

## Aussie Journalist Probes SARS-CoV-2 Origin

Analysis by [Dr. Joseph Mercola](#) ✓ Fact Checked

### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Six miners in Mojiang, China, were infected by a bat coronavirus in 2012. Three died of a disease near-identical to that of COVID-19 after long bouts of illness
- › The “Mojiang miners passage theory” proposes a precursor to SARS-CoV-2 – known as RaTG13 – sickened the miners, and once inside these patients, mutated into SARS-CoV-2
- › Samples from the mine and four of the hospitalized miners were all sent to the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) in 2012, from where the virus may then have escaped in late 2019
- › Shi Zheng-Li, Ph.D., heads up the biosecurity level 4 laboratory in Wuhan. She has studied the RaTG13 virus and conducted gain-of-function research on coronaviruses, in which viruses are manipulated to increase their infectivity and/or pathogenicity
- › Several U.S. government officials have indicated they have credible evidence pointing to the COVID-19 pandemic being the result of a laboratory accident

“Where did the deadly virus that shut down the world come from?” Liz Hayes asks in an April 14, 2021, episode of “60 Minutes Australia: Under Investigation.”<sup>1</sup> “It’s one of the greatest mysteries we’ve ever faced.”

Did it evolve in a bat-infested copper mine in Mojiang, in the southwest of China? Six miners who worked there were infected back in 2012, and three died of a disease near-identical to that of COVID-19.

The so-called “Mojiang miners passage theory”<sup>2,3</sup> proposes a precursor to SARS-CoV-2 – RaTG13, a virus collected from that same mine – sickened the miners, and once inside these patients, some of whom were ill for several weeks, it mutated into SARS-CoV-2.

Testing of RaTG13 when it was first discovered revealed the infection suffered by the miners had been caused by a SARS-like coronavirus from horseshoe bats.

One of the miners spent five months in the hospital before finally succumbing to the infection. This, it is believed, is sufficiently long for the virus to have mutated into SARS-CoV-2, a virus that is 96% identical, genetically, to RaTG13.

Samples from the mine and four of the hospitalized miners were all sent to the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) in 2012, from where the virus may then have escaped in late 2019.

## **Lab Origin Cannot Be Excluded**

According to U.S. deputy national security adviser Matthew Pottinger,<sup>4,5</sup> “There is a growing body of evidence that the lab is likely the most credible source” of SARS-CoV-2.

David Asher, former lead investigator for the U.S. State Department’s task force that looked into the [origins of COVID-19](#), has also gone on record saying the data they collected “made us feel the Wuhan Institute was highly probably the source of the COVID pandemic.”<sup>6</sup>

“Under Investigation’s” roundtable of experts includes Nikolai Petrovsky, professor of endocrinology at Flinders University College of Medicine in Adelaide, Australia. He too insists “we cannot exclude a laboratory origin for the virus,” and his own research forms the basis for this opinion.

His team has sought to identify a way by which animals might have co-mingled to give rise to SARS-CoV-2, ultimately concluding that it could not be a naturally-occurring virus. Petrovsky has previously stated it appears far more likely that the virus was created in a

laboratory, without the use of genetic engineering, by growing it in different kinds of animal cells.<sup>7</sup>

To adapt the virus to humans, it would have been grown in cells that have the human ACE2 receptor. Over time, the virus would then adapt and eventually gain the ability to bind to the human receptor.

“Under Investigation” also features Jonathan Latham, Ph.D., a molecular biologist and virologist, who developed the “Mojiang miners passage theory.”<sup>8,9</sup> [“Cover-Up of SARS-CoV-2 Origin?”](#) features my July 2020 interview with him, in which he reviews this and other theories.

## **Pure Conspiracy Theory?**

Professor of microbiology Robert Garry, of Tulane Medical School in New Orleans, meanwhile dismisses the theory that scientists would be covering up the origin of the virus as “pure conspiracy.”

While he agrees that the WIV housed RaTG13 and has been working extensively with this and other bat coronaviruses, he believes it is impossible for RaTG13 to have mutated into SARS-CoV-2, either in the lab or inside the sick miners. “That would take about 50 years of natural evolution,” he tells Hayes. Latham responds to this kind of critique saying:

*“The way to think about this is to say, if all the evidence that was in favor of a lab escape was in favor of natural origin, or the evidence in favor of natural origin was on the side of a lab escape, there would be no disagreement about it and what happened here.”*

As noted by Petrovsky, we know one thing: SARS-CoV-2 has a bat origin. The question is, how did it develop the ability to infect humans? Here there are several options. It may have mutated through one or more intermediary species. The problem is there is no evidence of SARS-CoV-2 in any other species.

## Gain-of-Function Research May Have Been Used

Shi Zheng-Li, Ph.D., also known as “the bat woman,” due to her extensive work with bat viruses and bat-related diseases, heads up the biosecurity level 4 laboratory in Wuhan. She is known to have studied the RaTG13 virus. What’s more, the WIV is known to have conducted gain-of-function research, in which pathogens are manipulated to increase their infectivity and/or pathogenicity.

In other words, pathogens are purposely altered to make them more dangerous. This is the entire premise of biowarfare, and why I believe gain-of-function research must be banned worldwide, regardless of how it’s done.

As explained by professor Raina Macintyre,<sup>10</sup> an epidemiologist and professor of global biosecurity at New South Wales University, there are several ways in which a virus can be genetically manipulated in the lab.

**“ By purposely engineering viruses to infect humans when they cannot do so naturally, we could inadvertently unleash a pandemic that wipes out mankind.”**

One well-established technique involves repeatedly passing the virus through a live animal host. In other words, you infect the animal over and over again until the virus develops the ability to infect and affect that animal. “You’re basically speeding up nature,” Macintyre tells Hayes. “You’re speeding up evolution by hundreds of thousands of years.”

As noted by human rights lawyer Jason Yat-Sen Li, by purposely engineering viruses to infect humans when they cannot do so naturally, we could inadvertently unleash a pandemic that wipes out mankind. “I find it shocking,” he tells “Under Investigation.” He, like I and many others, feels this kind of research simply should not be done, as the potential risks are extraordinary.

## **US Circumvented Gain-of-Function Moratorium**

Interestingly, as Petrovsky points out, during the few years that gain-of-function research was temporarily banned in the U.S., that research was moved to the WIV.

What's more, after the U.S. moratorium was lifted in 2017, a special review board, the Potential Pandemic Pathogens Control and Oversight, or P3CO Review Framework, was created within the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), to evaluate whether grants for gain-of-function research were worth the risks, and to ensure proper safeguards are in place before the research gets the green light.<sup>11</sup>

According to Rutgers University professor Richard Ebright, a National Institutes of Health grant for research involving the modification of bat coronaviruses at the WIV was sneaked through because the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) failed to flag it for review.<sup>12</sup> In other words, the WIV received federal funding for what Ebright insists is gain-of-function research from the NIAID without it first passing review by the HHS review board.

## **World Health Organization Botched Investigation**

Hayes interviews Dominic Dwyer, a professor of immunology and infectious diseases at the University of Sydney, Australia, who visited the WIV as part of the investigative team put together by China and the World Health Organization. At the time, Dwyer believed investigating the WIV as a source of the virus “was definitely part of their mission,” and that the laboratory leak hypothesis was a “very reasonable” one, “because it has happened before.”

If the virus came from the lab, additional questions arise. Did it simply escape? Or was more sinister research being conducted and the virus released on purpose?

Dwyer stressed that a successful investigation would require full cooperation of the Chinese. As it turns out, the investigation was not an entirely successful one. In fact, there's evidence to suggest it was yet another attempt at a cover up. The team — members of which were approved by Chinese authorities — did not have unfettered

access to WIV data but, rather, had to rely on whatever their Chinese counterparts gave them.

February 9, 2021, the team leader, Danish food safety and zoonosis scientist Ben Embarek, announced the WIV and two other biosafety level 4 laboratories in Wuhan, China, had nothing to do with the COVID-19 outbreak, and that the lab-escape theory would no longer be part of the team's investigation.

Instead, they would be focusing their attention on the theory that SARS-CoV-2 piggybacked its way into the Wuhan market in shipments of frozen food from other areas of China, where coronavirus-carrying bats are known to reside, or from overseas.<sup>13,14</sup>

According to Embarek, the officials at WIV “are the best ones to dismiss the claims and provide answers” about the potential for a lab leak. Clearly, that line of reasoning hardly passes the smell test. As noted by GM Watch, it “defies common sense: Suspects in an investigation should clearly not be treated as ‘the best ones’ to dismiss any possible charges against them.”<sup>15</sup>

Embarek further insisted that lab accidents are “extremely rare,” hence it’s “very unlikely that anything could escape from such a place.”<sup>16</sup> Yet this is another entirely unconvincing argument.

According to the Cambridge Working Group in 2014, “biosafety incidents involving regulated pathogens have been occurring on average over twice a week” in the U.S. alone,<sup>17,18</sup> and a Beijing virology lab accidentally released the original SARS virus on no less than four separate occasions.<sup>19</sup> Three of those four instances led to outbreaks.<sup>20</sup>

## **WHO Backtracks After Backlash**

Many experts condemned the WHO's inquiry as a sham and a political stunt to exonerate the Chinese government.<sup>21</sup> Two dozen scientists and policy experts signed an open letter<sup>22</sup> calling for a truly independent and transparent investigation into the virus'

origin,<sup>23</sup> listing a number of flaws in the joint WHO-China inquiry, including the universal absence of evidence demonstrating a wholly natural origin of SARS-CoV-2.

Within days, WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus walked back the team's outright dismissal saying "I want to clarify that all hypotheses remain open and require further study."<sup>24,25</sup> Perhaps he realized the WHO was about to make a public relations mistake so severe it would never recover.

Ghebreyesus and 13 other world leaders have since joined the U.S. government in expressing "frustration with the level of access China granted an international mission to Wuhan."

According to Ghebreyesus, the team "did not conduct an 'extensive enough' assessment of the possibility the virus was introduced to humans through a laboratory incident," which will therefore necessitate additional studies with "more timely and comprehensive data sharing."<sup>26</sup>

## **Did Initial Cover-Up Result in a Pandemic?**

As noted by Hayes, many Western countries believe China not only has covered up the origin of the pandemic, but downplayed its seriousness as well. Witnesses in China claim they knew the virus spread from person to person, yet Chinese authorities initially said human to human transmission was unlikely and that cases were very limited.

Chinese doctors have also stated they were ordered to lie about how quickly and easily the virus was spreading. Chinese authorities also allowed well-attended New Year's celebrations to proceed, despite the obvious health risks.

Professor Chen Hong, director of Australian studies at East China Normal University in Hong Kong, defends the Chinese government, telling Hayes such blame must be placed on local officials, not the CCP. They, like everyone else, were caught by surprise and didn't know what they were dealing with, he says.

However, according to former lead investigator for the U.S. State Department's coronavirus task force, Asher, three workers at the WIV who worked with the RatG13 coronavirus appear to have actually been the first cluster of cases of COVID-19. They fell ill with symptoms consistent with COVID-19 as early as October 2019, two months before the first words about the virus were uttered publicly. At least one of the workers required hospitalization.

## **Is Gain-of-Function Research Justifiable?**

Clearly, getting to the bottom of the origin of SARS-CoV-2 is crucial if we are to prevent a similar pandemic from erupting in the future. If gain-of-function research was in fact involved, we need to know, so that steps can either be taken to prevent another leak (which is not likely possible) or to dismantle and ban such research altogether for the common good.

As long as we are creating the risk, the benefit will be secondary. Any scientific or medical gains made from this kind of research pales in comparison to the incredible risks involved if weaponized pathogens are released, and it doesn't matter if it's by accident or on purpose. This sentiment has been echoed by others in a variety of scientific publications.<sup>27,28,29,30</sup>

Considering the potential for a massively lethal pandemic, I believe it's safe to say that BSL 3 and 4 laboratories pose a very real and serious existential threat to humanity.

Historical facts tell us accidental exposures and releases have already happened, and we only have our lucky stars to thank that none has turned into pandemics taking the lives of tens of millions, as was predicted at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Seeing how scientists have already figured out a way to mutate SARS-CoV-2 such that it evades human antibodies, as detailed in "[Lab Just Made a More Dangerous COVID Virus](#)," having a frank, open discussion about the scientific merits of this kind of work is more pertinent than ever before.

## Sources and Reference

---

- <sup>1, 10</sup> YouTube 60 Minutes Australia April 14, 2021
- <sup>2, 8</sup> Independent Science News July 15, 2020
- <sup>3, 9</sup> New York Post August 15, 2020
- <sup>4</sup> New York Post January 2, 2021
- <sup>5</sup> Mail Online January 2, 2021
- <sup>6</sup> Sky News March 21, 2021
- <sup>7</sup> Live Science April 18, 2020
- <sup>11, 12</sup> Daily Caller April 4, 2021
- <sup>13, 15, 16, 18</sup> GM Watch February 10, 2021
- <sup>14</sup> Nature February 10, 2021
- <sup>17</sup> Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists August 14, 2014
- <sup>19</sup> Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists March 31, 2014
- <sup>20</sup> Medium November 16, 2020
- <sup>21</sup> Ian Birrell February 14, 2021
- <sup>22</sup> WSJ Open Letter, Call for Full and Unrestricted International Forensic Investigation Into the Origins of COVID-19, March 4, 2021 (PDF)
- <sup>23</sup> New York Times March 4, 2021 (Archived)
- <sup>24</sup> WHO February 11, 2021
- <sup>25</sup> US Department of State Joint Statement on the WHO-Convened COVID-19 Origins Study March 30, 2021
- <sup>26</sup> Washington Post March 30, 2021
- <sup>27</sup> mBio 2012 Sep-Oct; 3(5): e00360-12
- <sup>28</sup> The Human Fatality Burden of Gain of Function Flu Research: A Risk Assessment by Lynn Klotz (PDF)
- <sup>29</sup> BMC Medicine 2013; 11, Article number 252
- <sup>30</sup> Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists February 25, 2019