

**ICS Dossier On Fang Fang's Wuhan Diary**

**COVID-19, China and Anatomy of Fang Fang  
Phenomenon**

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# COVID-19, China and Anatomy of Fang Fang Phenomenon

## Abstract

*In modern China, even under Mao's communist era, literature has been regarded as an instrument of political dissent. Two major approaches are required to seriously reflect on how to understand the anatomy of the Fang Fang Phenomenon: one is to view it in the historical context of New Culture Movement or the birth of 'enlightenment' in early 20th century China; the other, to critically examine a paradigm shift in the Communist Party of China (CPC) seeking political legitimacy through 维稳 weiwēn or 'social stability' during reform era, especially since the Tiananmen protests and the Soviet collapse. Fang Fang is not an ordinary Chinese living in Wuhan - the first epicentre of the ongoing global pandemic. Wang Fang, her real name, is an acclaimed, award-winning writer who has published widely in different genres. Her 60 days diary, called Fang Fang Diary, giving a daily commentary on the life and death in the streets of locked down Wuhan, has apparently created unprecedented split among the country's intelligentsia and has rattled the party orthodoxy. The unexpected popularity of Wuhan Diary or Quarantine Diary, as it is also being called, has recast Fang Fang from a well-known writer into China's most revered voice of literary dissent. Many call her "conscience of Wuhan."*

**Keywords:** Fang Fang, Wuhan Diary, Cultural Revolution, CPC, Maoist-Nationalist, Legitimacy.

*Let her and falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the work in a free and open encounter?*

– John Milton (1644)<sup>1</sup>

*Let other people speak out. The heavens will not fall and you will not be thrown out. If you do not let others speak, then the day will come when you are thrown out.*

– Mao Zedong (1962)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Irvine, A. D. (1998) "Let Truth and Falsehood Grapple," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, Vol. 67, No. 2 Spring pp. 549-566. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/516254/pdf> Viewed on 2020/04/28

<sup>2</sup> Mao Tse-tung (1962) "Talk at an Enlarged Working Conference Convened by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China," *Marxist Internet Archive*, [https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-8/mswv8\\_62.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-8/mswv8_62.htm). Viewed on 2020/04/30

## Literature, not contemporary theories, best way to understand contemporary China

John Milton and Mao Zedong's above quotes are frequently being cited these days on the Chinese social media. Surprised? But it is true that no "firewall" could prevent what the above quotes reveal - pluralistic ideas continue to exist despite top CPC leaders' focus on "establishing a rigid ideological canon." Besides, the ubiquitous presence of the party-state in everyday lives of people in China, and in spite of Xi Jinping's "iron fist" approach to crush dissent by cracking down on human rights activists and civil rights lawyers on one hand, and tight censorship control on the print and social media on the other, a quick glance over the cyber world of blogs, chat forums and news portals would reveal a remarkable degree of plurality of opinions. What surprises many within and outside of China is, the more Xi Jinping regime is becoming intolerant of dissenting or critical voices - in his first five year rule Xi is believed to have called dissent as "erroneous viewpoints" - the public discourse too has become more and more pluralistic in character, even engendering competing ideologies, especially on the social media.

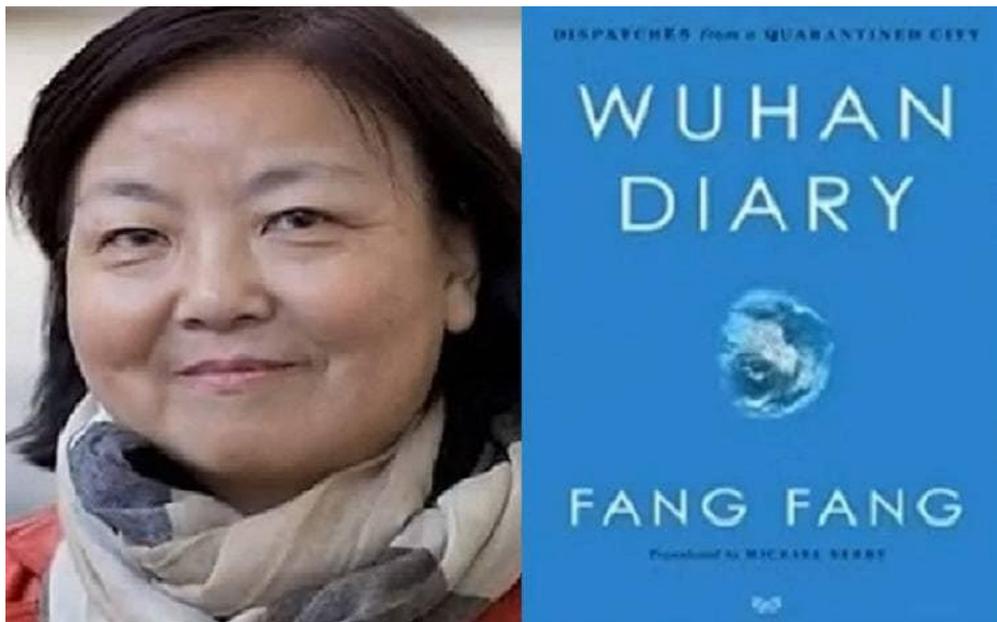


Image 1: Fang Fang and the cover of HarperCollins 'Wuhan Diary' in English

Be it individual blogs on Weibo, WeChat and Sina.com and so on, or even “comments” from the prescient readers on news portals, including the official People’s Daily e-newspaper, China’s well informed netizens offer a wide range of diverse “viewpoints”, which is actually posing serious challenge to the official orthodoxy. It is pertinent to recall the *Central Document No. 9* (April, 2013), a policy document with specific guidelines to severely crackdown on dissent and prepared under direct instructions (*mingling*命令) from the newly anointed party general secretary himself. The Document listed “seven threats” and the first was the Western-style democracy and independent media. The party-state is fully operative and invasive of the lifeblood in every sphere and the party’s role has expanded much more today than under any other leader in post-Tiananmen China. The latest and by far the biggest such “seismic event” challenging the Chinese authorities is, particularly in the times of internet in China, what the Chinese netizens are calling the “Fang Fang Phenomennon.”

Two major approaches are required to seriously reflect on how to understand the anatomy of the Fang Fang Phenomenon: one is to view it in the historical context of New Culture Movement or the birth of ‘enlightenment’ in early 20th century China; the other, to critically examine a paradigm shift in the Communist Party of China (CPC) seeking political legitimacy through 维稳 *weiwēn* or “social stability” during reform era, especially since the Tiananmen protests and the Soviet collapse.

In the words of a well-known and reputed Chinese writer, Ning Ken, contemporary society in China is perhaps the craziest period in China’s long history. Everything in China is “ultra-unreal,” Ken opined. Ken likened the “ultra-unreal” situation in Chinese society, in particular during the past two decades, with “magic realism” - a metaphor employed by the Latin American authors, especially Gabriel García Márquez, to describe reality in their own societies. “At the present moment, only literature can help us understand China. No other method will work. The biggest question on the planet right now might be ‘Whither China’? It is possible that the only

way we can address this question is through literature,” Ken wondered.<sup>3</sup> Lu Xun, modern China’s greatest cultural and literary icon and possibly among the first few founders of the early twentieth century Chinese ‘enlightenment,’ had something similar to say on the chaotic situation prevailing in Chinese society after over a decade of the 1911 revolution. Lu Xun used the metaphor “monkey business” to comment on the disappointing and frustrating mess in society caused by the failure of the Guomindang rule following the “Revolution.” Lu Xun used his literary pen to describe the chaos through his *The Dairy of a Madman* (1918) and *The True Story of Ah Q* (1921), respectively. Like the writer Ning Ken’s recommendation that literature is the only way to understand China today, Lu Xun had said that exactly a century ago. It was the power of his fiction and his ability to portray the Chinese reality which catapulted him into the position of China’s leading writer and cultural critic during the New Culture Movement. Lu Xun and his creative writing in diverse literary genres has been and is still so overwhelming that he and his short stories, essays, prose poetry etc. are viewed as the starting point towards understanding modern China. “...anyone wanting to get a sense of the despair that gripped it for large parts of the 20th century and which still lurks behind the country’s resurgent façade should probably start with the short stories of one of the country’s founding modernist authors: Lu Xun,” wrote Julia Lovell,<sup>4</sup> the author of widely read and influential translation of Lu Xun’s works, entitled *The Real Story of Ah-Q and Other Tales of China*.

Though there is undeniable organic link between New Culture Movement (NCM), May Fourth Movement (MFM) and ‘enlightenment,’ yet a failure to make a distinction among them while studying the growth of “new era” art, culture and literature in the first quarter in the past century would erroneously lead to wrong understanding of

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<sup>3</sup> Ning Ken (2016) “Modern China is So Crazy It Needs a New Literary Genre,” *Translated from the Chinese by Thomas Moran*, June 23, in *Literary Hub* <https://lithub.com/modern-china-is-so-crazy-it-needs-a-new-literary-genre/>, viewed in May 2020

<sup>4</sup> Lovell, Julia (2010) “China’s Conscience,” June 12, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/jun/12/rereading-julia-lovell-lu-xun>, viewed in March 2020; Julia Lovell (2010) *The Real Story of AhQ and Other Tales of China: The Complete Fiction of Lu Xun* (Penguin Classics); Geremie Barme (2017) “The True Story of Lu Xun,” November, *The New York Review of Books*, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2017/11/23/true-story-of-lu-xun/> viewed in May 2020

Chinese modernity. In more recent scholarship therefore it is argued that interpretations of the Chinese May Fourth era often reduce the period to one of wholesale westernization and cultural self-repudiation.<sup>5</sup> One of the reasons cited for this fallacy is that until very recently, studies of modern Chinese literature have been paid no or very little attention by the contemporary political theoretical debates. “It is true that modern Chinese studies in the West have only recently been recognized as an independent field... [But] the context under which this field came into being in the West has changed over the years. One central change is that scholarship in the field is no longer a monologue among a handful of China experts.”<sup>6</sup> It is these misperceptions and incorrect methodological frameworks, according to recent studies mainly undertaken by the young mainland Chinese cultural theorists based in western universities, which, despite postcolonial theory’s rejection of legacies of Western imperial dominance and cultural hierarchy, have failed to stop perceiving the Chinese May Fourth “enlightenment” project as wholesale westernization.<sup>7</sup> As recent Chinese cultural studies discourse claims, it is time the worldwide mainstream scholarship on modern China studies forsakes its West-centric notions and acknowledges and also accepts Chinese intellectuals’ endeavour to construct ‘enlightenment’ with the aim to blend Buddhist, Confucian and Daoist elements on one hand, and on the other hand create a subjectivity entailing “both/and” dynamic, inclusive of collectivist allegory and personal integrity.

If anyone is in doubt of the CPC reform leadership’s neo-liberal trajectory of China’s economic reform, what Peter Kwong wrote in an article a decade and a half ago should clear the doubt. A professor of Asian American Graduate Studies, CUNY, New York, Peter Kwong recalled in the article attending a meeting at the People’s University in 1980, where he was visiting professor. The university’s Scientific

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<sup>5</sup> Ho Jianwen Felicia (2012) *Full Spectrum of Selves in Modern Chinese Literature: From Lu Xun to Xiao Hong* (unpublished PhD dissertation) East Asian Languages and Culture, University of California, Los Angeles, <https://escholarship.org/content/qt5022k8qv/qt5022k8qv.pdf?t=mi1vu6>, viewed in May 2020

<sup>6</sup> Kang, Liu (1993) “Politics, Critical Paradigms: Reflections on Modern Chinese Literature Studies,” in *Modern China*, Vol. 19, No. 1, January, pp. 13-40, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/189327?seq=1> viewed in May 2020

<sup>7</sup> Ho Jianwen Felicia, *ibid*

Socialism Department had invited him to attend a special lecture by a foreign Noble Laureate in Economics, at the Great Hall of the People in October. To his disbelief, the foreign professor to deliver the special lecture turned out to be America's far-right neo-liberal scholar, Milton Friedman. When he asked his hosts at the university why invite someone who favoured the opening of markets in developing countries by political means or military intervention? His hosts, according to Professor Kwong, replied with no hint of being troubled by such facts, saying: "We want Friedman to show us how to jump-start our economy." Kwong found it extremely intriguing "how early the Chinese had searched out Friedman for guidance -only one year after Thatcher began her brutal "there is no other alternative" reforms. So just as Ronald Reagan started his "revolution" in America by stripping away social and welfare safety nets that had been in place since the FDR era, Deng and his supporters followed Friedman's recipe to "get the government off the people's back," ushering China into the neo-liberal universe."<sup>8</sup>

Since 1980s, following in the footsteps of Margret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC), under the authoritarian one party-politics of the CPC, has orchestrated neoliberal-looking, market-oriented economic reforms and expanded social policy provisions.<sup>9</sup> According to Jane Duckett, as social policies facilitated China's particular brand of neoliberal-looking market reform, it also contributed to increasing insecurities for many people, especially in rural countryside and among gradually vast numbers of low-wage factory workers. "The Chinese Party-state then used social policies to reduce dissatisfaction with the downsides of marketization: the wave of high unemployment from state enterprises in the late 1990s and early 2000s, rapidly rising income inequalities, and then the negative impact on farming from WTO entry."<sup>10</sup> Therefore, as the CPC went on dismantling "socialist" welfare policies one after the other, it also at the same time resorted to

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<sup>8</sup> Kwong, Peter (2006) "The Chinese Face of Neoliberalism," October 7, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2006/10/07/the-chinese-face-of-neoliberalism/>, viewed in May 2020

<sup>9</sup> Duckett, Jane (2020) "Neoliberalism, Authoritarian Politics and Social Policy in China," January 11, in *Development and Change*, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/dech.12568>, viewed in May 2020

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

more and more social policy measures in order to ensure the increasing insecurities and dissatisfaction among rural population and urban low wage workers do not lead to social instability.

### **Who is Fang Fang? What is Wuhan Diary? What is Fang Fang Phenomenon?**

*Who is Fang Fang? What is Wuhan Diary or Fang Fang Diary? What is “Fang Fang Phenomena?”*

Fang Fang is an accomplished and well-known yet controversial Chinese poet and writer. Wang Fang, her original name, has published widely in different genres and won several literary awards, including China’s most prestigious Lu Xun Literary Prize in 2010. Until recently, she served as president of the Hubei Writer’s Association.<sup>11</sup> Fang Fang spent her childhood during the tumultuous Great Leap Forward years and adolescent years in the cataclysmic decade of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). In her late teens, in order to support her family, she worked as a porter for four years before entering Wuhan University. Fang Fang says she was lucky to enrol into the graduation course in literature at the university in 1978 - the first year of college/university education after the Cultural Revolution ended. Fang Fang’s early works, mostly short stories, concentrated mainly on the poor Wuhanese - from urban factory workers to the city’s middle-class intellectuals - part of China’s “new realism” literature. Born into a literati family in 1955, she inherited the legacy of the May Fourth socialist realism and her own experiences of a struggling life made her remain committed to social consciousness. Applauding Fang Fang for her sincerity and sensitivity as a writer, well-known Chinese literary critic, Han Shaogong had once said, “the secret of Fang Fang’s success is that she can capture the complexities of an ever-changing life without losing its thread.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Adlakha, Hemant (2020) “Fang Fang: ‘Conscience of Wuhan’ Amid Coronavirus Quarantine,” *The Diplomat* <https://thediplomat.com/2020/03/fang-fang-the-conscience-of-wuhan-amid-coronavirus-quarantine/> viewed on 2020/05/05

<sup>12</sup> *Paper Republic: Chinese Literature in Translation* <https://paper-republic.org/pers/fang-fang/> viewed on 2020/03/20

Although considered by most literary critics as among top ten best short story writers in New China, Fang is one of the most controversial fiction writers in China today. She catapulted to instant fame when Wuhan Diary started appearing on her individual blog on Weibo - China's most popular social media platform, within days of the sudden imposition of lockdown in the central Chinese city of Wuhan, now known to the world as the epicentre of the coronavirus pandemic. Wuhan Diary, also called Quarantine Diary and Fang Fang Diary, is the daily account of the locked down city's millions of inhabitants' untold sufferings during the ongoing health crisis. Her phenomenal cyber-popularity has recast Fang Fang from a well-known literary figure into China's most influential living literary voice of dissent. Her fans in China are already proclaiming her to be the "Conscience of Wuhan".<sup>13</sup>

Fang Fang posted the first page of her journal on the night of January 25, two days after the Wuhan city was suddenly pushed into indefinite quarantine. On the night of February 7, Dr. Li Wenliang, who was reprimanded for warning about the coronavirus on social media, lay dead in the quarantine ward of the Wuhan Central Hospital. The same day, Fang Fang posted her first tribute to the "hero" of Wuhan on her blog, which "disappeared" within hours. But before being taken down by China's cyber censors, her Wuhan Diary had gone viral with thousands of re-posts. Actually, Fang Fang already enjoyed 3.5 million followers on social media even before she began chronicling her life during the Wuhan quarantine. The latest page of the diary (as of this writing), entitled "Let's see if you scare me!" was put up on March 20, on Day 57. Wuhan lockdown was lifted on March 23. The page sixty - the concluding entry in Wuhan Diary was on March 25. Angered and irritated by the censor authorities consistently taking down her Diary posts, Fang Fang titled one of her last few posts "Let's see if you scare me!" "Dear internet censors, you should let Wuhan people speak," Fang wrote in the post, as quoted by Kiki Zhao in the New York Times in

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<sup>13</sup> Adlakha, Hemant. Ibid.

March. “If you don’t allow us to express our anguish or complaints or reflections, do you want us to go really mad?”<sup>14</sup>

Albert Camus, the author of *The Plague*, which he completed in seven years as he could not finish writing it as he entered the Resistance during the WWII. During the war, Camus emerged as an intellectual leader for many of his contemporaries, and he became widely known as a result of serving as the editor of the Resistance’s popular journal, “Combat.” According to Tony Judt, the readers of his editorials (Camus’) had “formed a habit of getting their daily thought from him.”<sup>15</sup> It may not at all sound as far-fetched to attribute a somewhat similar position to Fang Fang amid the Wuhan lockdown. As hundreds and thousands of Fang Fang’s blog followers have confessed, with tears in their eyes how they eagerly awaited Fang’s next “post” as the last thing before going to bed and the first thing on waking up next morning.

### **Fang Fang Phenomenon - First Phase**

Fang Fang is definitely not the most famous living writer in China, but she is revered by hundreds and thousands of Chinese as the literary voice of COVID19-stricken China. Now, she is famous for another reason: her Wuhan Diary has recast her from a well-known writer into China’s most famous chronicler. For a proper understanding of what is called “Fang Fang Phenomena,” one needs to look at the phenomenal popularity of Wuhan Diary and particularly the unprecedented nation-wide ensuing debate it has caused, in two parts. The first phase of the debate can be attributed to the period from February 25 to April 8. During this period, the debate can be described as full of personal and political attacks on Fang Fang, by the so-called “nationalist” scholars and intellectuals with their loyalty to the “leftist” ideological orthodoxy. At least among the established “left” Chinese websites, the first article “attacking” Wuhan Diary had surfaced in early February.<sup>16</sup> Subsequently, in a series of articles,

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<sup>14</sup> Zhao, Kiki (2020) “The Coronavirus Story Is too Big for China to Spin,” *New York Times*, February 14, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/14/opinion/china-coronavirus-social-media.html> viewed on 2020/03/18

<sup>15</sup> Hughes, William (2020) “The Timeliness of Albert Camus’ *The Plague*,” May 14, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2020/05/14/the-timeliness-of-albert-camus-the-plague/>, viewed in May 2020

commentaries and blogs - on average five to six write-ups a day - mainly carried by a few “Maoist” leaning websites and blogs, Wuhan Diary has not only been dismissed as trash and nothing but a pack of lies, Fang Fang herself too has been targeted as “dishonest” writer of “petty-bourgeois” character and who only cares for cheap publicity.<sup>17</sup>

One of the few early reactions denouncing Fang Fang came from Guo Songmin, a former pilot and now well-known independent scholar and current affairs commentator.<sup>18</sup> In an article which appeared on the “Maoist”-leaning *Utopia*, Guo, a PhD from China’s Aviation University and a graduate of the Party School in Beijing, begins by commenting on Fang’s banned novel “Soft Burial” (People’s Literature Publishing Press, Beijing 2016).<sup>19</sup> “I was shocked to see the extremely rude and negative language she used in the novel to negate the Land Reform. But as I read on, I could clearly see her motive behind the novel’s crude language and irrational plot,” Guo wrote. According to Guo, in her Diary too, Fang Fang employs her “Death Theory” in falsifying the death of a nurse in Wuhan due to corona virus.

The article concludes by asking Fang Fang to feel ashamed for all the fame, position and a rewarding career Wuhan has accorded her.

Let me mention one more article from the early attacks on Fang Fang. Reacting to a certain picture of a Wuhan paramedic in Fang’s Fang’s Diary entry posted on February 14, Xiang Ligang 项立刚, a PhD in Literature from the prestigious Peoples’ University in Beijing and now China’s one of the most successful telecom industry expert and

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<sup>16</sup> Guo Songmin 郭松民 (2020) 评方方的“枉死论”：你对得起武汉吗？ *Ping Fang Fang de “wang si lun”：Ni duideqi Wuhan ma?* (On Fang Fang’s “Death Theory”：Are you really worthy of Wuhan?) The article was carried in *Utopia* and *Kunlunce* on February 6 and February 7, respectively. <http://www.wyxxwk.com/Article/yulun/2020/02/413338.html> & <http://www.kunlunce.com/ssjj/guojipinglun/2020-02-06/140286.html>, Viewed in March 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Li Donghong 李东宏 (2020) “方方 – 软脉是茅坑，日记是下水道，” *Fang Fang – ruanmai shi maokang, riji shi xiashuidao* (Fang Fang’s Novel “Soft Burial” is a pit, Her Diary is Drainage Tank) April 3, <http://www.wyxxwk.com/Article/yulun/2020/04/416307.html> *In Chinese* Viewed on 2020/04/25

<sup>18</sup> Guo Songmin 郭松民 (2020) “评方方的“枉死论”：你对得起武汉吗？” *Ping fāng fāng de “wǎngsǐ lùn”：Nǐ duìdèqǐ wúhàn mā?* (Fang Fang’s “Death Theory”：Is she even worthy of Wuhan?) February 26, <http://www.wyxxwk.com/Article/yulun/2020/02/413338.html> *In Chinese*, viewed on 2020/04/25

<sup>19</sup> Lousia, Lim (2018) “Rewriting History in the Peoples’ Republic of Amnesia and beyond,” *The Conversation* May 28, <https://theconversation.com/rewriting-history-in-the-peoples-republic-of-amnesia-and-beyond-90014>. Viewed on 2020/05/06

highly expensive consultant, in a provocative and insulting article wrote: “I think Fang Fang, the former president of the Wuhan Writers’ Association and therefore an ‘insider’, is not only a rumour-monger but she is creating panic by spreading lies about the corona virus.” Xiang Ligang, who is also the director-general of the influential Information Consumption Alliance - a telecom industry association, was reacting to a picture of a pile of mobile phones and the caption under the picture read: Owners of these unclaimed mobile phones have succumbed to the virus epidemic! The picture was posted alongside Fang’s Diary entry. Although Fang Fang denied the next day of ever putting up the picture in her blog, but Xiang Ligang went ahead and accused her of lying. According to Xiang, all mobile phones shown in the picture were too outdated and there was no way these phones belonged to the virus victims. The title of Xiang Ligang’s article which was widely circulated by several Chinese newspapers was “Why I wish Fang Fang had sued me in court?”<sup>20</sup>

Meanwhile, a WeChat group for Chinese living in the United States<sup>21</sup> closed down in March after its members became so divided on the controversial Wuhan Diary issue that they did not want to talk to each other no more. Those who supported Fang called her critics “brainwashed idiots”, while those in the opposite camp threw insults like “running dogs” and “traitors” at their opponents. In addition to the personal attacks and accusations of being a rumour-monger, a more serious and political controversy Wuhan Diary has triggered is a bitter and acrimonious slugfest of charges and counter-charges among supporters and detractors of Fang Fang. Professor Mu Zhai, a member of Chinese Writers’ Association and Research Professor in the School of Literature at Jilin University has very clearly described supporters and detractors of Fang Fang as divided into “intellectuals” and “non-intellectuals” respectively. In a “cyber-referendum”<sup>22</sup> conducted in April, Fang Fang has received overwhelming

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<sup>20</sup> Xiang Ligang 项立刚 (2020) “我为什么希望放方方起诉我，” *Wo wei shenme xiwang Fang Fang qisu wo* (How I wish Fang Fang had sued me in court?) February 18 (In Chinese) <http://www.kunlunce.com/ssjj/guojipinglun/2020-02-18/140629.html> Viewed in April 2020

<sup>21</sup> Xie Echo (2020) “Coronavirus journal Wuhan Diary continues to upset Chinese nationalists,” *Singapore News*, May 2, <https://sg.news.yahoo.com/coronavirus-journal-wuhan-diary-continues-060830064.html>, <https://sg.news.yahoo.com/coronavirus-journal-wuhan-diary-continues-060830064.html>, viewed in May 2020

<sup>22</sup> <https://twitter.com/azurewaylee/status/1253283060935622657>

support: the referendum was conducted on two consecutive days; on both days, a set of two questions were put before the participants.

### Q1. What do you think of Wuhan Diary's overseas publication?

Response:	April 23	April 24
In favour	36210 (71%)	103458 (61%)
Can't say	6044 (11%)	25150 (14%)
Oppose	8248 (16%)	40738 (24%)

### Q2. What do you think of Fang Fang?

Response:	April 23	April 24
Traitor	4650 (9%)	23043 (13%)
Writer of conscience	37853 (74%)	110987 (65%)
Can't say	8067 (15%)	35629 (21%)

Following days of cyberbullying along with rising tide of 'nationalism' against her, Fang Fang finally reacted and likened her opponents to belong to "extreme left" and to China's infamous Red Guards. Fang actually invoked the Cultural Revolution in response to a letter written to her by a 16-year old "high-schooler". The boy mockingly asked her to feel ashamed for disrespecting the motherland. In her reply, Fang Fang recounted her own traumatic experiences during the Cultural Revolution, when she was 16. According a report in the Los Angeles Times, Fang Fang took pity on the boy, who she was sure had been tutored for his open-letter to her. "Fang Fang's response was a recollection of her teenage years during China's Cultural Revolution, a time when young Maoists criticized, tortured and killed their elders, teachers and intellectuals, tearing the country apart," *LA Times* quoted from her Diary entry in mid-March.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Su, Alice (2020) "Two months into coronavirus lockdown, her online diary is window into life and death in Wuhan," March 21, <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-03-21/china-wuhan-coronavirus-diary-fang-fang> , viewed in March 2020

Even the state-run *Global Times*<sup>24</sup> quoted Fang Fang as saying “the backlash was due to a *far-left ideological trend* brewing in China over recent decades.” China’s ‘independent’ business and finance newsmagazine, *Cai Xin*, has called Fang Fang a “battlefield” diarist. In a long report featuring Fang Fang in China’s most popular business news portal, *Cai Xin* firmly stood by Fang Fang and cited a statement of hers as the title of the news feature: “Wuhan Will Suffer Long After Virus is Gone, ‘Battlefield’ Diarist says.”<sup>25</sup>

### “Cultural Revolution” and “Far Left” “文革”、“极左”

Fang Fang’s invoking Cultural Revolution and calling her “attackers” Maoists or China’s “far left” elements provoked the so-called nationalists launch vicious troll-attacks on her, and some even threatened to go to Wuhan to kill her. Professor Wu Danhong of Political Science and Law University, Beijing joined issues with Fang Fang on her “abusing “the Cultural Revolution and the “Maoist nationalists”. Professor Wu, who uses his pen name Wu Fatian and has a popular WeChat blog, recently posted: “Fang’s Wuhan Diary is full of lies. But whenever someone questions her, she becomes angry and accuses the person to be either belonging to *far left* or s/he is a Maoist. I was born in 1978 and I belong to the post-CR generation. I don’t understand Fang Fang, who had ‘suffered’ through the entire decade of the CR, why does she adore the language typical of the CR?”<sup>26</sup>

Just a day after Fang Fang posted the final and concluding journal entry, a long, anonymous blog-post carried by the Maoist website *Utopia* launched by far the most vicious political attack on Fang Fang. Outraged by Fang Fang’s frequent “anti-far left

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<sup>24</sup> Siqi, Cao (2020) “ ‘Wuhan Diary’ writer escalates online spat, wears out dwindling fans,” April 23, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1186483.shtml> , viewed in April 2020

<sup>25</sup> Xiao Hui and Isabelle Li (2020) “Wuhan Will Suffer Long After Virus Is Gone, ‘Battlefield’ Diarist says,” March 31, <https://www.caixinglobal.com/2020-03-31/wuhan-will-suffer-long-after-virus-is-gone-battlefield-diarist-says-101536880.html> , viewed in April 2020

<sup>26</sup> Wu Fatian 吴法天 (2020) 为什么质疑方方就会被贴上“极左”标签 *Wei shenme zhiyi Fang Fang jiu hui bei tieshang “jizuo” biaoqian* ( Why Fang Fang will be labelled as “Extreme Left”? March 25, <http://www.wyxxwk.com/Article/shiping/2020/03/415824.html> , viewed in April 2020

“condescending sneer and labelling her anti-national and anti-Mao, *Utopia* accused many Chinese public intellectuals of lending support to and standing by Fang Fang. Mounting fierce most criticism of these public intellectuals, *Utopia* declared: “China’s elites can be classified into three types: political elites, business elites and cultural elites; political elites are in control of power, business elites control wealth and cultural elites mould public opinion. Chinese public intellectuals are neoliberals among the elite strata and belong to the cultural elite types. Their social background is mainly professors, intellectuals and writers - they enjoy huge privileges and are largely the beneficiaries under the reform era. Politically they are wedded to the Western neoliberalism, their political slogan is “liberal democracy” and their ultimate dream is to establish a Western-style democratic political system in China. Majority of them are outside of the system and are critics of the current political system; however, a section of them are the ‘insiders’ and act as ‘reform activists’ (or reform radicals). Their political trait is pro-West and they worship individualism. Their spiritual motherland is the USA and they hold a totally negative attitude towards the history of the Chinese revolution and towards Chairman Mao. Therefore, their professed loyalty is to be gravediggers of the socialist system in China. They are in reality those who in yesteryears were called the bourgeois liberals.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Blog: 望长城内外 Wang changcheng neiwai (2020) 四平《方方日记》：中国自由主义梦想必定破灭 *Siping “Fang Fang Riji”: Zhongguo ziyoushuizhuyi de mengxiang biding pomie* (“Fang Fang Diary” : Dream of Chinese Liberals must be Smashed) March 26, <http://www.wywxwk.com/Article/shiping/2020/03/415868.html> , viewed in April 2020

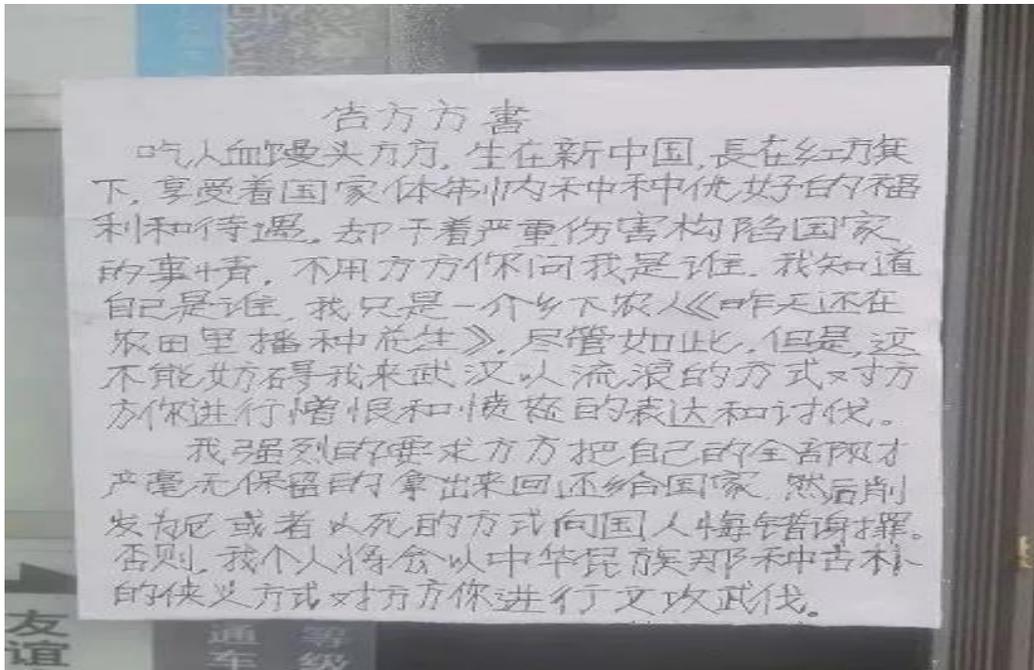


Image 2: A Cultural Revolution-style “public denunciation” of Fang Fang

## Fang Fang Phenomenon - Second Phase

With the announcement of Wuhan Diary’s overseas publication, her detractors started describing Fang Fang as a traitor, as enemy of the Chinese people and the CPC, as a “poisonous plant” out to destroy the revolutionary legacy of the Party, and so on. Most frustrating for all those pro-regime commentators or as they are uncharitably referred to in Chinese “five cents intellectuals” (五毛知识分子 *Wu mao zhishifenzi*) is the fact that the support for Fang Fang, especially following the twin news of Harper Collins and Fang Fang making it into the list of this year’s Noble Prize for Literature nominees, has been pouring all over from university professors, public intellectuals, freelance journalists and writers and artists. Since April 8, those opposing Wuhan Diary’s publication in the West have been demanding legal proceedings against Fang Fang and “clique”. Fang Fang and her gang are vociferously being accused of “offering themselves as ammunition to the anti-China foreign forces to mount fresh attacks on the Chinese Communist Party.” Now, the flurry of articles attacking Fang Fang carries a changed tone and tenor. Look at some of the headlines and commentaries: “Wuhan Diary’s overseas publication gives ammunition to antagonist forces,” “Wuhan Diary’s

Western translations will hand them a ‘sword’ to defame China,” “Not *Fang Fang Dispatch*, *Fang Fang’s Background* is the Issue,” and “Wuhan Diary’s overseas publication is artillery for ‘Eight Nation Alliance’ Army.”

Prominent figures who have jumped into the fray, either in defence of Fang or against, include some widely influential intellectuals and prominent personalities, namely world renowned Tsinghua University sociology professor Sun Liping<sup>28</sup>, Hubei native Yan Lieshan - considered one of China’s most respected columnist, editor and writer, renowned Chinese writer Yan Lianke who has self-banned his creative works as protest against the state censorship, Chinese Writers’ Association vice-president Zhang Kangkang - she was one of the first “educated city youths” sent to the remote countryside (in Manchuria) during GPCR and was rehabilitated only after Mao Zedong’s passing away, and many more. Cao Heping’s article in *Guangming Daily*, popular among educated urban Chinese, discussing the flawed logic behind Zhang Kangkang’s support to Fang Fang’s **Wuhan Diary** had been visited by over 236736 visitors on the day of its publication.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, some of Fang Fang’s fierce critics include Lu Kewen - a veteran Chinese political commentator, Zhang Yongjie - well-known political commentator and author of a recent ‘controversial’ article “Fang Fang has reminded us ‘class struggle’ battle is not yet over,” professor Zhang Yiwu of the Peking University, who has publicly lamented Fang Fang for “seeking to boost her personal reputation by exploiting Wuhan people’s suffering.”<sup>30</sup> Zhang Yiwu is a prominent culture studies scholar and is considered by many as the foremost postmodernist theorists in China. He had been a student under the famous cultural

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<sup>28</sup> Sun Liping 孙立平 (2020) 实在憋不住了，说说方方日记 *Shizai bie buzhu le, shuoshuo Fang Fang riji* (Can’t withhold it anymore, let’s talk about Fang Fang Diary) April 26, [http://www.uscnpm.com/model\\_item.html?action=view&table=article&id=21481](http://www.uscnpm.com/model_item.html?action=view&table=article&id=21481) , viewed in May 2020

<sup>29</sup> Cao Heping 曹和平 (2020) 张抗抗和方方的逻辑谬误在哪里? *Zhang Kangkang he Fang Fang de luoji miuwu zai nali?* (Logical Fallacy in Zhang Kangkang and Fang Fang) April 11, [https://www.guancha.cn/CaoHePing/2020\\_04\\_11\\_546421.shtml](https://www.guancha.cn/CaoHePing/2020_04_11_546421.shtml) , viewed in April 2020

<sup>30</sup> Zhang Yiwu 张颐武 (2020) 北大教授谈《方方日记》：“真实性”会压倒它最关键的东西 *Beida jiaoshou tan “Fang Fang Riji”: “Zhenshixing” hui yadao ta zui guanjian de dongxi* (Beijing University don debates Fang Fang Diary: “Authenticity” will overwhelm the Diary) April 14, <http://knowpia.k75.net/appdoc.php?p=433610416> , viewed in May 2020

theorist Frederic Jameson. Si Manan<sup>31</sup>, yet another well-known commentator and leading critic of Fang Fang, who is also an influential “Marxist” ideologue and TV personality, and is closely associated with the Maoist-leftist website *Utopia*, in his recent article “Fang Fang: What is to be done?” is said to have scared many scholars to stay out of the debate.



Image 3: “Big-character” poster depicting Fang Fang, the characters read “Down with imperialist dog and traitor Fang Fang.”

What supporters of Fang Fang have been fearing on one hand, and the critics, opponents of Fang Fang have been demanding from the Chinese authorities on the other, it seems is finally happening. Ever since the reports started appearing in the second week of April that Wuhan Diary will be published overseas in English and German languages respectively, the controversy surrounding it has acquired a new dimension. Prior to the April 8 pre-sale advertisement on Amazon that Harper Collins

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<sup>31</sup> Si Manan 司马南 (2020) 方方染上新冠，救不救呢？ *Fang Fang ranshang xinguan, jiubujiu ne?* (Fang Fang wears a new crown, shall we save her?) April 12, <http://www.wywxwk.com/Article/shiping/2020/04/416768.html>, viewed in May 2020. Also see Si Manan 司马南 (2020) 应该怎么样处理方方？ *Yinggai zenmeyang chuli Fang Fang?* (Fang Fang: What is to be done?) April 12, <http://www.wywxwk.com/Article/shiping/2020/04/416768.html> , viewed in May 2020; Si Manan 司马南 (2020)

Publishers will release the 208-page English translation of the Diary on August 18, the nature of social media 天天 天天 on WeChat and Weibo respectively was confined to issues, such as **(by the critics and opponents)** 1. How reliable is the Diary's content? 2. Fang Fang is a “motor mouth”; 3. Fang Fang is ambitious, attention hungry, her chronicle is all but truth; 4. Fang Fang is a “disease” (流芳), She “stinks” (流臭); 5. “*Fang Fang Chronicle* represents ‘decline’ of an intellectual versus”; **(by fans and supporters)** 1. Fang Fang has succeeded where others have failed; 2. *Fang Fang has dared to go through fire*; 3. Why is Wuhan Diary so popular? 4. Fang Fang is Wuhan's conscience keeper; 5. Fang Fang, at her best. Besides, there were commentaries written in perverse style and filthy language - a dreadful reminder of “GPCR”.

There are also those in the debate considered by many as “neutral” or “fence-sitters”. Most prominent such name is Hu Xijin, the ‘celebrity’ editor of the *Global Times*. Interestingly, Hu has been facing criticisms from both sides of the debate for his flip-flops on the issue. In his first few blog posts and a long write-up in the English language *GT*, Hu Xijin chose to play soft on Fang Fang. Doing so unexpectedly put him in the firing line of Fang Fang bashers. Angry columnists targeted him with articles, such as “Mr. Hu Xijin: Are you behind Fang Fang’s overseas publications?” “Hu Xijin goes soft on Fang Fang: A comedy of errors!” and “Hu Xijin errs, should go back to relearn Marxism, Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought.”<sup>32</sup> Unable to bear the heat, Hu quickly changed tracks. He immediately hardened his tone and wrote: “The diary will not be a normal exchange of documentary literature. It will be captured by international politics. It is quite possible that in the coming storm, the Chinese people, including those who have supported Fang Fang, will pay for her fame in the West. Of course, China is a powerful country and will not be affected because of the

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<sup>32</sup> Guo Songmin 郭松民 (2020) 胡锡进先生，你在方方背书吗？ *Hu Xijin xiansheng, ni zai Fang Fang bei shu ma?* (Mr. Hu Xijin, are you the hand behind Fang Fang’s overseas publications? April 10, <http://www.wyxxwk.com/Article/yulun/2020/04/416639.html>, viewed in April 2020. Also see Gao Dianjie 高殿杰 (2020) 方方和她的封城日记是对胡锡进至问的最好回答 *Fang Fang he ta de fengchengriji shi dui Hu Xijin zhi wen de zuihao huida* (Fang Fang and her Diary are most befitting response to Hu Xijin) April 9, <http://www.wyxxwk.com/Article/yulun/2020/04/416570.html>, viewed in April 2020; Ji Zhe 记者 (2020) 胡锡进手撕方方不吐脏字：你有继续学习做人的很大空间！ *Hu Xijin shousi Fang Fang butuzangzi: ni you jixu xuexi zuoren de henda kongjian* (Hu Xijin takes on Fang Fang using decent language: He needs to learn a lot) April 23, <http://www.kunlunce.com/ssjj/guojipinglun/2020-04-23/142750.html>, viewed in April 2020;

diary's publication. It is hoped that Fang Fang will be more philosophical in the face of changing public attitudes, including criticism and questioning.”<sup>33</sup> Fang Fang responded in kind. She wrote on her Sina Weibo blog: “Your comments are ‘vulgar’ and ‘disappointing’. No genuine writer will accept such condescending tolerance.” Fang Fang further dared him and wrote: “Who do you think you are?”<sup>34</sup> The ugly spat between Fang Fang and Hu Xijin, it seems is only getting uglier.

Despite accusations of her journal being biased and being “anti-China”, the raging controversy has earned Fang Fang a large number of loyal fans and the numbers are only expanding by the day. According to reports, on Weibo alone, Fang Fang Diary has had 380 million views, 94,000 discussions, and 8,210 original posts, peaking last week. He Qinglian,<sup>35</sup> author of controversial book *The Pitfalls of China's Modernization* (Hong Kong, Broad Press, 2004), who had left China in 1998 for her series of articles critical of Jiang Zemin's regime and since lives in London, has recently written in her blog page, a Chinese sculptor from Nanjing has installed Fang Fang's statue next to

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<sup>33</sup> Yin Guoming 尹国明 (2020):从方方日记英文版高调出版到胡锡进解不开的困惑, 答案其实很简单 *Cong Fang Fang rijiyinwenban gaodiao chuban dao Hu Xijin jiebukai de kunhuo, daan qi shi hen jian dan* (From high profile overseas publication of Fang Fang Diary to Hu Xijin's dilemma: A simple solution) April 9, <http://www.kunlunce.com/ssjj/guojipinglun/2020-04-09/142333.html>, viewed in April 2020.

<sup>34</sup>作家方方回应胡锡进：你以为你是谁 *Zuojia Fang Fang huiying Hu Xijin: Ni yiwei ni shi shei* (Fang Fang rebukes Global Times editor Hu Xijin: Who do you think you are?) April 10, <https://user.guancha.cn/main/content?id=284157&s=fwzwyzzwzbt>, viewed in April 2020; 方方成功激怒胡锡进, 胡锡进称方方文字水平和思想深度低。方方转发文章称胡锡进为胡呵呵 *Fang Fang chenggong jinu Hu Xijin, Hu Xijin cheng Fang Fang wenzi shuiping he sixiang shendu di, Fang Fang zhuanfa wenzhang cheng Hu Xijin wei hu diaodia.* (Fang Fang provokes Global Times editor Hu Xijin. Hu demeans Fang Fang's intellect. Fang replies in kind, says Hu is only good at murmuring) April 21, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vy1Ur9D8\\_04](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vy1Ur9D8_04), viewed in May 2020

<sup>35</sup>He Qinglian何清涟 (2020)：习氏中国不配拥有方方 *Xi shi Zhongguo bupei yongyou Fang Fang* (Xi's China doesn't deserve Fang Fang) April 24, <https://www.rfa.org/mandarin/pinglun/heqinglian/hql-04242020092511.html>, viewed in May 2020

<sup>36</sup>Xie, Echo (2020) “Coronavirus: Chinese professor targeted after praising Fang Fang's Wuhan Diary,” April 27, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3081765/coronavirus-chinese-professor-targeted-after-praising-fang>, viewed in April 2020; also see 方方好友、湖北大学文学院教授梁艳萍，真实同汪芳汪主席一样，也是个宝藏啊！ *Fang Fang haoyou hubeidaxue wenxueyuan jiaoshou Liang Yanping zhenshi tong wangfang wangzhuxi yiyang, ye shi ge baozang a!* (Fang Fang's good friend professor Liang Yanping of School of Literature, Hubei University like Fang Fang is a 'treasure'!) April 23, [https://www.weibo.com/3812400789/IEGyK9m1p?type=comment#\\_rnd1589546332837](https://www.weibo.com/3812400789/IEGyK9m1p?type=comment#_rnd1589546332837), viewed in May 2020

the tomb of the loyal General and now ‘national’ Hero, General Yue Fei (1103-1141) in Hangzhou. General Yue Fei was wrongly accused of plotting against the emperor and was secretly killed in prison. According to He Qinglian, in Nanjing alone, the Weibo post showing a kneeling Fang Fang statue next to the kneeling statue of Yue Fei, has had 1.5 million visitors and over 7, 000 re-posts in the past week.

### **The Party Crackdown: Fang Fang Supporters put under Investigation** 支持方方的知识分子“被扒”了

Now, with the announcement by the Hubei University authorities to launch investigations against Professor Liang Yanping梁艳萍,<sup>36</sup> apparently for standing on the side of Fang Fang and writing a blog-post praising Wuhan Diary. 59 year old Professor Liang has been on the faculty of the School of Liberal Arts of the University since 1997, the year she was awarded PhD degree by the School. She is now a Research Professor and specializes in Eastern Aesthetics, Literary Criticism and Creative Writing. She is well known internationally. She is member of the Japan Aesthetics Studies Council, National Aesthetics Society of the PRC, President of China International Association of Literary Theory Studies, Chairwoman of Hubei Aesthetics Study Council and member of the Chinese Prose Society. The news of her being under investigation for making ‘inappropriate speech’ has generated mixed reactions. Some of her prescient blog readers wrote posts such as “??? Just for praising Wuhan Diary,” “Why not make ‘inappropriate comments’ public? Let common people decide what is appropriate and what is not!”

On the other hand, the news of Professor Liang Yanping being put under investigation was greeted with cheers by Fang Fang’s critics. According to *GT*, the critics dug through Liang’s back history of chat posts and found out she had also backed the protesting Hong Kong students last year.<sup>37</sup> Her critics claim, Professor Liang has a long

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<sup>37</sup> “Hubei university investigates professor for online comments involving HK separatists,” April 27, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1186883.shtml>, viewed in May 2020

history of posting ‘anti-government’ materials in previous years, including several of her pictures showing her visits to the Japan’s controversial Yasukuni Shrine. Here are some of the article topics posted by the critics just within 24 hours of the news of Liang Yanping to face investigation: “Liang Yanping, Fang Fang and their clique are white-eyed wolf, who thrive on foreign culture and hate their own country!” (白眼狼 ‘white-eyed wolf’ is a typical Chinese phrase used to describe a particularly cold-hearted, cruel person), “Liang Yanping, a member of the Fang Fang brigade under investigation: finally, the state acts,” “Hubei University wakes up: Begins to probe Liang Yanping,” and “Fang Fang ‘Buries’ Liang Yanping” (‘Buries’ here is used sarcastically). In June 2016, Fang Fang’s novel “Soft Burial” 《块埋》 was published from Peoples’ Literature Publishing House, Beijing. “Soft Burial” was decorated with the prestigious Lu Yao Literature Prize in April 2017. However, Maoist intellectuals and leftist websites attacked the novel for alleged sympathy towards landowners and a desire to discredit land reform and thus the legitimacy of the CPC. Meetings and seminars were held to denounce both Fang Fang and the novel. “The book should never have been written, it is distortion of history, and it is nihilism...” its critics proclaimed. The novel was banned and withdrawn from circulation in June 2017, months before the CPC’s 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress.<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusion

As expected, several university professors, intellectuals and civil rights lawyers have expressed fears of repercussions of the kind last witnessed during the dark years of the GPCR. The probe set up against Professor Liang Yanping is a very bad signal, Professor Guo Yuhua, a sociologist from Beijing’s Tsinghua University said. Guo too had been approached by the authorities to withdraw the post she wrote in support of

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<sup>38</sup> Yu Zhang (2017) “Novel exploring excesses 1950s land reform draws criticism from Maoists,” March 22, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1039029.shtml>, viewed in May 2020; Lam, Oiwan (2017) “China bans ‘Soft Burial,’ an award winning novel about the deadly consequences of land reform,” June 12, <https://hongkongfp.com/2017/06/12/china-bans-soft-burial-award-winning-novel-deadly-consequences-land-reform/>, viewed in May 2020.

Fang Fang on April 18. “But I refused,” she told the *SCMP*.<sup>39</sup> The authorities deleted her post the next day. “Some people say the Cultural Revolution was just like that - people being criticized by their ideas and expression. I told them it’s normal that people have different opinions and they can’t just prevent people from expressing themselves,” she said. The authorities deleted her post the next day.

As China is in the midst of a hostile international media campaign and is trying all its diplomatic efforts and (English) media counter-campaign to salvage its damaged reputation, it is extremely possible that the Party will crackdown upon anyone who refuses to adhere by the official line and indulge in ‘inappropriate speech’ in the months ahead. Besides Liang Yanping, it has been reported ten more university professors have been placed under investigation, including two from Nanjing University and one each from Beijing University, Tianjin’s Nankai University, Shenzhen University, Xiamen University and associate professor from Harbin Normal Teachers’ University. The Harbin professor, Yu Linqi 于琳琦, according to reports, is also facing charges of having publicly dismissed and negated relevance of Marxism in contemporary China. Interestingly, Professor Yu Linqi is also holding the post of the deputy party secretary of the School of Social History at the university.<sup>40</sup>

China’s COVID-19 hero, Zhang Boli, 72-years old Chinese medicine specialist and President of Tianjin Traditional Chinese Medicine University, who is member of China Anti-Pandemic Leading Group and who spent 72 days fighting the virus in Wuhan, has become the latest and the highest ranking “official” to criticise Fang Fang and “group of intellectuals” supporting her. Dr. Zhang has also demanded punitive actions be taken against Fang Fang and everyone indulging in “improper speech” and questioning the good work the party and the government have done in containing the

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<sup>39</sup> Xie, Echo (2020) “Coronavirus: Chinese professor targeted after praising Fang Fang’s Wuhan Diary,” April 27, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3081765/coronavirus-chinese-professor-targeted-after-praising-fang>, viewed in April 2020

<sup>40</sup> 方方又双叒立功了：哈师范某副书记骂马克思，侮辱刘胡兰 *Fang Fang you shuang ruozhuo ligong le: hashifan mou fushuji ma Makesi , wuru Liu Hulan* (Fang Fang continues doing what she does best: Harbin Normal Teachers’ University Professor Negates Marxism, Insults Liu Hulan) May 8, <http://www.wyxxwk.com/Article/yulun/2020/05/417924.html>, viewed in May 2020.

pandemic.<sup>41</sup>Academician Zhang’s open call for punitive action to be taken against pro-West “public intellectuals,” is not only a sad reminder of the scary Cultural Revolution decade, it is also a sad hint to what is going to become of “socialism” under the current CPC leadership which otherwise has been spending millions of dollars over the past few years to achieve full “sinification” of Marxism under the reform era. The so-called loyalty and commitment to Marxist ideology by the current party leadership, in a way, is also a timely reminder of the times when Deng Xiaoping had ordered unprecedented brutality on thousands of students at the Tiananmen Square. At that time too, the world had to come to realize sooner than later that the PLA tanks were ordered by the Party not to save “socialism” but to safeguard, to use Deng’s infamous metaphor - the cat which catches mice (the cat here symbolizes the system, whereas the mice is for people). I recall how the late Professor G P Deshpande had summed up the CPC fiasco at the Tiananmen Square in 1989 in the name of communist ideology: “What has happened in Tiananmen Square has nothing to do with *socialism*. Does it really matter if the cat is black or white if it catches mice, asked Deng. The cat has killed the students, but to argue that it has done so because it is red is patently untenable.”<sup>42</sup>

Zhao Shilin, professor, Central Nationalities University in Beijing, who describes himself as a “bookmaker who is unaware of what is happening around,” has put up three “big character posters” - a typical symbol of the Cultural Revolution, downgrading and vilifying Fang Fang Dr. Zhang Wenhong (Zhang Wenhong is director of the Department of Infectious Diseases at the Huashan Hospital under the Fudan University in Shanghai. Dr. Zhang is also the secretary of the Party Branch at the Department.

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<sup>41</sup> Yin Guoming 尹国明 (2020): 张伯礼院士精彩亮剑，给方方日记致命一击！ *Zhang Boli yuanshi jingcai liangjian, gei Fang Fang riji zhiming yiji* (Academician Zhang Boli’s magnificent sword gives a lethal blow to Fang Fang Diary) May 15, <http://www.wyzxwk.com/Article/shiping/2020/05/418261.html>, viewed in May 2020; Ba Fenzhai 八分斋 (2020) 方方教训张伯礼 *Fang Fang jiaoxun Zhang Boli* (Fang Fang admonishes Zhang Boli) May 15, <http://www.kunlunce.com/ssjj/guojipinglun/2020-05-15/143401.html>, viewed in May 2020.

<sup>42</sup> Sudhanva, Deshpande (2014) “G P Deshpande: Trapeze Artist of the Mind,” January, <http://www.thoughtnaction.co.in/g-p-deshpande-trapeze-artist-of-the-mind/>, viewed in April 2020

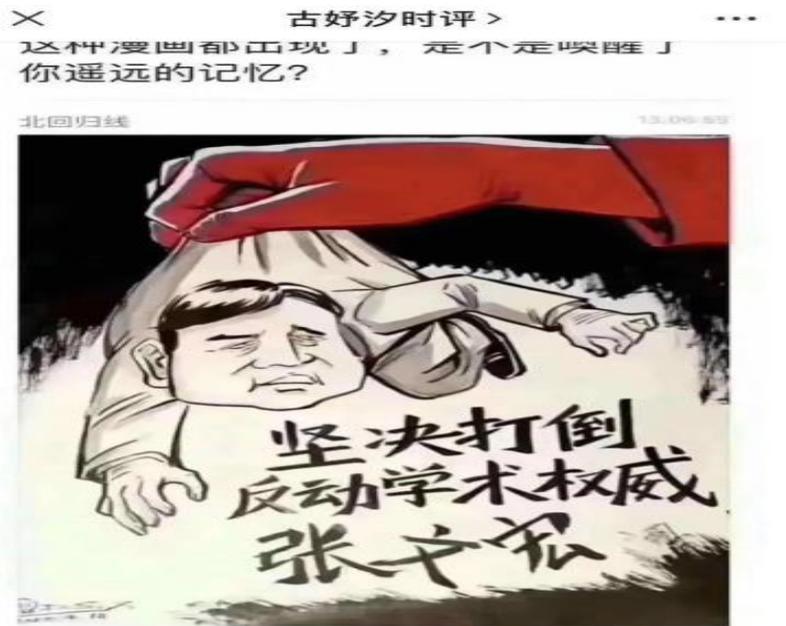


Image 4: “Big-character” poster denouncing Dr. Zhang Wenhong - “Down with reactionary scholars like Dr. Zhang Wenhong”

The two posters use foul language and venomous content, with sketches of Fang Fang portraying her as “bourgeois” cat. Unlike “traitor” Fang Fang, Dr. Zhang Wenhong is a well-respected doctor and is invited by China’s central authorities to deliver expert lectures and advice, to both international audience and people at home, on the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Zhang suddenly found himself a target of the so-called “Maoists” when he said in an interview that Chinese children should have milk and sandwiches rather than rice porridge for breakfast for nutritional reasons. In response, he was attacked and accused of “崇洋媚外” or *Chongyangmeiwai* (worshipping anything foreign and submitting to foreign powers) by a Weibo user with 6 million followers. The post got 300,000 “likes.” One comment says, “He has got some Western values in his bones. He is a time bomb.”<sup>43</sup> According to Professor Shilin, “Two posters immediately reminded one of the ‘ten catastrophic years.’ During the Cultural Revolution, newspapers, newsmagazines and even blackboards carrying big characters in the factories, in the villages, in the streets and alleys were full of such

<sup>43</sup> Costigan, Johanna M. and Xu Xin (2020) “China’s Digital Cultural Revolution,” April 29, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/04/chinas-digital-cultural-revolution/>, viewed in May 2020

illustrations. Such illustrations were used to criticise, vilify and humiliate all the capitalist roaders inside the party who were holding positions of power, academics and scholars, writers and celebrities, etc. From political “losers” to elites from all walks of life, including Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping, Ba Jin and Zhao Dan - no one escaped the wrath of these big-character posters.”<sup>44</sup>

Many in China believe, if the COVID-19 pandemic takes longer than usual to overcome in China - and the reports of a new round of positive cluster cases from Harbin and elsewhere are already raising fears of the worse yet to come - the Party would be pitted against the rising tide of the “extreme left” and “hyper nationalism”. Meaning, more and more people, especially intellectuals will be persecuted. It is anyone’s guess then that it won’t take long for the “cyber Cultural Revolution” being played out in the streets as it happened just half a decade ago. It is precisely in this backdrop that hundreds and thousands of netizens are declaring themselves to be not afraid in indulging to preserve, protect and stand together with the courageous, sincere and patriotic voices such as Fang Fang. It is of crucial import to re-present here a comment from a prescient Fang Fang WeChat follower whose words resonate with the feelings of millions of others. The fan likened “Fang Fang to a woodpecker that pecks at a tree forever in order not to topple it, but to help the tree to grow straight.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Zhao Shilin 赵士林 (2020) 运动了, 运动了! *Yundong le, yundong le!* (Movement, movement!) April 29, [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/ANMcPK3\\_QIyS8u9oVXzSjQ](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/ANMcPK3_QIyS8u9oVXzSjQ), viewed in May 2020.

<sup>45</sup> Miyajima Kanako (2020): “Wuhan blogger hailed, loathed for descriptions of city’s misery,” April 1, <http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/13230864>, viewed in April 2020

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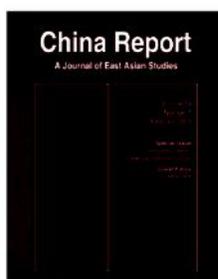


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