING:** Okay.

**DONGHU:** Yeah. And that's very interesting. Yeah, just from that time, we stayed with our parents and we spent most of the time separated.

**BROWNING:** Okay, so during most of the lockdown you were separated from your wife?

**DONGHU:** Yeah, until the lockdown finished—until the middle of April.

**BROWNING:** Did she live far away from you?

**DONGHU:** Yeah, just considering the scale of Wuhan, it's a little bit far away. It's maybe fifteen kilometers.

**BROWNING:** Okay.

**DONGHU:** Yeah.

**BROWNING:** Okay. Yeah, I guess that would be a little far.

**DONGHU:** Yeah, like from the riverside to Guanggu.

**BROWNING:** Okay, yeah. [00:15:00] All right. So when the lockdown began, what were your feelings? And what did you do?

**DONGHU:** Hm, I was staying with my parents in their apartment. So, of course, the lockdown meant we had to stay home and we cannot go outside. We just had a very normal, normal daily life. Just talk, cook, writing and working on the computer and listening to music, just as before. Yeah, I think the biggest difference is I can't go outside. And the feeling, you know, with the

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family is just very different. Everybody was extremely nervous. We *were* nervous. [00:16:00] And we, of course, [we] made a lot of phone calls to relatives, to family members and friends to ask about their situation. Asked them if there was some friends of theirs who have been infected or is there somebody we know who was in the hospital, blah-blah-blah, like that. And, at the time, I think the biggest differences happened on the media side. You know, everybody has a cell phone. And my parents and I, we just used most of the time to receive information, to receive a message, to watch news to try to know what happened and what will happen.

[00:17:00]

**BROWNING:** Right. But when the lockdown actually began, were you surprised by it or not surprised?

**DONGHU:** I was extremely surprised. I was extremely surprised because I don't believe [it]. Just before the lockdown, some information said Wuhan will be locked down before the lockdown really came. But I didn't believe it at all, because I think Wuhan is a very, very, very large city with a big population. So if Wuhan was locked down, how could everything work? For me, it is a really ridiculous and it's really strange for me to imagine a lockdown in Wuhan. [00:18:07] And so the reason I don't believe the lockdown will happen is because it's not reasonable. It's not reasonable. Yeah, it's emotional, or it's just from my experience before. I just don't believe the government will set a lockdown policy on Wuhan.

**BROWNING:** Right.

**DONGHU:** So when it really came, I was totally shocked. And I think, Jesus, what will happen? Yeah, and just everybody was very anxious about how long it would last.

**BROWNING:** Right. Yeah, maybe that's something I can ask you now. [00:19:00] Because, from what I know and what I've heard, basically, most people thought it would be a short time, right? Maybe like a week or two weeks. But they extended the lockdown. They made it longer, right? Several times. And so like you said, there was a general feeling of not knowing when it would end, right?



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**DONGHU:** Yeah, yeah.

**BROWNING:** So every time they made the lockdown longer, what were you feeling or what were your parents' feelings?

**DONGHU:** Yeah, I think we acted as most Wuhanese. Every time when they said the lockdown would be longer, we felt more anxious, felt more nervous. [00:20:00] But I think the most interesting thing is that maybe—I thought the most nervous moment was maybe at the end of February. Just because we never knew when the lockdown would end. And the situation at hospitals—just from the television, from the cell phone, from the social media was very, very very—it was just like a disaster. Just worse than a war, I think. Every day we saw the images from the hospitals. And the hospital is very, very, very busy. But I think after the end of February, we started to be a little bit less sensitive about the lockdown. [00:21:05] You cannot say we were not nervous. I have to say we learned some skills to get used to everyday life during the lockdown. So in my family, my parents and I tried to find some way to relax, to have fun. My father and I started to kick a football in the living room. And I started to play some music, my favorite music, for my parents, even if they asked or not. And we just watched TV and we just talked, you know.

In my neighborhood, I think the community support was pretty, pretty okay. [00:22:00] In Wuhan, it depends. It was very, very different in some [*xiaoqu*] neighborhoods. In some communities, support was very, very bad, which meant the resident there, I think, were very, very nervous. Very angry. But our community was okay. It was good. It was okay. You know, we have food. We have electricity. We can go downstairs to throw the garbage and to take a breath. [Laughs] But nobody wants to talk to anybody, even in the elevator. If there is a one person in the elevator, we will step back and say, You go down first, or you go up first. And we wear masks and—how can I say? Just had to wear eye protection. [00:23:03] And every one of us, I mean, my parents and I, we have a parka or we have an outfit. Because we don't have professional medical protection uniforms, so we have to use one piece of our normal clothes

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for that role. And every day we use a lot of time to clean our clothes, to clean our hands, clean our face, our eyes, but slowly you will become not that sensitive.

**BROWNING:** Right. You kind of get used to it.

**DONGHU:** Yeah, can get used to it.

**BROWNING:** Okay, so a couple follow up questions I have for you about what you just said.

[00:24:02] Maybe a little while ago, actually. Was there any family members or people you know that got sick?

**DONGHU:** I'm pretty lucky. I have no family members who got sick or infected by the virus, but I know some, you can say friends of my family, or just some people I knew who were ill. My father grew up in our community. So he had a lot of classmates or friends, old friends, maybe [they] had a friendship for more than forty or fifty years, who lived in the same community.

[00:25:00] I remember three or four of my father's friends in the same community passed away.

**BROWNING:** Oh okay.

**DONGHU:** Yeah, one of them didn't pass away because of the virus. Just maybe the intense situation at a hospital, maybe he had a really bad disease.

**BROWNING:** Right.

**DONGHU:** But another passed away directly because of the virus.

**BROWNING:** Okay. So the one basically maybe had some other health issue and he couldn't get treatment, right? Is that what you mean?

**DONGHU:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

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**BROWNING:** All right. [00:26:00] So you said that some communities were good at supporting the lockdown, I guess. I just want to ask you, what do you mean by supporting or not supporting?

**DONGHU:** During the lockdown period, community support, basically, included health support. If you or your family member had a health issue and maybe just even a very, very small health issue. Like, especially some health issues related to the virus, like a temperature that became a little higher—good community support meant that they will act quickly and effectively.

[00:27:00]

**BROWNING:** Right, help each other basically.

**DONGHU:** Yeah. And besides support for health stuff, I think the others includes, first of all, food, because you can't go outside. You couldn't go to a supermarket to buy food. You have to receive the food from your neighborhood community government. Actually, in China, we call it *juweihui*—a street committee. And good support meant they have, first of all, enough food to support us. They have meat, vegetables, blah-blah-blah, like that. And, but bad support meant maybe they don't have enough food or they just act very slowly. [00:28:00] And there's another aspect of that. Because during the lockdown period, everybody used social media, used their cell phone with a WeChat group to search for support, to receive information from the community, from your neighbor. But, you know, in my father or mother's generation, they can't use cell phones that well. So, I know in Wuhan, many, many communities they receive not very good feedback, because there were lots of old people living in that community. And just contacting or helping them would be more difficult. [00:29:01]

Yeah, and besides the support from the government side, we self-organized. Just take the example of my mother, she was in several WeChat groups, which focused on buying food or buying daily stuff. It depended on the whole community organization because you can buy something, but if your community was badly organized, the things you bought, they would not send to you in a very effective way, or very quickly. [00:30:00] Generally speaking, according to

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my experience during that time the support in my community is pretty good. It's okay. It's okay. We never experienced a time, even a day, that we were afraid of a shortage of food. Never, never.

**BROWNING:** So your mother participated in helping people out in your community, right?

**DONGHU:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**BROWNING:** Could you tell me more about that?

**DONGHU:** Yeah, it's perfectly normal during the lockdown period in Wuhan. They used WeChat groups to know [contact] people who lived near them because at the time you can't buy food individually. [00:31:04] So sometimes you have to connect to the manufacturer directly.

**BROWNING:** Oh wow.

**DONGHU:** But, yeah, which meant they can't sell you a kilo of apples. You have to buy many kilos of apples. So you have to make a group and you have to share and organize and have a general number of how much food, how much fruit, how much vegetables you have to buy. And you have to go downstairs to the doorway of your apartment to share the food. You know, just like that.

**BROWNING:** Okay. So basically, I mean, we would kind of say that you had to everything in bulk, like a large amount at one time. [00:32:01] And then you basically divide it and share it.

**DONGHU:** Yeah, yeah. And you have to buy a big amount of stuff and you have to share, which means you have to self-organize a set of food or daily stuff for distribution. That's a very unique experience in my life. I never think this kind of thing will happen to me.

**BROWNING:** Right, right. So I want to maybe ask, how did the lockdown work in your community? I mean, what were the rules or procedures or guidelines that your community used? [00:33:00]

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**DONGHU:** Yeah, it's pretty interesting question. So, first of all, of course, there was a clear restriction on going outside, but that is not very important. Because even if there was not a clear restriction, nobody dared to go out. And, of course, the local government in my community organized some of their workers or their members—how to say? You can say act as a guard or like an administrator. They placed them at the main doorways of our community, along the streets to stop anyone who wanted to go out. [00:34:00] But that is okay, because nobody dared to go out, especially during the first two months of the lockdown period. And when I looked down from my apartment, I can see them walking along the streets, walking along the road and checking every doorway. And the most interesting thing is that in most of the communities in Wuhan, the most useful way to stop the residents from going out is not by using a guard or some policemen. [00:35:00] They just, you know, they close the doorway physically.

**BROWNING:** Physically?

**DONGHU:** Yeah, maybe use a brace or maybe use wood or steel. In my community, you know what they used? They used—how can I say? They used abandoned bicycles.

**BROWNING:** Really?

**DONGHU:** Yeah, I will send some pictures to you later. They used a lot of abandoned bicycles to block the doorway.

**BROWNING:** Wow.

**DONGHU:** Yeah, yeah. So there is no possibility for a normal person to get out. It's like a jail. It's like a jail.

**BROWNING:** Right.

**DONGHU:** Yeah, yeah. [00:36:00] But, at a later time during the lockdown period, because the Chinese government controlled the COVID-19 a little bit better and the number of deaths, the

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number of infected people decreased. And just after two months, everybody wants to go outside. At that time, you know, somebody maybe used some equipment to open a little gap for maybe for one person to go out, but it's not very often.

**BROWNING:** So that was when things were starting to get better?

**DONGHU:** Uh-huh, exactly.

**BROWNING:** Okay. [00:37:00] So in your community did people cooperate with all these rules? Was there any trouble with people not wanting to follow the rules?

**DONGHU:** I think basically the people in my community cooperated pretty well. But still there were many arguments and even sometimes fights. Just between the residents and the government workers and social workers.

**BROWNING:** Right, about what exactly? Do you know?

**DONGHU:** Yeah, a lot of reasons. One day I remember in the afternoon, I heard somebody shout using very dirty words downstairs. [00:38:03] And I looked down and there's an old lady who wanted to go outside. I don't know why. Maybe she had some emergency. Maybe she just wanted to, you know, release her anxious emotions or, blah-blah-blah, I don't know the reason. But she yelled at the doorway guard and, of course, they had an argument. But, frankly speaking, in my community, the social workers, the government side, they were very calm. They treat that problem in a very, very careful way. Even if you hit me, I just go away. [00:39:00] Because contact with each other is very dangerous at that time. In my experience, or from what I heard in my community, there was no harsh violence between the residents and government workers.

**BROWNING:** Okay. All right.

**DONGHU:** But a lot of people, you know, complained. A lot. Everybody, yeah, maybe they yelled at each other on WeChat. [laughs]

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**BROWNING:** They complained about what?

**DONGHU:** Complained about the food quality and quantity. [Both laugh] Like, there was a baby besides him for like two months and he will be driven to madness. [00:40:02] Yeah, blah-blah-blah.

**BROWNING:** Just being very irritated by daily things, I guess.

**DONGHU:** Yeah, yeah. And one of the most interesting things I want to tell you about is the arguments between the two generations, the younger and the older. Because, you know, Robert, nobody could bear the situation of being together for such a fucking long time. Especially between the two generations. I received a huge number of messages from my friends who complained, I'll be crazy. I will kill my mother and father. I can't stand it anymore. [00:41:00] Just the only solution is drinking beer, but there was a beer shortage.

**BROWNING:** Right. I guess it's just there's just a lot of differences between—well, I mean, in many places in the world there's just a vast difference between old and young people.

**DONGHU:** Yeah, that's right. I think at the beginning of March, including (redacted), we had a cell phone call on WeChat and complained face to face via cell phone. Yeah, not only complained about parents, but complained about everything. And, of course, just made jokes and encouraged everybody and record some good memories and, you know, finally, [say] after the fucking lockdown, we'll go to Prison and get drunk. [00:42:03]

**BROWNING:** [Laughs] Right, so did you have any of these issues with your parents?

**DONGHU:** Not really, because generally my relationship between me and my parents is pretty good. They were very, very nice. They're just nice and cool people. Each of us do not have a strong ego, or blah-blah-blah. So we're okay. We were totally okay. After the lockdown, I have a very strong feeling that the relationship between me and my parents has gotten better. [00:43:00] Just frankly speaking, I understand and love them more.

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**BROWNING:** Well, so your experience was a little different, in that way, compared to some other people.

**DONGHU:** Yeah. [Laughs]

**BROWNING:** So I want to ask you, we talked a little bit about your volunteer experience, and I want you to tell me about this volunteer experience. What can you tell me about it?

**DONGHU:** I was involved in, you can say, a volunteer team called Lomo Road Mutual Support Team. [00:44:00] The direct translation. I'm not a person who gets involved very deeply because I have to stay at home. Because during that time, the government approved of people who were doing civil support practices by sending material. By driving the nurse and doctors to the hospital and back. You know, some of our team members, they were doing that work. [00:45:00] Our team's general purpose was to, first of all, collect money and we used that money to buy some materials, including protective uniforms and masks and maybe sometimes regular medicine to support the local hospitals. Yeah, that's one of the purposes and the other is we used a vehicle to transport those materials to a hospital that needs [things]. I think the third is we drove doctors and nurses to their workplace and drive them back home. We worked for just seven or eight days very, very intensely and after that we worked a little bit loosely, but generally, [for] one month or maybe forty days. [00:46:05]

**BROWNING:** Right. What did you do exactly in this group?

**DONGHU:** Oh yeah. I collected information. Because you can't imagine how much information there was on social media from a nurse, from a doctor, from a hospital, from any health station, health spots. In some specific communities, they needed masks, they needed protective uniforms, they needed glasses, they needed medicine. [00:47:00] And I was collecting some materials, some information, and I put information into our working WeChat group and somebody would call them to check the accuracy [to see if it] is real or not. And after that had been done, we just confirmed if the need is real. That is, we use some money we collected to



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buy something, or we use the things we have thought that would help them. Yeah, it's a very simple logic, I think.

**BROWNING:** So basically you would collect information—

**DONGHU:** Yeah, I collected the information and I put the information for collecting money on WeChat, on social media, for our team to receive the help. [00:48:00]

**BROWNING:** Right. So, basically, someone requests some help. You would collect that information; you would let everybody know and then—

**DONGHU:** Yeah, and also you can say I'm a little bit like an accountant. Just doing some accounting work. Yeah, I received some money. Yeah, I collected some money.

**BROWNING:** Okay.

**DONGHU:** And from my friends.

**BROWNING:** And would you purchase stuff?

**DONGHU:** No. I didn't get involved in purchases.

**BROWNING:** Okay. Somebody else would?

**DONGHU:** Yeah, I have to say we were pretty well organized.

**BROWNING:** And so it would be purchased and then collected and then delivered to wherever it needed to go, right? [00:49:00]

**DONGHU:** Yeah, you can say that. Basically.

**BROWNING:** Interesting. So I think it was around March that the lockdown began to become a little bit relaxed, right? Maybe the middle of March I want to say, yeah?

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**DONGHU:** Yeah, you're right. Yeah, you're right. At the beginning of March the situation was a little bit relaxed.

**BROWNING:** So how did you feel when things started to get a little bit more relaxed?

**DONGHU:** First of all, you know, just like I said before, I had gotten used to it. So nothing really changed. But, of course, just the emotion, the feeling would get better. [00:50:00] And we just got used to it. Yeah, at that time, I have no imagination of when it will end. I thought, Okay, it's my life. Maybe I will face the situation for one year or two years. And, oh yeah, everybody's experience is different. For me, at the beginning of March—I think maybe around the tenth—the community was still locked down, which means you cannot go outside your community, but you can go downstairs. [00:51:00] Because the number of infected persons had been very well—how can I say?

**BROWNING:** Controlled?

**DONGHU:** Yeah, controlled. So you can go downstairs and you can have a little walk on the street, but you still have to keep the social distance from the other person. And, from that time, every night, after dinner I went downstairs from my parent's apartment to a very little pavilion to listen to music and took two or three cans of beer and made a phone call to my wife or to my friends.

**BROWNING:** So, basically, from the beginning of the lockdown to early March, you could not leave your apartment? [00:52:03]

**DONGHU:** I could, I could.

**BROWNING:** Okay.

**DONGHU:** Yeah, yeah. And it's completely legal.

**BROWNING:** Okay.

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**DONGHU:** Yeah, nobody controlled me.

**BROWNING:** Okay. So from the beginning of March, you could maybe go out and walk around in your community a little bit more?

**DONGHU:** Yeah, and there were some stores, which were open, but they were just opened in a very, very strange way. Maybe they will hang a board outside their door that said, We are open. If you want to buy something, buy beer, buy food, buy whatever, you have to call us and we will open our door for you and you can come inside. [00:53:07] But, you know, day after day, the situation just got better and better. I think in the middle of March, I could go inside a little store to buy vinegar or to buy salt, to buy beer. But I still have no possibility to go outside of my community.

**BROWNING:** Right.

**DONGHU:** No way.

**BROWNING:** Okay, so like—

**DONGHU:** But, you know, yeah, nobody controls me. The general feeling was that you better stay home. So I had the experience of being blamed by an old person, by an old man, actually, who was also fucking outside. [00:54:00] He said to me, Why are you outside? I think, I can be here. I'm still inside my community. I just want to take a take a walk and I was wearing a mask. I don't want to talk to anybody, including you, very closely. But I can get the feeling that from, especially from the old generation, they still thought you'd better stay home. Yeah, because it's safer and it's healthier.

**BROWNING:** So you had a short little argument with the older gentleman.

**DONGHU:** Yeah, I had a little argument and I said, I just want to take a walk and it's legal. I will keep myself safe and I will try my best to keep everybody safe and if you don't want to talk to me, I will leave. [00:55:00] And, for me, it's a little bit odd because my mother said I went

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downstairs and walked every fucking day. Yeah, maybe after the middle of March, I went downstairs maybe twice per day. In the afternoon and evening. It was just like being in a jail, you have a time to move out from your cell and take a rest.

**BROWNING:** Right, right. So when the lockdown actually ended though, how did you feel about that? And what was the first thing you did?

**DONGHU:** You mean when the lockdown ended?

**BROWNING:** Yeah, when everything ended, what was the first thing you did? [00:56:02] And what did you feel?

**DONGHU:** Yeah, you ask a very, very, good question. Because, you know, Robert, after the lockdown finished—just generally, it's good. It's good. It's a very, very, very good signal for the community, for the city. We're getting better and the situation will get better. But, for me, I have no real change. Because, of course, you can go outside, but no place is open.

**BROWNING:** Right.

**DONGHU:** Yeah. No place is open. When the lockdown ended, it doesn't mean you can go outside from your community freely because you have to go to the door [of the community] and you have to have your temperature checked. [00:57:00] And you have to even get an ID, get some, you know—how to say that? Some, like, some resident card. You have to write down the time you go outside and when you come back. You have to write down the time you came in. So it's very, very difficult to go outside. And even if you go outside, the only thing you can do was take a walk along the Yangtze River and go back.

**BROWNING:** Right.

**DONGHU:** Yeah, but it was better. It was better. But, for me, I didn't go outside of my community. I remember very clearly, one of the first things I did, I contacted (redacted), who was doing a beer business during that time. [00:58:00] I said, I needed some beer. Just some

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good beer and (redacted) said, For sure. And he drove his vehicle, I remember, to the northern gate—no, no, to the southern gate of my community. Maybe it's not as bad, but maybe it was like a Palestinian going to Israel, I write a lot of stuff and my temperature was checked twice. And I went outside and just shook hands with Tudou and have a hug and take the beers from his arm and go inside. [Both laugh] Yeah, very strange. [00:59:02] A very strange period, you know? For me, it's interesting.

**BROWNING:** Right. Of course.

**DONGHU:** Yeah, during that time, lots of things I did outside the community was to help my mother take material, to take food, take the vegetables, take the fruit, she bought online. Somebody would send them to the door of my community and I go outside and take it in. Everybody did that. And we make a queue and the person before me and the person after me we have maybe one meter and a half [distance from each other]. Yeah, so everybody talks to each other very loudly because we have to talk loudly. [01:00:00]

**BROWNING:** That's kind of interesting because people in Wuhan often talk loudly normally.

**DONGHU:** Yeah, right. Yeah, we are very used to that.

**BROWNING:** Okay, it didn't really feel like when the lockdown was declared over or finished, it didn't really feel like it was actually finished in your mind.

**DONGHU:** Yeah, the first moment I really realized that the lockdown is finished was when my mother said, Maybe, it's time for us to drive you to your wife's parent's home.

**BROWNING:** When was that?

**DONGHU:** Uh, it's the fifteenth of April. I remember very clearly and my mother drove her car. Actually, it's very interesting. [01:01:01] You know, my mother thought she could not start the engine.

**BROWNING:** Study what?

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**DONGHU:** Start the engine of the car. But, of course, it could be started. So she drove me along the road around the Yangzi river and, yeah, Robert, it was so impressive. Very empty streets and every spot that I was so familiar with was totally different. Totally different, with a lot of wood blocks, steel blocks.

**BROWNING:** You mean to block the roads?

**DONGHU:** Yeah, block the roads and no restaurants, no stores were open. [01:02:00] And that's just the quickest time we drove. Just maybe used like fifteen or twenty minutes from my parents to (redacted) place. And when my mother drove under the bridge—I mean, the Chang Jiang Yiqiao, the first Yangzi River Bridge—I was little bit moved. I say, okay, Jesus Christ. Yeah, that's my city. Now it's in that situation.

**BROWNING:** So it took like fifteen to twenty minutes to get to your wife's house?

**DONGHU:** Yeah, yeah. Yeah, it's very quick, because—

**BROWNING:** Normally, how long would it take?

**DONGHU:** Normally, I have to say just more than half an hour.

**BROWNING:** Okay, okay.

**DONGHU:** Yeah, it was more than half an hour. And my mother drove back from (redacted) place to my parent's apartment. [01:03:00] And I remember very clearly at the doorway of the [university] because (redacted) and her parents lived in a campus of a university. So the university was more strictly regulated than other communities. So we have to just do a lot of paperwork, get our temperature checked and then go inside. But the real reason my mother sent me to (redacted) place I think is because she said can't stand even one more day together with me. [Both laugh] Yeah, she's a little bit tired. She's not angry. She's a little bit tired.

[01:04:00]

**BROWNING:** Right, right. Yeah, how was it to see your wife finally?

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**DONGHU:** She's pretty good. Because she and her family, her parents they were living in a little bit bigger apartment than my family, so they're doing well. You know, the university during the lockdown was in a better situation. Because, of course, in China, the universities had a very, very strong, self-organized system, so if you were the workers or teachers in a university, your situation *usually* was better.

**BROWNING:** Right. I mean, obviously there was cafeterias or dining halls, but also like shops, right?

**DONGHU:** Yeah, true, actually. Yeah, exactly. [01:05:00]

**BROWNING:** At least a lot of universities in China are like that. But, I mean, how did it feel to finally meet your wife after such a long time?

**DONGHU:** It's pretty normal, because I have a very special experience of living separately from my wife for many years, you know.

**BROWNING:** Right, yes.

**DONGHU:** Yeah, so for me I think it's short. Maybe the lockdown should be longer. [Both laugh] Yeah, because, you know, Robert, in Chinese family tradition, after that big social issue, I *have* to go to visit my wife's parents and I have to stay for a little bit longer. [01:06:02] I stayed with my wife's family for fifteen days. They were good. They're good. To be honest, frankly speaking, they're very, very good to me. But, for me, it's not that free. Not like in my own family, right? In (redacted) place, we just cooked, talked, and just chatted with her family. And, at that time, we can go outside. Her parent's apartment was located very close to Yangzi River. So every day, we walked to the Yangzi River. [01:07:00] And just during the time I lived together with my wife, after three—no, after maybe more than three—almost four months it was the first time I ate hot dry noodles in a little restaurant open on the street.

**BROWNING:** That must have felt pretty good.

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**DONGHU:** Yeah, for sure. Yeah, everybody was excited.

**BROWNING:** Okay, so I don't know if you have anything else you want to say about the end of the lockdown. If there's anything else you want to share about the end of the lockdown.

**DONGHU:** Nothing special.

**BROWNING:** Okay. [01:08:00] All right. So I really have just like maybe two or three more questions to ask you.

**DONGHU:** Okay, just go ahead.

**BROWNING:** And so one of them is I think is kind of a big question. In your mind, how have things changed since the lockdown? Maybe you could approach this in any way you want. Like, how have things changed for you, your family, for Wuhan, for China? I'll allow you to choose about what you want to speak about.

**DONGHU:** Yeah, that's a very big question. Can I have a second to think about it?

**BROWNING:** Yeah, yeah, of course.

**DONGHU:** Just for me, I think just physically and mentally I have to say I didn't experience any big change during the lockdown period. [01:09:03] Because I was very well supported by the community, by friends, by family and I was involved in the volunteer team, which gave me some sense of the lockdown period. I thought, Okay, anyway, I helped somebody. And from my parent's side I think they were good. They didn't change too much. [01:10:00] Because my family, including me, didn't experience very strict or harsh things during the lockdown. No close relatives were ill or infected. Everybody was safe including the mother of my mother, including the parents of (redacted) father. Yeah, everybody was safe.

Oh yeah, that's a really big question. I know why (redacted) took two hours. Okay, just from my side I think it's okay. It was okay for me. Because, you know, if you don't ask me or do this interview, I even cannot recall some memories that clearly. [01:11:00] Yeah, I almost forgot.



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But if you ask me something that's changed, just the general side like the city or the government or the country, I have something to say. You know, I have a background in education in cultural studies and I research. I'm a guy who was always very interested in the social issues, the political stuff. But, before the lockdown period, I could never imagine that the power of the Chinese government is so strong. Very, very strong. [01:12:00] Just so strong. Just it'd be horrible. They can react very, very quickly. Very effectively, but at the same time, they could use a lot of stuff, a lot of equipment, a lot of policies, a lot of strategies to control the society in the name of controlling the— how can I say? To control a health emergency.

Because after the lockdown, everybody has the experience of being checked in every doorway. Now, our ID, even our bio information, maybe might be controlled by the government.

[01:13:00] I will tell you an example. After the lockdown, I went outside and in May or June, everything seems a little bit normal and we hang out. We go to a restaurant for food. We drink beer. We go to a place to have fun. And I remember the first time I went outside of Wuhan, which was the fourth of November. I went to Beijing to meet (redacted) and just after I went outside of the Beijing West Railway Station, I have to have my ID card checked, right? And the screen shows every fucking place I went before. [01:14:00]

**BROWNING:** Wow, you could see that?

**DONGHU:** Yeah, I took a glance, but they don't want me to see that and they asked me during which date to which date, where were you? I said, I have no fucking idea. I can't remember that clearly. The administrator said, (redacted), we have to know that experience clearly, because we think you didn't get checked at some point. You know, maybe I went to a department store in Wuhan and maybe for some reason I just went directly in without being checked.

**BROWNING:** Right, checked? Like your temperature or? [01:15:00]

**DONGHU:** Yeah, maybe, but they can see that. Yeah, they knew where exactly you were.

**BROWNING:** So they have that detailed information?

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**DONGHU:** Yeah, exactly. So they just gave me some paperwork. They said, You have to write something down just to tell us a general memory about where you were going, where you were during that time. It was maybe just three hours, man. Just from maybe from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

**BROWNING:** Wow, so this is all done through your ID card or your phone or both?

**DONGHU:** My phone. Yeah, that's another thing I want to tell you. Just after the lockdown period, I do believe some scholars, in critical media studies, said the cell phone is a very, very horrible thing. [01:16:02]

**BROWNING:** Yeah. Why is that?

**DONGHU:** Just like, just now especially in China, everybody uses their cell phone as maybe a secondary ID card to move everywhere, to go into everywhere, to go out everywhere, to do everything. So the information and all the data collected via your cell phone, it's very, very exact and very, very detailed. Maybe we have a general policy in every city, in every province. There is—how can I say? [01:17:00] There's a self-identification [system], which could vary from color to color, like red, green, or yellow.

**BROWNING:** Oh right.

**DONGHU:** Yeah, which shows your health situation, right? Now, it's like, if you go to some place—I have no experience, just (redacted) told me. He was in Guangzhou. He went to one specific district for two hours. And when he came back, the color changes from green to yellow. And if you want to change from the yellow to green, you have to double check your health status and stay at home for two weeks.

**BROWNING:** You mean a fever, right? Your temperature?

**DONGHU:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's like that. Yeah, and, you know, 2020 is a big year for every country. [01:18:04] In China, including Hong Kong and Taiwan, there was a lot of social resistance, especially in Hong Kong. And just some friends and I we do believe that the

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Coronavirus helped the Chinese government to push down the resistance in the name of health issues.

**BROWNING:** Right.

**DONGHU:** Yeah. And I think the aftermath will still go on for a long time because now what if you want to go to Hong Kong? [01:19:00] You have to, first of all, you have to stay in a fucking hotel for 14 days and every Hong Kongese who goes back to the mainland, they have to do the same thing. Yeah, that's the policy regarding to the health issue.

**BROWNING:** Even now?

**DONGHU:** Even now, even now. Yeah, just because of you—I can say, yeah, I will tell you. I haven't told anybody this experience. I told you before, last October, you know David Graeber?

**BROWNING:** Yeah, yeah.

**DONGHU:** He passed away. Yeah, he's a very influential scholar to me. And after he passed away, we had some friends in Wuhan who would like to have a tribute event for him. [01:20:00] It is not our idea. It is from his wife, Nika. Nika said, everybody all around the world can have a kind of a celebration to pay tribute to him, so we started to work on that. Finally, we were stopped by the police and the most important reason the police gave us is you can't gather in a public space because we are enduring the virus period. Because now in China everything can be controlled in the name of health issues. You can't get together. [01:21:00] You can't watch an independent movie together, if you have 20 persons or more, because we have a policy about the virus spreading.

**BROWNING:** So you feel it's a way to control people and manage people?

**DONGHU:** Yeah. Right, right. And I feel just after the lockdown period—even just before the lockdown period, the entire political situation, the political atmosphere in China was not that

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open. But I have a very, very strong feeling that the atmosphere now in China—you can't say is much worse, but it is worse.

**BROWNING:** Why is that? [01:22:00]

**DONGHU:** Yeah, because they have an open reason to control something. Actually, it's not connected to virus, but they can control in the name of virus.

**BROWNING:** Yeah, yeah. I understand.

**DONGHU:** Yeah, a lot of stuff. A lot of examples and I want to say another thing. Chinese nationalism increased quickly even during the lockdown and after the lockdown. [01:23:00] Because just as a Chinese experience—[the] policies for controlling the virus could be discussed. It's not that bad. Of course, it's not that good, either. But, for the nationalists, they think maybe it's the best example to say the Chinese system, the Chinese government is the best in the world.

**BROWNING:** Right, you're saying basically they used the lockdown and what happened afterwards as a way to explain how successful China is?

**DONGHU:** Yeah, I can say that. [01:24:00] Even now on Chinese websites, a lot of people blame or laugh at Boris Johnson's policy about the UK's situation. They said, Look at them. It's shocking. It's a fucking bad example. You know, the Western countries, they always think openness is very important, but you can see how many people died. For us [ed. note: China], how many people died? Yeah, like that. I have to say, I do not support the policies of Boris Johnson. But, yeah, just the things I want to talk to you are about other things.

**BROWNING:** Okay, I guess my last question for you would be is, given what happened with lockdown and since the lockdown, how do you feel about the future? [01:25:04]

**DONGHU:** I believe the virus, the Coronavirus, will be with us for a very, very long time. And that's my basic understanding, basic belief. Because my thoughts on the Chinese government's

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control of the virus, like what I said to you before, I have a very general feeling that human beings have a very big problem here. [01:26:00] The virus is not only a medical or scientific issue, but it's more general. It's more total. It's bigger. It's related to a lot of things. It's related to how you react to the other communities, how we react to the other countries, to other ways. It's pretty cultural. And so I think if somebody told me we could find the ultimate solution for stopping the virus, by a scientific or medical way, I think it's a little bit naïve. So, yeah, I'm not that sad. I'm okay. [01:27:00] The future is the future. I believe this virus has changed a lot of things, but, you know, the most important thing—we'll be in the same situation. Which we have to try our best to think about. It's not about the virus. The virus, it's a fucking emergency that maybe led this kind of stuff to come out or seem bigger.

**BROWNING:** Right. Okay, so I guess the very, very last question I have is like—

**DONGHU:** It's okay, it's okay.

**BROWNING:** Right. But it is really the last question. [01:28:00] Is there anything else that you wish to say or share?

**DONGHU:** Hm. Yeah, I want to share one thing. I want to share one very detailed, very specific thing, during this period, when I worked with my friends in the volunteer team, most of the money came from the Chinese people, or the Chinese people living abroad. But, I guess, I believe, in the total amount of the Lumo Road Volunteer Team collected, there is only one amount of money that came from foreigners, which came from my Canadian friend, named Derrick [01:29:07] Actually, he is a black friend. Yeah, he's African American. And [he gave] just about 50 Canadian dollars. Not too much. And what I want to say is after that was the George Floyd stuff and the Black Lives Matter thing. And just after the lockdown period, most of the Chinese people consider the African American people's situation, the Black Lives Matter movement, in a very, very negative way. [01:30:01] I have to say the COVID-19 helped the Chinese racism increase. But I want to say, just the only money from outside to help Wuhan

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was from an African American person. It is the only amount of money. Yeah, that is very, very important to me. You can imagine, Robert, that is very, very important to me.

**BROWNING:** Yeah.

**DONGHU:** Yeah. Just anybody that talked about any issues related about black politics or the situation of African American citizens in America or in Canada, I would never say anything else. [01:31:00] I would just want to tell the story to them.

**BROWNING:** So, I have to ask though, you said that the COVID-19 increased racism towards African people or African American people especially—

**DONGHU:** Generally, the black people, even the black people in China.

**BROWNING:** Oh okay. So why is that?

**DONGHU:** Uh, it's pretty complex, but I have to say, because the racism is not directly caused by COVID-19, but it was there. It was there for a long time. But maybe it's easier to tell you by using some examples. [01:32:03] Like, I remember in the middle of last year, a lot of media—not a lot of media—there was always a lot of information about that. Just like, in the United States, or in Canada, in North America. The number of black people who were infected was more than white people. And in China, a very mainstream reaction is to say that, Yeah, for sure, because black people don't care about their health very much. [01:33:05] And, even in southern China, in Guangzhou, in Guangdong, there are a lot of black people living there. And most of them are from Africa or the Mideast or Southeast Asia. For a long period of time, the local people were a little bit afraid of them, because they just think they were they were not that competent. I don't know how to say, you know what I'm saying?

**BROWNING:** Yeah, right. They were uncomfortable with them.

**DONGHU:** Yeah. [01:34:00] And on the other hand, the success of Chinese policies, or the Chinese control of the virus, made some people believe that our successful experience or

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successful result is related to race, because Chinese people just care about health or are just easily controlled. We have a better relationship between our government and something, blah-blah-blah and black people are just very chaotic, blah-blah-blah.

**BROWNING:** Well, I can remember even when I was in China, I would come across Chinese people who would say Chinese people like to pay attention to their health, you know?

[01:35:04]

**DONGHU:** Yeah.

**BROWNING:** And it wasn't always like a racist thing or a political thing. But it seemed to be kind of, like, Chinese are good at that.

**DONGHU:** Maybe (redacted) told you before and even considering Hong Kong, it's more complicated. I have to say many of Hong Kongese are very conservative. There is just only one major reason—only two major reasons changed the situation. One is COVID-19 and the other is BLM. [01:36:00] At the end of last year, in Hong Kong, there was a kind of a—how can I say? There was a social tendency that you can't believe the local government because they're controlled by the central government. And, of course, we can't believe Chinese government because they are the central government. And the only thing we have to believe is the America or UK, but after that though they took a very, very strict view that the only person who can represent the United States are middle class white people. [01:37:03] Yeah, because you can see the BLM is very, very bad or blah-blah-blah, like that. Yeah, COVID-19 and the BLM movements I think just totally changed the entire general Hong Kong atmosphere, I think.

**BROWNING:** Right. I can imagine.

**DONGHU:** Yeah.

**BROWNING:** Okay. So, okay, on that note, I think I'm about done.

**DONGHU:** Okay.

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**BROWNING:** But I'm going to stop recording and there's just a couple things I needed to talk to you about, so stay on the line here for a moment. Okay?

**DONGHU:** Yeah, yeah, I will.

**BROWNING:** Okay. [01:38:00] And I want to say this in the recording, thank you very much for doing this.

**DONGHU:** No problem, man.

End of interview