

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

### **Scarlett Interview**

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Virtual Meeting

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**ROBERT BROWNING:** Today's date is March fourteenth, here in America, 2023. This is a follow up interview with Scarlett about her experiences during the last couple, three years since the first lockdown. And so I want to begin by asking you, three years later, what are your feelings now about the first lockdown?

**SCARLETT:** Well, I still think they did the right thing and we did the right thing. And if the whole world did the same thing, as we did, the virus would have been extinct, you know?

**BROWNING:** Right.

**SCARLETT:** In early, like, 2020. Yeah, 2020. [00:01:01]

**BROWNING:** Okay. And so since that first lockdown and with all of the many other lockdowns and changes in policies and other restrictions, what are your feelings about that? (noise in background)

**SCARLETT:** Well, if we're talking about [the] first lockdown, it started in the end of 2019. Oh, no, no, actually it was in January 2020, right? The Chinese Spring Festival. And officially ends after like seventy-four days, something around like April or May in 2020. [00:02:04] And so I think the first lockdown was a relatively short period of time. And especially it's in an extreme situation, so I think it was understood and supported by most people.

**BROWNING:** And what about—

**SCARLETT:** It's much like—

**BROWNING:** Go ahead.

**SCARLETT:** It's something like in a fairy tale. It's dangerous outside. You'd better stay at home and if you step outside, you will be killed or you will be captured by some monsters. And you're required to stay at home for around three to four months. But there are people outside protecting you and giving you enough supplies, so I think it is quite okay for most people. [00:03:00]

**BROWNING:** But what about what happened since that first lockdown? Did the other lockdowns affect your life at all? Or the other restrictions affect your life?

**SCARLETT:** (Laughs) Do you want to put the question in a specific time period of time? Like, how many lockdowns are you talking about?

**BROWNING:** (noise) Yeah, I mean, I know that there were a lot of lockdowns, but did they affect you? I guess, just generally speaking, did they affect *you* in any way? Like your work? Your ability to move around? Travel? Anything like that?

**SCARLETT:** Well, I have to say that I was super surprised [when] you told me we're going to have a further interview and about the first lockdown and what happened in 2020, something. And I was, like, Huh, okay, why do you still want to know [about] the things [that] happened the first year in 2020? [00:04:07] Actually, there was much more came out after that year. Why didn't you ask me about what happened in 2022? Because there was a lot of shit that happened actually in 2022. I think peoples' doubts and their experience and how they feel about those things and the lockdown and restriction orders, they've changed a lot during these three years, I have to say. So I was kind of surprised. I feel it's kind of funny. Your interview was still, you know, focusing on the first year but I'm glad you actually asked me about the following lockdowns.

**BROWNING:** Right. [00:05:00]

**SCARLETT:** It starts in January 2020, but it officially ended December 2022.

**BROWNING:** Right, right. Yeah.

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, it actually affected [us] also during January 2023. So let's put it [for] like three years.

**BROWNING:** Yeah, yeah.

**SCARLETT:** There were lots of things [that] actually changed. Also, my thoughts, my feelings. And did it actually affect my life that much? No, actually, I was a lucky one. Because during the main time, I was working for 51Talk and it's an online business, so it didn't affect me that much. Also, some of the colleagues, no. I kept myself busy with lots of stuff. [00:06:00] My own work, my own stuff and the volunteering jobs. I kept myself busy. I actually didn't have so much time to think about others. You know, to complain. And about traveling, actually, I felt like sometimes people had memory loss when

they're so pissed or furious about stuff. Like, the things went extremely bad during the fourth quarter in 2022.

**BROWNING:** Right.

**SCARLETT:** We could see [it] on the internet. People complained every time and about every matter. They were complaining they've been on lockdown for three years. Actually, it's not true. Because after the first half year in 2020, things were very clear. [00:07:05] We read the news from all over the world, like, Europe was suffering, the states was suffering and Canada was suffering. Even Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong. They were suffering for a half year. Like, yes, yes, for half of 2020. After finishing the lockdown, it was totally clean in China.

**BROWNING:** Right.

**SCARLETT:** And also people felt, like, Wow, we did the right thing. And we're so lucky right now, the rest of the world was still struggling with COVID, but now we can go party. We can go traveling, of course, in China. But then things were kind of twisted in 2020 and especially after the super long lockdown in Shanghai, you know. [00:08:01] But if you really want to hear from me, I'm sorry what did you say?

**BROWNING:** Do you mean there was a lockdown in Shanghai in 2022, right? Last year was it?

**SCARLETT:** Was it 2022 or 2021?

**BROWNING:** You know, I forget now. (Laughs)

**SCARLETT:** Yes, sorry.

**BROWNING:** That's okay, that's okay.

**SCARLETT:** Do you need me to Google it right now?

**BROWNING:** No, no, it's okay. Don't worry about that.

**SCARLETT:** Okay, let's just give a pin here. Because after the interview, I can do some Baidu work just to make sure when it actually happened. Oh my god. (laughs) It was a very long lockdown. I don't know, three months, four months. [00:09:01] Apparently due to the big population in Shanghai, people were super pissed about that and they were not satisfied at all. Then people started to think about all the restriction orders and if the virus is really dangerous for most people. And also young people don't care much about old people. Like, Okay, if it's the virus, only friends. The old people, then I don't care [about it]. I'm young. I still have a long life to live, something like that.

Well, for me, if you want to hear something from me, I'd like to say, in which angle we started to talk about that? Something like political? [00:10:01] Especially in 2020, people were very proud and there were lots of people talking about the difference between the two totally different political systems. Like, the socialist political system shows more concern for the people. Because what have we heard at that time, the governors were always saying, Ensure the safety of the people's lives, at all costs. Yeah, but, actually, the will of the first leader was good [Xi Jinping]. We're sure about that. Sometimes when we go down, you know, to implement it, because some of the civil servants, like, local governments at some levels, they were arrogant or just being lazy.

**BROWNING:** Okay. [00:11:01]

**SCARLETT:** So there were some extreme implementations or, actually, they didn't care much about people's feelings. I don't know if you know about the difference between northern and southern China and southern China—the officers in the south.

**BROWNING:** A little bit. But yeah, go ahead. Go ahead and explain.

**SCARLETT:** Okay, actually, I'm not going to talk about the climate and the cultural difference. Let's focus on the government officials. Normally the officers in south are more qualified. You know, because a lockdown is not just a simple lockdown. It's not about you just shut down to put [limit] the virus, to shut down some communities. People need to arrange many things to ensure that the people under lockdown can keep their quality of life as much as possible, right? [00:12:01] Because people who are on lockdown, they need food. They need supplies.

**BROWNING:** Right.

**SCARLETT:** And even for the prevention of the COVID, people during lockdown, they needed to do the PCR tests and how to arrange the PCR test in a perfect way, or in a proper way. I saw some news and some complaints about people [who] didn't have enough supplies during a lockdown. Maybe it's a long period of the time. It's around three months. And it turns out, the local government didn't manage [things] well. But, actually, back to 2020, I give [them] the nine out of ten. But, in 2022, I was also confused, I have to say.

**BROWNING:** Confused? [00:13:02]

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, I was also confused and also about [the] lockdown in Shanghai, there were lots of things that happened, which I do not understand. Because it's Shanghai. It's like Manhattan. It's like Tokyo. It's like London, like Berlin in Germany. It's a big city, right? Just now I mentioned that the officers in the south are supposed to be more qualified. And can you imagine our officers in Shanghai, in such a big modern city and, especially, it's a very important city in China?

**BROWNING:** Um-hm, of course.

**SCARLETT:** And so they put people [for a] very long time on lockdown, but people complained about supplies. Some people didn't get enough food. [00:14:02] And some people who tested positive, they were supposed to be transferred to some field hospital, but they spent like hours on the way or hours being trapped, from nowhere. And also Shanghai is kind of special, you know, because I've been working as a volunteer for many years and compared to the big population of Shanghai, the amount of people who were doing the volunteering in Shanghai were very few.

**BROWNING:** Oh really?

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, let's say people living there in Shanghai, actually, are a little bit selfish. Because I have a lot of friends in Shanghai. Sometimes during the Shanghai lockdown, I paid a lot of attention to them because I care about them. [00:15:01] I saw a friend kept posting something, like, We need food. We need drink. We need blah-blah-blah. So, oh my god, I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry about things happening to you. You need any help? Can I do something for you? I can mail something to you. Anything.

Anything you need. He said, No, no worries, I have everything in my fridge. I said, Then I don't understand why you keep posting things like that. He said, Because the community across the street, received the supplies from the government for free and I need to pay for my food. I also want to free stuff from the government. So that's why I keep yelling every day. Well, I was like, Okay, I understand that. But meanwhile, I don't understand, you know what I mean?

**BROWNING:** Um-hm.

**SCARLETT:** So it's a long period of time since 2020 and 2021. Let's put the time a little bit longer, before the Shanghai lockdown, so it's 2021 or 2022? [00:16:04] Oh, my God. But actually, it's the time before the lockdown happened in Shanghai, I could clearly feel that people in life or even on the internet were very proud. We highly recognized the sense of the security brought by the whole country. And especially when we read the news about the United States had lost one million people due to COVID and the White House lawn was covered with the white flags. By that time, we recognized the efforts of the country, actually. But when the impacts of COVID was slowly expanding, expanding, it's not only about Wuhan, or some small city, or, you know, some minimum amount of cities. [00:17:01] And the months went by without end, then different voices became more and more. And I'm pretty sure you've heard about things happening this winter in 2022 about protesters holding a white paper on a street.

**BROWNING:** Right, yeah, last year.

**SCARLETT:** And I also talked with one. Yes, yes. And I also talked with a friend because he posted something on the WeChat moments, like, Let's gather together tonight, to which place and you need to prepare some flowers and some white papers, something about that. And I texted him and kindly reminded him, If you want to protest, I support you. But be careful with the white paper, because I've traveled around so many nations. [00:18:04] I know how [the] government sees the white paper and the color revolution. So [you] better be careful. He said, yeah, yeah. Thank you. I'm not going to use the white paper, but I am for sure I'm going to hold the flower. I said, okay, it's your freedom. You can do that, of course. But why do you want to go to the streets, by the way? He said, I just want to go to the gym.

**BROWNING:** The gym?

**SCARLETT:** I just want to go to the gym. I said, Okay, you can go look.

**BROWNING:** What did he mean by that?

**SCARLETT:** Because before the protests in Wuhan, Wuhan had [been] locked down [for] more than three weeks.

**BROWNING:** Okay.

**SCARLETT:** And while for him, he hadn't been to the gym for—I don't know—a month. [00:19:03] So the reason for him to go to the streets and protest, it's only because he couldn't go to the gym at that time. So I was like, Okay, um-hm, um-hm, you don't need to worry about old people. But I understand that and sometimes people complaints [were] greater than gratitude, especially during that time, and their sense of freedom and normal life were greater than the protection of the lockdown. They started to think, compared with my freedom and my normal life, is it really worth it to just put us together in the lockdown area? And some of them were businessmen, which I understand a lot because due to the long term of the lockdown, their business had to be stopped. [00:20:05] And of course, it had brought them a huge loss. There were also some college students who were unwilling to spend three years, like, valuable college time [under] during the lockdown. So but, you know, I kind of don't [for] feel them or don't have the empathy for the protesters going on a street yelling, like, We want to go to the concert. We want to go to watch a movie, something like that. Actually, because there's something more important than the freedom of the individual person. Sorry, I was born in China.

**BROWNING:** No, that's okay. I just want to know your opinion. You know, your feelings, your thoughts, you know, your story. [00:21:01]

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, an individual person's values. But actually, I think sometimes there are things [that are] more important. Compared to a person going to a concert or going to watch a movie, something like that. I feel like people have enjoyed too much—

*Pause in recording*

**SCARLETT:** Hello?



**BROWNING:** Hello, hello.

**SCARLETT:** Oh, sorry, I got an incoming call and I hang it up.

**BROWNING:** That's okay. So you're saying that people were enjoying things?

**SCARLETT:** Oh okay. Yes, yes. I think people have enjoyed too much [of a] convenient life in the cities. [00:22:03] China's development in the past twenty years has made them forget that China is still a developing country with a large base of villages and town population. Like I said, Shanghai is China. Beijing is China, but they're not all of China. They're only part of China and those modern cities don't present the real China. There are lots of people [who] are super proud, like China, number one. No, we have a super long way to go. Still I insist, China is still a developing country and it's a third world country. [00:23:01] And now we're having not good relations between China and USA. Sometimes I feel it's funny, because, come on, it's USA. It's the most developed country of the world. It should be USA's humiliation that people always mention and compare China, as a developing country, to the USA, right?

**BROWNING:** Well, I mean, yeah, we could talk about that, you know, a lot. But I think I would like to maybe follow up on at least one thing that you said and maybe just clarify something that you said.

**SCARLETT:** Oh, of course.

**BROWNING:** And that was about the students you talked about. [00:24:02] And like, it sounded like you disagreed with the opinions or activities of the students. You know, by saying that they had spent a few years studying and then they went out and protested. Could you maybe elaborate on that a little bit more?

**SCARLETT:** Well, back to the time when I was at university, I did a lot of volunteer jobs. Like, to go to the west of China, go to the huge mountains [in] Guizhou province and Yunnan province. I volunteered to teach the kids there and I've seen the real poor people there. [00:25:00]

*Pause in recording*

**SCARLETT:** Hello?

**BROWNING:** Hello.

**SCARLETT:** Sorry, I had to answer that phone call.

**BROWNING:** Yes, that's okay.

**SCARLETT:** If I didn't do that, he will keep calling me.

**BROWNING:** Yeah, that's okay. That's okay. So you were talking about Guizhou?

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, the students and my college time. I've experienced the life there. We still have a large population there in the west of China. They're not Shanghai, they're not Beijing, they're not Guangzhou. They're not even Wuhan. And can you imagine how poor the people [are] there? And for most college students nowadays, they couldn't imagine, and they couldn't see, because they do not have the interest to go there to have a look. [00:26:07] Probably they've been there before for some tourist traveling, you know? But to go there to help the local people to build up something, to help them to have a better life, that's the thing they never did and they were never interested in. And they can feel old people around, especially old people in China, are having the same life as they have. They can go to the concerts, they can go to the library, and they can watch a movie. Whenever you want. And they don't need to worry about their life. They just spend their parents' money to sit in a fancy cafe to enjoy the whole afternoon coffee, something like that. [00:27:01]

**BROWNING:** Right, you could say that they were comfortable, maybe to too comfortable In your mind?

**SCARLETT:** Yes, yes. And why I don't agree? I understand them, but I don't agree. Because our coverage of the medical resources I think is less than one-third of that of the United States. So I will not sacrifice other peoples' lives, especially, the older peoples' lives and big amounts of the people in exchange for my own freedom and the freedom for going to watch a movie or going to a concert. I never do that. And also the Zero-COVID policy was urged to stop in December. [00:28:04] I think in December 2022. Which week? I think it's after first a week or two, but we think [in] one month many old people passed away.

**BROWNING:** Right.

**SCARLETT:** So that was the time people started to think, especially for those who lost their beloved ones. And before that time, all the students and protesters they were super proud. Like, See, we went up to the streets and we're brave enough to protest. Then the Zero-COVID policy ended and all of you [are] welcome, something like that. Within one month, we couldn't hear that voice anymore. People started to deny that they used to go up on the streets. [00:29:03] Also, one of my friends who went up to the street to protest because he wanted to go to the gym, his grandpa died. But I think we're better than this. We should be better than this. And no one from my family passed away, but one of my professors from Qinghua University died.

**BROWNING:** Okay.

**SCARLETT:** And he was a great man.

**BROWNING:** Right.

**SCARLETT:** So that's how I feel and how I see people around during that time. And also people complain, We have three years to prepare for the extreme situation. Come on. [00:30:00] Our country is not that rich. We expanded the ICU beds, but it's totally not enough.

**BROWNING:** Right, yeah. I mean, I can only imagine, you know, because I'm not there. So I guess—

**SCARLETT:** And now everyone got it. I think most people. More than 90% people got tested positive with COVID, suffered with COVID. So did I.

**BROWNING:** Yeah, you got it. I remember you telling me.

**SCARLETT:** Yes, yes. Oh my god. That's the thing I will never want to experience again.

**BROWNING:** I can imagine. I've never gotten COVID, yet.

**SCARLETT:** You're lucky, you're lucky.

**BROWNING:** But yeah, everybody tells me it's not fun. [00:31:01]

**SCARLETT:** Oh my God. I don't even want to go over the memory of that.

**BROWNING:** Yeah, that's okay. Um, I guess the last thing I can ask you is, what have you learned about yourself since all of this stuff has happened?

**SCARLETT:** Well, I'm not so sure if I told you before that I actually experienced the SARS time.

**BROWNING:** Yes, you did. Yeah.

**SCARLETT:** (Laughs) In 2004. And I had a full pack of the COVID things 2020. I think I began to have the habit of stocking things, you know. [00:32:03] I'll feel safe with my fridge full of food, and also some canned food, which has a super long expiring time. I keep my mask on while going [out in] public. And, actually, I take off my mask because we're having an interview right now, but I keep my mask on even sitting in [the] office. I wash my hands and I use sanitizer often. That's also the thing I asked my daughter to do. What changed in my life? Those are the small things change in my life. [00:33:01] And nothing more, actually. Nothing more.

**BROWNING:** Right.

**SCARLETT:** You know, there's a Chinese saying that what we learn from history is that people never learn from history.

**BROWNING:** Right. Oh yes, I've heard that.

**SCARLETT:** So I just want to take care of myself [and] the people I really care about. So I always have medication in my home, sanitizer, enough masks and test kits. Yeah. To see my room full of supplies brings me a sense of security. [00:34:01]

**BROWNING:** Okay. I can understand. Yeah, so I think with that we can maybe finish. Unless there's anything else you wish to say that I maybe didn't ask or maybe anything else that you want to say?

**SCARLETT:** Nothing much, actually. I think I've already said everything I want to share with you. And if you have any further questions anytime, you just contact me.

**BROWNING:** Okay, well—

**SCARLETT:** Because we went over things since 2019 to 2020, 2021, 2022 and 23. [00:35:03] Well, now is the time most people got COVID. And there is a period of time, like, nothing happened. We don't even talk about that anymore. Now we have the different flu spreading around, but people are not panicked at all.

**BROWNING:** Right, right. Yeah, it's flu season here, too.

**SCARLETT:** Yes, there's a seasonal flu. I went to the hospital the other day, because I needed to get my finger checked. I went to the hospital and that was the time I felt like, Wow, it's full, like, the ER room was totally full. And doctors told me because it's the flu and I said, Wow, I didn't feel it at all. Because no one around me got the flu. [00:36:01] And the COVID thing seems like a century ago, for me, for most people. Yeah, we kind of worried before the Spring Festival and we kind of worried about, you know, a different virus and probably a second peak. But nothing happened. And now it's March. Nothing happened. I know some people struggling with the flu, but for most people life just continues like in a normal way.

**BROWNING:** Right. Well, that's good to hear that things feel a little normal. Although, you know, nowadays we say, What is normal? (laughs)

**SCARLETT:** Yeah, yeah. What happened in the past, it's in the past.

**BROWNING:** Right. [00:37:00] Well, okay, I'm going to stop the recording, but before I do that I'm going to again, say thank you for doing this.

**SCARLETT:** Oh, it's totally okay.

End of interview