

From: "(b)(6)@state.gov>
Stilwell, David R (b)(6)@state.gov>;
EAP-FO-Principals-DL <EAP-FO-Principals-DL@state.gov>;
NSC Asia (b)(6)
Matthew Pottinger (h)(6)
Kissel, Mary E (S) (b)(6)@state.gov>;
Ortagus, Morgan D (b)(6)@state.gov>;
Zarate, Robert B (h)(6)@state.gov>;
(h)(6)@state.gov>;
Bremberg, Andrew P (Geneva) <(b)(6)@state.gov>;
(b)(6)@state.gov>;
Buangan, Richard L <(b)(6)@state.gov>;
(b)(6)@state.gov>;
(b)(6)@state.gov>;
Snyder, Nicholas <(b)(6)>;
(b)(6)>;
Storch, Thomas <(b)(6)>;
Glick, Bonnie L. (AID/A) <(b)(6)>;
Arha, Kaushalendra (PPL/AA) <(b)(6)>;
Feith, Dore (AID/A) (h)(6)>;
(b)(6)@state.gov>;
(b)(6)@state.gov>;
To: Ford, Christopher A <(b)(6)@state.gov>;
(b)(6)@state.gov>;
(b)(6)@state.gov>;
Kritenbrink, Daniel J (Hanoi) <(b)(6)@state.gov>;
Harris, Harry B (Seoul) <(b)(6)@state.gov>;
Adam Boehler <(b)(6)>;
McCarry, Caleb <(b)(6)>;
Henick, Jonathan D <(b)(6)@state.gov>;
Friedmann, Benjamin L <(b)(6)@state.gov>;
Culvahouse, Arthur B (Canberra) <(b)(6)@state.gov>;
Chiang, Mung <(b)(6)@state.gov>;
(b)(6)@state.gov>;
Joshua.cartin(b)(6)>;
C Policy <C_Policy@state.gov>;
(b)(6)@state.gov>;
McLaughlin IV, Charles J <(b)(6)@state.gov>;
Zadrozny, John A. EOP/WHO <(b)(6)>;
(b)(6)@state.gov>;
(b)(6)@state.gov>;
(b)(6)@state.gov>;
Snyder, Nicholas JC <(b)(6)@state.gov>;
Welch, Jennifer D <(b)(6)>

Subject: Updated timeline of PRC coverup (April 28)

Date: Tue, 28 Apr 2020 15:39:23 +0000

Attached includes an additional topline theme (the assault on international transparency), along with updates as of April 28.

Updated major themes:

--The silenced and the disappeared: E.g. Wuhan doctors Li Wenliang, Ai Fen and others; journalists Fang Bin, Chen Quishi, and Li Zehua; activist Xu Zhiyong; professor Xu Zhangrun; billionaire and Xi Jinping critic Ren Zhiqiang; online activists Cai Wei, Tang, and Chen Mei...

--The suppression and destruction of evidence: E.g. virus samples ordered destroyed at genomics labs, wildlife market stalls bleached, genome sequence not shared publicly, Shanghai lab closed for "rectification" after sharing genome on its own, academic articles subjected to prior review by the Ministry of Science and Technology, data on asymptomatic "silent carriers" kept secret...

--The deadly denial of human-to-human transmission: Despite evidence of human-human transmission from early December, PRC authorities deny it until Jan. 20. The World Health Organization does the same. Yet officials in Taiwan raised concerns as early as Dec. 31, as did experts in Hong Kong on Jan. 4...

--The endangerment of other countries: Millions of people leave Wuhan after the outbreak and before Beijing locks down the city on Jan. 23. Thousands fly overseas. Throughout February, Beijing presses the U.S., Italy, India, Australia, Southeast Asian neighbors and others not to protect themselves via travel restrictions, even as the PRC imposes severe restrictions at home...

--The assault on international transparency: As EU diplomats prepare a report on the pandemic, PRC successfully presses Brussels to strike language on PRC disinformation. As Australia calls for an independent inquiry into the pandemic, PRC threatens to cut off trade with Australia. (PRC has likewise responded furiously to US calls for transparency.)

New timeline elements in the attached:

— 2020 —

January 26: Major General Chen Wei, the Chinese military's top epidemiologist and virologist, assumes a senior position at the Wuhan Institute of Virology overseeing coronavirus vaccine research.

January 31: Acclaimed author and Wuhan resident Fang Fang writes online, "How many people have died in Wuhan and their families destroyed? . . . But so far not a single person has said sorry or taken responsibility. I've even seen a writer use the phrase 'complete victory'. What are they talking about?" Her "Wuhan Diary" writings become an increasing target of scorn online, backed by state media outlets, in a campaign she says recalls the Cultural Revolution.

February 6: The leaders of the U.S. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine write to the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy on the importance of information-sharing and transparency "for managing the 2019-nCoV outbreak and for preventing future outbreaks." "Samples collected as early as possible in the outbreak in Wuhan and samples from wildlife would be particularly valuable," they write, adding that the president of the

Chinese Academy of Sciences has indicated that the Wuhan National Biosafety Laboratory “is willing to share isolates of the 2019 nCov with the international community.” This transfer apparently never happened.

February 16: The Wuhan Institute of Virology issues a public denial that its former researcher Huang Yanling is “patient zero,” as speculated on Chinese social media based on the disappearance of Huang’s biographical information from the Institute’s website and Huang’s unknown whereabouts. Institute researcher Shi Zhengli writes on social media that she “guaranteed with her own life” that the outbreak was unrelated to the lab. She instructs “those who believe and spread malicious media rumors to close their stinky mouths. (In 2004, China suffered a SARS outbreak due to a lab leak that killed one person and infected nine. PRC authorities blamed negligence and punished five senior officials at the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention.)

April 18: Yuan Zhiming, vice director of the Wuhan Institute of Virology and director of the Wuhan National Biosafety Laboratory, tells state broadcaster CGTN, “There is absolutely no way that the virus originated from our institute. . . . I hope such a conspiracy theory will not affect cooperation among scientists around the world.”

April 21: A study published in the *Lancet* by researchers from Hong Kong estimates that China might have had tens of thousands more coronavirus cases than officials have disclosed.

April 22: Citizen journalist Li Zehua surfaces for the first time since February, saying that his detention included a quarantine in Wuhan and another in his hometown, after which he was reunited with his family. He says in a video: “During the whole process, the police enforced law in a civilised manner, ensured my rest time and food. They also cared about me very much. . . . I’m grateful to all the people who looked after me and cared about me. I wish all people suffering the epidemic can pull through. God bless China. I wish the world can unite together.”

April 24: Under pressure from Beijing, the European Union softens a published report on Covid-19 disinformation. The final text removed a draft reference to Beijing’s “global disinformation” campaign and struck mention of the diplomatic dispute between China and France over Chinese PPE exports and the aggressive rhetoric of China’s ambassador in Paris.

April 25: SCMP reports Chinese police have detained three Beijing residents (Cai Wei, a woman surnamed Tang, and Chen Mei) who helped publish articles about Covid-19 on open-source website Github that were previously censored from mainstream PRC media and social media, including material about Wuhan doctor Ai Fen.

April 27: PRC ambassador to Australia Cheng Jingye threatens economic harm if Australia continues pushing for an independent investigation into the coronavirus. “Maybe the ordinary [Chinese] people will say ‘Why should we drink Australian wine? Eat Australian beef?’” Cheng said, also citing the tourism and higher-education sectors. Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne answered: “We reject any suggestion that economic coercion is an appropriate response to a call for such an assessment, when what we need is global cooperation.”

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[REDACTED]

Senior Advisor
Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP)
U.S. Department of State

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]@state.gov

On April 17, 2020 at 7:19:08 PM EDT, [REDACTED]@state.gov wrote:
Updated timeline attached, through April 17. New elements include:

— 2015 —

November 9: Researchers from the Wuhan Institute of Virology (including Shi Zhengli) and several U.S. labs (including the FDA's National Center for Toxicological Research) publish a study in *Nature Medicine* entitled "A SARS-like cluster of circulating bat coronaviruses shows potential for human emergence." It stated: "To examine the emergence potential (that is, the potential to infect humans) of circulating bat CoVs, we built a chimeric virus encoding a novel, zoonotic CoV spike protein—from the RsSHC014-CoV sequence that was isolated from Chinese horseshoe bats—in the context of the SARS-CoV mouse-adapted backbone."

— 2019 —

March 2: Researchers from the Wuhan Institute of Virology publish a study in the medical journal *Viruses* noting that "it is highly likely that future SARS- or MERS-like coronavirus outbreaks will originate from bats, and there is an increased probability that this will occur in China."

March 5: Gao Fu, director of the PRC's CDC, says in a speech: "Viruses like SARS could emerge anytime, but there'll never be another SARS incident. That's thanks to how well our national contagious disease surveillance system works."

— 2020 —

January 3: The Wuhan Health Commission sets narrow criteria for confirming that a case is officially part of the outbreak, saying patients can be counted only if they had ties to the Huanan seafood market, excluding the growing number of cases with no such ties. An official from a district disease control center in Wuhan also tells a hospital doctor handling infection reports that "this was a special contagious disease and we should report only after superiors had notified us."

January 6: The head of an expert team sent to Wuhan from Beijing, Xu Jianguo, reports that "China has many years of disease control, there's absolutely no chance that this will spread widely because of Spring Festival travel," and there is "no evidence of human-to-human transmission."

January 10: After leading a second expert team from Beijing to Wuhan, prominent PRC government expert Wang Guangfa tells state broadcaster CCTV that the Wuhan pneumonia was “under control” and mostly a “mild condition.” His team reported no clear signs of human-to-human transmission, though more than half a dozen doctors already were ill. [On March 15, Wang wrote on social media that he “always suspected it was human-to-human transmissible.”]

January 14: In a confidential teleconference with provincial health officials, PRC National Health Commission chief Ma Xiaowei reportedly warns that the novel virus is “the most severe challenge since SARS in 2003, and is likely to develop into a major public health event,” adding that “clustered cases suggest that human-to-human transmission is possible.” Citing the case reported in Thailand the day prior, Ma warns of spread overseas and during China’s coming Lunar New Year festivities. It would be another six days before any of these official concerns are made public.

January 15: A day after the confidential teleconference, China’s CDC initiates the highest-level emergency response internally and the National Health Commission distributes 63 pages of instructions to provinces on identifying cases and equipping doctors with protective gear. These instructions are marked “internal,” “not to be spread on the internet,” and “not to be publicly disclosed.”

February 15: Finance magazine Barron’s finds that China’s official coronavirus data fit a near-perfect model that is almost impossible to naturally occur, as the number of cumulative deaths reported could be predicted by a simple mathematical formula to a 99.99% accuracy.

March 3: WHO chief Tedros plays down the risk of asymptomatic silent carriers, citing official PRC data: “COVID-19 does not transmit as efficiently as influenza, from the data we have so far. With influenza, people who are infected but not yet sick are major drivers of transmission, which does not appear to be the case for COVID-19. Evidence from China is that only 1% of reported cases do not have symptoms, and most of those cases develop symptoms within two days.” Later reports cited classified PRC data showing up to 33% of cases were asymptomatic (see March 22).

April 17: Wuhan raises its official tally of Covid-19 fatalities by 1,290, to nearly 3,900, blaming the initial undercount on cases unrecognized, untreated, or underreported by overstressed hospitals.

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(b)(6)

Senior Advisor

Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP)

U.S. Department of State

(b)(6)

(b)(6)@state.gov

On April 13, 2020 at 9:51:31 AM EDT, (b)(6)@state.gov wrote:

Updated timeline attached. This version notes at the top that major themes include:

--The silenced and the disappeared: E.g. Wuhan doctors Li Wenliang, Ai Fen and others; journalists Fang Bin, Chen Quishi, and Li Zehua; activist Xu Zhiyong; professor Xu Zhangrun; billionaire CCP member and Xi Jinping critic Ren Zhiqiang...

--The suppression and destruction of evidence: E.g. virus samples ordered destroyed at genomics labs, wildlife market stalls bleached, genome sequence not shared publicly, Shanghai lab closed for "rectification" after sharing genome on its own, academic articles subjected to prior review by the Ministry of Science and Technology...

--The deadly denial of human-to-human transmission: Despite evidence of human-human transmission from early December, PRC authorities deny it until Jan. 20. The World Health Organization does the same. Yet officials in Taiwan raised concerns about human-human transmission as early as Dec. 31, as did experts in Hong Kong on Jan. 4...

--The endangerment of other countries: Millions of people leave Wuhan after the outbreak and before Beijing locks down the city on Jan. 23. Thousands fly overseas. When Beijing cuts off travel from Hubei Province to the rest of China, it doesn't stop travel from Hubei to the rest of the world. Throughout February, Beijing presses the U.S., Italy, India, Australia, Southeast Asian neighbors and others not to protect themselves via travel restrictions...

New timeline elements in the attached:

--2013--

Researchers from the Wuhan Institute of Virology collect a sample of horseshoe bat feces from a cave in Yunnan Province, China. The sample, labeled RaTG13, is later found to contain a virus 96.2% identical to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid-19.

--2019--

February 20: Researchers at Hong Kong University publish a study of bat coronaviruses, warning: "bat-animal and bat-human interactions, such as the presence of live bats in wildlife wet markets and restaurants in Southern China, are important for interspecies transmission of [coronaviruses] and may lead to devastating global outbreaks."

December 30: Wuhan Institute of Virology researcher Shi Zhengli (known as "bat-woman" for her research) is called by the Institute's director and summoned back to Wuhan from a conference in Shanghai to study samples of the novel coronavirus. "Could they have come from our lab?" Shi feared.

--2020--

January 7: Shi Zhengli of the Wuhan Institute of Virology recalled in a March 11 interview with

Scientific American that by January 7 her team found that the novel coronavirus's sequence did not match any of the viruses her team had sampled from bat caves. "That really took a load off my mind," she said. But the novel sequence was 96% identical to one her team had sampled previously in Yunnan.

January 13: The first coronavirus case outside of China is reported in Bangkok when a 61-year-old woman from Wuhan tests positive four days after arriving from China with a fever at the airport. The patient had begun exhibiting symptoms (fever, chills, sore throat, headache) three days before leaving Wuhan.

January 15: The patient who becomes the first confirmed U.S. case leaves Wuhan and arrives in the U.S., carrying the coronavirus.

January 22: WHO holds emergency committee meeting, decides not to declare the novel coronavirus a "public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC)." WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus says afterward that declaring a PHEIC is a decision he takes "extremely seriously" and is "only prepared to make with appropriate consideration of all the evidence." The emergency committee meeting excluded Taiwan from its deliberations.

January 23: Despite locking down Wuhan and cutting off travel from the surrounding Hubei Province to the rest of China, PRC officials did not cut off travel from Hubei Province to the rest of the world.

January 24: Officials in Beijing prevent the Wuhan Institute of Virology from sharing samples of the novel coronavirus with the University of Texas biocontainment lab, overruling an initial agreement by the Wuhan lab to share these samples.

January 30: WHO declares a public-health emergency of international concern (PHEIC), after nearly 10,000 cases of the virus are confirmed, including in at least 18 countries outside of China.

February 6: Researchers from South China University of Technology publish a study concluding that "the killer coronavirus probably originated from a laboratory in Wuhan. Safety level may need to be reinforced in high risk biohazardous laboratories." The paper is soon withdrawn because it "was not supported by direct proofs," according to author Botao Xiao. "No scientists have confirmed or refuted the paper's findings," scholar Yanzhong Huang wrote on March 5.

February 16: The Wuhan Institute of Virology issues a public denial that its former researcher Huang Yanling is "patient zero," as speculated on Chinese social media based on changes to the Institute's website and Huang's unknown whereabouts. Institute researcher Shi Zhengli writes on social media that she "guaranteed with her own life" that the outbreak was unrelated to the lab. [In 2004, China suffered a SARS outbreak due to a lab leak that killed one person and infected nine. PRC authorities blamed negligence and punished five senior officials at the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention.]

February 23: Xi Jinping delivers speech to PRC officials calling virus “a crisis for us and also a major test.” He stresses “social stability” and states that “the effectiveness of the prevention and control work has once again demonstrated the significant advantages of the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the socialist system with Chinese characteristics.”

March 11: WHO declares the novel coronavirus a “pandemic,” after the official worldwide case count is 118,000 people in 114 countries.

March 26: China bars entry of all foreigners in attempt to limit virus spread. This measure is harsher than the travel restrictions of other countries that Beijing had criticized just weeks before.

April 3: While lifting lockdown restrictions in Wuhan, officials limit funerals of those who died from the coronavirus, suppress online discussions of fatalities, scrub images of funeral homes from social media, assign minders to families in mourning, and face questions from families such as why it took the government weeks to inform the public that the virus could spread among humans.

April 3: China’s Ministry of Science and Technology announces that ongoing clinical research on the coronavirus must be reported to authorities within three days or be halted.

April 7: Human rights activists report, citing public records alone, that Chinese police punished nearly 900 people for online speech or information-sharing about the virus over three months.

April 11: Chinese universities publish online—and then apparently delete—new guidelines stating that academic papers on the origin of the novel coronavirus can be published only with the approval of the Ministry of Science and Technology.

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(b)(6)

Senior Advisor

Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP)

U.S. Department of State

(b)(6)

(b)(6)@state.gov

On April 2, 2020 at 4:58:00 PM EDT, (b)(6)@state.gov> wrote:
Updated here to include more on the WHO, and some other tweaks. Please use this document (stamped 5pm).

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(b)(6)

Senior Advisor

Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP)

U.S. Department of State

(b)(6)

(b)(6) @state.gov

On April 2, 2020 at 3:07:15 PM EDT, Stilwell, David R <(b)(6)@state.gov> wrote:
Would like to include the timeline of WHO requesting access to the site (mid-January, I believe),
WHO ADVON getting permission to travel to Beijing (10 Feb), and the investigative team
actually heading out to investigate (around 20 Feb).

From: (b)(6)@state.gov

Sent: Thursday, April 2, 2020 11:16 AM

To: EAP-FO-Principals-DL <EAP-FO-Principals-DL@state.gov>; NSC Asia

(b)(6); Matthew Pottinger <(b)(6)>; Kissel, Mary E (S)

<(b)(6)@state.gov>; Ortagus, Morgan D <(b)(6)@state.gov>; Zarate, Robert B

(b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov; Bremberg, Andrew P (Geneva)

<(b)(6)@state.gov>; Erik Bethel <(b)(6)>; (b)(6)

<(b)(6)@state.gov>; Buangan, Richard L <(b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)

(b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov; Snyder, Nicholas

<(b)(6)>; (b)(6); Storch,

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Arha, Kaushalendra (PPL/AA) <(b)(6)>; Feith, Dore (AID/A) <(b)(6)>;

(b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov; Ford,

Christopher A <(b)(6)@state.gov>; Wells, Alice <(b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)

<(b)(6)@state.gov>; Kritenbrink, Daniel J (Hanoi) <(b)(6)@state.gov>; Harris,

Harry B (Seoul) <(b)(6)@state.gov>; Adam Boehler <(b)(6)>; McCarry,

Caleb <(b)(6)>; Henick, Jonathan D <(b)(6)@state.gov>; Friedmann,

Benjamin L <(b)(6)@state.gov>; Culvahouse, Arthur B (Canberra)

<(b)(6)@state.gov>

Subject: Updated timeline of PRC coverup (April 2)

Some of the new items in the attached:

January 4: Amid PRC denials, another expert outside mainland China begins to sound alarms over human-to-human transmission. The head of the University of Hong Kong's Centre for Infection, Ho Pak-leung, warns that Hong Kong "should implement the strictest possible monitoring system for a mystery new viral pneumonia that has infected dozens of people on the mainland, as it is highly possible that the illness is spreading from human to human."

January 23: Chinese authorities lock down Wuhan, after letting some five million people leave the city without screening in the weeks prior, amid the growing outbreak. NYT estimates seven million people left between Jan. 1 and Jan 23. Before the lockdown, some 900 people flew from Wuhan to New York City per month on average, while some 2,200 flew to Sydney and 15,000 to Bangkok (site of the first overseas case of the novel coronavirus in mid-January). Some 85% of infected travelers went undetected.

January 30: WHO special committee on the novel coronavirus states that it “does not recommend any travel or trade restriction based on the current information available.”

January 31: U.S. shuts down entry from China for non-Americans. By this time, outbreaks were already growing in 30 cities across 26 countries. PRC state media criticize the U.S. travel advisory urging citizens not to travel to China due to health concerns. PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs claims the U.S. action is “certainly not a gesture of goodwill.”

February 1: Referring to travel restrictions, PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi tells his Indian counterpart that China “opposes certain countries’ actions that are creating tension and causing panic.”

February 3: WHO chief Tedros calls on countries not to take measures that “unnecessarily interfere with international travel and trade.” He adds, “The chances of getting this going to anywhere outside China is very low, and even in China, when you go to other provinces, it’s very low.” This statement was amplified in PRC state media.

February 6: Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Qin Gang meets with Italy’s ambassador to China and “requires” Italy to suspend its decision cancelling direct flights between Italy and China. PRC press release states that Beijing “is strongly dissatisfied with the overreaction and restrictions of the Italian side” and claims that Italy agreed to resume some flights.

February 20: At a meeting with ASEAN foreign ministers, PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi pressures countries to ease travel restrictions, saying: “In light of the conditions on the ground, countries need to resume people-to-people ties and cooperation.”

February 29: WHO announces that it “continues to advise against the application of travel or trade restrictions to countries experiencing COVID-19 outbreaks.”

March 31: Chinese National Health Commission announces for the first time that it excluded from its national tally people who were infected with the virus but without symptoms, and that as of April 1 it would begin including these in the tally “in order to respond to society’s concern in a timely manner.”

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(b)(6)

Senior Advisor

Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP)

U.S. Department of State

(b)(6)

(b)(6) @state.gov

On March 22, 2020 at 4:58:25 PM EDT, (b)(6) @state.gov wrote:

Attached updates thru today, March 22. Thanks for suggestions.

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(b)(6)

Senior Advisor
Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP)
U.S. Department of State

(b)(6)

(b)(6) @state.gov

On March 18, 2020 at 7:53:15 PM EDT, (b)(6) @state.gov wrote:
Updated coverup timeline attached, including publication of this study March 11.

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(b)(6)

Senior Advisor
Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP)
U.S. Department of State

(b)(6)

(b)(6) @state.gov

On March 18, 2020 at 3:52:25 PM EDT, (b)(6) @state.gov wrote:
Shocking detail here from March 11 University of Southampton study. Estimates that if Beijing had owned up to the Wuhan virus and responded with significant measures just a week before it did, 66% of cases could have been avoided. And had Beijing responded three weeks sooner, 95% could have been avoided.
From <https://www.southampton.ac.uk/news/2020/03/covid-19-china.page>: “The research also found that if interventions in the country could have been conducted one week, two weeks, or three weeks earlier, cases could have been reduced by 66 percent, 86 percent and 95 percent respectively – significantly limiting the geographical spread of the disease.”

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(b)(6)

Senior Advisor
Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP)
U.S. Department of State

(b)(6)

(b)(6) @state.gov

<Wuhan virus coverup timeline 2020 03 18.docx>
<Wuhan virus coverup timeline 2020 03 22.docx>

<Coronavirus coverup timeline 2020 04 02.docx>
<Coronavirus coverup timeline 2020 04 13.pdf>
<Coronavirus coverup timeline 2020 04 17.pdf>

Sender: (b)(6)@state.gov>

Stilwell, David R <(b)(6)@state.gov>;
EAP-FO-Principals-DL <EAP-FO-Principals-DL@state.gov>;
NSC Asia <DL.Asia@whmo.mil>;
Matthew Pottinger <(b)(6)>;
Kissel, Mary E (S) <(b)(6)@state.gov>;
Ortagus, Morgan D <(b)(6)@state.gov>;
Zarate, Robert B <(b)(6)@state.gov>;
(b)(6)@state.gov>;
Bremberg, Andrew P (Geneva) <(b)(6)@state.gov>;
(b)(6)@state.gov>;
Buangan, Richard I <(b)(6)@state.gov>;
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(b)(6)@state.gov>;
Snyder, Nicholas <(b)(6)>;
(b)(6);
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Arha, Kaushalendra (PPL/AA) <(b)(6)>;
Feith, Dore (AID/A) <(b)(6)>;
(b)(6)@state.gov>;
(b)(6)@state.gov>;

Recipient:

Ford, Christopher A <(b)(6)@state.gov>;
Wells, Alice <(b)(6)@state.gov>;
DeSombre, Michael G (Bangkok) <(b)(6)@state.gov>;
Kritenbrink, Daniel J (Hanoi) <(b)(6)@state.gov>;
Harris, Harry B (Seoul) <(b)(6)@state.gov>;
Adam Boehler <(b)(6)>;
McCarry, Caleb <(b)(6)>;
Henick, Jonathan D <(b)(6)@state.gov>;
Friedmann, Benjamin L <(b)(6)@state.gov>;
Culvahouse, Arthur B (Canberra) <(b)(6)@state.gov>;
Chiang, Mung <(b)(6)@state.gov>;
(b)(6)@state.gov>;
joshua.cartin<(b)(6)>;
C_Policy <C_Policy@state.gov>;
Purser III, Benjamin S (T) <(b)(6)@state.gov>;
McLaughlin IV, Charles J <(b)(6)@state.gov>;
Zadrozny, John A. EOP/WHO <(b)(6)>;
(b)(6)@state.gov>;
(b)(6)@state.gov>;
(b)(6)@state.gov>;
(h)(6)@state.gov>;
Welch, Jennifer D <(b)(6)>

Summary timeline of novel coronavirus outbreak and PRC political coverup

NOTE: All information here is detailed in open sources available online, as cited in the footnotes.

Major themes observed below:

- **The silenced and the disappeared:** E.g. Wuhan doctors Li Wenliang, Ai Fen and others; journalists Fang Bin, Chen Quishi, and Li Zehua; activist Xu Zhiyong; professor Xu Zhangrun; billionaire and Xi Jinping critic Ren Zhiqiang; online activists Cai Wei, Tang, and Chen Mei...
- **The suppression and destruction of evidence:** E.g. virus samples ordered destroyed at genomics labs, wildlife market stalls bleached, genome sequence not shared publicly, Shanghai lab closed for "rectification" after sharing genome on its own, academic articles subjected to prior review by the Ministry of Science and Technology, data on asymptomatic "silent carriers" kept secret...
- **The deadly denial of human-to-human transmission:** Despite evidence of human-human transmission from early December, PRC authorities deny it until Jan. 20. The World Health Organization does the same. Yet officials in Taiwan raised concerns as early as Dec. 31, as did experts in Hong Kong on Jan. 4...
- **The endangerment of other countries:** Millions of people leave Wuhan after the outbreak and before Beijing locks down the city on Jan. 23. Thousands fly overseas. Throughout February, Beijing presses the U.S., Italy, India, Australia, Southeast Asian neighbors and others not to protect themselves via travel restrictions, even as the PRC imposes severe restrictions at home...
- **The assault on international transparency:** As EU diplomats prepare a report on the pandemic, PRC successfully presses Brussels to strike language on PRC disinformation. As Australia calls for an independent inquiry into the pandemic, PRC threatens to cut off trade with Australia. (PRC has likewise responded furiously to US calls for transparency.)

-- 2013 --

- Researchers from the Wuhan Institute of Virology collect a sample of horseshoe bat feces from a cave in Yunnan Province, China. The sample, labeled RaTG13, is later found to contain a virus 96.2% identical to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid-19.¹

-- 2015 --

November 9

- Researchers from the Wuhan Institute of Virology and several U.S. labs (including the FDA's National Center for Toxicological Research) publish a study in Nature Medicine entitled "A SARS-like cluster of circulating bat coronaviruses shows potential for human emergence." It stated: "To examine the emergence potential (that is, the potential to infect humans) of circulating bat CoVs, we built a chimeric virus encoding a novel, zoonotic CoV spike protein—from the RsSHC014-CoV sequence that was isolated from Chinese horseshoe bats—in the context of the SARS-CoV mouse-adapted backbone."²

-- 2019 --

¹ Matt Ridley, "The Bats Behind the Pandemic," The Wall Street Journal, April 9, 2020. See also Yan-Rong Guo et al., "The origin, transmission, and clinical therapies on coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak – an update on the status," Military Medical Research, March 13, 2020.

² Shi Zhengli-Li et al., "A SARS-like cluster of circulating bat coronaviruses shows potential for human emergence," Nature Medicine, online Nov. 9, 2015.

February 20

- Researchers at Hong Kong University publish a study of bat coronaviruses, warning: "bat-animal and bat-human interactions, such as the presence of live bats in wildlife wet markets and restaurants in Southern China, are important for interspecies transmission of [coronaviruses] and may lead to devastating global outbreaks."³

March 2

- Researchers from the Wuhan Institute of Virology publish a study in the medical journal *Viruses* noting that "it is highly likely that future SARS- or MERS-like coronavirus outbreaks will originate from bats, and there is an increased probability that this will occur in China."⁴

March 5

- Gao Fu, director of the PRC's CDC, says in a speech: "Viruses like SARS could emerge anytime, but there'll never be another SARS incident. That's thanks to how well our national contagious disease surveillance system works."⁵

December 6

- Five days after a man linked to Wuhan's seafood market presented pneumonia-like symptoms, his wife also presents with pneumonia and is hospitalized in an isolation ward. The wife had no connection to the market, suggesting human-human transmission.⁶

December 27

- Zhang Jixian, a doctor from Hubei Provincial Hospital of Integrated Chinese and Western Medicine, tells China's health authorities that a novel disease (then affecting some 180 patients) was caused by a new coronavirus.⁷

December 26-30

- Evidence of new virus emerges from Wuhan patient data sent to multiple Chinese genomics companies.⁸

December 30

- Ai Fen, a senior doctor at Wuhan Central Hospital, posts information on WeChat about the new virus and is reprimanded by superiors. Ai subsequently instructs her staff to wear protective clothing and masks, despite official instructions not to. "I knew there must be human-to-human transmission," she said in a later interview.⁹
- Wuhan doctor Li Wenliang also shares information about the virus on WeChat, including a photo of lab results initially shared by Ai Fen.¹⁰

³ Patrick Woo et al., "Global Epidemiology of Bat Coronaviruses," *Viruses* (journal), Feb. 2019, published online Feb. 20, 2019 (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6409556/>).

⁴ Yi Fan et al., "Bat Coronaviruses in China," *Viruses*, March 2019, online March 2, 2019.

⁵ Steven Lee Myers, "China Created a Fail-Safe System to Track Contagions. It Failed," *New York Times*, March 29, 2020.

⁶ Chaolin Huang et al., "Clinical features of patients infected with 2019 novel coronavirus in Wuhan, China," *The Lancet*, Feb. 15, 2020.

⁷ Josephine Ma, "Coronavirus: China's first confirmed Covid-19 case traced back to November 17," *South China Morning Post*, March 13, 2020.

⁸ Gao Yu et al., "In Depth: How Early Signs of a SARS-Like Virus Were Spotted, Spread, and Throttled," *Caixin Global*, February 29, 2020.

⁹ Lily Kuo, "Coronavirus: Wuhan doctor speaks out against authorities," *The Guardian*, March 11, 2020.

¹⁰ Lily Kuo, "Coronavirus: Wuhan doctor speaks out against authorities," *The Guardian*, March 11, 2020.

- Wuhan Institute of Virology researcher Shi Zhengli (known as “bat-woman” for her research) is called by the Institute’s director and summoned back to Wuhan from a conference in Shanghai to study samples of the novel coronavirus. “Could they have come from our lab?” Shi feared.¹¹

December 31

- Chinese officials alert the World Health Organization (WHO) China Country Office of several cases of pneumonia of unknown cause detected in Wuhan,¹² claiming erroneously that “the disease is preventable and controllable.”¹³
- Chinese internet authorities begin censoring terms from social media such: Wuhan Unknown Pneumonia, SARS Variation, Wuhan Seafood Market, and keywords critical of the government’s handling of the infection.¹⁴
- Officials in Taiwan report to the World Health Organization (WHO) that “news resources today indicate that at least seven atypical pneumonia cases were reported in Wuhan, China. Their health authorities replied to the media that the cases were believed not SARS; however the samples are still under examination, and cases have been isolated for treatment,” signaling human-to-human transmission.¹⁵ But Taiwan’s information is not published on the WHO platform for data-exchange among 196 countries. Taiwan officials also alert PRC authorities.¹⁶

-- 2020 --

January 1

- Eight doctors in Wuhan who warned about new virus reports via social media in late December, including Dr. Li Wenliang, are detained and condemned for “making false statements on the Internet.”¹⁷ Li is forced to write a self-criticism saying his warnings “had a negative impact.”¹⁸
- Hubei health commission orders genomics companies to stop testing and destroy all samples.¹⁹
- Wuhan authorities close the city’s seafood market, then disinfect it without swabbing individual animals and cages or drawing blood from workers, eliminating evidence of what animal might have been the source of the coronavirus and which people had become infected but survived.²⁰

January 2

- PRC state media aggressively highlight the detentions of the Wuhan doctors. Top national TV news program Xinwen Lianbo reports the detentions while Xinhua publishes a call from Wuhan police for “all netizens to not fabricate rumors, not spread rumors, not believe rumors.”²¹ Global Times tweets that “Police in Central China’s Wuhan arrested 8 people spreading rumors about local outbreak of unidentifiable #pneumonia. Previous online posts said it was SARS.”²²

¹¹ Jane Qui, “How’s China’s ‘Bat Woman’ Hunted Down Viruses from SARS to the New Coronavirus,” *Scientific American*, March 11, 2020.

¹² Gao Yu et al., “In Depth: How Early Signs of a SARS-Like Virus Were Spotted, Spread, and Throttled,” *Caixin Global*, February 29, 2020.

¹³ Jin Wu et al., “How the Virus Got Out,” *The New York Times*, March 22, 2020.

¹⁴ Lotus Ruan et al., “Censored Contagion: How Information on the Coronavirus is Managed on Chinese Social Media,” *Citizen Lab*, March 3, 2020.

¹⁵ Vandana Rambaran, “Taiwan releases December email to WHO warning about unheeded warning about coronavirus,” *FoxNews*, April 11, 2020.

¹⁶ “Taiwan says WHO failed to act on coronavirus transmission warning,” *Financial Times*, March 19, 2020.

¹⁷ Yong Xiong and Nectar Gan, “This Chinese doctor tried to save lives, but was silenced. Now he has coronavirus,” *CNN*, February 4, 2020.

¹⁸ Jeremy Page et al., “How It All Started: China’s Early Coronavirus Missteps,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 6, 2020.

¹⁹ Gao Yu et al., “In Depth: How Early Signs of a SARS-Like Virus Were Spotted, Spread, and Throttled,” *Caixin Global*, February 29, 2020.

²⁰ Editorial, “Stop the Wuhan Virus,” *Nature*, January 21, 2020. Also Donald G. McNeil Jr. and Zolan Kanno-Youngs, “C.D.C. and W.H.O. Offers to Help China Have Been Ignored for Weeks,” *New York Times*, February 7, 2020.

²¹ Gerry Shih et al., “Early missteps and state secrecy in China probably allowed the coronavirus to spread farther and faster,” *Washington Post*, Feb. 1, 2020.

²² Global Times tweet, Jan. 2, 2020, 1:26am Beijing time (<https://twitter.com/globaltimesnews/status/1212409846684884995>).

- [On Feb. 1, Washington Post cited Chinese surgeon and writer Wang Guangbao recalling that while speculation about a SARS-like virus was rampant within medical circles around Jan. 1, the detentions of the Wuhan doctors chilled open discussion. "The eight posters getting seized made all of us doctors feel we were at risk," Wang said.²³]
- Wuhan Institute of Virology completes mapping of the novel coronavirus genome, but this breakthrough is not made public by Chinese authorities.²⁴

January 3

- China's top health authority, the National Health Commission, follows the Hubei Health Commission by issuing a gag order directing that Wuhan pneumonia samples be moved to designated testing facilities or destroyed. The National Health Commission also orders institutions not to publish any information related to the unknown disease.²⁵
- The Wuhan Health Commission sets narrow criteria for confirming that a case is officially part of the outbreak, saying patients can be counted only if they had ties to the Huanan seafood market, excluding the growing number of cases with no such ties. An official from a district disease control center in Wuhan also tells a hospital doctor handling infection reports that "this was a special contagious disease and we should report only after superiors had notified us."²⁶

January 4

- Another expert outside mainland China begins to sound alarms over human-to-human transmission. The head of the University of Hong Kong's Centre for Infection, Ho Pak-leung, warns that Hong Kong "should implement the strictest possible monitoring system for a mystery new viral pneumonia that has infected dozens of people on the mainland, as it is highly possible that the illness is spreading from human to human."²⁷

January 5

- Wuhan Municipal Health Commission stops releasing daily updates on new cases.²⁸ This continued until Jan. 18.
- WHO releases statement characterizing PRC's initial Dec. 31 notice about "pneumonia of unknown etiology." WHO states: "Based on the preliminary information from the Chinese investigation team, no evidence of significant human-to-human transmission and no health care worker infections have been reported."²⁹ This continues to ignore Taiwan's warnings of Dec. 31.
- The Shanghai Public Health Clinical Center, a research lab, alerts National Health Commission that one of its professors has identified a SARS-like coronavirus and mapped its genome. The lab also recommends "appropriate prevention and control measures in public places."³⁰

January 6

²³ Gerry Shih et al., "Early missteps and state secrecy in China probably allowed the coronavirus to spread farther and faster," Washington Post, Feb. 1, 2020.

²⁴ Jeremy Page et al., "How It All Started: China's Early Coronavirus Missteps," Wall Street Journal, March 6, 2020.

²⁵ Gao Yu et al., "In Depth: How Early Signs of a SARS-Like Virus Were Spotted, Spread, and Throttled," *Caixin Global*, February 29, 2020.

²⁶ Steven Lee Myers, "China Ousts 2 Party Officials Amid Outrage About Coronavirus Response," New York Times, February 13, 2020.

²⁷ "Wuhan virus is probably spreading between people," RTHK, January 4, 2020.

²⁸ Jeremy Page et al., "How It All Started: China's Early Coronavirus Missteps," Wall Street Journal, March 6, 2020.

²⁹ "Pneumonia of unknown cause – China," WHO, January 5, 2020 (<https://www.who.int/csr/don/05-january-2020-pneumonia-of-unknown-cause-china/en/>).

³⁰ Jeremy Page et al., "How It All Started: China's Early Coronavirus Missteps," Wall Street Journal, March 6, 2020.

- US CDC offers Beijing technical expertise to help with the virus. Beijing ignores this offer for more than a month, along with repeated additional offers from HHS Secretary Alex Azar and other senior U.S. officials.³¹
- The head of an expert team sent to Wuhan from Beijing, Xu Jianguo, reports that “China has many years of disease control, there’s absolutely no chance that this will spread widely because of Spring Festival travel,” and there is “no evidence of human-to-human transmission.”³²

January 7

- Wall Street Journal reports for the first time that Chinese scientists have tied the mystery illnesses to a new strain of coronavirus.³³
 - [Shi Zhengli of the Wuhan Institute of Virology recalled in a March 11 interview with Scientific American that by January 7 her team found that the novel coronavirus’s sequence did not match any of the viruses her team had sampled from bat caves. “That really took a load off my mind,” she said. But the novel sequence was 96% identical to one her team had sampled previously in Yunnan.³⁴]

January 9

- Chinese authorities identify a novel coronavirus as the likely cause of the outbreak in Wuhan, two days after the Wall Street Journal reported on Chinese scientists discovering the novel strain.³⁵ In response to Beijing’s confirmation, international scientists urge Chinese authorities to quickly share data on the virus, the disease it causes, and how it spreads.³⁶
- WHO releases a statement: “Preliminary identification of a novel virus in a short period of time is a notable achievement and demonstrates China’s increased capacity to manage new outbreaks. . . . According to Chinese authorities, the virus in question can cause severe illness in some patients and does not transmit readily between people. . . . WHO does not recommend any specific measures for travellers. WHO advises against the application of any travel or trade restrictions on China based on the information currently available.”³⁷

January 10

- More international scientists and public-health experts call on China to share more information on the new coronavirus.³⁸
- After leading a second expert team from Beijing to Wuhan, prominent PRC government expert Wang Guangfa tells state broadcaster CCTV that the Wuhan pneumonia was “under control” and mostly a “mild condition.”³⁹ His team reported no clear signs of human-to-human transmission, though more than half a dozen doctors already were ill.⁴⁰
 - On March 15, Wang wrote on social media that he “always suspected it was human-to-human transmissible.”⁴¹

³¹ Donald G. McNeil Jr. and Zolan Kanno-Youngs, “C.D.C. and W.H.O. Offers to Help China Have Been Ignored for Weeks,” *New York Times*, February 7, 2020.

³² “China didn’t warn public of likely pandemic for 6 key days,” *The Associated Press*, April 15, 2020.

³³ Natasha Khan, “New Virus Discovered by Chinese Scientists Investigating Pneumonia Outbreak,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 7, 2020.

³⁴ Jane Qiu, “How’s China’s ‘Bat Woman’ Hunted Down Viruses from SARS to the New Coronavirus,” *Scientific American*, March 11, 2020.

³⁵ Jeremy Page et al., “How It All Started: China’s Early Coronavirus Missteps,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 6, 2020.

³⁶ Dennis Normile, et al., “Scientists urge China to quickly share data on virus linked to pneumonia outbreak,” *Science*, January 9, 2020.

³⁷ WHO Statement Regarding Cluster of Pneumonia Cases in Wuhan, China, January 9, 2020.

³⁸ Lisa Schnirring, “Pressure builds on China to share info on new coronavirus,” *CIDRAP*, January 10, 2020.

³⁹ Li Yuan, “China silences critics over deadly virus outbreak,” *New York Times*, January 25, 2020.

⁴⁰ “China didn’t warn public of likely pandemic for 6 key days,” *The Associated Press*, April 15, 2020.

⁴¹ “China didn’t warn public of likely pandemic for 6 key days,” *The Associated Press*, April 15, 2020.

January 11

- Hong Kong's secretary for food and health announces, "According to the mainland authorities, there is no evidence of human to human transmission and there is also no healthcare professional being infected. . . . Also of note is after the closure of the concerned market in Wuhan, there is no new case since January 3."⁴²
- Having provided the genomic sequence of the virus to national authorities on January 5 and seen no action from them, Shanghai Public Health Clinical Centre Professor Zhang Yongzhen publishes the data on virological.org and GenBank, allowing teams around the world to begin work on testing methods.⁴³

January 12

- Professor Zhang Yongzhen's lab in Shanghai is closed by authorities for "rectification," one day after it shared genomic sequence data with the world for the first time.⁴⁴ "The closure has greatly affected the scientists and their research when they should be racing against the clock to find the means to help put the novel coronavirus outbreak under control," a lab source says.⁴⁵
- With the private Shanghai lab having already gone public, the PRC government's National Health Commission shares virus genomic information with the WHO for the first time.⁴⁶

January 13

- First coronavirus case outside of China is reported in Bangkok when a 61-year-old woman from Wuhan tests positive four days after landing with a fever at the airport.⁴⁷ The patient began exhibiting symptoms (fever, chills, sore throat, headache) three days before leaving Wuhan.⁴⁸

January 14

- In a confidential teleconference with provincial health officials, PRC National Health Commission chief Ma Xiaowei reportedly warns that the novel virus is "the most severe challenge since SARS in 2003, and is likely to develop into a major public health event," adding that "clustered cases suggest that human-to-human transmission is possible." Citing the case reported in Thailand the day prior, Ma warns of spread overseas and during China's coming Lunar New Year festivities. It would be another six days before any of these official concerns are made public.⁴⁹
- The chief of the WHO emerging diseases unit reports that "it is possible that there is limited human-to-human transmission, potentially among families, but it is very clear right now that we have no sustained human-to-human transmission."⁵⁰
- Official WHO twitter page announces: "Preliminary investigations conducted by the Chinese authorities have found no clear evidence of human-to-human transmission of the novel #coronavirus (2019-nCoV) identified in #Wuhan, #China."⁵¹ This is more than five weeks after the first evidence of human-to-human transmission in Wuhan.

⁴² David Webb tweet citing Hong Kong press archives, March 20, 2020 (<https://twitter.com/webbhk/status/1240897837501542401>).

⁴³ Zhuang Pinghui, "Chinese laboratory that first shared coronavirus genome with world ordered to close for 'rectification', hindering its Covid-19 research," South China Morning Post, Feb. 28, 2020.

⁴⁴ Zhuang Pinghui, "Chinese laboratory that first shared coronavirus genome with world ordered to close for 'rectification', hindering its Covid-19 research," South China Morning Post, Feb. 28, 2020.

⁴⁵ Zhuang Pinghui, "Shanghai lab first to publish the coronavirus genome ordered shut," Inkstone News, March 2, 2020.

⁴⁶ Gao Yu et al., "In Depth: How Early Signs of a SARS-Like Virus Were Spotted, Spread, and Throttled," *Caixin Global*, February 29, 2020.

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Cheung, "Wuhan pneumonia: Thailand confirms first case outside of China," South China Morning Post, January 13, 2020.

⁴⁸ "Novel Coronavirus – Thailand (ex-China)," WHO, January 14, 2020.

⁴⁹ "China didn't warn public of likely pandemic for 6 key days," The Associated Press, April 15, 2020.

⁵⁰ Stephanie Nebehay, "WHO says new China coronavirus could spread, warns hospitals worldwide," Reuters, January 14, 2020.

⁵¹ WHO tweet, January 14, 2020, 6:18am ET (<https://twitter.com/WHO/status/1217043229427761152>).

- Plainclothes police detain journalists trying to report from Wuhan's Jinyintan Hospital and force them to delete their TV footage and hand in phones and cameras for inspection.⁵²

January 15

- A day after the confidential teleconference, China's CDC initiates the highest-level emergency response internally and the National Health Commission distributes 63 pages of instructions to provinces on identifying cases and equipping doctors with protective gear. These instructions are marked "internal," "not to be spread on the internet," and "not to be publicly disclosed."⁵³
- Li Qun, head of the Chinese CDC's emergency center, plays down the human-to-human transmission threat on state television: "After careful screening and prudent judgment, we have reached the latest understanding that the risk of human-to-human transmission is low."⁵⁴
- The patient who becomes the first confirmed U.S. case leaves Wuhan and arrives in the U.S., carrying the coronavirus.⁵⁵

January 18

- Wuhan Municipal Health Commission announces new cases of the virus for the first time since before January 5.⁵⁶ The announcement comes after the close of the five-day meeting of Wuhan's Communist Party-controlled People's Congress, during which officials made daily claims of no new cases, no human-human transmission, and no infected medical workers.⁵⁷
- Wuhan hosts mass "potluck" banquet of 40,000 families in attempt to break world record.⁵⁸

January 20

- PRC state media publish first public remarks from Xi Jinping about the virus, ordering officials to contain it.⁵⁹
- Dr. Zhong Nanshan, a leading authority on respiratory health well-known for his role in fighting SARS, confirms in a TV interview that the disease is spreading from person-to-person, a fact first identified by doctors in Wuhan in December.⁶⁰ He later said that if the government had taken action earlier, in December or even early January, "the number of sick would have been greatly reduced."⁶¹

January 21

- WHO delegation concludes a two-day field visit to Wuhan, notes that "Data collected through detailed epidemiological investigation and through the deployment of the new test kit nationally suggests that human-to-human transmission is taking place in Wuhan."⁶²

January 22

⁵² Ashley Collman, "China spent the crucial first days of the Wuhan coronavirus outbreak arresting people who posted about it online and threatening journalists," *Business Insider*, January 24, 2020. Also Li Yuan, "China silences critics over deadly virus outbreak," *New York Times*, January 25, 2020.

⁵³ "China didn't warn public of likely pandemic for 6 key days," *The Associated Press*, April 15, 2020.

⁵⁴ Jeremy Page et al., "How It All Started: China's Early Coronavirus Missteps," *Wall Street Journal*, March 6, 2020.

⁵⁵ "First Travel-related Case of 2019 Novel Coronavirus Detected in United States," U.S. CDC, January 21, 2020.

⁵⁶ Jeremy Page et al., "How It All Started: China's Early Coronavirus Missteps," *Wall Street Journal*, March 6, 2020.

⁵⁷ Amy Qin, "China's Leader, Under Fire, Says He Led Coronavirus Fight Early On," *New York Times*, Feb. 15, 2020.

⁵⁸ Li Yuan, "China silences critics over deadly virus outbreak," *New York Times*, January 25, 2020.

⁵⁹ Jeremy Page et al., "How It All Started: China's Early Coronavirus Missteps," *Wall Street Journal*, March 6, 2020.

⁶⁰ Gao Yu, "In Depth: How Early Signs of a SARS-Like Virus Were Spotted, Spread, and Throttled," *Caixin Global*, February 29, 2020.

⁶¹ Jeremy Page et al., "How It All Started: China's Early Coronavirus Missteps," *Wall Street Journal*, March 6, 2020.

⁶² "Mission summary: WHO Field Visit to Wuhan, China 20-21 January 2020," WHO, January 22, 2020.

- WHO holds emergency committee meeting, decides not to declare the novel coronavirus a “public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC).” WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus says afterward that declaring a PHEIC is a decision he takes “extremely seriously” and is “only prepared to make with appropriate consideration of all the evidence.”⁶³ As usual, Taiwan and its reporting was excluded from the deliberations of the committee.

January 23

- Chinese authorities lock down Wuhan, after letting some five million people leave the city without screening in the weeks prior, amid the growing outbreak.⁶⁴
 - NYT estimates seven million people left between Jan. 1 and Jan. 23. Before the lockdown, some 900 people flew from Wuhan to New York City per month on average, while some 2,200 flew to Sydney and 15,000 to Bangkok (site of the first overseas case of the novel coronavirus in mid-January). Some 85% of infected travelers went undetected.⁶⁵

January 24

- Officials in Beijing prevent the Wuhan Institute of Virology from sharing sample isolates of the novel coronavirus with the University of Texas biocontainment lab, overruling an initial agreement by the Wuhan lab to share these samples.⁶⁶
- The Lancet publishes a study noting that the first novel coronavirus case in Wuhan had no connection to the Huanan seafood market.⁶⁷

January 26

- Major General Chen Wei, the Chinese military’s top epidemiologist and virologist, assumes a senior position at the Wuhan Institute of Virology overseeing coronavirus vaccine research.⁶⁸

January 27

- Wuhan Mayor Zhou Xianwang says that rules imposed by Beijing limited what he could disclose about the threat posed by the virus: “As a local government official, after I get this kind of information I still have to wait for authorization before I can release it.”⁶⁹

January 28

- WHO Director-General Tedros visits Beijing and meets with Xi Jinping and other senior officials. “The two sides agreed that WHO will send international experts to visit China as soon as possible,” said the WHO afterward, adding that “the WHO delegation highly appreciated the actions China has implemented in response to the outbreak, its speed in identifying the virus and openness to sharing information with WHO and other countries.”⁷⁰

January 30

⁶³ Robert Delaney, “China coronavirus: World Health Organization delays declaring virus’ spread an international emergency,” January 22, 2020.

⁶⁴ Jeremy Page et al., “How It All Started: China’s Early Coronavirus Missteps,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 6, 2020.

⁶⁵ Jin Wu et al., “How the Virus Got Out,” *The New York Times*, March 22, 2020.

⁶⁶ Yasmeen Abutaleb et al., “The U.S. was beset by denial and dysfunction as the coronavirus raged,” *Washington Post*, April 4, 2020.

⁶⁷ Chaolin Huang et al., “Clinical features of patients infected with 2019 novel coronavirus in Wuhan, China,” *The Lancet*, Feb. 15, 2020.

⁶⁸ Anna Fifield, “‘Wolf Warrior’ strives to make China first with coronavirus vaccine,” *Washington Post*, March 22, 2020. Also Minnie Chan and William Zheng, “Meet the major general on China’s coronavirus scientific front line,” *South China Morning Post*, March 3, 2020.

⁶⁹ Josh Chin, “Wuhan Mayor Says Beijing Rules Partially Responsible for Lack of Transparency,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 27, 2020.

⁷⁰ “WHO, China leaders discuss next steps in battle against coronavirus outbreak,” WHO, January 28, 2020.

- WHO declares a public-health emergency of international concern (PHEIC), after nearly 10,000 cases of the virus are confirmed,⁷¹ including in at least 18 countries outside of China.⁷² WHO special committee states that it “does not recommend any travel or trade restriction based on the current information available.”⁷³

January 31

- U.S. shuts down entry from China for non-Americans. By this time, outbreaks were already growing in at least 30 cities across 26 countries.⁷⁴
- PRC state media criticize the U.S. travel advisory urging citizens not to travel to China due to health concerns. PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs claims the U.S. action is “certainly not a gesture of goodwill.”⁷⁵
- Acclaimed author and Wuhan resident Fang Fang writes online, “How many people have died in Wuhan and their families destroyed? . . . But so far not a single person has said sorry or taken responsibility. I’ve even seen a writer use the phrase ‘complete victory’. What are they talking about?” Her “Wuhan Diary” writings become an increasing target of scorn online, backed by state media outlets, in a campaign she says recalls the Cultural Revolution.⁷⁶

February 1

- Referring to travel restrictions, PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi tells his Indian counterpart that China “opposes certain countries’ actions that are creating tension and causing panic.”⁷⁷

February 3

- WHO chief Tedros calls on countries not to take measures that “unnecessarily interfere with international travel and trade,” calling the spread outside of China “minimal and slow.”⁷⁸ He adds, “The chances of getting this going to anywhere outside China is very low, and even in China, when you go to other provinces, it’s very low.” These statements are amplified in PRC state media.⁷⁹

February 6

- China’s internet watchdog tightens controls on social media platforms following Xi Jinping directive to strengthen online media control to maintain social stability.⁸⁰
- Citizen journalist and former rights lawyer Chen Qiushi disappears in Wuhan after posting mobile-phone videos of packed hospitals and distraught families.⁸¹
- Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Qin Gang meets with Italy’s ambassador to China and “requires” Italy to suspend its decision cancelling direct flights between Italy and China. PRC press release

⁷¹ Lanhee Chen, “Lost in Beijing: The Story of the WHO,” *The Wall Street Journal*, April 8, 2020.

⁷² Wilfred Chan, “The WHO Ignores Taiwan. The World Pays the Price,” *The Nation*, April 3, 2020.

⁷³ “Statement on the second meeting of the International Health Regulations (2005) Emergency Committee regarding the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV),” WHO, January 30, 2020.

⁷⁴ Jin Wu et al., “How the Virus Got Out,” *The New York Times*, March 22, 2020.

⁷⁵ “China criticizes ‘unfriendly US comments’ amid fight against novel coronavirus epidemic,” *Xinhua*, Feb. 1, 2020.

⁷⁶ Helen Davidson, “Chinese writer faces online backlash over Wuhan lockdown diary,” *The Guardian*, April 10, 2020 and Cao Siqi, “Wuhan diary writer escalates online spat, wears out dwindling fans,” *Global Times* (PRC state media), April 23, 2020.

⁷⁷ “China opposes some countries’ actions that create tension and panic,” *CGTN*, Feb. 1, 2020.

⁷⁸ Stephanie Nebehay, “WHO chief says widespread travel bans not necessary to beat China virus,” *Reuters*, February 3, 2020.

⁷⁹ Ai Heping and Bo Leung, “WHO chief holds to line against travel bans,” *Xinhua*, February 5, 2020.

⁸⁰ Iris Deng, “Coronavirus: China tightens social media censorship amid outbreak,” *South China Morning Post*, February 6, 2020. Also Kristin Huang, “China tires to contain outbreak of freedom of speech, closing critics’ WeChat accounts,” *SCMP*, February 26, 2020.

⁸¹ Vivian Wang, “They Documented the Coronavirus Crisis in Wuhan. Then They Vanished,” *New York Times*, February 14, 2020.

states that Beijing "is strongly dissatisfied with the overreaction and restrictions of the Italian side" and claims that Italy agreed to resume some flights.⁸²

- Researchers from South China University of Technology publish a study concluding that "the killer coronavirus probably originated from a laboratory in Wuhan. Safety level may need to be reinforced in high risk biohazardous laboratories."⁸³
 - The paper is soon withdrawn because it "was not supported by direct proofs," according to author Botao Xiao.⁸⁴
 - "No scientists have confirmed or refuted the paper's findings," scholar Yanzhong Huang wrote on March 5.⁸⁵
- The leaders of the U.S. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine write to the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy on the importance of information-sharing and transparency "for managing the 2019-nCoV outbreak and for preventing future outbreaks." "Samples collected as early as possible in the outbreak in Wuhan and samples from wildlife would be particularly valuable," they write, adding that the president of the Chinese Academy of Sciences has indicated that the Wuhan National Biosafety Laboratory "is willing to share isolates of the 2019 nCov with the international community."⁸⁶ This transfer apparently never happened.

February 7

- Dr. Li Wenliang dies of the novel coronavirus contracted from a patient, five weeks after his police detention for trying to alert fellow doctors to the outbreak. His death triggers an outpouring of grief and anger at Chinese authorities.⁸⁷

February 9

- Citizen journalist and local businessman Fang Bin disappears after posting videos from Wuhan that circulated widely on Chinese social media.⁸⁸

February 13

- Xi Jinping fires the Communist Party chiefs of Hubei Province and Wuhan, replacing both with proteges of his with extensive backgrounds in public security.⁸⁹

February 15

- PRC state media publishes a speech, said to have been delivered by Xi Jinping to party leaders on Feb. 3, saying he had been leading the fight against the virus "at every moment" since Jan. 7. His first public comments on the epidemic had been Jan. 20.⁹⁰
- Xi's published speech also urges tightened control over online discussion and increased policing to ensure "positive energy" and social stability.⁹¹

⁸² "Vice Foreign Minister Qin Gang Requires the Italian Side to Suspend the Decision to Cancel Direct Flights Between Italy and China; The Italian Side Agrees to Resume Some Commercial Flights," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, Feb. 7, 2020.

⁸³ Botao Xiao and Lei Xiao, "The possible origins of 2019-nCoV coronavirus," ResearchGate, Feb. 6, 2020.

⁸⁴ James Areddy, "Coronavirus Epidemic Draws Scrutiny to Labs Handling Deadly Pathogens," The Wall Street Journal, March 5, 2020.

⁸⁵ Yanzhong Huang, "U.S.-Chinese Distrust Is Inviting Dangerous Coronavirus Conspiracy Theories," Foreign Affairs, March 5, 2020.

⁸⁶ Marcia McNutt, John L. Anderson and Victor J. Dzau to Kelvin Droegemeier, February 6, 2020.

<https://www.nationalacademies.org/news/2020/02/national-academies-provide-rapid-response-to-white-house-on-coronavirus-data-needs#>.

⁸⁷ Jeremy Page et al., "How It All Started: China's Early Coronavirus Missteps," Wall Street Journal, March 6, 2020.

⁸⁸ Vivian Wang, "They Documented the Coronavirus Crisis in Wuhan. Then They Vanished," New York Times, February 14, 2020.

⁸⁹ Steven Lee Myers, "China Ousts 2 Party Officials Amid Outrage About Coronavirus Response," New York Times, February 13, 2020.

⁹⁰ Amy Qin, "China's Leader, Under Fire, Says He Led Coronavirus Fight Early On," New York Times, Feb. 15, 2020.

⁹¹ "China's Xi urges more policing as virus toll rises," AFP, February 15, 2020.

- Activist Xu Zhiyong arrested after nearly two months on the run, and after publishing a Feb. 4 essay calling on Xi Jinping to step down for suppressing information about the virus.⁹²
- Finance magazine Barron's finds that China's official coronavirus data fit a near-perfect model that is almost impossible to naturally occur, as the number of cumulative deaths reported could be predicted by a simple mathematical formula to a 99.99% accuracy.⁹³

February 16

- The Wuhan Institute of Virology issues a public denial that its former researcher Huang Yanling is "patient zero," as speculated on Chinese social media based on the disappearance of Huang's biographical information from the Institute's website and Huang's unknown whereabouts.⁹⁴
- Institute researcher Shi Zhengli writes on social media that she "guaranteed with her own life" that the outbreak was unrelated to the lab. She instructs "those who believe and spread malicious media rumors to close their stinky mouths."⁹⁵
 - [In 2004, China suffered a SARS outbreak due to a lab leak that killed one person and infected nine. PRC authorities blamed negligence and punished five senior officials at the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention.⁹⁶]
- Tsinghua University Professor Xu Zhangrun is placed under house arrest, barred from social media, and cut off from the Internet after publishing an essay declaring that "The coronavirus epidemic has revealed the rotten core of Chinese governance."⁹⁷
- A group of 12 WHO officials and 13 PRC officials begin a nine-day "WHO-China Joint Mission on Coronavirus Disease 2019," led by Canadian Bruce Aylward of WHO and Wannian Liang of the PRC National Health Commission.⁹⁸

February 17

- PRC ambassador Cheng Jingye publicly pressures Australia to ease travel restrictions, saying: "We have expressed our strong wish and hope that the Australian government in their review will take a balanced approach and remove these harsh restrictions."⁹⁹

February 19

- Beijing revokes press credentials of three *Wall Street Journal* reporters who had widely covered the outbreak, including one that was reporting from Wuhan.¹⁰⁰

February 20

- At a meeting with ASEAN foreign ministers, PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi pressures countries to ease travel restrictions, saying: "In light of the conditions on the ground, countries need to resume people-to-people ties and cooperation."¹⁰¹

February 23

⁹² Emily Feng, "Rights Activist Xu Zhiyong Arrested in China Amid Crackdown on Dissent," NPR, February 17, 2020.

⁹³ Lisa Beifuss, "China's Coronavirus Figures Don't Add Up. 'This Never Happens With Real Data,'" Barron's, Feb. 15, 2020.

⁹⁴ Jun Mai, "Chinese research lab denies rumours of links to first coronavirus patient," South China Morning Post, February 16, 2020.

⁹⁵ James T. Aredy, "China Bat Expert Says Her Wuhan Lab Wasn't Source of New Coronavirus," The Wall Street Journal, April 21, 2020.

⁹⁶ Jun Mai, "Chinese research lab denies rumours of links to first coronavirus patient," South China Morning Post, February 16, 2020.

⁹⁷ Verna Yu and Emma Graham-Harrison, "'This may be the last piece I write': Prominent Xi critic has Internet cut after house arrest," The Guardian, February 16, 2020.

⁹⁸ "Report of the WHO-China Joint Mission on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), 16-24 Feb 2020," Feb. 28, 2020.

⁹⁹ "Coronavirus: Beijing urges Australia to ease travel ban on China travelers," Reuters, February 17, 2020.

¹⁰⁰ "China Expels Three Wall Street Journal Reporters," *Wall Street Journal*, February 19, 2020.

¹⁰¹ Dewey Sim, "Coronavirus: China's top diplomat Wang Yi urges world to resume links with Beijing, says it's taken 'forceful action,'" South China Morning Post, Feb. 20, 2020.

- Xi Jinping delivers speech to PRC officials calling virus “a crisis for us and also a major test.” He stresses “social stability” and states that “the effectiveness of the prevention and control work has once again demonstrated the significant advantages of the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the socialist system with Chinese characteristics.”¹⁰²

February 26

- Citizen journalist Li Zehua, who quit his job at state broadcaster CCTV to report independently from Wuhan, is detained and disappears. With security officers at his door, Li records a video testament to free speech, truth, and the memory of the Tiananmen movement.¹⁰³

February 28

- The WHO-China Joint Mission on Coronavirus Disease 2019 publishes its report after a “huge back and forth” between PRC and non-PRC officials over wording. PRC officials refused to call the virus “dangerous” or include reference to a possible “second wave” of infections (preferring “resurgence” instead).¹⁰⁴

February 29

- WHO announces that it “continues to advise against the application of travel or trade restrictions to countries experiencing COVID-19 outbreaks.”¹⁰⁵

March 3

- WHO chief Tedros plays down the risk of asymptomatic silent carriers, citing official PRC data: “COVID-19 does not transmit as efficiently as influenza, from the data we have so far. With influenza, people who are infected but not yet sick are major drivers of transmission, which does not appear to be the case for COVID-19. Evidence from China is that only 1% of reported cases do not have symptoms, and most of those cases develop symptoms within two days.”¹⁰⁶ Later reports cited classified PRC data showing up to 33% of cases were asymptomatic (see March 22).

March 6

- Wuhan residents shout from windows “It’s all lies!” as senior official Sun Chunlan visits. After this goes viral on Chinese social media, PRC state media doctor and re-distribute the footage to claim that only one person had yelled this.

March 11

- WHO declares the novel coronavirus a “pandemic,” after the official worldwide case count is 118,000 people in 114 countries.¹⁰⁷
- Researchers at the University of Southampton (UK) estimate that had Beijing owned up to the coronavirus outbreak and responded with significant measures just one week before it did, 66% of cases could have been avoided, and had Beijing responded three weeks sooner, 95% could have been avoided.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² William Zheng, “Coronavirus is China’s fastest-spreading public health crisis, President Xi Jinping says,” *South China Morning Post*, Feb. 23, 2020.

¹⁰³ “Opening the Door,” China Media Project, February 28, 2020. See also Lily Kuo, “‘They’re chasing me’: The journalist who wouldn’t stay quiet on Covid-19,” *The Guardian*, March 1, 2020.

¹⁰⁴ “Taiwan says WHO failed to act on coronavirus transmission warning,” *Financial Times*, March 19, 2020.

¹⁰⁵ “Updated WHO recommendations for international traffic in relation to COVID-19 outbreak,” WHO, February 29, 2020.

¹⁰⁶ “WHO Director General’s opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 – 3 March 2020,” WHO, March 3, 2020.

¹⁰⁷ Lanhee Chen, “Lost in Beijing: The Story of the WHO,” *The Wall Street Journal*, April 8, 2020.

¹⁰⁸ Shengjie Lai, “Early and Combined Interventions Crucial in Talking Covid-19 Spread in China,” University of Southampton, March 11, 2020.

March 14

- Entrepreneur and activist Ren Zhiqiang disappears in Beijing after criticizing Xi Jinping's coronavirus response.¹⁰⁹ PRC officials announce a corruption investigation into Ren on April 7.¹¹⁰

March 22

- Reports emerge of classified PRC government data showing a far higher rate of asymptomatic illness in China than previously disclosed. Per South China Morning Post, the classified data show some 43,000 people in China tested positive without symptoms by the end of February, representing one-third of cases. But PRC officials excluded these cases from their public count. When epidemiologists from the Chinese CDC published a paper on Feb. 24, they cited only 889 asymptomatic patients out of 44,672 confirmed cases as of Feb. 11, a rate of only 2%.¹¹¹
- Experts worldwide call for expanded testing and greater transparency regarding asymptomatic "silent carriers," as evidence mounts from countries such as Iceland that as many as 50% of positive cases may be asymptomatic.¹¹²

March 26

- China bars entry of all foreigners in attempt to limit virus spread.¹¹³ This measure is harsher than the travel restrictions of other countries that Beijing had criticized just weeks before.

March 27

- Photographs and reports surface of many thousands of urns at Wuhan funeral homes, raising doubts about government claims that the virus caused only about 2,500 deaths in Wuhan and 3,200 in China.¹¹⁴ Local Wuhan social media users estimate, based on the daily capacity of incinerators, that more than 40,000 may have died there.¹¹⁵

March 31

- Chinese National Health Commission announces for the first time that it excluded from its national tally people who had the virus but without symptoms, and that as of April 1 it would begin including these in the tally "in order to respond to society's concern in a timely manner."¹¹⁶

April 3

- While lifting lockdown restrictions in Wuhan, officials limit funerals of those who died from the coronavirus, suppress online discussions of fatalities, scrub images of funeral homes from social media, assign minders to families in mourning, and face questions from families such as why it took the government weeks to inform the public that the virus could spread among humans.¹¹⁷

¹⁰⁹ Javier C. Hernandez, "Chinese Tycoon Who Criticized Xi's Response to Coronavirus Has Vanished," *New York Times*, March 14, 2020.

¹¹⁰ Javier C. Hernandez, "China Investigates Critic of Xi's Coronavirus Response," *New York Times*, April 7, 2020.

¹¹¹ Josephine Ma et al., "A third of coronavirus cases may be 'silent carriers,' classified Chinese data suggests," *South China Morning Post*, March 22, 2020.

¹¹² Jason Gale, "Coronavirus Cases Without Symptoms Spur Call for Wider Tests," *Bloomberg*, March 22, 2020.

¹¹³ Doug Palmer, "China closes border to foreign travelers," *Politico*, March 26, 2020.

¹¹⁴ "Urn in Wuhan Prompt New Questions of Virus's Toll," *Bloomberg News*, March 27, 2020.

¹¹⁵ "Estimates Show Wuhan Death Toll Far Higher Than Official Figure," *Radio Free Asia*, March 27, 2020.

¹¹⁶ Chong Koh Ping, "China's Coronavirus Count Excluded Infected People With No Symptoms," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 31, 2020.

¹¹⁷ Amy Qin and Cao Li, "China Pushes for Quiet Burials as Coronavirus Death Toll is Questioned," *New York Times*, April 3, 2020.

- China's Ministry of Science and Technology announces that ongoing clinical research on the coronavirus must be reported to authorities within three days or be halted.¹¹⁸

April 7

- Human rights activists report, citing public records alone, that Chinese police punished nearly 900 people for online speech or information-sharing about the virus over three months.¹¹⁹

April 11

- Chinese universities publish online—and then apparently delete—new guidelines stating that academic papers on the origin of the novel coronavirus can be published only with the approval of the Ministry of Science and Technology.¹²⁰

April 17

- Wuhan raises its official tally of Covid-19 fatalities by 1,290, to nearly 3,900, blaming the initial undercount on cases unrecognized, untreated, or underreported by overstressed hospitals.¹²¹

April 18

- Yuan Zhiming, vice director of the Wuhan Institute of Virology and director of the Wuhan National Biosafety Laboratory, tells state broadcaster CGTN, "There is absolutely no way that the virus originated from our institute. . . . I hope such a conspiracy theory will not affect cooperation among scientists around the world."¹²²

April 21

- A study published in the *Lancet* by researchers from Hong Kong estimates that China might have had tens of thousands more coronavirus cases than officials have disclosed.¹²³

April 22

- Citizen journalist Li Zehua surfaces for the first time since February, saying that his detention included a quarantine in Wuhan and another in his hometown, after which he was reunited with his family. He says in a video: "During the whole process, the police enforced law in a civilised manner, ensured my rest time and food. They also cared about me very much. . . . I'm grateful to all the people who looked after me and cared about me. I wish all people suffering the epidemic can pull through. God bless China. I wish the world can unite together."¹²⁴

April 24

- Under pressure from Beijing, the European Union softens a published report on Covid-19 disinformation. The final text removed a draft reference to Beijing's "global disinformation" campaign and struck mention of the diplomatic dispute between China and France over Chinese PPE exports and the aggressive rhetoric of China's ambassador in Paris.¹²⁵

¹¹⁸ Stephanie Kirchgaessner et al, "China clamping down on coronavirus research, deleted pages suggest," *The Guardian*, April 11, 2020.

¹¹⁹ Sophia Yan, "Inside Wuhan as city at heart of coronavirus outbreak tries to return to normal," *Daily Telegraph*, April 7, 2020.

¹²⁰ Stephanie Kirchgaessner et al, "China clamping down on coronavirus research, deleted pages suggest," *The Guardian*, April 11, 2020.

¹²¹ "Chinese epicenter Wuhan raises number of virus cases by 1,290," *Associated Press*, April 17, 2020.

¹²² "Wuhan Lab Denies Any Link to First Coronavirus Outbreak," *Bloomberg News*, April 20, 2020.

¹²³ Tim K. Tsang et al., "Effect of changing case definitions for COVID-19 on the epidemic curve and transmission parameters in mainland China: a modelling study," *Lancet*, April 21, 2020.

¹²⁴ "Li Zehua: Journalist who 'disappeared' after Wuhan chase reappears," *BBC*, April 23, 2020.

¹²⁵ Matt Apuzzo, "Pressured by China, E.U. Softens Report on Covid-19 Disinformation," *New York Times*, April 24, 2020.

April 25

- SCMP reports Chinese police have detained three Beijing residents (Cai Wei, a woman surnamed Tang, and Chen Mei) who helped publish articles about Covid-19 on open-source website Github that were previously censored from mainstream PRC media and social media, including material about Wuhan doctor Ai Fen.¹²⁶

April 27

- PRC ambassador to Australia Cheng Jingye threatens economic harm if Australia continues pushing for an independent investigation into the coronavirus. "Maybe the ordinary [Chinese] people will say 'Why should we drink Australian wine? Eat Australian beef?'," Cheng said, also citing the tourism and higher-education sectors. Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne answered: "We reject any suggestion that economic coercion is an appropriate response to a call for such an assessment, when what we need is global cooperation."¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Phoebe Zhang, "Chinese activists detained after sharing censored coronavirus articles on crowdsourcing site Github," South China Morning Post, April 25, 2020.

¹²⁷ Kirsty Needham, "Australia rejects Chinese 'economic coercion' threat amid planned coronavirus probe," Reuters, April 27, 2020.