

1 **COVID-19-like illness in Mojiang miners (2012) and the mine**  
2 **could provide important clues to the origin of SARS-CoV-2**

3

4 Monali C. Rahalkar\*<sup>1</sup> and Rahul A. Bahulikar<sup>2</sup>

5

6 <sup>1</sup>C2, Bioenergy group, MACS Agharkar Research Institute, G.G. Agarkar Road, Pune 411004,  
7 Maharashtra, India

8 <sup>2</sup>BAIF Development Research Foundation, Central Research Station, Urulikanchan, Pune 412202

9 \*Corresponding author: [monalirahalkar@aripune.org](mailto:monalirahalkar@aripune.org)

10 **Running Title:** Links of Mojiang mineshaft pneumonia to COVID-19

11 **One line summary:** COVID-19-like illness in Mojiang miners and the mine could provide an  
12 important link to the origin of SARS-CoV-2.

13 **(Manuscript in review)**

14 **Abstract**

15 There is currently a lack of information regarding the precise origin of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The  
16 nearest genomic relative to SARS-CoV-2 was reported in February to be a bat virus RaTG13. The  
17 sequence RaTG13 (CoV/4991) is in fact derived from a sample originally collected from a mineshaft  
18 in Mojiang, Yunnan in July 2013. The reason for the coronavirus surveillance in this bat population  
19 was an outbreak of lethal pneumonia in six miners in 2012. Three of the miners succumbed to the  
20 infection. A medical student's Masters thesis from Kunming Medical University describes clearly the  
21 miners' conditions, the details of which upon review show a striking resemblance to COVID-19. The  
22 similarities were in terms of bilateral pneumonia, thrombotic complications, and secondary infections.  
23 The treatment was a combination of antivirals, steroids, anti-thrombotic, and antibiotics are similar to  
24 what is given for COVID-19. This thesis also confirms that samples from these miners were sent to  
25 WIV. However, no report of any viruses recovered from these miners exists. This single mine was  
26 visited multiple times between 2012 and 2013 by researchers representing three institutes and the bat  
27 virus samples were collected and used for at least eight reports. The similarities between the 2012  
28 illness in Mojiang miners and COVID-19, the subsequent sampling of the bats by various labs, and  
29 finding the SARS-CoV-2 nearest relative from this single mine in Mojiang warrants further  
30 investigation into the full history of this incident.

31 **Key Words:** Mojiang mineshaft; pneumonia; miners; COVID-19; SARS-CoV-2; origin; ancestor

32

### 33 **The Nature and Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

34 COVID-19 is a contagious respiratory illness that emerged in late 2019 in Wuhan, a city of 10 million  
35 inhabitants located in the Hubei Province of central China. It became an epidemic there, leading to a  
36 public health emergency. It soon turned into a global pandemic affecting more than 23 million people  
37 with a death toll of 0.8 million affecting 188 countries and territories.

### 38 **The closest kin of SARS-CoV-2 is RaTG13, is the same virus referred as CoV/4991**

39 The causative agent for COVID-19 is a novel coronavirus (CoV) designated SARS-CoV2 [1] in  
40 recognition of its phylogenetic relationship to SARS, another CoV which caused a smaller-scale  
41 pandemic of respiratory disease in the 2002-2003 timeframe. Phylogenetic analysis places SARS-  
42 CoV-2 within the clade of SARS-like CoV at the whole-genome level [1; 2]. The publication by  
43 Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) which first described SARS-CoV-2 mentioned that the closest  
44 relative of it was a betacoronavirus derived from a bat fecal swab, named as RaTG13 (MN996532.1),  
45 showing 96.2% nucleotide identity to SARS-CoV-2 [1]. RaTG13 was mentioned to be collected from  
46 *Rhinoplohus affinis*, an intermediate horseshoe bat from the Yunnan province. The horseshoe bats  
47 usually inhabit the Yunnan Province in China's southern sub-tropical zone [3]. Although the WIV  
48 publication described RaTG13 as the closest relative of SARS-CoV-2, a paper by another lab from  
49 Wuhan published during the same time (2/3rd February) [2], stated that the RdRp region of SARS-  
50 CoV2 showed 98.7% similarity to a beta coronavirus named as CoV/4991 (KP876546). After blast  
51 analysis, we found that the 370 bases RdRp region of CoV/4991 and RaTG13 were the same. Also,  
52 there were other preprints e.g. [4] which reflected that the scientific community largely questioned that  
53 RaTG13 and CoV/4991 represented the same virus or sample [5]. On 24<sup>th</sup> July 2020, in a recent  
54 question and answer article, the principal bat coronavirus scientist from WIV, Zheng-Li Shi clarified  
55 that RaTG13 and CoV/4991 indeed represented the same fecal swab collected from a mineshaft in  
56 Tongguan, Mojiang, Yunnan [6].

57 **RaTG13 (CoV/4991) recovered during surveillance of bat coronaviruses in Mojiang mineshaft**  
58 **where lethal pneumonia cases occurred**

59 After finding out that RaTG13 and CoV/4991 might represent the same sample, it was noted that  
60 CoV/4991 was a betacoronavirus from a bat fecal sample from an abandoned mineshaft in Yunnan[7].  
61 As per the reference for CoV/4991 [7], surveillance of the bat coronaviruses was conducted in 2012-  
62 2013, in an abandoned mineshaft in Mojiang, Yunnan province, China by Zheng-Li Shi and her  
63 coworkers. In total, four trips were done over a year (2012-2013), and 150 alphacoronaviruses and  
64 only two betacoronaviruses, of which only one SARS-related Lineage B coronavirus (CoV/4991) were  
65 detected from a 2013 sample [7]. A high prevalence of coronaviruses was found in the mineshaft and  
66 also higher numbers of the horseshoe bats were observed. Though this study [7] is interesting with  
67 respect to the coronavirus diversity and prevalence it does not mention the reason why this  
68 longitudinal surveillance was conducted. During the interview of Zheng-Li Shi by Jane Qiu published  
69 in Scientific American, [3] a mineshaft in Yunnan was mentioned in the context of fatal pneumonia  
70 which affected six mine workers of which three died. Zheng-Li Shi also mentioned that they were  
71 asked to do surveillance in a mineshaft in Mojiang and found a high prevalence of coronaviruses in the  
72 bat species studied there. A Science article also described this incident about pneumonia in miners  
73 which was caused by probably an unknown virus [8].

74 **Lethal pneumonia occurred in miners working in the Mojiang mineshaft (2012)**

75 A lethal pneumonia-like illness occurred in six miners who were cleaning the bat feces from a copper  
76 mineshaft in Mojiang, Yunnan, in 2012 [3; 8]. Three of the miners died due to pneumonia and  
77 complications and three survived. In a preprint published on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2020, we documented the link  
78 that the same mineshaft in Mojiang, Yunnan which was surveyed for bat coronaviruses [7] was linked  
79 to the fatal pneumonia cases in six miners <https://www.preprints.org/manuscript/202005.0322/v1>.

80 However, there was a complete lack of any scientific publications or articles which mentioned the  
81 pneumonia cases in detail. No publications by WIV commented on the pneumonia cases and their link  
82 to the surveillance carried out. We obtained a Master's thesis that described the miners pneumonia  
83 cases in detail [9].

84 The Master's thesis [9] was the result of the study done by a medical college student, Li Xu, who  
85 studied the pneumonia cases in the six miners. His study was done in the Emergency Department, The  
86 first affiliated hospital of Kunming, Kunming Medical University, China where the six miners were  
87 admitted, and the thesis was submitted to Kunming Medical University in May 2013. The original  
88 thesis is in Chinese [9] and was translated using google translation. During the submission of our  
89 paper, we found that <https://bioscienceresource.org/> did a professional translation of the thesis which  
90 is now available online ([https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/6981198-Analysis-of-Six-  
91 Patients-With-Unknown-Viruses.html](https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/6981198-Analysis-of-Six-Patients-With-Unknown-Viruses.html)).

92 As per the details mentioned in the thesis [9] and in the news in Science [8], in April 2012, a total of  
93 six mine workers started working in a mineshaft situated in Tongguan, Mojiang, Yunnan Province in  
94 China. The six mineworkers were employed to clear the slag from a copper mine shaft which was full  
95 of bat feces and waste. After working for a few days (4-14), each of them started facing breathing  
96 problems, cough, and fever which lead to severe respiratory issues and severe pneumonia [8]. All the  
97 patients were admitted to the hospital in Kunming during the period of late April and early May [9].  
98 The mineworkers suffered from severe pneumonia, breathing difficulties, and high fever in most of the  
99 cases. Three miners died and the rest three survived. We mentioned the major details of the miners  
100 illness in our updated preprint [5]. The illness in the miners was unlike any other diseases with  
101 symptoms of primarily pneumonia (which was later found to be of a viral origin), severe breathing  
102 difficulties, fever, thromboembolism (in some cases) accompanied by secondary bacterial and fungal

103 infections. The details of the pneumonia cases concerning the admission of the patients, their hospital  
104 stay, and the outcome of the disease (death or recovery) are summarized in Table 1 as given in [9].  
105 The keywords mentioned in the thesis are: severe pneumonia, SARS-like coronaviruses and bats,  
106 making it clear that the pneumonia cases were related to SARS-like coronaviruses from bats. The  
107 details of the course of illness and diagnosis for individual patients is summarized in **Supplementary**  
108 **Information**.

### 109 **Supplementary Information**

#### 110 **Details of the lethal pneumonia illness in the six Mojiang miners**

111 1. The **first patient**, 63 years old, was exposed to the mine for 14 days. During admission to the  
112 hospital, he reported having signs of fever, cough, dyspnea, chest pain, and hiccups for more than 10  
113 days. The illness progressively developed and he showed an increasing tendency of fever with a  
114 decline in lymphocytes. The condition worsened and the patient died after 12 days of admission. This  
115 patient was the oldest of all and had a tumor history (co-morbidity). The discharge (death) diagnosis  
116 was: severe pneumonia, sepsis, septic shock, abdominal infection, and cardiac arrest.

117 2. The **second patient**, aged 42 years, worked for 14 days in the mine. He was admitted to the hospital  
118 after cough and fever for ~15 days. He reported that he was also exposed to a lot of bat waste. The CT  
119 scans showed severe pneumonia in both the lungs. The condition worsened and after ~40 days the  
120 heart showed poor outline and indications of deep vein thrombosis. During the disease, the patient's  
121 lymphocytes decreased suggesting his immune function was impaired. He also had chronic Hepatitis B  
122 infection (co-morbidity). The arterial blood gas analysis suggested that he has persistent respiratory  
123 failure and poor oxygenation. The patient died after 48 days in the hospital and the diagnosis on  
124 discharge was respiratory and cardiac arrest, severe pneumonia, respiratory failure, sepsis, and death.

125 3. The **third patient** was 45 years old, male, and worked for 14 days in the mine. After 10 days he  
126 developed a cough, chest tightness, and shortness of breath with fever and sore limbs and headache. A  
127 remote video consultation by the famous doctor, Dr. Zhong Nanshan, the most expert doctor in China  
128 for SARS and Covid-19 was provided after ~52 days. Dr. Nanshan diagnosed the patient to have  
129 interstitial pneumonia (primarily of viral origin), a possibility of secondary infection (invasive  
130 pulmonary aspergillosis), and ordered to do a swab testing and SARS antibody testing (to be carried in  
131 Wuhan Institute of Virology). Also, he asked to confirm with the Kunming Institute of Zoology for  
132 confirmation of the type of the bat. He died after 109 days after admission to the hospital and  
133 treatment. In the case of patient 3, the discharge diagnosis after his death was: severe pneumonia;  
134 multiple organ failure; aspiration lung injury; acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), interstitial  
135 pneumonia (highly viral probabilities); invasive pulmonary aspergillosis (secondary) followed by  
136 death.

137 **4. Patient 4**, aged 46 years worked for 14 days in the mine after which he developed a cough, sputum,  
138 and fever. In the CT scans, he showed bilateral interstitial pneumonia of severe kind. There were  
139 multiple ground glass exudates in both lungs, the lower lungs showed consolidation and a small  
140 number of pleural effusions on both sides. Similar to patient 3, this patient also received remote video  
141 consultation by Dr. Zhong Nanshan. He diagnosed him with interstitial pneumonia (viral possibility  
142 high) and invasive aspergillosis (secondary). The day after the antithrombotic treatment with warfarin,  
143 the patient's respiratory function was significantly improved, indicating that anticoagulation and  
144 antithrombotic treatment have an effect. Since the viral pneumonia was diagnosed and the patients had  
145 worked in the environment of bat feces, it was suggested to determine the bat types, pharyngeal  
146 dipstick or swab test, and SARS antibody test, by Dr. Nanshan. After struggling for 107 days as per  
147 the thesis actual for 137 days, and receiving a prolonged treatment he was discharged live.

148 **5 and 6. Patients 5 and 6:** These patients were relatively young (32/33 years) and exposed to the mine  
149 only for a short time (4/5 days). After admission, patients 5 and 6 were given antibiotics, anti-  
150 inflammatory, and anti-viral treatment. Patient 6 was not given antifungal drugs and still, the condition  
151 improved. Therefore, it was concluded that the initial onset of the disease was very unlikely to be  
152 caused by a fungal infection. Both of the patients were discharged after 24/26 days (Table 1).

153

154 **Summary of lethal pneumonia and illness in the Mojiang miners [9]:**

155 The main clinical symptoms of the six patients were cough and fever, and the main accompanying  
156 symptoms were dyspnoea, aching limbs, sputum/bloody sputum, and headache. They showed  
157 interstitial pneumonia, fever, difficulty breathing, and required a mechanical ventilator in many cases.  
158 Some patients (1,2 and 4) showed clotting complications such as pulmonary thromboembolism and all  
159 showed elevated D-dimer values. The radiological findings according to the CT scans were: diffuse  
160 ground-glass opacities, areas of peripheral consolidation. In the Master's thesis, it has been clearly  
161 concluded that the pneumonia cases were due to viral pneumonia, primarily from SARS-like  
162 coronaviruses originating from horseshoe bats. The percentage of lymphocytes, T, B, and NK cells  
163 decreased significantly after the admission of the patients, which indicated that the immune system of  
164 the patients was seriously damaged by a viral infection and multiple opportunistic infections had  
165 occurred. The longer the patient worked in the mine, the higher the mortality rate. The age of the  
166 patient and co-morbidities resulted in complications and death (patients 1 and 2). The prognosis was,  
167 shorter the working time and the younger the age, the better the prognosis and the shorter the  
168 hospitalization time. Dr. Zhong Nanshan, the most famous doctor who was the face of China during  
169 the SARS epidemic and national advisor during COVID-19, had provided remote consultation for  
170 patients 3 and 4, the most serious patients. The diagnosis he provided for patients 3 and 4 was:  
171 interstitial pneumonia (primarily of viral origin), a possibility of secondary infection (invasive



172 pulmonary aspergillosis). He had ordered to do a swab testing and SARS antibody testing (to be  
173 carried in Wuhan Institute of Virology). Also, he asked to confirm with the Kunming Institute of  
174 Zoology for confirmation of the type of the bat. His opinion that Mojiang miners pneumonia could be  
175 primarily viral probably due to bat-related coronaviruses was very valuable for this incident. Later,  
176 after the consultation of Dr. Zhong Nanshan, the WIV tested the serum (IgM) antibodies (probably for  
177 SARS-like CoV) of the patients, which were positive, indicating the existence of SARS-like infection.  
178 Additionally, positive IgG antibodies (for SARS-like CoV) were tested in WIV and detected in 4 of  
179 the 4 patients tested (probably the last four patients as two died earlier) as reported in Chapter 3 of a  
180 Ph.D. thesis [10]. Chapter 3 of the Ph.D. thesis by Canping Huang highlights the miners case [10] and  
181 the translation is provided as Supplementary material. The Master thesis, Ph.D. thesis, and [7], all  
182 report the dominance of Chinese horseshoe bats (*Rhinolophus sinicus* and *Rhinolophus affinis*) in the  
183 mine. Also, Kunming Institute of Zoology confirmed that the six patients were exposed to Chinese  
184 horseshoe bats (*Rhinolophus* species). *Rhinolophus* species harbor SARS-like coronaviruses [11]. The  
185 blood work indicated elevated markers such as Serum Amyloid A (SAA) with a normal range of PCT  
186 (procalcitonin), which suggested that the six patients had a viral infection. The treatment given to the  
187 pneumonia patients included antivirals (ganciclovir, acyclovir injections), steroids (methylprednisone),  
188 antibiotics (meropenem, vancomycin, etc.), antifungals (caspofungin, fluconazole) and anti-thrombotic  
189 medicines (warfarin, low molecular weight heparin).

#### 190 **Mojiang miners pneumonia and illness resembles COVID-19**

191 The Master thesis concluded that a SARS-like coronavirus (unknown) originating from horseshoe bats  
192 was the causative agent of lethal pneumonia and illness in the miners  
193 Various symptoms of COVID-19 started becoming clear by the end of January [12]. However, the  
194 additional symptoms, secondary infections [13], clotting, and distinct laboratory markers like elevated  
195 D-dimers [12], SAA, etc. were clear later after February. The retrospective analysis of pneumonia

196 illness in miners (2012) showed a strong resemblance with COVID-19 and is given further and  
197 summarized (Table 2).

### 198 **1. Clinical symptoms**

199 **Common symptoms seen in the Mojiang miners pneumonia:** Cough, fever, fatigue, sore limbs (in  
200 all except one), sputum, and severe pneumonia. In some patients, bloody sputum, headache, and chest  
201 pain were seen [9].

202 **Common symptoms seen in COVID-19:** The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are the same:  
203 fever, cough, and tiredness. Other symptoms that are less common and may affect some patients  
204 include aches and pains, nasal congestion, diarrhea, headache, conjunctivitis, etc. (as per the WHO).

205 **2. Age and co-morbidities** increased the complications and resulted in death, in both the Mojiang  
206 miners pneumonia cases (though the patient number is small) and COVID-19.

207 **3. The radiological picture** seen in the CT scans of COVID-19 patients [14] and miners cases [9] is  
208 very similar which includes ground-glass opacities, peripheral consolidation, and clear indications of  
209 bilateral pneumonia.

210 **4. Blood clotting and pulmonary thromboembolism**, a complication seen in COVID-19 were also  
211 found in three of the six miners in 2012 [9]. The use of heparin, warfarin, and anticlotting drugs was  
212 successful in treating the respiratory condition in the 4<sup>th</sup> miner. In the case of COVID-19, pulmonary  
213 thromboembolism and blood clotting have been a serious complication. Anti-thrombotic medicines or  
214 blood thinners are given in COVID-19 to treat thrombotic complications such as pulmonary  
215 thromboembolism.

216 **5. Lymphocytopenia**, i.e. low lymphocyte counts is another common feature in both, the miners  
217 pneumonia cases and Covid-19. Especially the T cell depletion is a common feature observed in both  
218 the diseases.

219 **6. The similarity in treatments:** Treatment given to the miners were: antivirals, steroids, mechanical  
220 ventilation, antibiotics (for treating the secondary bacterial infections) and antifungals (for treating the  
221 secondary fungal infections). Also, anti-thrombotic agents like warfarin, heparin were given in case of  
222 patient 4 who successfully recovered. Very similar treatment is given for COVID-19 where an array of  
223 antivirals, steroids, blood thinners, antibiotics, and antifungals are given (in conjunction with the  
224 secondary infections).

225 **7. Secondary infections:** In the case of the miners pneumonia illness, most of the patients had  
226 secondary infections due to bacteria (*Acinetobacter baumannii*, *Klebsiella pneumoniae*) or secondary  
227 aspergillosis [9]. This scenario is very similar to COVID-19 where secondary bacterial infections due  
228 to similar organisms [13] and aspergillosis infections are commonly being observed [15].

229 **8. Elevated SAA values:** The Mojiang miners pneumonia cases showed that the serum amyloid A  
230 protein (SAA) was elevated in the case of the first 4 patients and showed very high values (~198-400  
231 mg/L) just after admission. These values are exceptionally high and show poor prognosis if considered  
232 to be similar to COVID-19 [16]. The SAA protein is characteristically elevated in the case of COVID-  
233 19 patients showing poor prognosis and is used as a marker for the declining condition [16].

234 **9. Different nature to SARS1:** In the case of SARS1, mostly unilateral pneumonia is seen in the CT  
235 scans [17]. In contrast to that, both pneumonia illness in miners and COVID-19 show mostly bilateral  
236 pneumonia. The kind of complications seen in the pneumonia of miners, e.g. pulmonary  
237 thromboembolism, are seen both in pneumonia illness in miners and COVID-19. Also, Dr. Nanshan  
238 did not classify the pneumonia cases as SARS1. (We have not compared the symptoms with MERS, as  
239 MERS emerged in September 2012 in Saudi Arabia, later than the miners pneumonia).

240 We found no published evidence of human to human transmission of pneumonia from the miners to  
241 others.[9; 10].

242 **Mojiang miners samples and mine: a missing link to SARS-COV-2?**

243 The pneumonia cases have not been discussed in any of the scientific papers (except the two theses)  
244 and not mentioned in the scientific papers published by the WIV laboratory [1; 7]. Also, the Mojiang  
245 mineshaft pneumonia outbreak has not been discussed in context with COVID-19 in any other  
246 scientific papers worldwide. The illness was not attributed to MojV (a paramyxovirus) detected in the  
247 same mineshaft in the rats [18; 19].

248 Although the miners pneumonia outbreak in 2012 was known to the major concerned scientists and  
249 medical professionals in China, namely: Dr. Zheng-Li Shi (WIV) [3] [7], Dr. Gao Fu [10] (Director,  
250 Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention) and Dr. Zhong Nanshan [9; 10], this case has not  
251 been mentioned in the context of COVID-19 to the best of our knowledge.

252 According to the thesis, WIV was involved in analyzing the pharyngeal swab samples (probably for  
253 the presence of coronaviruses) and blood samples for the SARS antibody tests of these patients.  
254 Additionally, the WIV group led by Zheng-Li Shi also was also responsible for the surveillance of the  
255 bat coronaviruses found in the Tongguan mine shaft [9]. The samples were also sent to two other  
256 laboratories in China (Chengdu laboratory and probably to Zhong Nanshan's laboratory- not clear) [9;  
257 10]. However, there are no documented reports on the analysis of the Mojiang miners samples by  
258 WIV.

259 Looking at the stark similarities in the disease presentation in the pneumonia of the miners and  
260 COVID-19, it is highly probable that the miners were infected by a SARS-CoV-2 like or the ancestral  
261 SARS-CoV-2. The hosts of SARS-like CoV, the horseshoe bats are small in size and can fly only  
262 maximum up to 30 km, they cannot travel huge distances [11]. Due to the limited flying capacities of  
263 the horseshoe bats and their habits, the host having the virus cannot have traveled from Yunnan to  
264 Wuhan which is 1100 km apart [11].

265 The following questions would be worth exploring by the agencies like WHO, NIH, etc. which would  
266 investigate the origin of SARS-CoV-2. If the SARS-CoV-2 virus originated in Mojiang, Yunnan, how  
267 did the pandemic start in Wuhan? Many of the samples collected from the mine (bat fecal samples),  
268 and the samples from the pneumonia patients (pharyngeal swabs, blood/serum, etc.) were sent to WIV,  
269 Wuhan. Would these samples act as a potential source of the ancestral virus? Were any SARS-like or  
270 other coronaviruses isolated from the miners samples? There were at least three research groups (Shi  
271 group, WIV, Wuhan Huang Canping, George Gao, CDC group, and Qi Jin lab, State Key Laboratory  
272 for Molecular Virology and Genetic Engineering, Beijing) who sampled the mineshaft between 2012-  
273 2014 (for about 8 times in total) [7; 10; 19], to the best of our information. The extensive sampling of  
274 bat coronaviruses has resulted in at least eight publications from three institutes in China [1; 7; 10; 18;  
275 19; 20; 21; 22]. Zheng-Li Shi mentioned in her interview [3] that the mine was promptly closed (in  
276 2013), however, sampling was done till October 2014 [10] (Supplementary Data 1) is in contrast to  
277 this statement [3]. Why were the Mojiang miners pneumonia cases in 2012 not reported to any public  
278 health agency like WHO? Why did programs like PREDICT not mention these cases as a mini-  
279 outbreak? Was the mineshaft in Mojiang actually closed? If yes, when did it close? Was it still open  
280 for the researchers? Did any of these researchers get infected by any coronavirus between 2012-2019?  
281 The only important difference between the pneumonia cases and COVID-19 was that the Mojiang  
282 miners pneumonia cases were not human to human transmissible from the available information. Also,  
283 Zheng-Li Shi in the recent question and answers article told that the people near the Tongguan mine  
284 were seronegative [6]. This indicates that the virus was not so transmissible and unless people were  
285 directly exposed to the bat feces in large amounts (e.g. miners) it produced infection. Or was it present  
286 at that particular time ( April 2012) or was seasonal [10]? We conclude that studying the Mojiang  
287 miners pneumonia illness (2012) could provide important clues to the origin of the SARS-CoV-2. The  
288 samples collected from the mines and especially the miners would be very important in the context of

289 the investigation which would be undertaken in the future regarding SARS-CoV-2 origin. The  
290 coincidence between the 2012 illness in Mojiang miners, the subsequent samplings, and finding the  
291 SARS-CoV-2 nearest relative from this single mine warrants further inquiry into the full history of this  
292 incident.

293

294

## 295 **References**

- 296 [1] P. Zhou, X.L. Yang, X.G. Wang, B. Hu, L. Zhang, W. Zhang, H.R. Si, Y. Zhu, B. Li, C.L. Huang, H.D.  
297 Chen, J. Chen, Y. Luo, H. Guo, R.D. Jiang, M.Q. Liu, Y. Chen, X.R. Shen, X. Wang, X.S. Zheng, K.  
298 Zhao, Q.J. Chen, F. Deng, L.L. Liu, B. Yan, F.X. Zhan, Y.Y. Wang, G.F. Xiao, and Z.L. Shi, A  
299 pneumonia outbreak associated with a new coronavirus of probable bat origin. *Nature* 579  
300 (2020) 270-273.
- 301 [2] L. Chen, W. Liu, Q. Zhang, K. Xu, G. Ye, W. Wu, Z. Sun, F. Liu, K. Wu, B. Zhong, Y. Mei, W. Zhang, Y.  
302 Chen, Y. Li, M. Shi, K. Lan, and Y. Liu, RNA based mNGS approach identifies a novel human  
303 coronavirus from two individual pneumonia cases in 2019 Wuhan outbreak. *Emerg Microbes*  
304 *Infect* 9 (2020) 313-319.
- 305 [3] J. Qiu, How China's 'Bat Woman' Hunted Down Viruses from SARS to the New Coronavirus. *Sci.*  
306 *Am.* 322 (2020) 24-32.
- 307 [4] D. Bengston, All journal articles evaluating the origin or epidemiology of SARS-CoV-2 that utilize  
308 the RaTG13 bat strain genomics are potentially flawed and should be retracted. preprint  
309 (2020).
- 310 [5] M.C. Rahalkar, and R.A. Bahulikar, Understanding the origin of 'BatCoV-RaTG13', a virus closest to  
311 SARS-CoV-2, 2020.
- 312 [6] J. Cohen, Wuhan coronavirus hunter Shi Zhengli speaks out. *Science* 369 (2020) 487-488.
- 313 [7] X.Y. Ge, N. Wang, W. Zhang, B. Hu, B. Li, Y.Z. Zhang, J.H. Zhou, C.M. Luo, X.L. Yang, L.J. Wu, B.  
314 Wang, Y. Zhang, Z.X. Li, and Z.L. Shi, Coexistence of multiple coronaviruses in several bat  
315 colonies in an abandoned mineshaft. *Virol. Sin.* 31 (2016) 31-40.
- 316 [8] R. Stone, A New Killer Virus in China? *Science* (2014).
- 317 [9] L. Xu, 'The analysis of 6 patients with severe pneumonia caused by unknown viruses' The First  
318 Clinical Medical College of Kunming Medical University, Kunming Medical University, China,  
319 China, 2013 Master's Thesis, pp. 66.
- 320 [10] C. Huang, Novel virus discovery in bat and the exploration of receptor of bat coronavirus HKU9,  
321 National Institute for viral disease control and prevention, China, 2016 PhD Thesis.
- 322 [11] P. Yua, B. Hua, S. Zhengli, and J. Cuia, Geographical structure of bat SARS-related coronaviruses.  
323 *Infect., Genet. Evol.* 2019 (2019) 224-229.

- 324 [12] C. Huang, Y. Wang, X. Li, L. Ren, J. Zhao, Y. Hu, L. Zhang, G. Fan, J. Xu, X. Gu, Z. Cheng, T. Yu, J.  
325 Xia, Y. Wei, W. Wu, X. Xie, W. Yin, H. Li, M. Liu, Y. Xiao, H. Gao, L. Guo, J. Xie, G. Wang, R.  
326 Jiang, Z. Gao, Q. Jin, J. Wang, and B. Cao, Clinical features of patients infected with 2019 novel  
327 coronavirus in Wuhan, China. *The Lancet* 395 (2020) 497-506.
- 328 [13] C.-C. Lai, C.-Y. Wang, and P.-R. Hsueh, Co-infections among patients with COVID-19: The need for  
329 combination therapy with non-anti-SARS-CoV-2 agents? *J. Microbiol. Immunol. Infect.* 53  
330 (2020) 505-512.
- 331 [14] H. Shi, X. Han, N. Jiang, Y. Cao, O. Alwalid, J. Gu, Y. Fan, and C. Zheng, Radiological findings from  
332 81 patients with COVID-19 pneumonia in Wuhan, China: a descriptive study. *The Lancet* 20  
333 (2020) 425-434.
- 334 [15] S. Johns, COVID-19 patients could be at greater risk of fungal infections, researchers say,  
335 Imperial College London, London, UK, 2020.
- 336 [16] H. Li, X. Xiang, H. Ren, L. Xu, L. Zhao, and e. al, Serum Amyloid A is a biomarker of severe  
337 Coronavirus Disease and poor prognosis. *J. Infect.* 80 (2020) 646-655.
- 338 [17] M. Hosseiny, S. Kooraki, A. Gholamrezanezhad, S. Reddy, L. Myers, H. M, and Kooraki S,  
339 Radiology Perspective of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Lessons From Severe Acute  
340 Respiratory Syndrome and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome. *American Roentgen Ray* 214  
341 (2020) 1078-1082.
- 342 [18] I. Rissanen, A.A. Ahmed, K. Azarm, S. Beaty, P. Hong, S. Nambulli, W.P. Duprex, B. Lee, and T.A.  
343 Bowden, Idiosyncratic Mojiang virus attachment glycoprotein directs a host-cell entry  
344 pathway distinct from genetically related henipaviruses. *Nature Communications* (2017).
- 345 [19] Z. Wu, L. Yang, F. Yang, X. Ren, J. Jiang, J. Dong, L. Sun, Y. Zhu, H. Zhou, and Q. Jin, Novel Henipa-  
346 like Virus, Mojiang Paramyxovirus, in Rats, China, 2012. *Emerging Infect. Dis.* 20 (2014) 1064-  
347 1066.
- 348 [20] N. Wang, C. Luo, H. Liu, X. Yang, B. Hu, W. Zhang, B. Li, Y. Zhu, G. Zhu, X. Shen, C. Peng, and Z.  
349 Shi, Characterization of a New Member of Alphacoronavirus with Unique Genomic Features in  
350 Rhinolophus Bats. *Viruses* 11 (2019) 1-19.
- 351 [21] B. Li, H.-R. Si, Y. Zhu, X.-L. Yang, D.E. Anderson, Z.-L. Shi, L.-F. Wang, and P. Zhou, Discovery of Bat  
352 Coronaviruses through Surveillance and Probe Capture-Based Next-Generation Sequencing.  
353 *mSphere* 5:e00807-19 (2020).
- 354 [22] Canping Huang , William J. Liu , Wen Xu , Tao Jin , Yingze Zhao, Jingdong Song, Yi Shi, Wei Ji, Hao  
355 Jia, Yongming Zhou, Honghua Wen, Honglan Zhao, Huaxing Liu, Hong Li, Q. Wang, Ying Wu,  
356 Liang Wang, Di Liu, Guang Liu, Hongjie Yu, Edward C. Holmes, Lin Lu , G.F. Gao, and A Bat-  
357 Derived Putative Cross-Family Recombinant Coronavirus with a Reovirus Gene. *PLoS Path.*  
358 <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.ppat.1005883> (2016).

359

360

361

<b>Number of the patient*</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Admitted to the hospital on</b>	<b>Worked in the mine for</b>	<b>Days in the hospital</b>	<b>Outcome/ Date of discharge/ death</b>
1.	63	26.04.2012	14 days	12	<b>Death</b> 07.05.2012
2.	42	25.04.2012	14 days	48	<b>Death</b> 12.06.2012
3.	45	27.04.2012	14 days	109	<b>Death</b> 13.08.2012
4.	46	26.04.2012	14 days	107 (actual days 137)	Improved and discharged on 10.09.2012
5.	30	02.05.2012	5 days	26	Alive, discharged on 28.05.2012
6.	32	26.04.2012	4 days	32	Alive, discharged on 28.05.2012

362

363 **Table 1: Summary of the six pneumonia patients in 2012 (as per [9]. \*Names not given.**

364



Features	COVID-19 [12; 14]	Six pneumonia patients [9] (Master thesis 2013)
<b>Major Symptoms</b>		
<b>Fever</b>	✓	✓
<b>Dyspnoea/Fatigue</b>	✓	✓
<b>Cough</b>	✓	✓
<b>Minor Symptoms</b>		
Sputum/bloody sputum	✓/ in some cases	✓
headache	✓ (in some)	✓ (in some)
ARDS	✓	✓
<b>Laboratory results</b>	✓	✓
lymphocytopenia	decrease	decrease
Serum amyloid A protein, mg/L	High	High
D-dimers, mg/L	Increase	Increase in size
<b>Radiology</b>		
Chest X-ray, Chest C. T. scan	Ground glass opacities, bilateral pneumonia, peripheral consolidation	Ground glass opacities, bilateral pneumonia, peripheral consolidation
<b>Complications</b>		
Pulmonary thromboembolism	✓	✓
Vascular complications	✓	✓
Hypoxia	✓	✓
Secondary infections (bacterial, fungal)	✓	✓
Role of age	✓	✓
Co-morbidities	✓	✓
Male sex	✓	✓ All were males
Reason of death	Cardiac arrest, ARDS, pulmonary failure	Cardiac arrest, ARDS, pulmonary failure

365

366 **Table 2: Common features observed in the six pneumonia patients and COVID-19**

367

368

369 **Acknowledgments:**

370 We are extremely grateful to Dr. Luigi Warren, CA, USA, for important scientific discussions, content  
371 finalization, and the help in the language (@luigi\_warren). We would like to especially thank  
372 @TheSeeker268 for finding and sending us the links for two important references (Xi, Lu et al 2013,  
373 Master's thesis and Huang, C. 2016, Ph.D. thesis in Chinese). We are very thankful to the twitter  
374 group members of the DRASTIC group (Decentralised Radical Autonomous Search Team  
375 Investigating COVID-19) for the valuable discussions on twitter which helped us to write the paper.  
376 Some of the important members who contributed are: ([@luigi\\_warren](#), [@The Seeker268](#),  
377 [@BillyBostickson](#), [@franciscodeasis](#) [@AntGDuarte](#) [@Real Adam B.](#) [@DrAntoniSerraT1](#),  
378 [@KevinMcH3](#)). I would like to thank Dr. Rossanna Segreto for her important suggestions. We would  
379 like to thank Dr. Jonathan Latham of bioscienceresource.org for the link to the professional translation  
380 of the Master's thesis. We would like to thank Francisco ([@franciscodeasis](#)) and Rossanna Segreto for  
381 the help in the initial translation of the thesis. We specially would like to thank Dr. (Prof.) Anand  
382 Rahalkar, MD radiology, Bharti Vidyapeeth Medical College, Pune, India, for the review of the X-  
383 rays and CT scans in the Xi Lu 2013, Master's thesis. We thank all the anonymous people who helped  
384 us in this paper. We would like to specifically thank the reviewers for their valuable comments.  
385 **Earlier version of the paper has been published as a pre-print on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2020 at**  
386 **[<https://www.preprints.org/manuscript/202005.0322/v2>], Rahalkar and Bahulikar [5]''.**

387 **Authors Contributions:** Conceptualization- MCR. Writing of the paper- MCR, and RAB. Both the  
388 authors reviewed and approved the final version.

389 **Funding and conflict of interest:** We declare that there is no conflict of interest. No project or  
390 institutional funding was used for this research.

391 **Important links:**

392 1. Master's Thesis in Chinese (Li Xu 2013) L. Xu, 'The analysis of 6 patients with severe pneumonia  
393 caused by unknown viruses' The First Clinical Medical College of Kunming Medical University,  
394 Kunming Medical University, China, China, 2013 Master's Thesis, pp. 66.

395 Link:

396 [http://eng.oversea.cnki.net/Kcms/detail/detail.aspx?filename=1013327523.nh&dbcode=CMFD](http://eng.oversea.cnki.net/Kcms/detail/detail.aspx?filename=1013327523.nh&dbcode=CMFD&dbname=CMFD2014)  
397 [D&dbname=CMFD2014](http://eng.oversea.cnki.net/Kcms/detail/detail.aspx?filename=1013327523.nh&dbcode=CMFD&dbname=CMFD2014)

398 2. Ph.D. Thesis in Chinese (Huang, Canping, 2016) C. Huang, Novel virus discovery in bat and the  
399 exploration of receptor of bat coronavirus HKU9, National Institute for viral disease control  
400 and prevention, China, 2016 Ph.D. Thesis.

401 Link:

402 [http://eng.oversea.cnki.net/kcms/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CDFD&QueryID=11&CurRec=1&](http://eng.oversea.cnki.net/kcms/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CDFD&QueryID=11&CurRec=1&dbname=CDFDLAST2018&filename=1017118517.nh&UID=WEEvREcwSIJHSldTTEYzWEpEZktmRXB3Sm9JeHRKZExVOG5ySkJk0xHMD0%3d%249A4hF_YAuvQ5obgVAqNKPCYcEjKensW4IQM)  
403 [dbname=CDFDLAST2018&filename=1017118517.nh&UID=WEEvREcwSIJHSldTTEYzWEpEZktm](http://eng.oversea.cnki.net/kcms/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CDFD&QueryID=11&CurRec=1&dbname=CDFDLAST2018&filename=1017118517.nh&UID=WEEvREcwSIJHSldTTEYzWEpEZktmRXB3Sm9JeHRKZExVOG5ySkJk0xHMD0%3d%249A4hF_YAuvQ5obgVAqNKPCYcEjKensW4IQM)  
404 [RXB3Sm9JeHRKZExVOG5ySkJk0xHMD0%3d%249A4hF\\_YAuvQ5obgVAqNKPCYcEjKensW4IQM](http://eng.oversea.cnki.net/kcms/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CDFD&QueryID=11&CurRec=1&dbname=CDFDLAST2018&filename=1017118517.nh&UID=WEEvREcwSIJHSldTTEYzWEpEZktmRXB3Sm9JeHRKZExVOG5ySkJk0xHMD0%3d%249A4hF_YAuvQ5obgVAqNKPCYcEjKensW4IQM)  
405 [ovwHtwkF4VYPoHbKxJw!!&autoLogin=0](http://eng.oversea.cnki.net/kcms/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CDFD&QueryID=11&CurRec=1&dbname=CDFDLAST2018&filename=1017118517.nh&UID=WEEvREcwSIJHSldTTEYzWEpEZktmRXB3Sm9JeHRKZExVOG5ySkJk0xHMD0%3d%249A4hF_YAuvQ5obgVAqNKPCYcEjKensW4IQM)

406 3. Translation of the Master's Thesis

407 <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/6981198-Analysis-of-Six-Patients-With-Unknown->

408 [Viruses.html](https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/6981198-Analysis-of-Six-Patients-With-Unknown-Viruses.html).

409