

# Unfinished Farewell

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## ABSTRACT

As COVID-19 spreads across the globe and the number of deaths continues to rise, the heartbreaking experiences are being replaced by collective mourning. As German journalist and pacifist Kurt Tukholsky once said: “The death of one man is a tragedy, the death of millions is a statistic”.

When we look back at the help-seeking posts of those who were lost, those who died of unconfirmed COVID-19 testing reports; those who committed suicide out of despair; those whose life-saving medical equipment were being taken away and those who lost their lives due to overwork and infection from their patients... Many of them were not included in the official statistics, and they are likely to be forgotten over time. They were not being treated fairly when they were alive, and they were not being mentioned after they passed away.

We spoke to one of those families. One daughter said: “After this pandemic, who will remember someone such as my mother – she had nowhere to go for medical treatment; she was rejected by the hospital, and she had to die at home?”

This is one of the reasons why we built this online platform. We want to document as many people who have left us because of the pandemic as possible. Our website also includes the help-seeking information these people posted before they passed away. These are the evidences they have left in a particular moment in this pandemic. We hope to provide a space for family members to express their grief and for the public to mourn the dead. Behind every number is a life.

“Unfinished Farewell” can be viewed at [www.farewell.care](http://www.farewell.care) and [www.jiabaoli.org/covid19](http://www.jiabaoli.org/covid19)

## CCS CONCEPTS

• **Human-centered computing** → **Visualization design and evaluation methods**; **User interface design**; **Web-based interaction**.

## KEYWORDS

data visualization, interactive web art, covid-19, pandemic

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## 1 VISUALIZATION DESIGN

Here we try to gather the portrait for each deceased person.

Imagine the following scenario: You have never met this person before, but his or her portrait is right in front of you. You then realize that he or she has passed away. When your finger lingers on the their faces, their faces scatter and vanish. You have not had a chance to really get to know them, and they have already faded away.

We designed the visualization to create a special kind of atmosphere. We want the visitors to sense sorrow, grief, solemn, melancholy, and agony. We want the experience to be comparable to physically visiting the person's tombstone. This helps the visitors to have a deeper understanding of death than just reading the statistics.

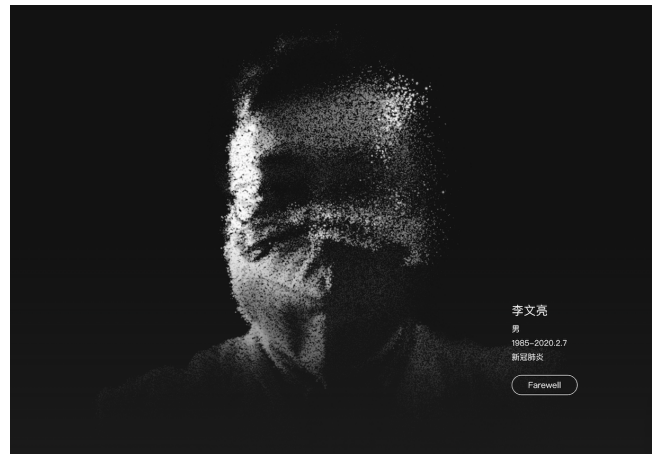


Figure 1: Doctor Wenliang Li, the whistleblower who passed away due to COVID-19.

## 2 INTERACTION DESIGN

Enter each individual's space by clicking the 'Farewell' button. You can see the help-seeking information they posted before they passed away. You can leave a message on the page. All the messages people

sent here will float in the chamber space. Below are a few messages that we have received since the project was published:

“Do I need to shout loudly to be noticed?”

“The best way to mourn the dead is to not forget their stories”,

“RIP. I hope you get to switch job in your next life.”, (This is a message to a cyber police who died of overwork from deleting censored messages on the internet.)

“I cannot and I do not understand”, (to the whistle blower Doctor Wenliang Li)

“Because of you, I will always learn to love.”,

“I hope I can at least know your name. May you rest in peace.”,

“Yancheng, after you have left, your dad and your brother still push your wheelchair to eat with you”,

“No freedom to speak, no freedom to die”.

One visitor uploaded her grandmother’s information on our website, and wrote her a message:

“Thank you, grandma. And thank you for loving me more than your own life. Grandma, you must take care of yourself. Please rest in peace and I will take care of our family. Grandma, I really miss you. Grandma, I love you.”



**Figure 2: Portraits of the people who passed away due to COVID-19. Visitors can interact with the particle system via mouse.**

### 3 IMPLEMENTATION

The particle system is written in three.js [Imbrizi and Lou 2019]. The floating message inside the chamber is written in p5.js. The data was collected from Weibo and from interviewing the family members of the deceased.

This project can be exhibited with a projector or on a TV screen. You can also interact it with a keyboard and a mouse. A speaker is needed for sound.

### 4 INTERVIEW

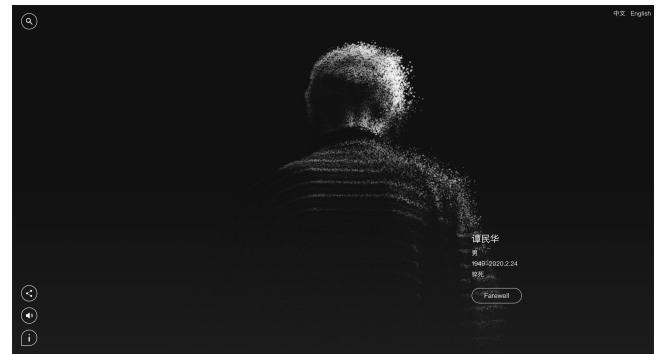
Jiabao’s interview on this project with South China Morning Post’s Inside China Tech Podcast on “How technology has changed the way we die and mourn” can be found [here](#) and on [Spotify](#).

### 5 SUMMARY

As COVID-19 continues to spread in the world, we hope to use this project to document the stories of the ordinary people. We



**Figure 3: Visitors can enter each individual’s space by clicking on the “Farewell” button and see the help-seeking information they posted before they passed away. Visitors can leave a message on the page. All the messages that were sent from here will float in the chamber space.**



**Figure 4: The deceased’s name, gender, date of birth/death, and cause of death are shown on the bottom right.**

especially want to shed light on those whose death are left outside of the statistics. We want to build a collective space for mourning so that we could express our grief and celebrate their lives with them and their families.

There are various ways to visualize COVID-19 statistics, but not many of them are about visualizing the story from an individual’s perspective. This project provides a way for us to visualize individual statistics and to relate ourselves to the deceased.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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### REFERENCES

Imbrizi and Lou. 2019. Interactive Particles. <https://github.com/brunoimbrizi/interactive-particles>.