

學術對談

不確定時代中的生命經驗、 跨學科知識生產與批判性反思

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「疫情以來我一直在思考這樣一些問題：即包括我自己在內的學術界，我們所生產出來的學術話語，是否真正有益於社會？如何才能真正有益於社會？如何不給我們自己和我們的族裔、社群帶來意外傷害？以共情的和充滿希望的精神來做研究，對回答這個問題頗有助益。當然，樂觀的精神，絕不是否定批判，希望恰恰是批判的生命力所在。」

Dialogue

Lived Experience, Inter-Disciplinary Knowledge Production and Critical Reflections in an Age of Uncertainty

Discussants: Guobin YANG, Changwen CHEN, Shengjun LIN, Jack Linchuan QIU

Translators: Changwen CHEN, Shengjun LIN, Jack Linchuan QIU

Abstract

Humanity is in jeopardy. International conflicts, economic upheavals, wars, diseases, racism, and xenophobia are inflicting untold harm on ordinary people, the poor, and minorities. How will communication scholars respond? In this conversation, we argue that, more than ever before, communication scholars ought to engage these fateful issues in their research. Furthermore, our critical analysis will be enriched and strengthened, not softened, by infusing it with an

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ethos of empathy, care, love, and hope. We encourage emerging scholars, especially our graduate students, to believe in their own lived experience as a criterion of knowledge as established theories and concepts begin to lose their relevance in an unsettled world.

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不確定時代中的生命經驗、跨學科知識生產與批判性反思

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YG：楊國斌

CS：陳昶文、林聖鈞、邱林川

CS：為甚麼您在比較文學專業取得第一個博士學位後，又決定再攻讀社會學博士學位？怎樣的契機使您開始研究傳播與社會？

YG：我第一個博士學位的專業方向是文學翻譯，博士論文題為〈《文心雕龍》英文新譯 (30篇) 與理論探討〉。論文完成後，我便想換換環境，也換換腦子，做點新東西。北卡羅來納大學教堂山分校 (北卡；University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, UNC-Chapel Hill) 社會學系的社會理論家 Craig Calhoun 教授，曾在北京外國語大學給英文系博士生講授「批判社會理論」的課程。我在這門課上初次接觸了哈貝馬斯 (Jürgen Habermas)、布迪厄 (Pierre Bourdieu) 等當代社會學理論。1994年，他邀請我去北卡訪學，並給我發了

《傳播與社會學刊》，(總)第67期(2024)

當研究員 (fellowship) 的邀請。去到那邊訪學後，我決定再讀個社會學博士，跟 Craig 系統研讀社會理論和社會運動理論。Craig 編著的《哈貝馬斯與公共領域》(*Habermas and the Public Sphere*) (1992) 那時候剛出版，現在已經是哈貝馬斯公共領域理論研究中的經典文獻。1994年 Craig 出版了《不要神仙皇帝》(*Neither Gods Nor Emperors*)，1995年出版《批判的社會理論》(*Critical Social Theory*)。這兩本書中都有關於媒體與傳播的重要論述。此外，Craig 也是目前熱門話題「基礎設施」研究的先驅。早在1992年的一篇文章中，他就提出資訊技術是現代性基礎設施的重要論點 (Calhoun, 1992)。在美國社會學界，他是少有的關注傳播學核心問題的學者之一。受其影響，我的社會學興趣從一開始就有傳播學痕跡：不論是對紅衛兵運動的研究，還是關於互聯網的研究，我都關注媒體與傳播的作用。

我「正式」進入傳播和社會的研究領域，則始於互聯網研究。我的社會學博士論文寫的是紅衛兵和知青一代的認同轉變。在寫作的後期，即1999、2000年前後，我開始注意到知青網站和知青個人網頁。2000年5月論文答辯後一段時間，我都泡在網上，在各類BBS論壇上看帖子，看到很多抗爭性的內容，感覺很有意思。那年夏天到夏威夷大學社會學系任教後，我就選了「資訊技術與社會運動」作為新的研究方向。

CS： 在您的跨學科歷程中，碰到過哪些障礙？您是如何克服的？能給面對類似挑戰的青年學者們一些建議嗎？

YG： 到國外的大學讀一個新學科的博士學位，對我來說一切都很陌生。好在 Craig 了解我興趣所在，鼓勵我不僅在社會學系修課，也去人類學和傳播學系選課。我記得在傳播學系選過 Larry Grossberg 的課，講 Gilles Deleuze 和 Félix Guattari 的《反俄狄浦斯》(*Anti-Oedipus*) 之類書籍，聽得一頭霧水。在人類學系選過馮珠娣 (Judith Farquhar) 教授的課程「Techniques of the Self」，讀了點福柯 (Michel Foucault)。雖說是一知半解，但激起了我對自我和個人認同的極大興趣。1996年，Craig 換工作去了紐約大學 (New York University, NYU) 的社會學系。1997年春季，我也轉學去了

不確定時代中的生命經驗、跨學科知識生產與批判性反思

NYU，繼續讀博士。我的社會學博士，在北卡和NYU各三年。到NYU後，我感覺才真正開始入門。當時對我影響大的課程是Steven Lukes面向博士生開設的「Enlightenment in Question」，這門課對歐洲啟蒙運動思想做了較為系統的研讀。另外影響較大的課程包括David Garland講的「Advanced Seminar on Foucault」、Craig講的「Cultural Sociology」，以及Jeff Goodwin講的「Social Movements」。我還在NYU歷史系選過已故Marilyn Young教授講的文革課程。

在這個過程中，我逐漸意識到，社會學研究可以是多種多樣的，因此自己的研究在內容和方法上，都不必追趕時髦或主流，可以按自己的興趣來做。如果說如何面對做跨學科研究的挑戰的話，我的經驗是：在讀書和思考方面要放寬眼界，不要拘泥於自己的學科，要到外系去選些課、讀些本學科之外的書。在研究和寫作方面，則要用自己喜歡的方法，研究重要問題，或者說做自己喜歡做的研究。研究自己感興趣的問題，用自己的眼光看問題，不盲目跟風。

在開始讀社會學博士學位的初期，我還有個困惑。有一陣子，感覺開始學社會學了，是不是該把從前學的文學，像包袱一樣甩掉？這樣才能完完全全進入社會學？回頭看，那是一種個人學術歸屬感的認同危機。後來逐漸意識到文學和文化理論在某些方面能補社會學之不足，這時候我便開始有意識地把文學和文化的興趣融入社會學研究，而不是拋棄掉。我最初發表的幾篇研究社會運動的文章，關注情感和敘事，也是這個原因。另外，我也慢慢認識到，理論和概念未必都可靠，如果不符合自己的經驗，那就不必盲從。從經驗出發，反而有可能對理論和概念有新貢獻。研究者常常對自己的想法猶豫不決，但我希望大家相信自己。相信自己的現在，也相信自己的過去。這些都是學術動力的來源。在寫文章的時候，要相信自己的想法。有時候你有一個飄忽不定、稍縱即逝的念頭，可能會自我懷疑。但這個念頭有可能是新概念和新理論的萌芽。這時候你要相信自己，要努力去追著這個念頭不放，把它記下來，把它一點點展開。即使手頭的文章

《傳播與社會學刊》，(總)第67期(2024)

裏沒能用上，以後也可能有用。這樣的筆記做多了，就有可能形成系統的思想。

CS：研究中文語境中的傳播與社會問題，相較於在西方從事類似研究，可能有甚麼特別的貢獻？

YG：最重要的貢獻，是讓世界看見中國經驗。讓世界看見，不是一個小問題。

不被看見，意味著被無視甚至被歧視，是一種不被承認的狀態。這其中原因比較複雜，不單單是學者個人研究和寫作的問題，也有深層的國家政治、種族和文化因素。僅從學者角度看，如何讓世界看到豐富的中國，學術界需要從認識論 (epistemology) 層面重新思考學術研究的意義和社會作用。這一點我後面再詳談。

這裏先就「中文語境」這個概念談一點想法。中文語境的傳播，是個相當寬泛的概念。中文語境不限於大陸，也有港澳台、新加坡，以及世界各地的海外華人。近些年興起的「華語圈」(Sinophone) 文化研究，涵蓋了「中文語境」。這個固然重要，但我們還是不能低估國家 (nation-state) 的重要性。全球流動 (global flows)、去中心化、跨國主義等全球化話語，曾經為資本的全球化滲透造勢，其結果是在一定程度上削弱了國家，而被「削弱」的國家的人民，也因此不被看見。所以我認為，研究「中文語境」和全球傳播的學者應該重新把國家的範疇帶回來，置於研究的中心位置。學者之為人，都生活在一片熱土上，每片土地都有自己的歷史、文化、社會和政治，因此不可能脫離國家去談全球或跨國的「中文語境」。

植根於國家、國族與歷史來研究中文語境中的傳播問題，還能夠把去殖民 (decolonization) 問題納入到中文圈的傳播研究，這樣也就可以從中文語境的角度，對近年傳播學界所宣導的「全球南方」去殖民探討，有所貢獻。港澳台、大陸都有作為殖民地、半殖民地的歷史。在世界各地的海外華人，也從殖民歷史走過來。例如，早期去美國修鐵路的中國勞工，他們的苦難遭遇，跟殖民地的賤民沒甚麼不同。世界歷史上的殖民與反殖民鬥爭的歷史、海外華人移民的歷史，應該是研究中文語境中的傳播與社會

不確定時代中的生命經驗、跨學科知識生產與批判性反思

的一個大背景。這樣的研究，與「全球南方」的去殖民，存在有機聯繫。

CS：您對目前「媒介和行動主義」的研究狀況有何評價？包括中文語境在內，該領域最矚目的理論議題是甚麼？對您而言，哪些是最有意思的研究題目？

YG：這方面的研究很多，但我感覺還不夠精彩。主要有兩個原因：一是行動主義的現象本身發生了很多變化，而且仍在不斷變化中，研究跟不上也不足為奇；二是因為研究者往往看重理論，而對網路行動本身的意義關懷不夠，缺少對現象的透徹敘述。這也可以理解，因為現象本身也越來越撲朔迷離，依靠社交網路傳播的抗爭事件趨於碎片化，不像傳統的抗爭和革命運動那樣有較為清晰的時間線、故事人物和運動組織。這些因素使得社交媒體時代的行動主義現象難以把握，難以用生動的故事形式呈現出來。沒有好的故事，空有理論和概念的研究，不太容易產生深遠的影響。不重視現象，就容易忽略敘事的重要性。不重視講故事，文章就缺少魅力。有學者可能會說，社科研究重理論，敘事不重要。其實好理論也要靠好敘事撐起來。

學界雖然關注理論，但對甚麼是行動主義這樣的基本問題，仍沒有很好的答案。一般會認為「行動主義」一定與政府對立，其實未必。或者會說行動主義是一種抗爭行為，這也未必。我認為，行動主義是一個情景化很強的概念。同樣的行為，在特定情境中是行動主義，換個情境就不是。行動主義不一定與政府對立，也可以是支援政府的行為。如封城中的公民行動大都是與政府政策相一致的。以自己狹隘的定義和理論去衡量不同情境中的行為，這種做法不可取。

如果承認行動主義的情境化特徵，就沒有哪一個具體定義可以適用於所有的行動主義現象。研究者需要做的，是對情境與行動的關係做仔細分析。我在《武漢封城》一書中提出一個看法，即「行動主義」(activism)，其中的「主義」所表達的是一種堅持(commitment)。比如說環保主義者，指的是關注環保問題、參與環境保護行動的積極分子，其言行和思想有一定的一致性。但很

《傳播與社會學刊》，(總)第67期(2024)

多普通公民，在日常生活中參與各種各樣的活動，或為某種公益事業出力捐款，這也是一種公民行動(acts of citizenship)。他們是公民行動者，而不必是「行動主義者」。如果他們這樣的日常行為能夠堅持一段時間，他們也可以成了「行動主義者」。反之，行動主義者，亦可轉變為日常行動者。

關於議題，目前在理論和概念上，談的比較多的是「連接行動」(connective action)和「標籤行動主義」(hashtag activism)。Bennett與Segerberg(2013)提出「連接行動」的概念，認為在社交媒體上，集體認同在集體行為中不再起重要作用，把零碎的個人表達連接為群體行為的是社交網路。這個概念頗為新穎，很快走紅。但我看到一些使用這個概念的文章，包括對大陸#MeToo等現象的研究論文，大都泛泛地把現象說成是「連接行動」，並未具體說明行動是如何連接起來的。Paolo Gerbaudo一直以來對「連接行動」這個概念有所異議。在2014年的一篇文章中(Gerbaudo, 2014)，他提出「連接行動」能夠真正連接在一起，還要依賴文化與集體認同。在2022年的另一篇論文中(Gerbaudo, 2022)，他又提出，像#MeToo這樣的集體行動，之所以成為集體行動，主要原因是個人的訴求與怨憤通過網路彙集在一起，形成群體的集體認同。他認為網路集體行為是個人與集體認同相互作用的結果，不能說個人化表達就可以取代集體認同。

我比較贊成Gerbaudo的觀點，但我認為強調個人訴求與怨憤可以彙聚成集體認同還不夠。畢竟，網路上個人訴求和怨憤每天都有，但只有少量訴求可以彙聚成有社會影響的集體事件。那麼甚麼樣的訴求可以成為網路事件呢？我認為事件本身的性質和傳播方式是關鍵因素。有的怨憤格外容易引起公憤，也就格外容易傳播。從傳播方式上看，又分媒介與敘事策略和風格。從媒介方面看，互聯網和社交媒體一直起關鍵作用。從敘事策略看，通常是情感傳播，以情動人。動人的故事，流傳得快。傳播方式則要根據事件的性質來選擇。但選擇又未必是個人有意識的決定。一般來說，線民按自己習慣，都會選擇恰當的傳播方式，這是一種實踐理性。

不確定時代中的生命經驗、跨學科知識生產與批判性反思

巧得很，我現在正好人在老家山東淄博。因為燒烤，淄博成了網紅城市。各地網紅都湧到淄博燒烤城，現場播音，他們自然而然都選擇了在抖音和小紅書等視頻平台上做直播，這就是傳播方式的選擇。我跟淄博的親戚朋友吃飯聊天，主要話題也都離不了淄博。淄博燒烤為甚麼能一夜紅遍全國？大家提到最多的，是淄博市先後發出的三封公開信。¹其中第一封信，發表於2022年5月3日，題目是「致山大學子的一封信」，表達歡迎山大學生來淄博隔離抗疫之情。信很短，但情真意切。而當山大學子結束隔離回濟南之前，淄博人民又在學生們的隔離點，在每個學生的房間外，做燒烤為他們餞行。後面的兩封信同樣洋溢著淄博人的真誠與熱情。三封信講了三個動人的故事，這三個故事對於淄博燒烤的「出圈」起到了重要作用。因此，研究網路行動主義如何「出圈」，需要重視敘事方式，研究講故事的策略。我認為這個是比較重要而且很有意思的研究議題。

CS：您最有影響力的一本專著是《連線力：中國網民在行動》（2013，英文版於2009年出版）。書中對互聯網帶來社會進步持較樂觀的態度。無論在中國還是全球，近年流行的觀點都更悲觀。如果此書再版，您會進行甚麼調整嗎？

YG：如果再版，我希望增強故事性，增加對細節的敘述，減少關於理論和概念的討論。但主要觀點和分析框架應該不會改變。

至於樂觀還是悲觀，涉及到的問題比較複雜。的確有評論者認為《連線力》所表達的觀點偏於樂觀。其實，與其說《連線力》對於互聯網的社會影響持樂觀態度，不如說我在研究與寫作中，努力保持樂觀精神，對媒介技術和社會發展保持希望。書如果現在再版，我仍然會保持這種樂觀精神。只要我們相信人的能動性，就能夠保持樂觀和希望。反之，如果只看到社會結構對人的制約，看不到人的能動性，就容易悲觀失望。樂觀還是悲觀，不僅跟現象的性質有關，還是一個認識論的問題，是我們作為研究者如何觀察和分析現象的問題，也是如何看待人與社會與權力的關係、如何看待知識生產的性質的問題。

《傳播與社會學刊》，(總)第67期(2024)

一直以來，包括傳播學在內的社會科學，都缺乏樂觀精神。分析研究問題固然少不了批判，但懷疑一切、沒有共情的批判，往往從一開始就把研究對象看成了「嫌疑犯」(criminal suspects) (Felski, 2015)。正是在對這個問題的反思上，一批文學理論家提出了「後批判」(post-critique)的主張。他們反對文化批評中懷疑一切的做法，認為這種做法來源於冷戰時期國家機器在民眾中培養出來的那種懷疑身邊人都是敵人的心態，即「懷疑成為當時的文化」(Castiglia, 2017, p. 216)。

這些文學理論家提出要擯棄「懷疑的闡釋學」(hermeneutics of suspicion)，宣導有共情、有希望的批評精神(Felski, 2015)，認為「希望並非對立於批判，而是批判的生命線。希望說明批判未必需要懷疑」(Castiglia, 2017, p. 217)。

如果我們用「後批判」視角來審視人文和社會科學中的當代中國研究，會發現很多研究，包括互聯網研究，其出發點都是把研究對象當成「嫌疑犯」，都是在做懷疑、揭露、批判的工作。這樣的分析固然重要，但如果當代中國研究中只有懷疑和否定，沒有希望和肯定，那不僅不符合現實，還會製造出一套懷疑和否定一切的學術話語和輿論環境。而這套話語和輿論環境不論對於大陸的老百姓，還是對海外華語圈的普通華人，都有可能帶來不良影響。疫情期間在美國針對亞裔和華裔的種族仇恨，在某種程度上跟這套懷疑的話語不是沒有關係的。正是有了疫情期間海外華人的生活經歷，疫情以來我一直在思考這樣一些問題：即包括自己在內的學術界，我們所生產出來的學術話語，是否真正有益於社會？如何才能真正有益於社會？如何不給我們自己和我們的族裔、社群帶來意外傷害？「後批判」學者們提出的，以共情的和充滿希望的精神來做研究，對回答這個問題頗有助益。當然，樂觀的精神，絕不是否定批判。但正如Castiglia (2017)所說，希望恰恰是批判的生命力所在。

CS：《紅衛兵的一代與中國的政治行動主義》(2016)是您「當代中國研究三部曲」的第二本，分析中國六十年代的激進主義及其遺產。

不確定時代中的生命經驗、跨學科知識生產與批判性反思

歷史地看，您如何評價中國大陸語境中，媒介在行動主義中的角色和作用，有哪些變與不變？

YG：媒介在行動主義中一向起到重要作用。只不過在不同時期，起作用的媒介有所不同。六十年代的激進主義，油印小報在全球範圍內起到了重要作用。在大陸，紅衛兵小報和大字報在規模上蔚為壯觀，影響巨大。幾個人成立一個紅衛兵組織，也要發傳單或印小報來宣告組織的成立。如同後來有了互聯網，幾個志同道合的朋友一起做公益環保，會做一個網頁來宣告自己的成立。在這個意義上說，媒介是社會組織的名片，也是行動主義者的名片。

不論是紅衛兵報還是網站、網頁以及現在的社交平台，相對於官方報紙、電視和廣播，都具有非主流特徵。在行動主義中發揮作用的往往是非主流媒介。這與行動主義自身的非主流特徵相符，也因為主流媒體往往對行動主義視而不見。

至於六十年代以來的變與不變，是個相對的問題，不是絕對的。有的方面變得更多些，有的變得少些。變得更多的是媒介技術和行動主義者的訴求，變得少的是表達方式。從油印小報到互聯網，媒介技術發生了深刻變化。與上世紀六十年代相比，互聯網時代的行動主義變得更加媒介化。因為媒介化程度高，跨國程度也相應提高，跨國機制成為行動主義的重要特徵 (Tarrow, 2005; Zhao & Fang, 2023)。

在訴求上，行動主義也有很多變化。紅衛兵小報幾千種，全國範圍內每天發行成千上萬份，所表達的核心訴求，一言以蔽之，就是表演看誰更革命。互聯網時代的訴求更多的則是日常生活中的訴求，比如對腐敗官員的揭露、對弱勢群體的同情等。當然也有很多內容屬於自我表達，是一種自我認同和集體認同的訴求。這些我在《連線力》中有所論述。

為甚麼說表達方式變得少些？我認為不論是六十年代還是現在，行動主義訴求的表達都重視風格、文采及體裁。在風格上，有戲謔幽默的，也有義正詞嚴的。社交媒體上網民喜歡用幽默表情包，紅衛兵小報上則風行打油詩和漫畫。紅衛兵寫文章講究革

《傳播與社會學刊》，(總)第67期(2024)

命化修辭，有的長篇大論模仿中共與蘇共論戰時期發表的《九評》的風格，排比句洋洋灑灑，大有氣吞山河之勢。大字報不僅文章要有氣勢，毛筆字也要寫得漂亮。1967至1968年間，重慶最大的造反派組織「八一五」，辦的小報叫做《八一五戰報》，編輯部設在重慶大學，小報的編輯們因為會寫文章，都是大學裏的紅人(周孜仁，2006)，如同在互聯網時代，一篇好文章能賺得無數眼球。當然互聯網時代的特有形式，如短視頻、標籤、表情包和迷因等等，增加了體裁的多樣性。在行動主義表達的風格上，還有一個經久不衰的特點，那就是對諷刺和笑話的運用。這其中的奧妙值得另文探討，但需要指出的是，諷刺和笑話也常見於主流媒體，只不過形式相同，內容各異。這種形式的相同，為行動主義者使用諷刺和幽默提供了一定的合法性。

CS：您近些年也在研究互聯網的歷史。您如何評價目前中英文學界針對互聯網史的研究現狀？這方面研究對我們理解當下數碼平台等熱點現象有何啟發？

YG：互聯網歷史的研究，方興未艾。有一批論文發表；很多關於互聯網的專著中，會講到互聯網歷史，如胡泳教授的《眾聲喧嘩：網絡時代的個人表達與公共討論》、邱林川教授的《信息時代的世界工廠：新工人階級的網絡社會》、彭蘭教授的《中國網路媒體的第一個十年》、韓榮斌教授的英文專著 *Contesting Cyberspace in China* 和郭紹華教授的英文專著 *The Evolution of the Chinese Internet* 等等，不一而足。我看到的唯一一部中國互聯網歷史的專著，應該是武漢大學吳世文教授所著《網事綿延：社會記憶視角下的中國互聯網歷史》。這些著作作為進一步全面書寫中國互聯網的歷史打下了很好的基礎。

互聯網歷史研究的意義，至少有兩個方面值得強調。一是早期互聯網歷史的資源嚴重缺失，比如早期有影響的網站、網頁、博客、社區等，很多已經無可挽回地消失。在這種情況下，我們急需發掘、搜尋、保存互聯網歷史的資源。其次，我希望通過互聯網歷史的研究，能夠建立起一個中國互聯網歷史的傳統。這個傳統有甚麼特點？需要學界同仁來共同探討。我認為早期的中國

不確定時代中的生命經驗、跨學科知識生產與批判性反思

互聯網，比如BBS論壇，商業化程度低、開放程度高、論壇裏的討論熱烈而真誠等等。這個早期互聯網的傳統，為我們理解當下的社交平台，提供了一面鏡子。

CS：《武漢封城》是您的新書。目前為止，從身處中國和來自西方的讀者中，您分別收到了怎樣的回應？對本學刊讀者，您有何建議以使他們能更好應對及時性話題，例如封城，或其他無法預見的危機？學者們需要如何準備才能把握住那些無法預料但至關重要的時刻？

YG：目前讀者回應主要有兩種。一種是書評，另外是在我講座之後，聽眾提的問題。很多學術刊物，如《中國季刊》(*The China Quarterly*)、《亞洲事務》(*Asian Affairs*)、《全球媒體與中國》(*Global Media and China*)和《當代社會學》(*Contemporary Sociology*)均有書評發表。最讓我高興的是，《洛杉磯時報書評》(*Los Angeles Times Book Review*)有長篇書評發表，著名的醫學刊物《柳葉刀》(*The Lancet*)發表了兩篇關於本書的書評。書出版後，我做了很多次講座，也收到很多聽眾的反饋。書評和聽眾的反饋大體一致，對本書的敘事手法、語言風格，以及使用封城日記敘述封城期間日常生活，都給予了肯定。

問題方面，涉及到方法和資料的比較多。常有聽眾問資料如何收集、又如何選擇。封城期間日記的作者會不會偏中上的社會階層、不夠有代表性等等。代表性(representativeness)這類問題，其實並不適用於質性研究。質性研究的目的，是深入理解研究對象的意義，而並不追求研究結論的一般化(generalization)。《武漢封城》的主要目的，是通過敘事的形式，來闡述封城期間武漢居民日常生活的意義。

要闡述日常生活的意義，最寶貴的資料是封城日記。因為封城日記是在當時特定情境之下書寫出來的，情感是當時情境中的情感，細節是情境中的細節。這與訪談不一樣。訪談中，被訪者的敘述依賴記憶，而我們的記憶力是不很可靠的。

封城日記是一種個體敘事體裁。在當代社會發展中，結構越來越強大，個體越來越渺小，個人的無力感越來越嚴重。但是我

《傳播與社會學刊》，(總)第67期(2024)

們看到，在疫情期間，弱小的個體卻表現出無比的堅韌。這是一種精神、道德和心靈的力量。但除了少數例外 (Kleinman et al., 2011; Zhang, 2020)，當代社會科學對人的精神力量幾乎毫無興趣，也基本毫無所知。對個體敘事的深入研究，是探索精神力量的重要途徑。德國社會學家齊美爾 (Georg Simmel) 的早期著作關注社會形態。他關於社會結構的論述，廣為人知。但他在晚年，卻走向對個體精神世界和心靈力量的追求。對他來說，一個人就是一個社會，就承載著一整個世界 (Simmel, 2005, 2015)。同理，即使是一冊封城日記，也有可能照亮一個社會，更何況疫情期間出現了無數的封城日記。在個體日漸渺小的當代社會，我們需要重新思考個體與社會的關係。在這方面，齊美爾的晚期著作給我們提供了寶貴的理论資源。

除了日記，我還選用了大量其他的網上資料，如社交網站的帖子、主流媒體和自媒體微信號上的文章、視頻網站上的視頻、國家和地方新聞發布會資料和社區微信號的文章等等。資料不可能全面，也不必全面，但其豐富性足以支撐起我的封城敘事。封城敘事應該是多種多樣的，應該從各個角度展開。我所講的故事，固然很多是封城期間大家都熟悉的故事，但也不可避免地帶有我個人的視角。我們需要各個學科的學者都來書寫封城和疫情的歷史和故事。

最後，您提到「學者們需要如何準備才能把握住那些無法預料但至關重要的時刻？」這個問題提得太好了，非常及時、非常重要。過去我們很少思考這類問題，但現在必須面對，因為我們所面對的世界，越來越充滿不確定性。危機四伏，生命變得異常脆弱。在這種條件下，學者對書齋外面的世界，應當保持高度關注，並用自己的專長，來記錄歷史。當代歷史發展之快，對學者提出的首要挑戰是如何保存資料、如何記錄歷史，理論分析尚在其次。也正是在這個意義上，早在疫情之前，就有學者大聲疾呼，人文和社科界現在最迫切需要做的不是理論和闡釋，而是「記錄和描述」(Love, 2010; Marcus et al., 2016)。疫情當前，只能使「記錄和描述」變得更加迫切。但「記錄和描述」不是擯棄理論。

不確定時代中的生命經驗、跨學科知識生產與批判性反思

好的描述，甚至對理論和理論素養有更高要求。只不過運用理論的形式多種多樣，或隱或顯。有時候，根據書的宗旨和目標讀者的需要，讓理論藏而不露，讓故事和人物說話，社會效果反而可能更好。

註釋

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Communication and Society, 67 (2024)

Academic Dialogue with **Guobin YANG**

Lived Experience, Inter-Disciplinary Knowledge Production and Critical Reflections in an Age of Uncertainty

YG: Guobin YANG

CS: Changwen CHEN, Shengjun LIN, Jack Linchuan QIU

CS: How did you decide to pursue a second doctoral degree (in sociology) after your first Ph.D. in comparative literature? What led you into the study of communication and society?

YG: My first doctoral degree was in the field of literary translation, and my dissertation was titled, “English Translation (30 Chapters) and Theoretical Discussions of *Wenxin Diaolong*.” After completing the dissertation, I wanted a change of environment to refresh my mind and try something new. Prof. Craig Calhoun, a renowned social theorist in the Department of Sociology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-Chapel Hill), had previously taught a seminar on “Critical Social Theory” for doctoral students in the Department of English at Beijing Foreign Studies University. I was first exposed to the social theories of Habermas and Bourdieu in this seminar. In 1994, he invited me to visit UNC-Chapel Hill and kindly extended a fellowship to me. After I arrived, I decided to pursue a doctoral degree in Sociology and study social theory and social movement theory systematically under the supervision of Prof. Calhoun. During that time, Craig had just published *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (1992), which has become a seminal work on public sphere theory. In 1994, he published *Neither Gods Nor Emperors*, followed by *Critical Social Theory* in 1995. Both books contain important discussions of media and communication. In addition, Craig is also a pioneer in Infrastructure Studies, which now attract much scholarly attention. As early as 1992, he put forth a compelling argument about the crucial role of information technology as the foundation of modernity

Lived Experience, Inter-Disciplinary Knowledge Production and Critical Reflections

(Calhoun, 1992). In the context of American Sociology, he stands out as one of a few scholars who are interested in the core issues of Communication Studies. Inspired by his work, my interest in sociology has always had something to do with communication, from the very beginning. Whether it was my research on the Red Guards or my investigations into the internet, I have consistently focused on the role of media and communication.

My “formal” entry into the field of communication and society began with my research on the internet. My doctoral thesis in Sociology focused on the transformation of identity among the Red Guards and the sent-down youth generation. During the later stages of my writing, around 1999 and 2000, I started paying attention to websites and personal webpages created by former educated youth. After defending my thesis in May 2000, I spent a considerable amount of time browsing Chinese websites, visiting various BBS forums, and reading posts. I came across a lot of content related to social activism, which I found fascinating. When I started teaching at the Department of Sociology at the University of Hawaii that summer, I chose “Information Technology and Social Movements” as my new research direction.

CS: What road bumps have you encountered in your interdisciplinary journey? How did you manage them? Any tips for junior scholars who are facing similar challenges?

YG: Pursuing a Ph.D. in a new academic discipline at a foreign university was an entirely new experience for me. Fortunately, Craig understood my interests and encouraged me to take courses not only in Sociology but also in the departments of Anthropology and Communication Studies. I remember taking a course by Larry Grossberg in communication, where he delved into books like Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus*. I found it hard to follow those discussions. In the Department of Anthropology, I took Prof. Judith Farquhar’s course on “Techniques of the Self” and read some Foucault. Although my understanding of the material was limited, the course aroused my keen interest in sociological notions of the self and self-identity.

In 1996, Craig relocated to the Department of Sociology at New York University (NYU). In the spring of 1997, I transferred to NYU to continue my doctoral studies. I spent three years each at

Communication and Society, 67 (2024)

UNC and NYU for my sociology Ph.D. Once I arrived at NYU, I felt like I truly started to grasp the subject matter. Several courses impacted me significantly, including Steven Lukes' doctoral seminar titled "Enlightenment in Question," which offered a comprehensive examination of European Enlightenment thought. Other influential courses included David Garland's "Advanced Seminar on Foucault," Craig's "Cultural Sociology," and Jeff Goodwin's "Social Movements." Moreover, I had the opportunity to take a course on the Chinese Cultural Revolution taught by the late Prof. Marilyn Young at the NYU Department of History.

Through this process, I gradually came to realize how diverse sociological studies can be. There is no need to chase trendy topics or conform to the mainstream. I can pursue my research based on my own interests. If I were to offer advice on how to face the challenges of interdisciplinary research, my experience tells me this: when it comes to reading and thinking, you should broaden your horizons and not confine yourself. It is beneficial to take courses in other disciplines and explore books in other fields. When it comes to research and writing, it is important to employ methods that you like to use and explore issues or engage in research that genuinely interests you. It is crucial to focus on questions that spark your personal interests and approach them from your unique perspective, rather than blindly following the crowd.

During the early stages of pursuing my Ph.D. in Sociology, I experienced a perplexing dilemma. I found myself questioning whether I should discard my previous knowledge about literature as unwanted baggage in order to fully immerse myself in Sociology. In hindsight, I recognize that this was a crisis in my academic identity. However, over time, I gradually came to realize that literature and cultural theory can indeed enrich Sociology. With this realization, I made a conscious decision to integrate my interests in literature and culture into my sociological research rather than abandoning them. For instance, in my initial publications, which focused on social movements, I paid special attention to emotions and narratives. I believed that incorporating them would enrich my research. Moreover, I came to understand that theories and concepts are not infallible. If they do not align with my experiences, there is no need to adhere to them. In fact, drawing from personal experiences can contribute

Lived Experience, Inter-Disciplinary Knowledge Production and Critical Reflections

something original to existing theories and concepts. It is common for researchers to have self-doubt when it comes to their own ideas, but I hope to encourage readers of this journal to have faith in your own ideas. Believe in the value of your present and past experiences, which can serve as important sources of academic motivation. When writing, it is crucial to have confidence in your own ideas. Sometimes, you may have a fleeting and elusive idea, and you may not be sure whether it is a good idea. However, that thought could potentially be the seed of a groundbreaking concept or theory. In such moments, it is important to trust yourself, make an effort to pursue that thought, jot it down, and develop it step by step. Even if it does not find a place in your current writing, it may prove valuable in the future. By accumulating notes of such ideas, you will grow intellectually and develop a systematic way of thinking.

CS: What would likely be some of the unique contributions to studying Chinese communication and society as compared to similar studies in the West?

YG: The most significant contribution is to let the world see Chinese experiences. This is not a trivial matter, because invisibility is a condition of non-recognition. To be invisible is to be ignored, and worse, to be discriminated against.

The reasons behind this are quite complex. It is not merely a matter of individual scholars' research and writing but also involves deeper national-political, racial, and cultural factors. As far as the academic community is concerned, to work toward a richer and more multi-dimensional understanding of China, scholars must reassess epistemologically the significance and social impact of their own research. I will return to this point later.

Let me offer some thoughts on the concept of the "Chinese-language context." Communication in the Chinese context includes many things. It extends beyond mainland China to include Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Singapore, and overseas Chinese communities worldwide. In recent years, the emerging field of Sinophone studies pertains to the Chinese-language context. It is important. However, we should not underestimate the role of the nation-state. By emphasizing global flows, decentralization, and transnationalism, discourses of "globalization" once served to facilitate the infiltration

Communication and Society, 67 (2024)

of global capital, ultimately eroding the role of the nation-state and diminishing the visibility of its people. Therefore, I would urge scholars of communication in the Chinese-language context, or global communication in general, to bring the nation-state back in and put it at the center of our research. Scholars are individual human beings who are all rooted in specific territories, each with its own history, culture, society, and politics. It is impossible to study a global or transnational “Chinese-language context” divorced from the history and politics of the nation.

By situating Communication Studies in the Chinese-language context within the realms of nation, ethnicity, and history, we can infuse decolonization into the field of Chinese communication and media studies. This approach enables us to contribute to the ongoing discussions on decolonization within the framework of the Global South, as advocated by communication scholars in recent years. Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and mainland China all have unique histories as colonies or semi-colonies. Likewise, overseas Chinese communities have emerged from colonial histories. For instance, early Chinese laborers who participated in the construction of railroads in the United States faced similar hardships as oppressed people in colonial territories. Therefore, it is essential to consider the history of colonization and anti-colonial struggles in a global context, as well as the experiences of overseas Chinese migrants, when studying communication and society in Chinese-language contexts. Such research aligns well with the broader decolonization efforts of the Global South.

CS: How do you see the research landscape of media and activism nowadays? What are the most prominent theoretical issues, including in the Chinese context? What are the most compelling issues for you in this academic field?

YG: There is a substantial body of research concerning online activism, but I believe it can still be more exciting. I attribute this to two primary factors. First, the nature of activism has undergone major change and continues to evolve, which challenges researchers to stay updated. Second, researchers tend to prioritize theoretical frameworks and may not fully appreciate online activism as a social phenomenon,

Lived Experience, Inter-Disciplinary Knowledge Production and Critical Reflections

resulting in a dearth of in-depth descriptive and historical accounts. This has to do with the increasingly elusive nature of phenomena. Protests and acts of resistance disseminated through social networks often lack clear timelines, identifiable characters, and the traditional organizational structures seen in conventional movements and revolutions. These factors make it difficult to capture and present activism in the social media age through vivid storytelling. Without compelling narratives, research solely based on theory and concepts is unlikely to have a profound impact. Neglecting the significance of the phenomenon diminishes storytelling, which makes academic publications less captivating. While some may argue that social science research should prioritize theory and downplay the role of narratives, it is crucial to acknowledge that even excellent theories need to be supported by well-crafted narratives to be truly compelling and influential.

Although the academic community devotes attention to theories, the fundamental question of what constitutes “activism” remains to be answered. It is commonly believed that activism must involve opposition to the government, but this is not always true. Similarly, some may argue that activism is synonymous with resistance. Yet, this is not necessarily the case either. I see activism as highly contextualized. The same behavior can be regarded as activism in a specific context, but it may not be so elsewhere. Activism is not solely limited to opposition against the government; it can also encompass actions that support governmental policies. For instance, civic actions during pandemic lockdowns often align with government directives. It is unwise to evaluate behavior across different contexts based on a narrow definition.

If we acknowledge the contextual nature of activism, we come to realize that a single definition cannot cover all instances of activism. Instead, researchers should scrutinize the relationship between context and action. In my book *The Wuhan Lockdown*, I propose that “activism” entails a sense of commitment. For instance, an environmental activist is an actively involved individual who shows commitment to environmental issues and takes action to protect the environment, demonstrating consistency in their words, actions, and thoughts. However, many ordinary citizens engage in occasional civic activities

Communication and Society, 67 (2024)

in their daily lives, such as making charitable donations, which can also be regarded as acts of citizenship. They are participants in civic action, though not necessarily “activists.” If these individuals persist with such behavior over a prolonged period, they can become “activists.” Conversely, activists can also transition into everyday actors.

When it comes to theoretical discussions about online activism, the two most influential concepts are probably “connective action” and “hashtag activism.” The concept of “connective action,” introduced by Bennett and Segerberg (2013), suggests that collective behavior via social media is no longer driven by collective identities but rather by social networks that connect fragmented individual expressions into collective action. This novel concept gained instant popularity. However, I have come across articles utilizing this concept, such as studies of #MeToo in mainland China, where the broad category of “connective action” is evoked without clearly explaining exactly how the actions become connected. Paolo Gerbaudo has expressed reservations about the concept of “connective action.” In a 2014 article, he proposed that for “connective action” to genuinely connect individuals, it still needs to rely on culture and collective identity (Gerbaudo, 2014). In a subsequent paper, Gerbaudo (2022) further argued that campaigns such as #MeToo become connective action primarily because individuals’ demands and grievances converge through the networks, forming a collective identity for the group. He believes that online collective behavior is the outcome of the interactions between individual and collective identities, and it is problematic to claim that individualized expressions can replace collective identities.

I am sympathetic with Gerbaudo’s argument, but I believe that emphasizing the convergence of individual demands and grievances into collective identity is still not enough. After all, there are countless personal demands and grievances expressed on the internet every day, but only a fraction of them turn into collective protest events with social impact. So, what distinguishes those online expressions that do evolve into online contentious events? I think the nature of the event itself and its mode of communication are vital. Certain grievances have a heightened potential for triggering public outrage, thereby increasing their dissemination potential. As for how they spread, this can be

Lived Experience, Inter-Disciplinary Knowledge Production and Critical Reflections

analyzed in terms of the media channels, narrative strategies, and styles. The internet and social media have always played a crucial role in disseminating such events. Emotional communication, employing poignant narratives, often proves effective in moving people. Touching stories tend to propagate rapidly and extensively. The selection of communication modes should be contingent upon the nature of the event. However, this selection may not necessarily be a conscious decision made by the individual. Generally speaking, netizens opt for the most suitable communication mode based on their habits, which is a form of practical reason.

It is quite a coincidence that I am currently in my hometown, Zibo, Shandong Province. Thanks to its famous barbecues, Zibo has gained much fame across the internet. Influencers from various places have flocked to Zibo, where they live-stream their experiences on platforms like Douyin and Xiaohongshu. This exemplifies a choice of communication mode. During dinner conversations with my relatives and friends in Zibo, our main topic always revolves around Zibo's barbecue-induced fame. We wondered why Zibo barbecue became a sensation nationwide. The most frequently mentioned reason is the three open letters issued by Zibo.¹ The first letter, titled "A Letter to Shandong University Students," was published on May 3, 2022, expressing a warm welcome to Shandong University students coming to Zibo for quarantine and anti-epidemic measures. Though short, the letter conveyed genuine warmth. Before the Shandong University students left Zibo after completing their quarantine, the people of Zibo set up barbecues outside each student's dorm as a farewell gesture. The two subsequent letters were equally imbued with the sincerity and enthusiasm of the people of Zibo. These three letters thus told three touching stories, and these stories played a crucial role in popularizing Zibo barbecue. This shows that exploring how online activism can attract widespread attention necessitates a focus on narratives and storytelling strategies. I believe that this is an important and captivating research topic.

CS: One of your most influential books is *The Power of the Internet in China* (2009), which took more of an optimistic view about the Internet leading to social progress than the prevalent view today, both in China and globally. If you are to update this book, what changes will you make?

Communication and Society, 67 (2024)

YG: If a new edition of the book is coming out, I would hope to tell more stories and add more narrative details, while shortening the theoretical and conceptual discussions. The main ideas and analytical framework would probably remain.

As for the question of optimism or pessimism, the issues involved are quite complex. Indeed, some commentators believe that the views expressed in *The Power of the Internet in China* are optimistic. However, rather than saying that the book is optimistic about the social impact of the internet, it would be more appropriate to say that I tried to maintain an orientation or ethos of optimism and hopefulness in my research and writing about media technology and social development. If the book were to be updated, I would retain this ethos of optimism. As long as we believe in human agency, we will be able to retain an ethos of optimism and hope. Conversely, if we only see the constraints imposed by the social structure without acknowledging human agency, we may become pessimistic and disillusioned. Optimism or pessimism is not only related to the nature of the phenomenon. It is also a question of epistemology. It is about how we, as researchers, observe and analyze phenomena, how we perceive the relationship between individuals and society, and how we view the nature of knowledge production.

Throughout the history of Social Sciences, including Communication Studies, there has been a lack of optimism. Analyzing issues certainly involves some form of critique, but the practices of unsympathetic skepticism and wholesale doubt may lead scholars to treat their research subjects as “criminal suspects” (Felski, 2015). It is in response to this issue that literary theorists proposed the concept of “post-critique.” They oppose the practice of skepticism in cultural criticism and argue that this approach has its roots in the Cold War, when the state apparatus cultivated a mindset of suspecting everyone around them as enemies, leading to a “culture of suspicion” (Castiglia, 2017, p. 216).

These literary theorists advocate abandoning the “hermeneutics of suspicion” and promoting a critical ethos that is empathetic and hopeful (Felski, 2015). They argue that “hope is not opposed to critique; rather, it is the lifeline of critique. Hope shows that critique does not necessitate skepticism” (Castiglia, 2017, p. 217).

Lived Experience, Inter-Disciplinary Knowledge Production and Critical Reflections

If we examine contemporary Chinese studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences from a “post-critique” perspective, including research on the Chinese internet, we will find that many studies similarly approach their subjects as “criminal suspects,” engaging in the work of doubt, exposure, and criticism. While such analysis is certainly important, if contemporary Chinese studies only consist of skepticism and negation without hope and affirmation, it will not only fail to capture the full spectrum of Chinese experiences, but also create an academic discourse and public opinion environment of perpetual suspicion and negativity. This discourse and environment can potentially have counter-productive effects on both mainland Chinese and Chinese communities overseas. The racial hatred targeting Asians and Chinese Americans during the pandemic in the United States, to some extent, is related to this discourse of suspicion. The experiences of overseas Chinese during the pandemic led me to ponder the following questions: Does the academic discourse we produce in the scholarly community, including myself, truly benefit society? How can it genuinely benefit society without causing unexpected harm to ourselves and our ethnic and social communities? In answering these questions, we might find inspiration from scholars of “post-critique,” who call for a new orientation to critique, one of empathy and hope. Of course, an ethos of hope and empathy does not negate criticism. As Castiglia (2017) has said, hope is precisely the lifeline of critique.

CS: *The Red Guard Generation and Political Activism in China* (2016) is the second book of your trilogy on contemporary China, in which you examine radicalism during Mao’s era and its legacies. In terms of the role of media in activism in mainland China, how do you see what has changed and what has remained roughly the same?

YG: The media has always played a crucial role in activism. However, the specific types of media vary over time. In the 1960s, the underground press had a significant impact on radical activism worldwide. In mainland China, the Red Guard press and big-character posters were impressive in scale and had a tremendous influence. Even when only a few individuals formed a Red Guard organization, they would distribute leaflets or publish a newspaper to declare their establishment. Similarly, with the advent of the internet, a group of

Communication and Society, 67 (2024)

like-minded friends engaging in environmental activism would create a website to announce their formation. In this sense, media serves as the calling card of social organizations and activists alike.

Be they the Red Guard press, websites, web pages, or current social media platforms, all of them possess non-mainstream characteristics compared to official newspapers, television, and radio. Alternative media often plays a role in activism. This aligns with the alternative nature of activism itself, as mainstream media often overlook activism.

Regarding change and continuity since the 1960s, it is a relative rather than an absolute question. Some aspects have changed more than others. More change has occurred in media technologies and the demands of activists, while the modes of expression have changed less. From the underground press to the internet, there has been a profound change in media technologies. In comparison with the 1960s, activism in the internet age has become more mediated. Due to the high degree of mediation, transnational activism has also increased, with transnational mechanisms becoming a key characteristic of activism (Tarrow, 2005; Zhao & Fang, 2023).

In terms of demands, activism has also gone through tremendous transformation. The Red Guard press had thousands of titles, with tens of thousands of copies distributed nationwide on a daily basis in their heydays. However, the core demand they expressed can be summarized as a performance to show who was more revolutionary. In the internet age, the demands of activism have shifted more towards everyday life issues, such as exposing corrupt officials or demonstrating sympathy for marginalized groups, and so on. Of course, there are also many forms of self-expression, reflecting both individual and collective identity concerns, which I have discussed in *The Power of the Internet in China*.

Why do I say that the ways of expression have changed less? In my opinion, whether it was the 1960s or the present, expressions of activist demands have always emphasized style, literary flair, and genre. In terms of style, there are elements of both playful humor and solemn righteousness. Internet users on social media platforms enjoy using humorous memes and emoticons, while it was popular for the Red Guard newspapers to carry satirical poems and cartoons. The Red Guards were meticulous in their revolutionary rhetoric, with

Lived Experience, Inter-Disciplinary Knowledge Production and Critical Reflections

some lengthy articles imitating the style of the “Nine Commentaries” published during the period of ideological debates between the Chinese Communist Party and their Soviet counterpart. These articles were often filled with parallelism, exuding an air of grandeur. It was not just the content of the big-character posters that needed to be imposing; even the calligraphy mattered. During 1967 and 1968, the largest rebel organization in Chongqing, known as the “August 15 Faction,” published a newspaper called *August 15 Battle News*, with its editorial office located at Chongqing University. The editors of this newspaper were all respected individuals known for their writing skills within the university community (Zhou, 2006). Similarly, in the era of the internet, a well-crafted article has the potential to garner countless views. Of course, the unique forms of the internet age, such as short videos, hashtags, memes, and emoticons, have added to the diversity of genres. Another enduring characteristic of stylistic expression in activism is the use of satire and jokes. The intricacies of this phenomenon warrant separate exploration, but it should be noted that satire and jokes are also commonly found in mainstream media, albeit with different content. The shared form provides a certain legitimacy for activists to use such rhetorical devices.

CS: In recent years, you have been working on the history of the Internet. How would you assess the current state of research on this topic in Chinese and English? What insights can the study of Internet history offer to our understanding of current phenomena, such as digital platforms?

YG: The study of Internet history is flourishing. Numerous papers have come out, and many books on the internet touch on its history. These include Hu Yong’s *The Rising Cacophony: Personal Expression and Public Discussion in the Internet Age*, Jack Qiu’s *Working-Class Network Society: Communication Technology and the Information Have-Less in Urban China*, Peng Lan’s *The First Decade of Chinese Online Media*, Han Rongbin’s *Contesting Cyberspace in China*, Guo Shaohua’s *The Evolution of the Chinese Internet*, and many more. The only monograph fully devoted to the history of the Chinese internet that I have come across is *The Duration of Internet Stories: Chinese Internet History from the Perspective of Social Memory* by Wu Shiwen from Wuhan University. These works have laid a solid foundation for a comprehensive investigation of Chinese internet history.

Communication and Society, 67 (2024)

Chinese internet studies are important in at least two ways. First, much of the information concerning the early history of the Chinese internet has disappeared. For example, influential websites, web pages, blogs, communities, and more from the early days have vanished. In such circumstances, there is an urgent need to explore, search for, and preserve historical resources on the internet. Second, I hope that through the study of internet history, we can establish a tradition of the Chinese internet. What are the characteristics of this tradition? This requires exploration by colleagues in our academic communities. In my opinion, the early Chinese internet, such as BBS forums, had a low level of commercialization, more openness, and lively and sincere discussions. This tradition of the early internet can serve as a mirror for us to reflect on the current state of social media platforms.

CS: Your most recent book is *The Wuhan Lockdown* (2022). What kinds of responses have you received so far—from readers in the West and from those inside China? What advice do you have for our readers to get ready to tackle a timely topic like the lockdown, which can be another unexpected crisis? How do we prepare ourselves for the moment—an unanticipated, critical moment to be seized?

YG: Currently, there are mainly two types of reader responses. One is book reviews; the other is questions raised by the audience after my book talks. Many academic journals, such as *The China Quarterly*, *Asian Affairs*, *Global Media and China*, and *Contemporary Sociology*, have reviewed this book. I was particularly delighted by the publication of a lengthy book review in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* and two reviews in the renowned medical journal *The Lancet*. After the book was published, I delivered numerous lectures and received feedback from many. The reviews and feedback from the audience are consistent, affirming the book's narrative techniques, its language style, and the use of diary entries to depict daily life during the lockdown.

There are often inquiries about the book's methods and data. Audience members frequently ask how the data was collected and selected. They also inquire whether the authors of the lockdown diaries are representative, since many of them belong to the urban middle class. However, questions of representativeness are less applicable to qualitative research. The purpose of qualitative inquiry is

Lived Experience, Inter-Disciplinary Knowledge Production and Critical Reflections

to gain deeper understandings of the meaning of the research subjects rather than seek generalizations of the research findings. The main objective of *The Wuhan Lockdown* is to elucidate, through narratives, Wuhan residents' everyday experiences during the lockdown.

To do so, the most valuable source of information is the lockdown diaries. These diaries were products of the moment. They capture the emotions and details of that particular moment. This is different from interviews, where the interviewees' narratives rely on memory, and we know that memory is not always reliable.

Lockdown diaries belong to the genre of individual narratives. In the course of contemporary social development, structures have become increasingly powerful, while individuals have become increasingly insignificant, leading to a growing sense of personal powerlessness. However, during the pandemic, these seemingly vulnerable individuals demonstrated incredible resilience with their spiritual, moral, and emotional strength. Yet, with few exceptions (Kleinman et al., 2011; Zhang, 2020), contemporary social sciences have shown little interest in and knowledge regarding the emotional and moral conditions of individual existence. In-depth research on individual narratives serves as an important avenue for exploring this important question. The early works of German sociologist Georg Simmel focused on social forms, and his writings on social structure are well known. However, in his later years, he turned toward the study of the spiritual world and the power of the human soul. For Simmel (2005, 2015), an individual's life may contain an entire society and carry a whole world within it. Similarly, even a single volume of a lockdown diary has the potential to illuminate a society, not to mention the power of multitudes of such diaries during the pandemic. In today's world, where individuals are increasingly diminished, we need to reconsider the relationship between individuals and society. In this regard, Simmel's later works remain a valuable theoretical resource.

In addition to diaries, I utilized a large amount of other online materials, such as posts on social networking sites, articles from mainstream media, individual WeChat accounts, videos from video-sharing websites, press releases from national and local news conferences, articles from community WeChat accounts, and so on. The materials are not exhaustive, nor is it necessary for them to be so. However, their richness is sufficient to support narratives about

Communication and Society, 67 (2024)

the lockdown. Such lockdown narratives should be diverse and approached from various perspectives. The stories I tell include many familiar stories from the lockdown period, but they inevitably carry my personal perspective. We need scholars from multiple disciplines to contribute to the writing of contemporary history and the stories of the lockdowns and the pandemic.

Finally, you asked, “How can scholars be prepared to grasp those unforeseen but crucial moments?” This is such a great question, really timely and important. In the past, we rarely pondered such questions, but now we must face them because the world is filled with more and more uncertainties. It is fraught with crises, and life has become exceptionally fragile. Under these conditions, scholars should pay close attention to the world beyond their private studies and use their expertise to record history. The acceleration of contemporary history poses academic challenges: how to preserve materials and document history becomes a primary concern, while theoretical analysis could wait. It is precisely in this sense that even before the pandemic, scholars already argued that what the humanities and social sciences urgently needed to do was not theoretical interpretation but “documenting and describing” (Love, 2010; Marcus et al., 2016). Under the circumstances of the pandemic, the need for “documenting and describing” becomes even more pressing. However, “documenting and describing” does not mean abandoning theory. Good descriptions even place higher demands on theory and theoretical sophistication. It is just that the application of theory can take various forms, sometimes subtly integrated, sometimes overtly apparent. Depending on the purpose of the work and the needs of the target audience, it may produce a stronger social impact if we let theories remain implicit and let the stories and characters speak for themselves.

QS: Thank you very much for an engaging dialogue. This is full of deep insights.

Selected Works by Guobin Yang

Please refer to the end of the Chinese version of the dialogue for Guobin Yang’s selected works.