

**Gendering National Sacrifices: The Making of New Heroines in China's Counter-  
COVID-19 TV Series**

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**Abstract**

Since February 2020, presenting the “correct” narrative regarding the COVID-19 pandemic has become a top priority in China’s state-controlled media. This paper focuses on two high-profile, state-endorsed, COVID-19-themed TV series that retell stories from the Wuhan lockdown. It examines the gendered nature of state narratives by analyzing the representation of national heroines of the pandemic and demonstrates the centrality of heterosexual families and gender performances in romanticizing individual sacrifices and mass suffering in such a traumatic event. Unlike in depictions of previous socialist heroes, the personal weakness and emotional flaws of China’s new heroines are tactically displayed to enhance emotional authenticity and resonate with contemporary audiences while following the party line. These new state narratives reflect stereotypical depictions of femininity within a hierarchical gender order in post-reform China, where politicized womanhood is imbued with a sacrificial attitude and gendered conduct that serves to discipline China’s new generation of “strong women”.