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### In Doubt of the Past

I frustratedly finished my computer science test at 8 o'clock in the morning in Kashgar, the westernmost city in China, the area represented by poverty. The autumn has come and winter is around the corner. I glanced at the outside of the window, the sun had risen. I texted good night to my classmate in New York, where I had been living for a year and should have been living now. However, everything is just as common as nothing happens, and as chaotic as I even start to take for granted. I try to get some sleep before my doctor mom comes home from a 14 days quarantine as my lovely city has been experiencing the third round of lockdown, but I couldn't. It has been too late and early to sleep. I started to browse my vlogs of last year, in which ways I have been recording wonderful moments of my life for 3 years.

One video was in September last year. From my footage, "My dream job is working for Apple. Really, I mean..." I said to Tim Cook, the CEO of Apple.

"Glad to hear that, and hope you could work out!" He kindly replied and shook hands with me.

This vlog was recorded on the day iPhone 11 was available, at Apple Store Fifth Avenue, when I had waited for the whole night on Fifth Avenue the night before it was launched, where I

knew Tim Cook would show up to welcome customers for store re-opening and new products. People were excited. They clapped hands, talked to each other, and took photos together, without masks and social distance. It now feels unreal, for not seeing these crowded people and “intimate” interactions for like a year. I even feel panic, for anxiety seeing the cases may increase. I start to doubt the realness of the past.

I click another vlog of mine which was recorded in Port Jefferson. It was sometime after midterms in the fall of last year, and my friend and I decided to take a day off. The sky was crystal clear, the weather was sunny but the wind was chilly. I saw tourists riding a carriage, the cute smiles on their faces. When I watched a vessel leave the port to Connecticut, people were celebrating going home, I said in the voiceover that I miss home under this scenario in the season of fall, a season meaning homesickness in my culture. I doubt if I have ever been to Port Jefferson, where everything could be this peaceful. As I recall the Black Lives Matter protest happened in March this year in Port Jefferson, I doubt the realness of people was so kind and patient that the waiter could wait for us to get cash from the ATM in order to pay them tips that day last year. It is now another year of fall and I do not feel homesick anymore because I am here at home. Due to the pandemic, are there still tourists walking around and enjoying the seafood there? I can't even feel the crystal blue sky that day from my footage now. What is more real is the sunny weather that I can't feel outside of my windows and the depressively locked city under pandemic.

I should have been physically studying at Stony Brook University, and seeking opportunities in the New York City of a better future on weekends, getting rid of the monotonous lifestyle in my hometown. I should have been going to museums in New York, seeing new

people and great people like Tim Cook. Even Tim Cook on last night's Apple keynote seemed unfamiliar, that I questioned myself if I really once met him. I start to question if I really have been to New York City, studying at Stony Brook, and taking a walk in Port Jefferson.

No matter if we admit or not, the pandemic changes our ways of seeing the past. We start to question college education when courses can be online, and the working scenario when remote working and meeting becomes normal. We might never go back to the times where people can talk to each other freely without any measurements. I don't know since when I have started to doubt the realness of the past and I have been living with these questions since then. However, this morning after I've watched my last-year vlogs, I figured the doubt is not about the realness of the past, but the hope and fear of the future. The real question is, are we, as humanity, able to turn this horrible situation into days where interpersonal communication and global cooperation are encouraged? These days are absolutely unfair to people who are supposed to enjoy their lives, to the youth who are fighting for their dreams, and to explorers who are seeing the world. As it is said, even the dust of dark history is like a mountain for every individual, and I as part of the unfortunate era feel skeptical about the future.