

*FROM WUHAN TO THE WHITE HOUSE*

# COVID-19

THE  
GREATEST  
COVER-UP  
IN HISTORY

DYLAN HOWARD  
& DOMINIC UTTON





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# & DOMINIC OTTON

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# COVID-19





The definitive historical record of the first six months of the 2020 global coronavirus pandemic—the invisible and deadly enemy that would change the world forever. This unprecedented investigation reveals what government leaders and world medical agencies from Wuhan to the White House knew, when they knew it, how they covered it up—and how shameless politicians and media titans have executed a war on the truth.

# COVID-19

THE GREATEST COVER-UP IN HISTORY—FROM  
WUHAN TO THE WHITE HOUSE

**DYLAN HOWARD  
AND DOMINIC UTTON**



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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available on file.

Jacket design by 5mediadesign

Jacket images: Shutterstock

Print ISBN: 978-1-5107-6533-7

Ebook ISBN: 978-1-5107-6534-4

Printed in the United States of America

The faces of those on the COVID-19 front line around the world are usually obscured, masks pulled tight over the mouth and nose and behind the ears, eyes exposed to show the strain of harrowing realities.

Nurses look like heroes, because they are just that. They look like prisoners, too. But unlike the guilt of an inmate, these nameless nurses, doctors, and medical personnel are trapped in a world they never signed up for. They are saviors. They too are victims.

During this global crisis, the harrowing images we have seen show those on the front line tired and tireless, committed and conflicted. They are in an impossible spot and right where we need them as the world grapples with a seemingly overwhelming force.

They are the best of society, from the worst hit countries to those even with small outbreaks. These versatile people are in a complex profession, rushing to a disaster's epicenter while the rest of us tiptoe through everyday life in a state of careful panic. What bravery they have. They are our silent soldiers, going to war—*for us*—each and every day. We will never be able to thank them enough.



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# **PROLOGUE**

The heir to the British throne. A prime minister. A grand chancellor. Award-winning actors. An NBA superstar. Elected leaders. TV hosts.

They are among the millions who have tested positive for the coronavirus as it has spread around the world. Many of the famous figures, by going public with their diagnoses, have helped put a face to the virus, sharing updates via social media and giving interviews about their symptoms.

On the other side of the world, ground zero for the COVID-19 outbreak, it is a vastly different story—censorship, lies, and ignorance have killed thousands, even as the predictions about the coronavirus catastrophe grow more ominous by the minute.

At least, that's the narrative we're fed. The truth, as you will see over the following pages, is less black-and-white, less East-and-West.

Despite the best efforts of countries enacting emergency action plans to contain the disease, its spread continues at a worrying rate. Even the World Health Organization (WHO) forecasts a future of pain. It says the virus poses a greater global threat than terrorism.

Their figures are terrifying. Professor Gabriel Leung, who led the fight against the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory System) virus, believes 60 percent of the world's population could become infected with COVID-19 and that up to 45 million people might die from it. As we write, in June 2020, six months into the pandemic, some 8.5 million have been infected, and nearly half a million killed. That's roughly 2,700 lives lost every single day of 2020 so far.

But could it have been avoided? It most certainly could have been contained beyond the devastation facing the world if one man had been listened to.

Dr. Li Wenliang, of Wuhan Central Hospital, was the whistleblower. In December, he had been told by police officers in China not to spread “fake rumors” after alerting his friends to a new emerging virus. On February 7, 2020, that same virus tragically took his life.

His death sparked a wave of anger, grief, and overwhelming sense of mistrust toward the government. It also exposed the great cover-up of China, in which Beijing punished the informer, claimed US troops started it, and is still lying about death and infection figures.

China is not the only nation whose government is lying.

The fault for the most catastrophic pandemic to hit our species in living memory—the impact of which will be felt for generations to come and across all levels of society—does not lie solely with Beijing. And neither does the cover-up. As you will read, governments in the West, specifically those of the United States and the United Kingdom, have blood on their hands too—through arrogance, through complacency, through fear of looking foolish, through stupidity, and through greed.

What lessons can be learned? The life and death of Li Wenliang is a critical reminder of the need to speak truth to power. Whistleblowers like Dr. Li demonstrate guts and integrity when so many go with the flow or look out for number one. He was one brave doctor who tried to warn the world, was silenced through coercion, yet was still able to make a difference in the most inspiring of ways even as he lay on his deathbed.

Throughout history we, as a society, have benefited greatly from the brave exhibitions of character of men like Dr. Li. Wars have ended; lives have been saved; governments and corporate titans have been held to account.

Don't let Dr. Li's example be lost. Amid the bluster and buck-passing of governments in the West, remember the simple truth of what he tried to tell us. Listen to the experts. Look at the facts. Remember that, as humans, saving human lives should always be our priority.

—Dylan Howard & Dominic Utton, June 2020



## **A NOTE ON THE NUMBERS**

Where statistics for infections and deaths from COVID-19 are quoted throughout this book, we have used figures from [worldometers.info](https://www.worldometers.info), an independent source acknowledged and trusted by governments and news outlets around the world. A word of caution, however—much of their data is in turn supplied by official government bodies ... and as we shall see, official government bodies have an odious habit of not telling the whole truth. With that in mind, it is perhaps best to treat these statistics as reflecting only the *minimum* numbers of those affected by COVID-19.

The real count of the infected and the dead is likely far higher.

# PART I: OUTBREAK

“Make no mistake. This is an emergency in China, but it has not yet become a global health emergency. It may yet become one.”

—Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus,  
WHO Director General, March 11, 2020

# CHAPTER ONE

## ONCE UPON A TIME IN WUHAN

“We have it totally under control. It’s one person coming in from China, and we have it under control. It’s going to be just fine.”

—President Donald Trump,  
CNBC interview, January 22, 2020

It began in China. It began with a single person.

In the fall of 2019, Wuhan—the capital city of Hubei Province in the center of the world’s most populous country—was a place few people outside the People’s Republic had even heard of. Within a few months it would become forever synonymous as ground zero for the greatest medical emergency of our age.

Nobody could have guessed the coming notoriety that November, however. The sun was shining. The sprawling city’s 11 million people were, as usual, thronging the streets, parks, and markets.

“Golden October”—as the Chinese call fall—had passed, and if the people of Wuhan were preparing for winter, they were doing so with little out of the ordinary on their minds. Winters in central China tend to be relatively mild, and at the end of them comes the Chinese New Year holiday, a time of intense celebration during which some 450 million people

travel across the country. As a major transportation hub, Wuhan could expect at least 15 million to do so via the city.

But a hidden menace was lurking in the very air the people of Wuhan were breathing. A strange new virus was developing and mutating rapidly.

It was here in Wuhan, in the streets and factories, the offices and apartment blocks, the train stations, metro carriages, and markets, that the invisible enemy was born—festering at least a month and a half before the world was told.

By which time it was already too late.

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The Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market is a vast and chaotic space occupying over 50,000 square meters in the Jiangnan district of Wuhan, an area conveniently close to shops, homes, and offices and just 800 meters from the Hankou railway station, the main Wuhan terminal for high-speed trains to and from Shanghai, home to some 24 million.

Over a thousand tenants set up stalls in this “wet market,” selling seafood and live animals. Some were licensed, some were not—for although Huanan market was officially a space for the mass selling of seafood to shops and restaurants, there was another trade going on here too.

Besides the traditional crab, shrimp, striped bass, and salmon for sale, there were all types of exotic and wild animals, from pangolins to bats, rats and frogs to wolf pups. A price list posted by one vendor on the popular Chinese review site *Dazhong Dianping* listed 112 items available, including a number of wild animals. The South China *Morning Post* reported the market had a section selling around “120 wildlife animals across 75 species.” In documents reviewed by these authors, the breathtaking range of creatures includes badgers, beavers, camel, crocodiles, dogs, donkeys, foxes, giant salamanders, hedgehogs, koalas, ostrich, otters, peacocks, pheasants, porcupines, rabbit organs, sheep, snakes (including the many-

banded krait, *Bungarus multicinctus*, an extremely venomous species), and turtles.

Also available at Huanan were masked palm civets—a mammal native to southeast Asia and India, a little like a cross between a cat and a small bear. In 2003, the SARS virus was isolated in a number of masked palm civets found in another wet market in the Chinese city of Guangdong, ten hours from Wuhan. In 2006, scientists from the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention in Hong Kong and Guangzhou established a direct genetic link between the SARS virus appearing in civets and in humans, with many believing that inadequate or unhygienic preparation of the meat may have been the cause of the disease outbreak.

Between 2002 and 2003, SARS would spread to more than two dozen countries in North America, South America, Europe, and Asia and infect 8,098 people worldwide, killing just under one in ten of them before it was contained.

But by fall of 2019, SARS was considered old news. There hadn't been a reported case anywhere in the world since 2004. The stallholders of Huanan—and those who thronged the market browsing for everything from shrimp to camel, masked palm civets, pangolin, and bats included—were completely relaxed about any threat from that disease. It was a beaten virus.

Not all the meat sold at wet markets like Huanan was dead. There was also a steady trade in live animals—not as pets, but to be either taken away and slaughtered at home, or else picked out by the customer and butchered there and then. Such livestock would often be kept alongside carcasses in the narrow, crowded, chaotic lanes and stalls that made up the market, with little or no separation between living and dead, one species or another.

One report in the *Bangkok Post* quoted a local resident of the Jiangnan district describing a selection of the live animals on offer: “There were turtles, snakes, rats, hedgehogs and pheasants.” The report also carried photographs of the shocking conditions in which they were slaughtered, with unwashed buckets, scales, and knives, splattered with blood and entrails, being reused between several species without washing.



Not that the official authorities were especially concerned about the trade in animals—or the conditions in which they were kept and slaughtered. In September 2019, the Wuhan Administration for Industry and Commerce said that government officials had inspected eight stalls at Huanan wet market selling live animals and were happy they all had the correct documentation and licensing.

To those in the West, it seems barbaric. To the Chinese people, however, eating rare, unusual, or exotic meat is deeply ingrained in their history and culture. According to Hu Xingdou, professor of economics at Beijing Institute of Technology, “While the West values freedom and other human rights, Chinese people view food as their primary need because starving is a big threat and an unforgettable part of the national memory.”

Furthermore, what may once have been born of necessity is now an indication of status. “While feeding themselves is not a problem to many Chinese nowadays,” Hu continued, “eating novel food or meat, organs or parts from rare animals or plants has become a measure of identity to some people.”

This collision of cultural identity and the chaotic reality of life inside wet markets such as Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market—as well as a profound refusal to learn the lessons that SARS should have taught—would provide the ideal breeding ground for the return of a disease everyone thought had gone away forever.

When COVID-19, a new, deadlier strain of SARS, was discovered, that initial collision was made indescribably worse by the deliberate actions of governments, as you will learn through the pages of this book—first in China and then elsewhere—who, for one reason or another, sought to downplay the threat ... with horrific, worldwide consequences.

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On December 31, 2019, when Chinese authorities contacted the World Health Organization and informed them of “cases of pneumonia of

unknown etiology detected in Wuhan”—the first official admission that there was anything unusual happening in the city—few would have dared guess just how much carnage this “unknown pneumonia” would go on to cause around the world.

In fact, at that time the Chinese government was still denying that the new strain of pneumonia was in any way linked to SARS. And they were prepared to go to extreme lengths to prove they were right.

One man, however, was convinced that these patients were potentially the forerunners of a pandemic. His name was Li Wenliang.

A little over a month later, he would be dead.

Dr. Li was an ophthalmologist who worked as a physician at Wuhan Central Hospital. He was known as a calm, patient, and diligent doctor, a dedicated family man, married with one child and another due in the spring. He had been at Wuhan Central since 2014, and at thirty-three years old was a fit and healthy man, with a keen interest in basketball.

On December 30, 2019, Dr. Li’s world was turned upside down. It began with a patient’s report from his colleague Dr. Ai Fen, director of the emergency department at the hospital. In the preceding weeks she had treated two patients who had been admitted with apparent influenza, but strangely for whom conventional treatment methods did not seem to have had any effect. One was a delivery person at the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market; the other had no apparent history of contact with the market—and seemingly no connection with the first patient.

What seemed a strange coincidence took a more frightening turn after Dr. Ai saw the lab results from one of those patients. The report contained the words “SARS coronavirus, pseudomonas aeruginosa, 46 types of oral / respiratory colonisation bacteria.”

Dr. Ai circled the word “SARS” and sent an image of it to another doctor, who forwarded it to his colleagues; by the afternoon it had spread through Wuhan’s medical circles until it reached Dr. Li. As other doctors passed on the information and shared details of their own patients, it turned out those two cases were not as unique as first expected.

At 5:43 p.m., Dr. Li posted in a private WeChat group of his medical school classmates. (WeChat is China's biggest and most comprehensive multipurpose messaging and social media app, akin to WhatsApp, and boasting a billion monthly users. It is also subject to whispers of political censorship and mass surveillance by the Chinese government. Imagine Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Apple Pay all combined ... but watched over by Big Brother.)

Dr. Li's message read: "Seven confirmed cases of SARS were reported from Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market." He also posted shots of the patient's diagnosis report and CT scan image before adding, "They are being isolated in the emergency department of our hospital."

Fifty-nine minutes later, he received a reply warning him that WeChat was not a secure platform.

"Be careful," said the message, "or else our chat group might be dismissed."

But around him, the toll mounted. More pneumonia cases with unknown causes presenting with fever, fatigue, coughing, and breathing difficulties continued to be diagnosed.

Undeterred, Dr. Li kept posting. "The latest news is it has been confirmed that they are coronavirus infections, but the exact virus strain is being subtyped," he wrote, adding, "Don't circulate the information outside of this group, tell your family and loved ones to take caution."

Dr. Li's posts were not kept within the group. Screenshots were taken and shared. To use an unfortunate phrase, under the circumstances, his warnings of a new, potentially deadlier strain of SARS went viral.

It did not take long for Big Brother to notice. Within twenty-four hours, the authorities became involved—but not in the way one might have hoped, expected, or even imagined. The Chinese state's response to Dr. Li's posts was not to take swift, decisive action against the threat of a new epidemic, but to attempt to swiftly, decisively silence any mention of it.

The cover-up had begun.

On January 1, 2020, Wuhan police announced that eight internet users were being punished for "spreading rumors." They claimed that these eight

people were guilty of, in the words of the *Beijing News*, “posting and forwarding false information on the Internet without verification, causing adverse social impact.”

Two days later, the Wuhan Public Security Bureau interrogated Dr. Li, issuing him with a warning notice and censuring him for “making false comments on the Internet.” He was made to sign a letter of admonition promising not to do it again. The police warned him that if he failed to learn from the warning and continued to violate the law, he would be prosecuted. They also issued a report stating that Dr. Li’s original message, “Seven confirmed cases of SARS were reported from Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market,” was unequivocally false.

Why exactly were the authorities so desperate to bury such potentially important information? What could their motivations for suppressing warnings of a deadly new coronavirus possibly spring from?

The censorship did not end with Dr. Li and the other seven so-called “rumor makers.” In early March 2020, a report issued by the Toronto-based research group Citizen Lab found that WeChat had begun censoring key words about the coronavirus outbreak from as early as January 1—in other words, almost from the moment Dr. Ai first became aware of it and Dr. Li messaged his fellow medical students warning them of a potential virus.

Citizen Lab’s report found that during the whole of January, WeChat censored no fewer than 132 keyword combinations ... and that during the first fifteen days of February—by which time the cat was well and truly out of the bag—a further 384 new keywords were added to the blacklist. These all included references to Chinese leaders, including President Xi Jinping, references to government policies on handling the epidemic, and responses to the outbreak in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macau.

References to Dr. Li were also censored.

As well as the crackdown on WeChat, the report noted that popular Chinese live-streaming site YY also blacklisted forty-five keywords from its platform, including the terms “Unknown Wuhan pneumonia” and “SARS outbreak in Wuhan.”

Somebody, it seemed obvious, was trying to rewrite history.

Did the executives behind WeChat and YY make the decision to censor content and supposedly private messages themselves, perhaps conscious of attracting official reprimands for being seen as vessels for “posting and forwarding false information on the Internet”? If that is the case, it would seem they were not only extremely quick off the block to quash any kind of rumors, but also immediately and astonishingly aware of the Communist Party’s desire to keep this particular information locked down.

What seems far more likely is that those whispers of state involvement and surveillance through the likes of WeChat and YY are more than whispers after all. For a regime that has banned Google and Wikipedia altogether, attempting to control the spread of information—and specifically *what* information is spread—by effectively censoring the internet itself does not seem so far-fetched.

“It’s appalling to see the wide range of terms, even including some non-sensitive terms, [being] censored,” Patrick Poon, a researcher at Amnesty International, told the BBC in March.

“It shows how obsessed and concerned the Chinese government is [in] trying to curb any discussion ... that falls outside the official narrative. It’s totally about social control and deprives citizens of their rights to freedom of information and expression.”

That “social control” of its own citizens was to have a devastating effect on the whole planet.

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For the moment, however, it seemed the Chinese authorities’ efforts to quash any talk of a new SARS outbreak was proving successful. WeChat was shutting down attempts to spread awareness, YY was doing the same, Dr. Li Wenliang had been publicly admonished, an official statement had been put out, and life in the People’s Republic was to carry on as normal.

Except, of course, it wasn’t.

Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market was closed on January 1 by the Wuhan health authorities. It was later admitted that this was in response to Dr. Ai's initial patients, and that the closure was to conduct investigations into the outbreak, as well as to clean and disinfect the market. But at the time, the state-run Xinhua News Agency claimed its closure was simply for "renovations."

It was too little, too late, and with much of the population being kept ignorant of the disease, COVID-19 began to spread like wildfire. On January 2, forty-one patients were hospitalized in Wuhan with the new coronavirus, now named 2019-n-Cov; 66 percent of them had had direct exposure to Huanan wet market. The following day, health authorities reported forty-four cases, eleven of whom were "seriously ill." That same day, Dr. Li Wenliang resumed his position at Wuhan Central Hospital.

What followed was the bitterest twist of fate in this horrific story to date.

On January 8, just over a week after his original WeChat posting and just five days after returning to work, Dr. Li treated a female patient with glaucoma. At that time, she showed no obvious signs of infection with coronavirus—her body temperature was normal and she did not appear to have a cough. Prior to its closure, she had been a storekeeper at Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market.

The next day the woman developed a fever, and a CAT scan revealed she had a lung infection. It emerged that two of her relatives had also developed fevers. Despite the official warnings to keep quiet, Dr. Li was convinced this was another case of the new virus—and reported to the hospital that this was evidence that it could be transmitted human to human. He would be proved horribly correct.

On January 10, Dr. Li developed a cough, followed quickly by a fever, and was admitted to the hospital—as a patient—after a scan showed he too had a lung infection. His parents were also admitted with the same infection. Two days later, Dr. Li was placed in intensive care. As his condition worsened—and more and more people became infected—Dr. Li Wenliang once again became a household name in China.

This time, his attempts to warn the country about the disease were acknowledged, rather than suppressed. In a national TV broadcast on January 29, Zeng Guang, chief epidemiologist at the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, said on national television that Dr. Li and the other seven people punished by the police for speaking out the month before should not be considered troublemakers but instead be held in “high regard.”

The same day—perhaps in an attempt to retrospectively shift the blame onto the Wuhan police force and away from the state apparatus—China’s Supreme People’s Court issued a statement on its social media account. According to them, they now realized that the police had been too heavy-handed. “It might have been a fortunate thing if the public had believed the ‘rumor’ then and started to wear masks and carry out sanitization measures,” they now said.

On January 30, Dr. Li was confirmed as having what we now know as COVID-19. That same day, he gave an interview to a reporter from Caixin Media, one of China’s most influential investigative journalism media groups. He described how he believed it was that single exposure to the glaucoma patient that had given him the infection.

“One of our patients who was hospitalized for glaucoma had a weak appetite but normal body temperature,” he said. “We didn’t realize anything was wrong at that time. But she still had a weak appetite after her eyes had healed and had a fever. The same day she got a fever, her family members also had a fever, indicating human-to-human transmission.

“At first I didn’t take any protective measures. After the patient was transferred, I started coughing and had a fever the next day. After that I started wearing an N95 mask. On January 12, I had a test for respiratory viruses and a CT scan. The results were highly suspicious for a coronavirus infection. My colleagues showed similar symptoms later and my parents also fell sick three or four days later. My condition deteriorated and now I need antibiotic, antiviral, and globulin injections and extra oxygen every day.”

He also explained how he had never wanted to be a whistleblower or a subversive of any kind, but simply acted to warn his friends about what he believed to be a dangerous new strain of SARS.

“I sent the message to a group of 150 former classmates and emphasized that the message should not be spread beyond the group. I wanted to remind my schoolmates who work on the front lines to protect themselves.

“That night, I received some WeChat messages asking me about the matter with screenshots of my earlier messages. Most of the screenshots were incomplete. After mentioning that there were seven confirmed SARS-like cases, I emphasized that it was some type of coronavirus that still needed confirmation. But that was not included in the screenshots that were widely spread online. I thought I could get in trouble because it was sensitive information and it was during a sensitive time when the city was having its annual meeting of legislators. At first I was angry at the people who spread the messages without hiding my identity. But later I understood that they too were worried about their families and friends when they distributed the message.

“I never thought the police would pursue me. On January 3, they called me to sign a letter of admonishment. I had never had trouble with the police before and was worried. So I went and signed without telling my family. I was worried that it might lead to punishment by the hospital and affect my career.”

Even as he lay in intensive care, struggling to breathe, his body ravaged by the disease he had been silenced for trying to warn people about, Li Wenliang insisted he bore no ill will to the Chinese state.

“I just wanted to warn my former classmates not to panic,” he said. “I don’t want to cause trouble with the police. I’m afraid of trouble. It is more important for people to know the truth. To clear my name is not that important to me. Justice lies in people’s hearts.

“I believe there should be more than one voice in a healthy society. I don’t agree with the use of public power to overly interfere.”



Finally, the reporter asked Dr. Li if he felt like a hero for trying to raise the alarm so quickly. His answer was nothing short of heroic.

“I don’t deserve this designation. I was just aware of the information and warned my classmates. I didn’t think that much at the time. After I recover, I still want to go back to the front line. Now the epidemic is still spreading. I don’t want to be a deserter.”

A week later, on the night of Thursday, February 6, social media lit up with reports that Dr. Li’s heart had briefly stopped, that he had been placed on an artificial respirator, and that doctors were battling to keep him alive. Within hours, some 17 million users logged onto a livestream of updates from the hospital, desperate for news of his condition. Thousands of users flooded microblogging platform Weibo, demanding the Wuhan police offer a formal apology to the doctor. “Apologize to people all over the nation,” wrote one user.

It was all in vain. At 2:58 a.m. the following morning, February 7, 2020, the hospital announced that Dr. Li Wenliang had died.

“It happened so suddenly,” one doctor in Wuhan told reporters. “Humans are like ants sometimes. We are too small.”

Another was even bleaker. “Our hope is gone. He was our hero.”

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When Dr. Li Wenliang sent his fateful WeChat message, nobody had heard of COVID-19—and the Chinese state seemed determined to keep it that way. By the time of his death just 40 days later, 545 residents of Wuhan were dead of the virus, with a further 154 elsewhere in China. A staggering 37,198 cases in total had been recorded throughout the country, with an additional 354 cases recorded in other countries, including Thailand, South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, India, Russia, the United Arab Emirates, Australia, Canada, and the United States, as well as no fewer than eight European countries, including the United Kingdom.

In the port of Yokohama, Japan, 3,700 passengers and crew had been quarantined onboard the cruise ship *Diamond Princess*. At least 712 of them would test positive for the virus, and 13 would die of the disease.

How could COVID-19 spread so swiftly, so far, even after the warnings of Wuhan? The first portion of blame unquestionably lies with Xi Jinping, the general secretary of the Communist Party of China and president of the People's Republic. Even as Dr. Li lay in intensive care, President Xi made a decision that would ultimately condemn the world: he allowed five million people to leave the epicenter of the virus without being screened. By the time Wuhan and other cities in Hubei Province were locked down on January 23, it was already too late.

Dr. Li was right to be frightened when he saw that first patient report. This new coronavirus was unlike anything in living memory—for speed of transmission, for virulence, and for its utter lack of discrimination as to who it infected. He only wanted to warn the world.

Why were such efforts made to keep him from doing so? And just how deep does the cover-up go? The following chapters will expose the extraordinary lengths the Chinese government continued to go to in order to conceal the true horror of COVID-19 even after Dr. Li's death—but will also tell how they have not been the only world power to do so. We will show how the British and American governments in particular have arguably exceeded even the worst of Beijing's COVID-19 crimes.

In death, Dr. Li will be remembered as one of the most important whistleblowers the world has ever seen. He spoke up. He told the truth. He had public integrity. Yet he died as a result. As great a tragedy as Dr. Li's death is, attention must now—quite rightfully—turn to those who covered up the depth and destructive nature of the disease.

The chain of events that led from that initial diagnosis of a single delivery worker at Huanan wet market to the most terrifying pandemic of the modern age is a story about the failure of those we trust to look after us. Not doctors—the doctors have been heroes—but those in government. It goes far deeper than President Xi Jinping. It traverses the globe to Europe, Brazil, the United Kingdom—and ultimately, to the White House itself.

In a tearful video posted to social media the day after his death, Li Wenliang's mother had a stark and simple message for the men and women in power worldwide.

“We will not be OK if they do not give us an explanation.”