

# Social Justice Watch 0318

[图集精选](#)

[消息精选](#)

[Domestic Violence Cases Surge During COVID-19 Epidemic](#)

[Fan-Fiction Site Blocked in China After Celeb's Stans Complain](#)

[How to argue with a racist](#)

[It's Time To Stop Tokenizing Female Medical Staff](#)

[She Faced Her ISIS Rapist in Court, Then Watched Him Sentenced to Death](#)

[The True Face of China's Plastic Surgery Clinics](#)

[When China's Matchmaking Services Are a Tinderbox for Violence](#)

[Why Telling People They Don't Need Masks Backfired](#)

来源：[Social Justice Watch](#)

[镜像](#)

# 图集精选

[返回目录](#)



**A woman  
without a man  
is like a fish  
without a bicycle.**

**- Gloria Steinem**

今日所感：一个女人没有男人，就像鱼没有自行车。 [Natalie不明白](#)

---



你就是你。节日快乐！ [DIANLIN](#)

---



Ryan Knight @ProudResister



Masculinity is not under attack.  
Masculinity is being redefined to not include harassing women or bullying people who are different than you.  
Masculinity is being expanded to a more loving space and if you can't handle that then you deserve to be left in the past with your hate.

---

# I'm pro-CHOICE.

That means, **if you want or need an abortion**, I support your decision.

If you **choose adoption**, I support your decision. If you want to **give birth and parent**, I support your decision.

**CHOICE** looks different for everyone — and everyone **deserves the freedom to decide** for themselves.





Siddharth

@DearthOfSid



Men whine about "feminazis" essentially because equality feels like oppression to the oppressor. They define a "moderate" and an "extremist" feminist to discourage women from identifying as feminists. The "moderate" feminist has to disown the word and prove she doesn't hate men.

1:58 AM · 01 Nov 19 · [Twitter for Android](#)

---



Jeppe Mulich

@jmulich



Friendly reminder that it's possible to be critical of China's initial coverup of COVID-19 and of the west's inadequate response to the virus at the same time. You don't have to choose one.

[游泳健将女士](#)

[返回目录](#)

# 消息精选

[返回目录](#)

<https://youtu.be/qBwtCf2X5jw>

YouTube

I Was the Fastest Girl in America, Until I Joined Nike | NYT Opinion

Mary Cain's male coaches were convinced she had to get "thinner, and thinner, and thinner." Then her body started breaking down. At 17, Mary Cain was already...

---

## **Brains of girls and boys are similar, producing equal math ability**

[Read Full Article](#)

ScienceBeta

No Gender Difference Found In Brain Function Or Math Ability

1992: Teen Talk Barbie is released with the controversial voice fragment, "Math class is hard." The toy's release met with public backlash.

But this underlying assumption persists, propagating the myth that women do not thrive in science, technology, engineering...

---

**The assumption that boys are more likely to be adept at math and science than girls has no foundation in the brain, according to a new study. It is the first to look at human neurobiology to try and understand whether supposed gender differences in mathematical ability are grounded in biology.**

[Read Full Article](#)

Inverse

A tired stereotype about men and women's brains has been debunked

No, the sexes are not hard-wired to process mathematical information

differently, scientists say.

---

[youtu.be/qbnt6nlskcQ](https://youtu.be/qbnt6nlskcQ)

YouTube

再见，我的新郎\_Bridegroom.mp4

[返回目录](#)

# Domestic Violence Cases Surge During COVID-19 Epidemic

[返回目录](#)

On Feb. 11, Xiao Li received a distressing call from a 12-year-old crying for help.

The child was wandering the deserted streets of their hometown in the central Henan province with his mother and 7-year-old sister. Their father had physically abused their mother and then kicked them out of the house at a time when many cities, including theirs, were on lockdown to contain the spread of COVID-19.

Their mother, surnamed Wang, had already divorced the man, but he had coerced her and the children into spending the Lunar New Year with his family.

Xiao told Sixth Tone that Wang — a distant relative — had wanted to escape her abusive ex-husband and make the 50-kilometer trip to see Xiao. But it was extremely difficult to get a permit from the police to leave a city under lockdown.

After much fruitless discussion, Xiao said she finally managed to convince the police to give her a driving permit. Xiao said she met Wang and the children at her town's border — which they had walked five hours toward before Wang's ex-husband picked them up and drove them the rest of the way.

"We were super worried about how easy it was for the abuser to beat her during the lockdown," Xiao said. "There were no restaurants open, no transportation allowed. They (Wang and her children) hadn't eaten in so long."

**According to our statistics, 90% of the causes of violence are related to the COVID-19 epidemic.- Wan Fei, founder of an anti-domestic violence nonprofit**

While millions of people are spending time indoors, rights activists say there

have been increasing instances of domestic violence — a crime in China since a landmark anti-domestic violence law went into effect in March 2016.

Wan Fei, a retired police officer who is now the founder of an anti-domestic violence nonprofit in Jingmen, a city in the central Hubei province, told Sixth Tone that reports of domestic violence have nearly doubled since cities were put under lockdown.

He said that as of Friday, the police station in Jianli County, which administers Jingmen, had received 162 reports of domestic violence in February — three times more than the 47 reported during the same month the previous year. The number of cases reported in January had also doubled compared with the same period last year.

“The epidemic has had a huge impact on domestic violence,” said Wan. “According to our statistics, 90% of the causes of violence are related to the COVID-19 epidemic.”

Wan believes the fear and anxiety from the extended quarantine, as well as the economic strain put on many families, may have contributed to the uptick. Meanwhile, support systems for survivors of domestic violence have weakened.

On Wednesday, a woman from the southern city of Shenzhen shared a recorded conversation with a police officer on microblogging platform Weibo in which the latter is heard asking her to forget about pursuing the case.

“He has a very good job. You would ruin his life if you reported him,” the officer is heard saying. “Why would you believe his words (death threats) when he was drunk?”

A day later, Shenzhen police said the abuser would be detained for five days, and that the police officer in question had been “educated.”

Although Wan said his colleagues have personally visited many individuals who’ve reported domestic violence, police in some parts of China have been reluctant to help the survivors, especially during the epidemic. He added that many shelters for survivors have been converted into homeless shelters by the authorities, while some officers vacillate when it comes to detaining perpetrators due to several recent COVID-19 clusters in prisons.

**While everyone's attention is on the epidemic, victims of domestic violence are very much being neglected.- Wan Fei, founder of an anti-domestic violence nonprofit**

“While everyone’s attention is on the epidemic, victims of domestic violence are very much being neglected,” Wan said. “They deserve more attention and help.”

With a spike in domestic violence-related cases amid the epidemic, some nonprofits have even published special manuals instructing survivors on how to better protect themselves and directing them to online legal aid, if needed.

Feng Yuan, the director of Beijing-based women’s rights nonprofit Weiping, told Sixth Tone that they have also received a substantial number of domestic violence-related reports since the Lunar New Year vacation a little over a month ago — beginning around the time several cities went into lockdown. She added that police should be more proactive in registering survivors’ complaints instead of finding excuses to not help them.

“The police can detain people for insulting (leading respiratory disease expert) Zhong Nanshan online and arrest someone for not wearing a mask on the street. It looks to me like the epidemic has not affected their law enforcement capacity,” Feng said. “If they use the epidemic as an excuse to not deal with domestic violence cases, that’s not acceptable.”

To empower women, Feng held a livestreamed workshop on Saturday where she shared what a person can do when they witness or become aware of domestic violence.

“It’s very important to let domestic violence survivors know their rights, and as witnesses we should all give them confidence and support,” she said.

*Editor: Bibek Bhandari.*



[原文](#)

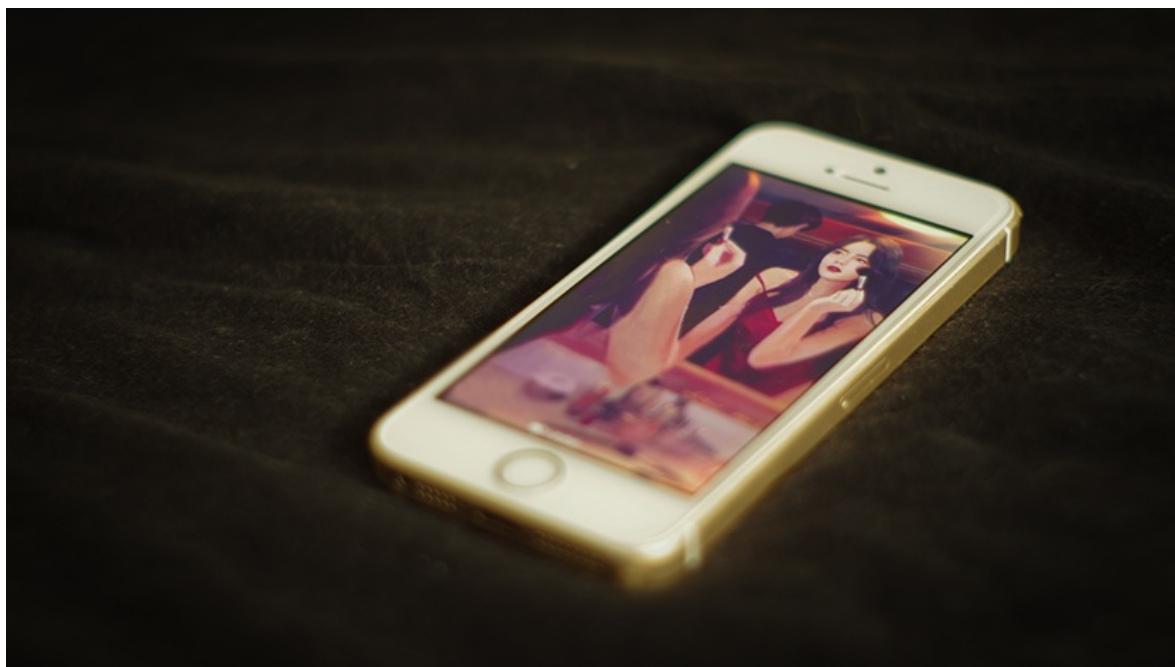
[返回目录](#)

# Fan-Fiction Site Blocked in China After Celeb's Stans Complain

[返回目录](#)

A Hugo Award-winning fan-fiction website has been banned in China after a celebrity's fans complained, en masse, about its alleged "poronographic content."

Archive of Our Own (AO3), a popular platform for user-generated art and writing, was no longer accessible on the Chinese mainland Saturday. According to domestic media, AO3 was taken offline after fans of 28-year-old celebrity actor Xiao Zhan reported the website to the authorities after they became aware of a novel series published on the platform that portrayed their idol as a trans woman pursuing a romantic relationship with a male high school student.



Created in 2008 by the Organization for Transformative Works, AO3 is a nonprofit open-source repository for fan fiction with a large and active Chinese community. In a statement Saturday night, OTW said it had received inquiries from users on the Chinese mainland who were no longer able to access the site.

“It seems to be due to a disconnection from the (telecom) supplier when the local networks attempt to connect to the overseas network,” the statement said. “We don’t know if this is due to a temporary, unplanned outage of supplier services or a long-term access restriction. Since the connection problem is not caused by the AO3 server, we have no way to resolve it.”

OTW also tweeted Sunday that “Unfortunately, the Archive of Our Own is currently inaccessible in China. We’ve investigated, and it is not due to anything on our end.”

Unfortunately, the Archive of Our Own is currently inaccessible in China. We've investigated, and it is not due to anything on our end. We're keeping Chinese users updated on our Weibo: <https://t.co/B4r3IEj0fU>— AO3 Status (@AO3\_Status) February 29, 2020

The web novel series at the heart of the controversy — “Xiazhui” — is an unofficial spinoff of the popular Chinese drama “The Untamed,” starring Xiao and pop star Wang Yibo. The drama was itself adapted from a queer online romance novel.

Despite the LGBT origins of “The Untamed,” the salacious storyline of its literary spinoff appears to have been too much for some to stomach. Last week, fans of the show organized an online campaign to protest the novel series and AO3, saying the stories had defamed their idol and asking people to report both the content and its hosting platform to China’s internet regulators.

The campaign and the ultimate blocking of the website on Saturday have outraged AO3 users as well as those who believe that the existence of writing and other creative content should not hinge on universal approval. Many AO3 users announced they would boycott the actor, Xiao, demanding that brands endorsed by him cancel their agreements and leaving scathing reviews for Xiao’s shows on the IMDb-like platform Douban.

On Sunday, one of the fans who initiated the campaign against AO3 raised the white flag, apologizing for the “terrible impact of my irrationality.” Xiao’s fan group, meanwhile, also apologized for “not acting in a timely manner to stop, guide, and speak out about some fans’ extreme remarks.”

The same day, Xiao’s agency issued an apology, saying it had noticed “the recent controversy about Xiao’s fans” and calling for everyone to “stan

celebrities rationally.”

To understand the online fervor, it’s important to remember that many fans feel responsible for their idols’ reputations, according to Zheng Xiqing, an assistant researcher with the Institute of Literature under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

**Many fan circles feel that they have to assert their existence and sense of purpose through ‘fighting.’**

- **Zheng Xiqing, assistant researcher**

“Many fan circles feel that they have to assert their existence and sense of purpose through ‘fighting’,” said Zheng, who studies fan culture. But the fundamental reason for the tiff between the AO3 supporters and Xiao stans has more to do with reporting mechanisms in China, she told Sixth Tone.

“Why did so many people file complaints?” Zheng said. “People do it because it works — otherwise no one would bother.”

The genres of real-person fiction and queer romance have born witness to the effectiveness of these reporting mechanisms. In late 2018, a court in the eastern Anhui province sentenced an author of gay erotica to 10½ years in prison for “producing, selling, or disseminating pornographic materials.” And last May, a court in the central city of Wuhan fined another writer of queer romance novels 120,000 yuan (then around \$17,500) and sentenced her to four years in prison for “illegal business operations.”

According to Zheng, AO3 is the first nonprofit website to be founded by fans, for fans — many of whom migrated to the site after another popular platform for user-generated writing, LiveJournal, started strictly policing content. “There are no taboos on AO3,” she said, as long as writers tag their posts with warnings and don’t cross a few bottom lines.

The website has policies on tags, ratings, and warnings. The author of “Xiazhui” — the novel series that sparked the flood of complaints against AO3 — had marked her work as intended for mature audiences and included the content tag “underage.”



Many readers who thought of AO3 as a sort of online comfort zone say its sudden disappearance is akin to the destruction of their spiritual home.

Zheng, who has been reading stories on AO3 since 2011, says she would check the website every night before bed. “It’s a kind of psychological comfort, a way of life,” she said.

**For these teenagers, reporting content may be just like completing homework assigned by other, more influential fans.**

**- Li Ying, AO3 reader**

Li Ying, a Shanghai-based AO3 reader, has been following fan culture and queer romance novels for over a decade. The 31-year-old told Sixth Tone that she and some fellow readers were worried that the website would be blocked after Xiao Zhan’s fans organized their complaint campaign.

“I think the reporting mechanism is getting easier and easier now — it has become so simple that people don’t even think they’re filing a complaint,” Li

said. “For these teenagers, it may be just like completing homework assigned by other, more influential fans. It’s like they need to contribute in order to claim digital victory for their idols every day.”

Many online seem to share this sentiment, while stressing that the increasingly common phenomenon of reporting anything one dislikes and wishes to have stricken from cyberspace isn’t constructive.

“Why are you people reprimanding those who file complaints? Because you’re not aware that your criticism has no legal basis — the only reason is you have a different point of view,” one user wrote on microblogging platform Weibo. “You don’t understand that creative content deserves freedom, and that other views can coexist on the internet. Instead, you’re just trying to destroy all the content you disagree with.”

*Editor: David Paulk.*

*(Header image: Sixth Tone)*

[原文](#)

[返回目录](#)

# How to argue with a racist

[返回目录](#)



Racism can be debunked with facts and science

Stereotypes and myths about race abound, but this does not make them true. Often, these are not even expressed by overt racists.

For many well-intentioned people, experience and cultural history has steered them towards views that aren't supported by human genetics. For example: the assumption that East Asian students are inherently better at maths, black people have natural rhythm, or Jews are good with money. Many of us know someone who thinks along these lines.

Dr Adam Rutherford, a geneticist and BBC presenter, says "Racism is being expressed in public more openly today than at any time I can recall, and it's our duty to contest it with facts."

Here's how to debunk five racist myths with science and facts.

## **MYTH 1: The DNA of white and black people is completely different**



### FACT: All humans share almost all of their DNA

The primary pigment in human skin is melanin. It's used to protect us from the sun.

It absorbs the sun's ultra violet rays before they can destroy folate, one of the body's key vitamins.

Many genes are involved in the biochemical pathways that result in melanin production. Natural variation within these genes is the root cause of the spectrum of skin tones that humans have.

So, the biggest genetic difference within the human race is between white people and black people, right? Wrong.

Firstly, all humans share almost all the same DNA - a fact that betrays all of our recent origins from Africa.

Secondly, there is more genetic diversity on the continent of Africa than in the rest of the world put together.

Two people from different tribes in Southern Africa will be more genetically different from each other than a Sri Lankan, a Māori and a Russian.

We might categorise people as white, black or brown, but these visual variations don't accurately reflect the genetic differences - or rather similarities - between us.

### **MYTH 2: There is such a thing as 'racial purity'**



FACT: "Racial purity is pure fantasy"

We think of certain areas, lands or peoples as being isolated - either physically or culturally - and these boundaries as being insurmountable.

But this is neither what history, nor genetics, tell us. In fact, no nation is static.

"People have moved around the world throughout history, and had sex whenever and wherever they could," says Dr Rutherford.

Sometimes these are big moves in short times.

More often, people are largely static over a few generations - and that can feel like a geographical and cultural anchor.

"Nevertheless, every Nazi has Jewish ancestors" says Dr Rutherford, "Every white supremacist has Middle Eastern ancestors. Every racist has African, Indian, East Asian ancestors, as well as everyone else."

"Racial purity is pure fantasy. For humans, there are no pure bloods. Only mongrels enriched by the blood of multitudes," he says.

**MYTH 3: 'Germany for the Germans', 'Turkey for the Turks' (and other variations)**



A 1972 protest in the UK calling for an end to immigration

Some people experience a lot of angst about migrants and refugees coming to their country, a phenomenon that has been experienced in many places around the world of late.

Among recent examples, the shooting rampage last month that started in a shisha bar in Hanau, Germany, was motivated by a far-right doctrine to expel or murder immigrants.

Those on the far right have long expressed anger in the form of epithets: "Germany for the Germans", "France for the French", "Turkey for the Turks" and "Italy for Italians" have all been used as anti-immigration phrases by far-right groups.

"Go back to where you came from" is an offensive phrase that resonates all over the world.

In truth, countries like Germany, France, Turkey and Italy have had immigration throughout their history. In fact, just about everywhere has.

The British Isles, for instance, have become home to migrants since they separated from the continent around 7,500 years ago.

Before the French took over in 1066, that part of the world had been invaded by Vikings, Angles, Saxons, Huns, and dozens of other smaller tribes and clans.

And even before that, the Romans ruled, which in their turn came from all over

the intercontinental empire, which reached as far as sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East.

Earlier still, around 4,500 years ago Britain was populated primarily by farmers, who had migrated from Europe across what was continuous terrain between the Netherlands and East Anglia.

On the basis of DNA evidence, we think they may have been olive skinned, with dark hair and brown eyes.

And before them there were hunter-gatherers, who had even darker skin.

So, when political parties or even racists say: "France for the French", or "Italy for the Italians" and talk about "indigenous" people... who do they actually mean?

#### **MYTH 4: A genealogy test can prove someone is 100% white**



You carry DNA from only half of your ancestors dating eleven generations back

Genealogy and ancestry fascinate us - and racists in particular.

Websites like Stormfront are frequented by white nationalist, white supremacist, and anti-Semitic members who forward theories for Holocaust-denial and are obsessed with population genetics.

They use mainstream genealogy tests, like those offered by Ancestry DNA, to "prove" they are 100% white or non-Jewish.

However, the logic is flawed.

DNA can tell you some interesting things about family history - and it's very useful for identifying close family like lost siblings or biological parents - but its powers are profoundly limited by fundamental biology.

Over time, descendants start to shed the DNA of their actual ancestors, and the amount that vanishes builds up over the generations to be huge..

You carry DNA from only half of your ancestors dating eleven generations back. So it is possible that you are genetically unrelated to people you are actually descended from as recently as the 18th Century.

"You are descended from multitudes, from all around the world, from people you think you know and from more you know nothing about," says Dr Rutherford, "You will have no meaningful genetic link to many of them."

## 5. Black people are better at running than white people



Usain Bolt's apparent easy wins seemed to fuel this erroneous idea

The last white man to compete in a 100m final at the Olympics was in 1980.

Since then, black athletes have dominated the modern era of sprinting. This has fuelled a commonly held belief that people of African descent have an advantage at the sport because of their genetic ancestry.

"Maybe there are probabilistic predictions one could make about ethnicity and sporting success based on genetics," says Dr Rutherford, "but they would be weak at best."

In actual fact, the genetics of sporting success are wickedly complex.

There are a myriad of factors in physiology of physicality, including the size of your heart, the efficiency with which you absorb oxygen, and muscular recovery, says Rutherford.

And these are relatively well understood phenomena which do have a genetic basis. But there are other physical traits (such as flexibility and co-ordination) which are less well understood.

On top of that, there's the psychological dimension: determination, concentration, and risk-taking, for example.

We do know that people who are good at explosive-energy sports tend to have a higher proportion of "fast-twitch" muscle cells, that process energy more quickly.

The genetics that underlie this involve a gene called ACTN3.

Studies have shown that elite athletes in power and strength sports are more likely to have copies of the R-type of ACTN3. The research indicates the gene occurs in a higher proportion of African Americans (96%) compared to white Americans (80%).

That does give a slight, population-wide advantage to African Americans to take place in explosive-energy sports - but it doesn't come anywhere close to explaining the difference between the number of African American sprinters and white competitors.

If it just came down to that gene, you might expect to see six black elite sprinters for every five white runners.

Adam says this is a simplistic analysis, but still a good example of how genetics don't align with racial stereotypes in sports.

---

*This piece has been adapted from the BBC radio programme How to argue with a racist, and presented by Dr Adam Rutherford .*

---

[原文](#)

[返回目录](#)

# It's Time To Stop Tokenizing Female Medical Staff

[返回目录](#)



Zhang Bo is an editor at Sixth Tone.

There are currently more than 100,000 female medical professionals working in the central province of Hubei, the heart of the country's COVID-19 epidemic. Together, they account for more than half of the province's health care workers and 90% of its nurses.

In other words, women have made huge contributions to the battle against COVID-19, which has sickened 81,000 and killed 3,200 in the country as of March 16, including dozens of medical workers. Unsurprisingly, their heart-wrenching stories have been covered widely in domestic media, often powerfully. Yet several efforts to valorize female medical workers by the country's "mainstream" media — a constellation of largely state-backed outlets uniquely well-positioned to set the public agenda — have fallen flat, arousing public ire for their reliance on outdated tropes like female suffering or extreme collectivist self-sacrifice.

In one widely criticized example, female hospital workers in the northwestern province of Gansu were filmed crying as they had their heads shaved. In other

cases, outlets came under fire after publishing profiles of women who stayed at their posts despite being eight or even nine months pregnant, or who returned to work less than two weeks after a miscarriage. Taken together, they suggest a growing gap between the values of some hidebound mainstream outlets and the audiences they purport to reach.



China isn't the only country where heroism is repackaged into patriotic content. In times of crisis or difficulty, these stories bring people together, steady popular sentiment, and drum up feelings of national pride or unity. Well-known examples in China range from socialist oiler Wang Jinxi in the 1960s to teachers who died protecting their students during the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake.

This time, the narrative appears to have misfired. While the above-mentioned reports ostensibly shower women with praise, critics have expressed frustration, even anger, with the way they appropriate the female body and repackage women's sacrifices into overarching narratives of national glory — even as

hospital leaders, local institutions, and others ignore or minimize women's everyday needs.

**Critics have expressed frustration, even anger, with the way they appropriate the female body and repackage women's sacrifices into overarching narratives of national glory.**

- **Zhang Bo, editor**

This shift in public attitudes can partly be traced to a growing awareness among Chinese, and especially young Chinese, of gender issues. Many quickly realized that mainstream reports were blind to the intelligence and skills of the women they profiled while appropriating their bodies to rouse audiences into compassion and action.

Although women have made great strides in modern China, both inside and outside the home, many continue to struggle with stereotypical portrayals of their bodies in media, as well as with their status as the “second sex.” Some outlets in particular fall into the trap of focusing on what makes women different from the male “default” — their physical appearances, their reproductive organs, their roles as mothers — instead of treating them as fully formed individuals.

Just because women’s bodies are celebrated doesn’t always mean they’re appreciated. Female frontline workers have seen many of their needs go unmet. Feminine hygiene products, for example, have been treated as less of a priority, even overlooked altogether, by those in charge of collecting and allocating material aid. Even when some charities expressed a willingness to donate menstrual pads, they were flat-out rejected by male hospital managers.

And in a country where “menstruation” is still considered a dirty word, even paeans to female sacrifice generally steer clear of the subject: In an interview with state broadcaster China Central Television, a nurse at Wuhan Jinyintan Hospital, near the center of the outbreak, spoke at length about the physical toll of caring for patients. In the process, she mentioned she was on her period.



A screenshot from a CCTV interview with a nurse at Jinyintan Hospital. From @老梅梅梅 on Weibo

“I’m on my period, and I’m having abdominal pains,” she noted. When the segment was later rebroadcast, that particular remark had been edited out.

It’s not all bad news. A number of civilian volunteers and feminine product companies began organizing donation drives since early February, and more regions, including Shanghai and the southwestern province of Guizhou, have begun providing hygiene products to female medical staff. Yet in a still male-dominated society, it’s all too easy for the men making the decisions — the above-mentioned hospital leaders, for example — to mistake their perspectives as universal, while neglecting the legitimate needs of others.

It’s also important to remember that the decision to make a sacrifice should be voluntary, not mandatory. True sacrifice requires an individual to deeply understand the value of their life and the potential risks involved in their actions, and to nevertheless willingly choose to take the risk in question.

**The irony is, there’s no need for the media to fabricate drama about women being forced to choose between their lives, families, or bodies and their sense of duty.**

**- Zhang Bo, editor**

That means they cannot have been pressured into doing so. At least until the 1990s, the ideal of collectivist self-sacrifice — unconditionally giving one's life for the greater good — dominated Chinese mainstream discourse. Now, however, we are more likely to question whether the people involved truly had a choice and whether their rational interests were protected.

The nine-months-pregnant nurse; mothers being forced to give up breastfeeding their kids; a woman who returned to work 10 days after her miscarriage — whereas older generations might have unquestioningly accepted these as instances of heroism, young Chinese see individual lives being trivialized. Their selfless contributions and efforts are meant to save people — but why must one life be sacrificed for another?

The irony is, there's no need for the media to fabricate drama about women being forced to choose between their lives, families, or bodies and their sense of duty. All frontline workers — men and women alike — have done more than enough to earn our respect and gratitude. People are already rooting for them to return home safely.

Some seem to grasp this better than others. Much of the media's coverage has been professional, even extraordinary. Last month, the market-oriented Southern Metropolis Daily newspaper was widely praised for its series of close-up portraits of frontline doctors and nurses. By not limiting their focus to men or women, the paper's photographers were free to concentrate on the struggles and scars shared by all frontline health care workers: the bags under their eyes and the deep lines left by days of wearing surgical masks. It felt human rather than inflammatory, but was inspiring all the same.



Southern Metropolis Daily's series of close-up portraits of frontline doctors and nurses, published Feb. 14, 2020. Zhong Ruijun/Southern Metropolis Daily

I'm not suggesting we don't honor or report on people who are saving lives. Every country creates its own heroes. At this critical moment, however, frontline medical staff need reinforcements and material support, not exaggerated flattery. Instead of trying to canonize them or turn them into comic book superheroes, we should start by improving their working conditions and guaranteeing their basic rights and needs.

Over the past two months, Chinese audiences have repeatedly shown they care for and respect the individual will and authentic humanity of the people they choose to lionize. That's a remarkable development, and I believe it heralds a bright future for society.

*Translator: Katherine Tse; editor: Kilian O'Donnell.*

*(Header image: A nurse attends to welts caused by extended periods of surgical mask wear in Nanchang, Jiangxi province, Feb. 13, 2020. Wan Xiang/Xinhua)*

[原文](#)

[返回目录](#)

# **She Faced Her ISIS Rapist in Court, Then Watched Him Sentenced to Death**

[返回目录](#)



For the first time, an Iraqi court has held the Islamic State accountable for its atrocities against the Yazidi religious minority.

BAGHDAD — Iraq has held thousands of trials for members of the Islamic State, but until Monday none had sought to bring justice specifically to the thousands of members of the Yazidi religious minority who were kidnapped, raped and killed.

A soft-spoken 20-year old Yazidi woman changed that when she decided to testify in open court.

The witness, Ashwaq Haji Hamid Talo, gave a restrained but searing account to judges and before the public — in the presence of the ISIS militant to whom she was once given as a gift, and who raped her repeatedly.

The defendant, Mohammed Rashid Sahab, 36, who is an Iraqi, was found guilty of participating in a terrorist organization and in the rape and abduction of Yazidi women. He was given the death penalty.

“The most important thing to me is that my dream came true and I was watching the one who raped me being sentenced to death,” Ms. Haji Hamid said afterward.

The trial, which ended on Monday, was the first in Iraq to specifically address the Islamic State’s crimes against the Yazidis — or at least one militant’s crimes. It was also the first in which a Yazidi victim personally confronted her attacker.

“I want my story to reach the whole world, so my message is heard by my friends and gives them the courage to do the same thing that I did, so that they can get revenge on Daesh,” she said, using the Arabic acronym for the Islamic State.

The chief judge in the case expressed a similar wish.

“We hope that if people hear about this case, others will come forward,” said Judge Haider Jalil Khalil of the Kharkh Criminal Court in Baghdad. He said the judiciary had been hampered in bringing this kind of case by the reluctance of victims to testify in public.

In Iraqi society, it is especially difficult for women to speak out in public about rape, as Ms. Haji Hamid did, for fear that they will be accused of having allowed the men to rape them and that they will tarnish their family name.

“But perhaps if they see that the judiciary will give them their rights, they will come forward now if they hear about this case,” Judge Khalil said.

The international human rights community has criticized the Iraqi judiciary for holding rapid-fire trials against large numbers of ISIS members without detailing their individual crimes. “A vague charge of terrorism just does not do justice to the act committed,” said Belkis Wille, the senior Iraq researcher for Human Rights Watch.

Ms. Wille said this prosecution appeared different.

“This would be the first case I have come across in the last four years where a victim has had any meaningful role in the proceedings,” she said. “And it would be first case where the charge of rape was added and addressed by the court, which is significant.”

She explained that the rape charge seemed to show that the Iraqi judiciary recognized how important it is for individual ISIS victims to have their day in court.

Ms. Haji Hamid grew up in Khana Sor, a small town in the Sinjar mountain region of northern Iraq near the Syrian border, which is entirely populated by people of the Yazidi faith. She had six sisters and 12 brothers; her father had two wives.

“We had a stable life there,” she told the court. “I was happy with being with all my cousins.”

Then armed members of the Islamic State rolled into town on Aug. 3, 2014.

“They told us we were infidels and that our sect needed to become Islamic,” Ms. Haji Hamid testified. The Yazidi religion is shaped by a variety of faiths, including Zoroastrianism, Islam and Judeo-Christian practices.

Her father declared that they were committed to their faith.

The militants gave him a day to decide whether to convert. After that, they warned, those who did not would be “slaughtered, except for the women,” Ms. Haji Hamid said.

The family resolved to escape by night and loaded up their cars. More than 70 of them piled in, but before they could leave, a group of ISIS members intercepted them. They separated men from women, and then young girls from their mothers.

Ms. Haji Hamid was with a group of nine girls who were sold to Islamic State fighters for “\$100 or \$200,” she said. “Four of my sisters were sold in Syria, and me and my younger sister were sold in Nineveh Province in Iraq,” she said.

Later, she was held in a place with about 50 girls.

“We were forced to change our clothes,” she said, “and they kept us almost naked, like dancers, and they told us to do prayers in the Islamic way five times a day.”

Eventually, Ms. Haji Hamid was given to Mr. Sahab, who at the time was about 30, and had escaped from prison with the help of the Islamic State.

In court on Monday, the judge asked if she recognized her captor in the room, where he was now wearing prison yellow.

Ms. Haji Hamid looked at the defendant directly and nodded.

“I know him better than I know myself,” she said.

She said it was just one day after she was given to Mr. Sahab that he “forcibly raped me.” At the time, she said, she was a virgin.

He asked her to marry him, and when she refused, he went to an Islamic judge and had a ceremony anyway. Under Iraqi law, marital rape does not exist.

“He raped me every day, sometimes two or three times a day,” Ms. Haji Hamid said.

The only reason she did not become pregnant, she said, was because she got her captor to take her to the doctor on the pretext that she was ill. When she was alone with the doctor, she begged for birth control pills, and then took them secretly, she said.

During her captivity, Ms. Haji Hamid testified, she tried to cut herself with the idea of committing suicide.

Finally, she went to the doctor and asked for sleeping pills, saying she needed them to get some rest. Instead, Ms. Haji Hamid and the other Yazidi girls prepared a meal for the ISIS fighters, and put the sleeping pills into their food.

While the fighters were sleeping, the young women escaped to Sinjar mountain.

When the Islamic State took control of northern Iraq in 2014, it singled out

Shiites and Yazidis for the worst treatment, killing or enslaving many and sending the Yazidis fleeing from their homes around Sinjar. Many of the atrocities came to light after the Iraqi army, backed by the American forces, retook the north.

Mr. Sahab is originally from Anbar Province, an overwhelmingly Sunni area of western Iraq. When he was 19, he killed a taxi driver and stole his car, and was sentenced to 20 years in prison. When ISIS broke into the prison, freeing the prisoners, Mr. Sahab quickly swore allegiance to the group.

At his trial, Mr. Sahab expressed neither regret nor a sense that he had done anything wrong.

In court, he described himself as “a Quran teacher,” and said, “I also did spiritual things like driving demons out of people.”

Mr. Sahab said that he had been told by the Islamic State leadership to participate in the attack on the Yazidis, and that he had been injured, spending a few weeks in the hospital.

“They came to me and said they had a captive, a sabiha, for me,” he testified. He said, “She was given to me as a gift.”

Mr. Sahab insisted he could not tell if his “gift” had been happy or unhappy. “I did not see her crying or laughing,” he said.

Although Ms. Haji Hamid is now back with her family, not all of her brothers and sisters were able to do the same.

“My father bought five of my sisters from Daesh,” she said. “He paid \$15,000. They were all forcibly raped many times.”

“We have them all back except Reham — we do not know her destiny,” she said.

Then she paused: “And five of my brothers went with Daesh, and they are lost.”

Falih Hassan contributed reporting.

[原文](#)

[返回目录](#)

# The True Face of China's Plastic Surgery Clinics

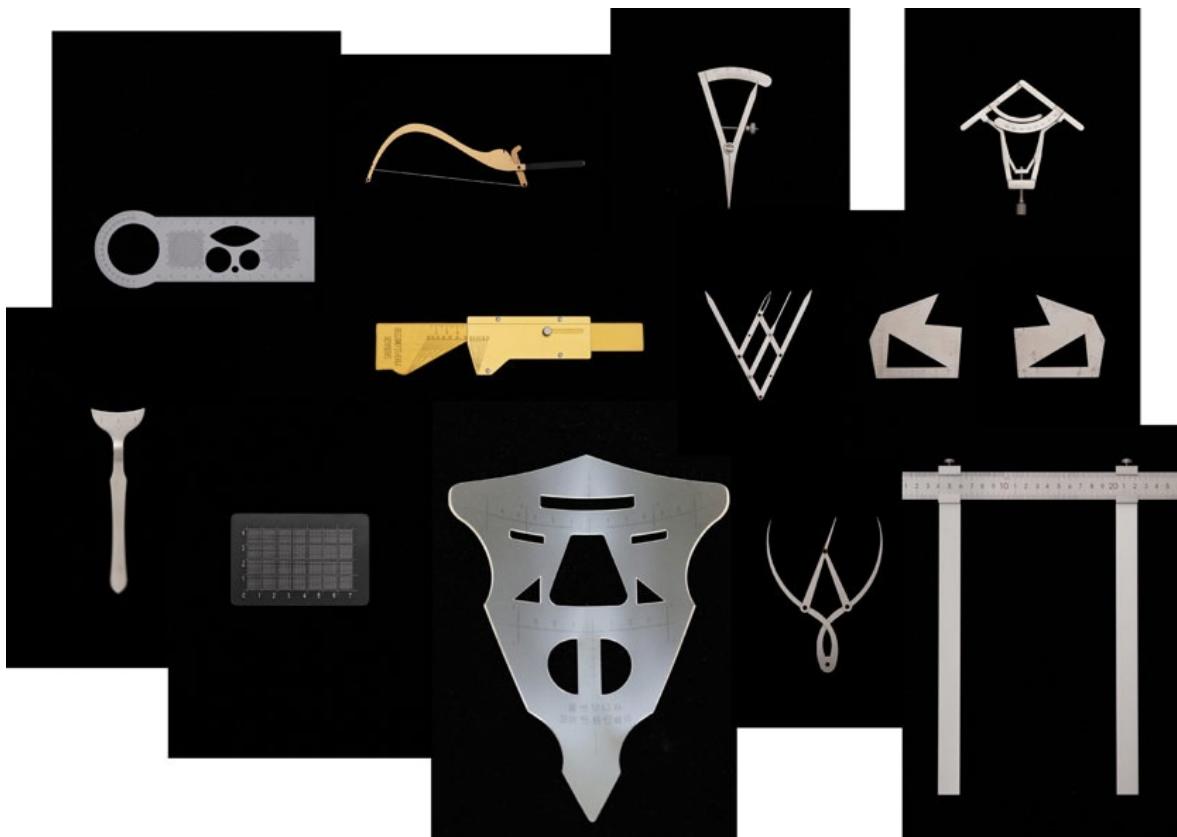
[返回目录](#)

Five identical photographs of a young woman fill the screen. Each one is covered with scribbles and annotations scrawled in black and red ink, highlighting her facial imperfections.

Small circles cluster around her jawline in several images, while dotted lines run down her nose in another. In all five, the doctor has traced new contours for her eyes.

The marked-up photographs are part of “Make Me Beautiful” — an ongoing project by visual artist Lu Yufan that explores the power China’s cosmetic surgery industry holds over young women.

Since 2018, the 28-year-old has gone for consultations at more than 10 different plastic surgery clinics in Beijing, northern city Tianjin, and South Korea. Each time, she documents her experience in forensic detail — but never books a procedure.



“I already know what parts of my face don’t conform to the aesthetic standards set by the majority,” Lu tells Sixth Tone. “My decision to consult doctors comes from a need to prove my self-estimation is correct.”

Lu says the project helps her unravel her conflicted feelings toward cosmetic surgery, which has grown enormously popular among Chinese of her generation.

Chinese cosmetic surgery clinics performed over 16 million procedures in 2017, up 26% year-over-year, and China is now estimated to be the world’s largest market for plastic surgery. According to SoYoung, an online platform for cosmetic surgery, more than half its customers are under 26, and 90% are female.

The artist says she has also felt an urge to go under the knife for a long time. She first began feeling dissatisfied with her appearance in middle school, when looks were everything.



“At that time, the boys would rank the girls by appearance,” says Lu. “I remember someone pointing at me and declaring I was at the bottom of the list.”

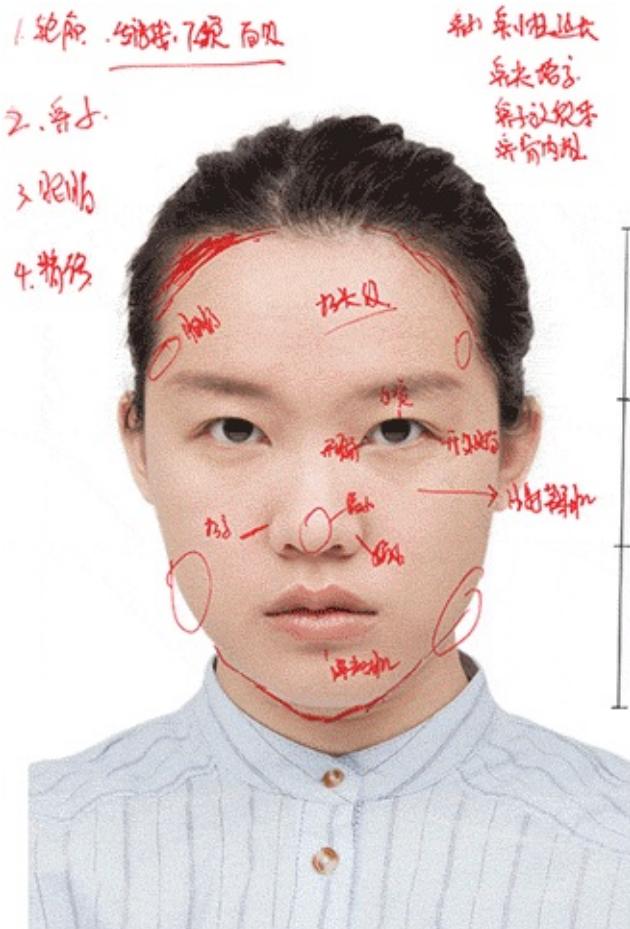
In the ’00s, Chinese TV networks ran multiple reality shows based around young women undergoing cosmetic procedures. Lu recalls hearing about one popular show called “Angels Love to Be Pretty.”

In each episode, several women received free plastic surgery. Then, a studio audience voted for the contestant with the most-improved appearance. This kind of show was later banned in China, but it left a deep impression on Lu.

After Lu graduated from high school in 2010, many of her classmates went to get their noses, eyes, and jawlines done. Around 10% of her peers have had some form of cosmetic surgery, she estimates.

At the start of “Make Me Beautiful,” Lu was tempted to join them. She first began visiting clinics out of curiosity, wondering whether she’d be willing to get some work done if she could afford it.

“I’m lacking in confidence in many aspects, so I thought cosmetic surgery was a way to solve my problems ,” says Lu.



A GIF shows the artist with her perfect face, as calculated by a Korean researcher, from the project “Make Me Beautiful,” 2018. Courtesy of Lu Yufan

As she expected, nearly every consultant gave her the same advice: Add a crease to her eyelids to make her eyes appear larger; raise the bridge of her nose to make it more prominent; reshape her jawline to make it narrower and longer; and have wrinkle-removal treatments to make her look younger.

The angular set of facial features — often known as an “internet celebrity face” in China, because so many online influencers have surgery to achieve this look — has been the dominant beauty trend for years. Often, Lu says, the consultants wouldn’t even ask her any questions about what she wanted, instead immediately doodling all over her photo.

The experience of listening to the “condescending” advice of the clinicians, all pointing out the same flaws in her appearance, initially made Lu want the procedures even more, she tells Sixth Tone.

“It’s a process that intensifies the idea that you’re not pretty enough,” says Lu. “After you receive very specific advice, you have a clear picture of where the problems are.”

But as she continued interacting with the clinics, Lu says she began to notice a darker side to the industry. Several businesses downplayed safety risks and pushed her to have more expensive treatments, according to Lu.







































There are two main methods for making noses more prominent: a surgical operation or injections of hyaluronic acid. Consultants continually talked up the former, pricier option, Lu says.

“It (the consultants’ advice) was no longer coming from an aesthetic point of view,” says Lu.

The cosmetic surgery industry is often poorly regulated in China, and Lu says her consultations also opened her eyes to the lack of consumer protections.

“The consultants proposing various plans to me would never mention whether any of them had risks,” says Lu. “Take hyaluronic acid, for example. There are domestic and imported products, with many different brands. But when recommending an option, the consultants didn’t explain things in detail.

“I also know people who didn’t sign a contract until the day of the operation, and some people didn’t have time to read the contract carefully before signing,” Lu adds.



From left to right, “Young and Immature Style,” “‘Anego’ Style,” “Internet Celebrity Style,” and “High-Level Style,” from the “Archive of the Diagnoses” series, from the project “Make Me Beautiful,” 2018. Courtesy of Lu Yufan

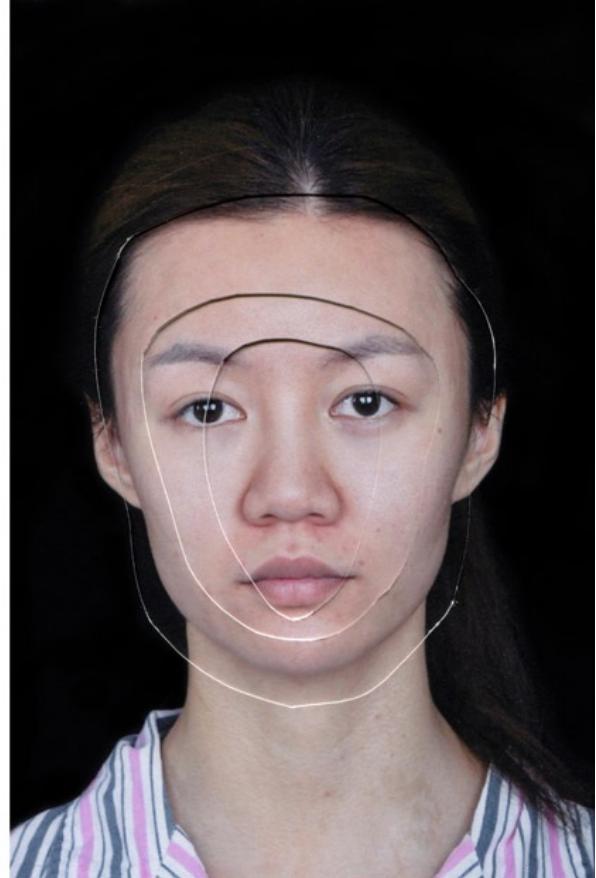
For Lu, the recent shift in beauty standards in China — with younger influencers abandoning an “internet celebrity face” in favor of more diverse styles — underlines the fact that plastic surgery is ultimately just a fashion trend, with faces coming in and out of style like flare jeans or crop tops.

“When doctors are capable and willing to turn your appearance into whatever you want, they somehow lose medical authority,” says Lu. “It’s almost like entering a supermarket or a shopping mall and all the shelves are filled with various faces and features.”

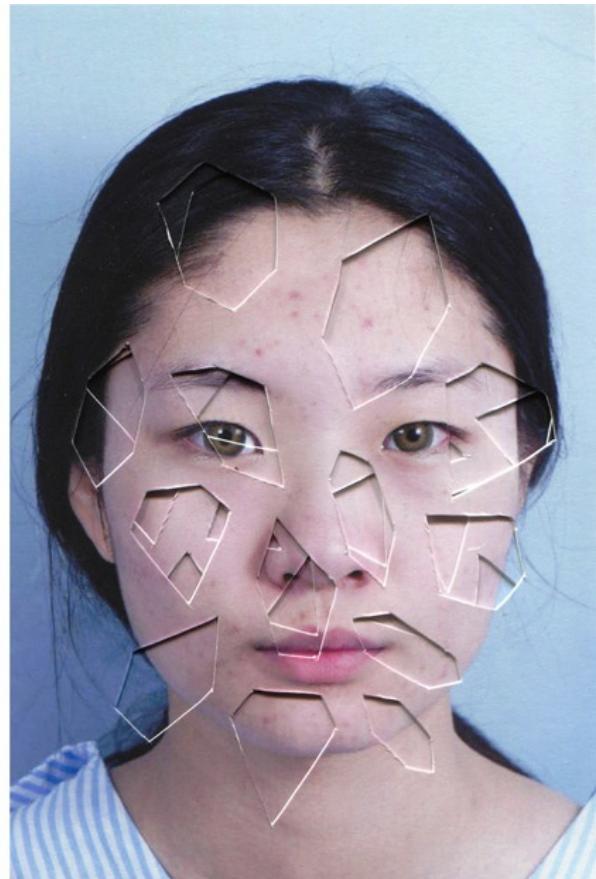
After nearly two years working on “Make Me Beautiful,” Lu admits her attitude toward cosmetic surgery remains conflicted. Though the experience has made her more aware of how the industry can manipulate young women, she also understands why many of her peers have chosen to alter their appearances.

“I agree with the feminist critique on cosmetic surgery, as it caters to the disciplinary powers that turn women into docile bodies,” says Lu. “However, it can also be argued that each woman has the right to decide her appearance.”

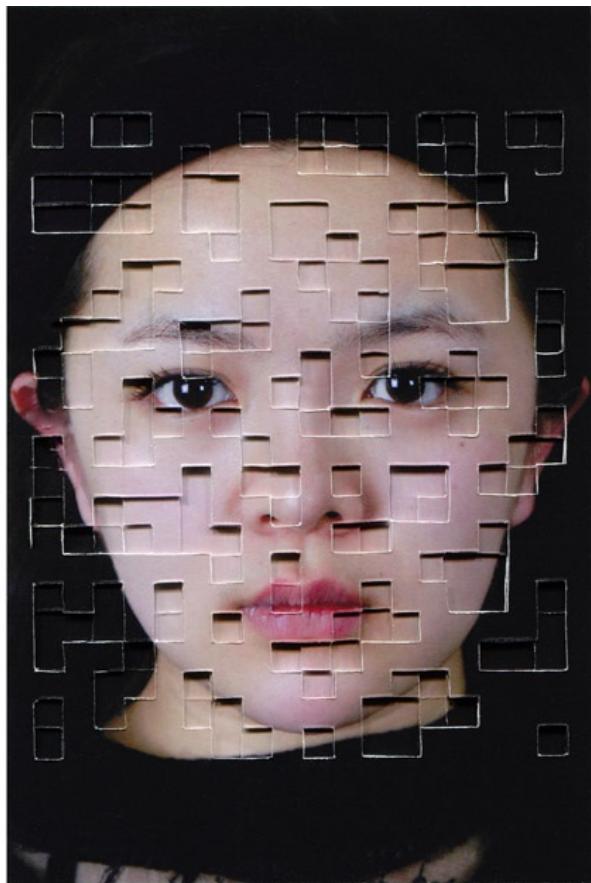
进入镜子里的自己都会哭。



第一次被叫女神  
第一次被男神级别的男人追  
第一次喜欢上拍照  
第一次觉得这段感情值得这么重  
第一次知道原来的距离对人对你的待遇是不一样的  
第一次不会有人再觉得丑或者讨厌我  
第一次和朋友说说自己今天不太如意  
第一次敢于发表对于旅行的观感而不被别人说17岁。  
  
明明家境一般 却被大家认为有教养  
性格的一点 就会被赞赏欢迎



看看现在的我，还有什么是不值得的呢？



和大部分人不一样，我对整容的欲望从小学四年级就开始了。

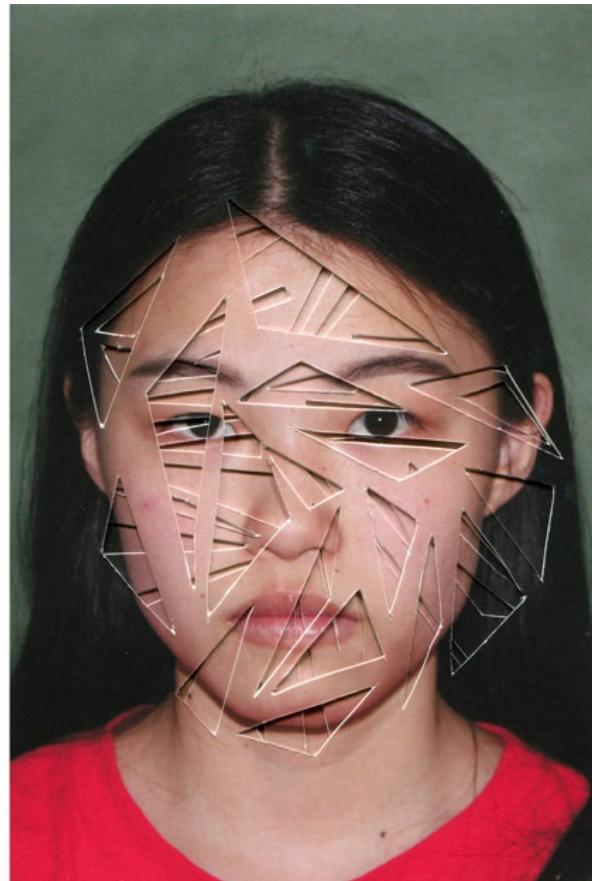
听起来很奇怪，可那个时候小的、还没有练习表演的孩子就这样开始练习，一步一步计划着将来需要创伤的地方。

然后，直到高中毕业，  
我都没有在任何一张合照中留下影子。

做完手术的第一个晚上，我因为对麻药过敏吐了很久，整个人难受得快要虚脱了，却才终于有勇气拿起那半年里抵制的化妆照片，遮住面部的缝痕窟窿。

幼小的我有着内双和肿眼泡，可怜地抬起头的鼻子和一如既往标准化的鹅蛋脸，带着自卑和愁苦无奈的表情，小心翼翼地把嘴唇向镜头。

丑（完），永别！

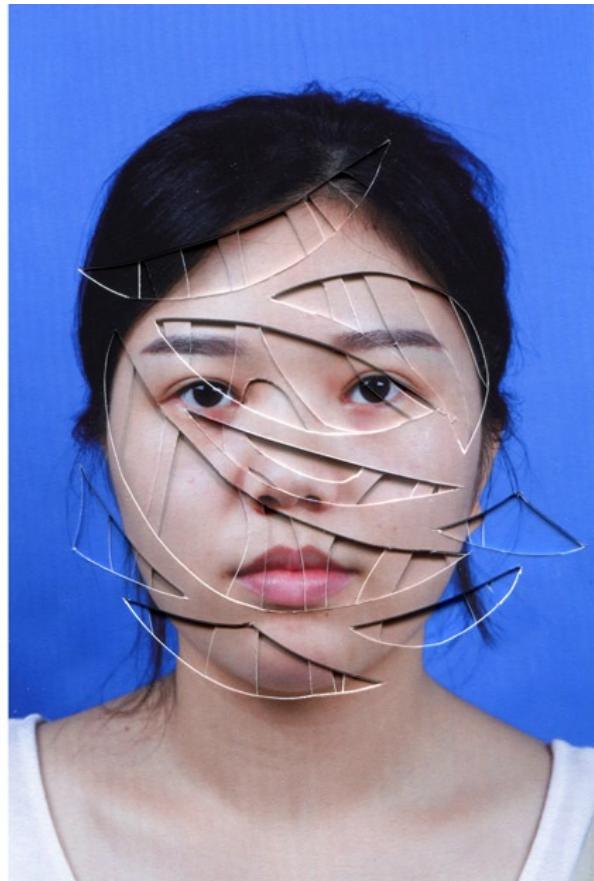


不真的手颤了。  
我的想告诉你们。  
有多疼。  
以下午我流泪了不停的眼肿。  
醒来是12点。  
我不记得自己是怎么从手术室被扶回病房的。  
醒来是个很高的韩国翻译师陪在我身边。  
麻醉师。让我想吐。  
因为睡醒的原因，喉咙疼痛嘶哑。  
让我大喊让医生来，禁食禁水。  
所以，身上，到肚子结束。我已经禁24个小时禁食禁水了。  
喉咙疼痛嘶哑，想喝水。  
后来翻过来了。  
我不停地吸吐出喉咙里的痰。  
依然禁食禁水。  
医生说你已经在睡着了，就不知道。  
医生的嘴唇都干裂了。  
医生身上沾着一身汗水。  
医生不敢动。  
晚上在病房里，只有我和一个韩国护士。  
护士拿着手机，手机壳不知道掉哪里。  
一直接电话。  
护士在心里骂了自己不知道多少遍。  
护士没有哭，她的笑容都因内罪。  
护士的话。语言不通，护士没有安全感。  
护士的话。从医、护士一直都有止疼针。  
护士的话，护士姐姐也穿着手机都讲英文。  
我们都在默默地流泪。

一夜，我不能睡觉。  
一个发热，一个是吃了太多。  
术后反弹的纹身。  
医生怕在进手术室的冬天里，护士姐姐忘把胶带贴上。  
护士姐姐说要先关机再用洗手液。  
后来，护士姐姐还是关机了。  
穿手术衣，护士姐姐一直在说话，一直不停地擦着眼泪。  
真美好的一夜。



原味  
对看者镜子里的自己也会想  
看到底是谁呢？



我做过十三次整容  
变成了世人眼中的美女  
而别人对我的态度瞬间不一样了  
就像是在做梦一样  
我活在一个假的人生里  
每天过得像只看透事情的女子第一样  
也有人喝醉后整容鬼  
喝我的脸是假的  
我靠脸得到的尊重，包括爱情。  
都是假的。

可是这又如何呢？至少我得到了尊严。  
没有好的外貌，  
别人连搭理你内心的资格都不会有。  
对不起，走向这个以貌取人的社会妥协了。



带给了很多时间。  
换了身份证。



Some of the biggest problems with cosmetic surgery are ultimately driven by sexism and inequality, rather than industry malpractice, according to Lu. She points to the Chinese online influencer agencies that reportedly force young women to have surgery to get a contract.

“It (cosmetic surgery) is an outcome of a social reality,” says Lu. “For anyone who needs this job, she’ll accept changing her original appearance into an ‘internet celebrity face.’ It may harm her authenticity and uniqueness, but it’ll bring her economic benefits.”

Lu also says she understands how deeply many women internalize the patriarchal values they are exposed to from a young age. Despite being critical of the cosmetic surgery industry, the artist confesses she sometimes still yearns to book a procedure.

Yet Lu’s experience has made her feel more empowered. She’s given up wearing expensive makeup and clothes and is trying to find fulfillment in her artwork.

“It’s not that I’m no longer controlled by consumer culture,” says Lu. “The control is still there, but I’ve gradually learned to live with it.”

*Editors: Dominic Morgan and Shi Yangkun.*

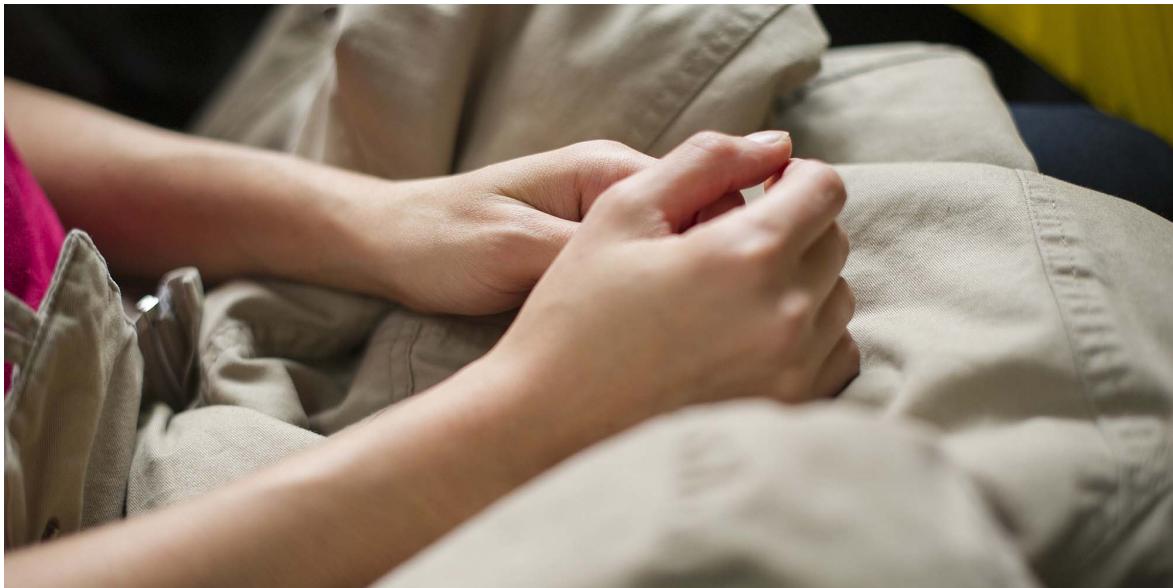
*(Header image: From left to right, “Diagnosis 1,” “Diagnosis 3,” and “Diagnosis 4,” from the photo project “Make Me Beautiful,” 2018. Courtesy of Lu Yufan)*

[原文](#)

[返回目录](#)

# **When China's Matchmaking Services Are a Tinderbox for Violence**

[返回目录](#)



## When China's Matchmaking Services Are a Tinderbox for Violence

Protected by ironclad contracts, high-end “hongniang” can be less than sympathetic to their clients when dates go awry.

China’s matchmaking companies say they’ll help clients find the love of their life. But for some women using such services, all they’ve found is trauma.

Zhang Ji is a 30-year-old user of Wo Zhu Liangyuan — a matchmaking agency whose name roughly translates to “I take control of my own marriage destiny.” After visiting the company’s office in Shanghai to meet a recommended match, surnamed Shen, he invited her to his apartment. That’s where Zhang said he raped her, according to a post last week on microblogging platform Weibo.

Zhang told Sixth Tone that she reported the rape to Wo Zhu Liangyuan the next day, but the company’s response disappointed her. According to chat screenshots included in Zhang’s post, a Wo Zhu Liangyuan manager surnamed Wang suggested that Zhang “move on.”

**Don’t tell boys about this. They’ll definitely look down on you, whether they’re friends or colleagues.- Wang, Wo Zhu Liangyuan manager**

“My dear, don’t think about that,” the manager’s message said. It was followed by a photo of another recommended match. “Check out this guy — he’s not bad. He’s good-looking, and that’s your type, right?” Wang said. “There are so many good boys out there, so don’t think about it (the rape).”

The matchmaker also discouraged her from reporting the encounter to police and sharing her experience with others, Zhang said.

“Don’t tell boys about this. They’ll definitely look down on you, whether they’re friends or colleagues,” read another message from Wang. “If I were you, I definitely wouldn’t tell third parties about this.”

Zhang went to the police anyway. But four days had passed since the alleged rape, and the police declined to file a report, citing insufficient evidence. Sixth Tone’s calls to Shen’s mobile number went unanswered Tuesday.



A portrait of Zhang Ji. Courtesy of Zhang

A portrait of Zhang Ji. Courtesy of Zhang

A public relations manager for Wo Zhu Liangyuan surnamed Gao told Sixth Tone that the company is not at fault in Zhang’s case, as the matchmaker had advised her not to go to the man’s apartment because of the signals it might send.

“The only thing we can guarantee is the authenticity of our members’ information, such as their annual income. The rest, we cannot guarantee,” Gao

said. He added that while the company does not check its users' police records, it requires them to sign a "guarantee" that they will not do anything illegal during dates.

**The only thing we can guarantee is the authenticity of our members' information, such as their annual income.- Gao, Wo Zhu Liangyuan PR manager**

When asked about the matchmaker's response to Zhang's report that she had been raped, Gao said: "A woman says she was raped — that's going to be bad for her reputation, right?"

In recent years, matchmaking agencies have boomed in China, showering high-end clients with promises of "top-quality" matches — men and women with homes, well-paying jobs, or elite education backgrounds. Membership fees can be anywhere from several thousand to even millions of yuan.

Unlike dating websites such as Momo and Tantan — China's equivalents to Tinder — matchmaking businesses are hands-on when it comes to managing their clients' relationships. According to Wo Zhu Liangyuan's website, its matchmakers, or *hongniang*, are all trained in "the study of marriage, love, and psychology," and can "increase their clients' capacity to love and be loved."

But not all matchmakers give constructive relationship advice.



Antidepressants Zhang Ji was prescribed after the alleged rape.  
Courtesy of Zhang

Antidepressants Zhang Ji was prescribed after the alleged rape. Courtesy of Zhang

Xiaobai, a 33-year-old woman living in Shanghai, told Sixth Tone that she, too, has been harassed during a date arranged by another matchmaker service, Yi Jia Yuan. And when she told the company about her experience, she, too, was irritated by the matchmaker's response.

Last autumn, Xiaobai went on a date arranged by Yi Jia Yuan after paying nearly 20,000 yuan (\$2,850) for a three-month membership with the company.

"He was staring at my legs and kept touching my arms. I felt quite uncomfortable," said Xiaobai, who asked to use a pseudonym to protect her privacy. "Later, he suggested we take a deserted stairwell, claiming it was a shortcut. Then he said he wanted to hug me and shoved me against the wall."

Terrified and angry, Xiaobai said she escaped into the mall with the man in pursuit. After the ordeal, Xiaobai called the matchmaker who had paired them

together.

“She told me I was too conservative, and said the man was just showing affection for me,” Xiaobai said, adding that the matchmaker seemed to doubt her story because, she said, no one had complained about the man before.

**The responsibilities of the matchmaking company are so few that even car-hailing services have stricter vetting practices for their drivers.- Wan Miaoyan, lawyer**

“The matchmaker didn’t try to protect me at all. She called the man and asked him about what I had told her, which made me very afraid that he would try and take revenge on me,” said Xiaobai. She said that rather than call the man and potentially endangering her further, the matchmaker could have contacted other women who had gone on dates with him previously to ask if they had seen warning signs.

“Matchmakers only care about their clients getting together — and the resulting ‘successful match bonuses’ — rather than what the woman actually wants,” Xiaobai said.

Matchmaking companies have come under fire in recent years for fraud and catfishing, with at least a few cases ending in death. In 2017, China’s central government called for dating websites to use real-name registration and vet information users were entering in their profiles.

However, such regulations offer little comfort to women who are raped or experience other sexual misconduct after turning to matchmaking platforms. “After all, a person’s financial situation has nothing to do with their morality,” Xiaobai said.

In 2016, a woman in eastern China’s Shandong province went to police after her matchmaker-arranged date allegedly tried to rape her — and was shocked to learn that the man had previously served four years in prison for sexual assault.



A man and woman chat on a blind date in Shanghai, Oct. 31, 2015.  
Zhang Xinyan for Sixth Tone

A man and woman chat on a blind date in Shanghai, Oct. 31, 2015. Zhang Xinyan for Sixth Tone

Wan Miaoyan, a lawyer specializing in women's rights who is providing Zhang with legal counsel, told Sixth Tone that, from a purely legal standpoint, the matchmaking company holds little if any liability when clients experience violence or harassment.

"Matchmaking companies often use brokerage contracts — a type of contract in which one party just acts as an agent and has little obligation to the other party," Wan said. She explained that Zhang's contract with Wo Zhu Liangyuan clearly states that the matchmaking company is not responsible for any client conflicts involving money or sexual behavior.

"The responsibilities of the matchmaking company are so few that even online car-hailing services have stricter vetting practices for their drivers' information," Wan said.

Wan added that women who use matchmaking services may be especially

vulnerable, as their eagerness to find a partner could make them less discerning of potential partners, as well as the matchmaking services they use.

“Many people take advantage of women’s apprehension and anxiety about marriage to do immoral or even illegal things,” Wan said. “Matchmaking companies are often accomplices in dating violence.”

Compared with being assaulted by a stranger, dating violence — as Wan categorizes the trauma experienced by Zhang and others — presents a greater challenge for victims seeking justice, as it tends to require more evidence to prove that whatever happened wasn’t consensual.

After failing to receive justice from both the matchmaking company and the police, Zhang has changed her profile picture on Weibo to the blond protagonist from the Netflix miniseries “Unbelievable,” based on a Pulitzer Prize-winning report about a woman whose rape story was doubted and dismissed. Though the show’s protagonist is eventually vindicated, justice for Zhang is still far away.

*Editor: David Paulk.*

[原文](#)

[返回目录](#)

# Why Telling People They Don't Need Masks Backfired

[返回目录](#)



To help manage the shortage, the authorities sent a message that made them untrustworthy.

When news of a mysterious viral pneumonia linked to a seafood market in Wuhan, China, reached the outside world in early January, one of my first reactions was to order a modest supply of masks. Just a few weeks later, there wasn't a mask to be bought in stores, or online for a reasonable price — just widespread price gouging. Many health experts, no doubt motivated by the sensible and urgent aim of preserving the remaining masks for health care workers, started telling people that they didn't need masks or that they wouldn't know how to wear them.

As the pandemic rages on, there will be many difficult messages for the public.

Unfortunately, the top-down conversation around masks has become a case study in how not to communicate with the public, especially now that the traditional gatekeepers like media and health authorities have much less control. The message became counterproductive and may have encouraged even more hoarding because it seemed as though authorities were shaping the message around managing the scarcity rather than confronting the reality of the situation.

First, many health experts, including the surgeon general of the United States, told the public simultaneously that masks weren't necessary for protecting the general public and that health care workers needed the dwindling supply. This contradiction confuses an ordinary listener. How do these masks magically protect the wearers only and only if they work in a particular field?

Second, there were attempts to bolster the first message, that ordinary people didn't need masks, by telling people that masks, especially medical-grade respirator masks (such as the N95 masks), needed proper fitting and that ordinary people without such fitting wouldn't benefit. This message was also deeply counterproductive. Many people also wash their hands wrong, but we don't respond to that by telling them not to bother. Instead, we provide instructions; we post signs in bathrooms; we help people sing songs that time their hand-washing. Telling people they can't possibly figure out how to wear a mask properly isn't a winning message. Besides, when you tell people that something works only if done right, they think they will be the person who does it right, even if everyone else doesn't.

Third, of course masks work — maybe not perfectly and not all to the same degree, but they provide some protection. Their use has always been advised as part of the standard response to being around infected people, especially for people who may be vulnerable. World Health Organization officials wear masks during their news briefings. That was the reason I had bought a few in early January — I had been conducting research in Hong Kong, which has a lot of contact with mainland China, and expected to go back. I had studied and taught about the sociology of pandemics and knew from the SARS experience in 2003 that health officials in many high-risk Asian countries had advised wearing masks.

It is of course true that masks don't work perfectly, that they don't replace hand-washing and social distancing, and that they work better if they fit properly. And of course, surgical masks (the disposable type that surgeons wear) don't filter

out small viral particles the way medical-grade respirator masks rated N95 and above do. However, even surgical masks protect a bit more than not wearing masks at all. We know from flu research that mask-wearing can help decrease transmission rates along with frequent hand-washing and social-distancing. Now that we are facing a respirator mask shortage, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is recommending that surgical masks are “an acceptable alternative” for health care workers — again, obviously because some protection, even if imperfect, is better than none. In the face of this, publicly presenting an absolute answer — “You don’t need them” — for something that requires a qualified response just makes people trust authorities even less.

Fourth, the W.H.O. and the C.D.C. told the public to wear masks if they were sick. However, there is increasing evidence of asymptomatic transmission, especially through younger people who have milder cases and don’t know they are sick but are still infectious. Since the W.H.O. and the C.D.C. do say that masks lessen the chances that infected people will infect others, then everyone should use masks. If the public is told that only the sick people are to wear masks, then those who do wear them will be stigmatized and people may well avoid wearing them if it screams “I’m sick.” Further, it’s very difficult to be tested for Covid-19 in the United States. How are people supposed to know for sure when to mask up?

Fifth, places like Hong Kong and Taiwan that jumped to action early with social distancing and universal mask wearing have the pandemic under much greater control, despite having significant travel from mainland China. Hong Kong health officials credit universal mask wearing as part of the solution and recommend universal mask wearing. In fact, Taiwan responded to the coronavirus by immediately ramping up mask production.

Sixth, masks are an important signal that it’s not business as usual as well as an act of solidarity. Pandemics require us to change our behavior — our socialization, hygiene, work and more — collectively, and knowing our fellow citizens are on board is important for all efforts.

Finally, providing top-down guidance with such obvious contradictions backfires exactly because lack of trust is what fuels hoarding and misinformation. It used to be said that back in the Soviet Union, if there was a line, you first got in line and then figured out what the line was for — people knew that there were going to be shortages and that the authorities often lied, so

they hoarded. And when people feel as though they may not be getting the full truth from the authorities, snake-oil sellers and price gougers have an easier time.

Given that there is indeed a mask shortage and that medical workers absolutely do need these masks more, what should the authorities have said? The full painful truth. Despite warnings from experts for decades, especially after the near miss of SARS, we still weren't prepared for this pandemic, and we did not ramp up domestic production when we could, and now there's a mask shortage — and that's disastrous because our front line health care workers deserve the best protection. Besides, if they fall ill, we will all be doomed.

If anything, a call for people who hoarded masks to donate some of them to their local medical workers would probably work better than telling people that they don't need them or that they won't manage to make them work. "Look, more masks would be great. We are doing our best to ramp up production. Till then, if our medical workers fall ill, we will all be worse off. Please donate any excess — maybe more than two weeks' worth per person — to your hospital" sounds corny, but it's the truth. Two weeks is a reasonable standard because the C.D.C. and the W.H.O. still recommend wearing masks if you're taking care of someone with a milder illness self-isolating at home, something that will increasingly be necessary as hospitals get overwhelmed.

Research shows that during disasters, people can show strikingly altruistic behavior, but interventions by authorities can backfire if they fuel mistrust or treat the public as an adversary rather than people who will step up if treated with respect. Given that even homemade masks may work better than no masks, wearing them might be something to direct people to do while they stay at home more, as we all should.

We will no doubt face many challenges as the pandemic moves through our societies, and people will need to cooperate. The sooner we create the conditions under which such cooperation can bloom, the better off we all will be.

Zeynep Tufekci (@zeynep) is an associate professor at the University of North Carolina, the author of "Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest" and a contributing opinion writer.

[原文](#)

[返回目录](#)