CNN Used Lies and Misinformation to Muddle the Water on the Origin of SARS-CoV-2

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Very recently, CNN attacked two scientific reports published by us (the Yan Report, the 2nd Yan Report). The first attack was an article published on CNN politics, which was followed two days later by a four-minute program on TV with the same contents. CNN's goal is clear – to ruin Dr. Yan's reputation and, more importantly, discredit the lab origin theory of SARS-CoV-2. As authors of the Yan reports, we found the attack by CNN entirely baseless and full of lies. To expose the disinformation campaign that is being pushed by CNN to deny the lab origin of SARS-CoV-2, we list their lies and mistakes and offer our response correspondingly. We deem this as necessary because, on this important question, the public deserves to know who is lying and intentionally misleading and who is honest and trustworthy.

1. False accusation of plagiarism

CNN mentioned repeatedly that the Yan reports copied contents from blogs and a GNews article written by an anonymous blogger with a screenname of *Nerd Has Power*. CNN suggests that Dr. Yan and co-authors may have committed plagiarism.

CNN is lying here.

This anonymous blogger is Dr. Shu Kang, who is a co-author of the two Yan reports. We have indicated so in the first Yan report – we cited Dr. Kang's blog (reference 23) and indicated that it was written by one of us. Dr. Kang also identified himself as a co-author when the first Yan report came out (Figure 1). He also very recently clarified it again in responding to the CNN article both on Twitter and on his own blog.

Figure 1. Tweet posted by Dr. Shu Kang on September 14th, 2020.

Importantly, the blogs and the GNews article, which were written by Dr. Kang based on the revelation made by Dr. Li-Meng Yan since January 18th (Figure 2), are not official scientific publications. No personal benefit has been gained by Dr. Kang, either academically or professionally, with the blogs or the GNews article. Therefore, using contents from the blogs and the GNews article in the Yan reports, which are official preprint publications with Dr. Kang being a co-author, is not self-plagiarism and does not violate any rules of scientific publications. In fact, many people commenting on his blogs had previously urged Dr. Kang to publish his study officially because blog posts are not considered as official scientific publications and do not have as much impact in the scientific world (Figure 3).

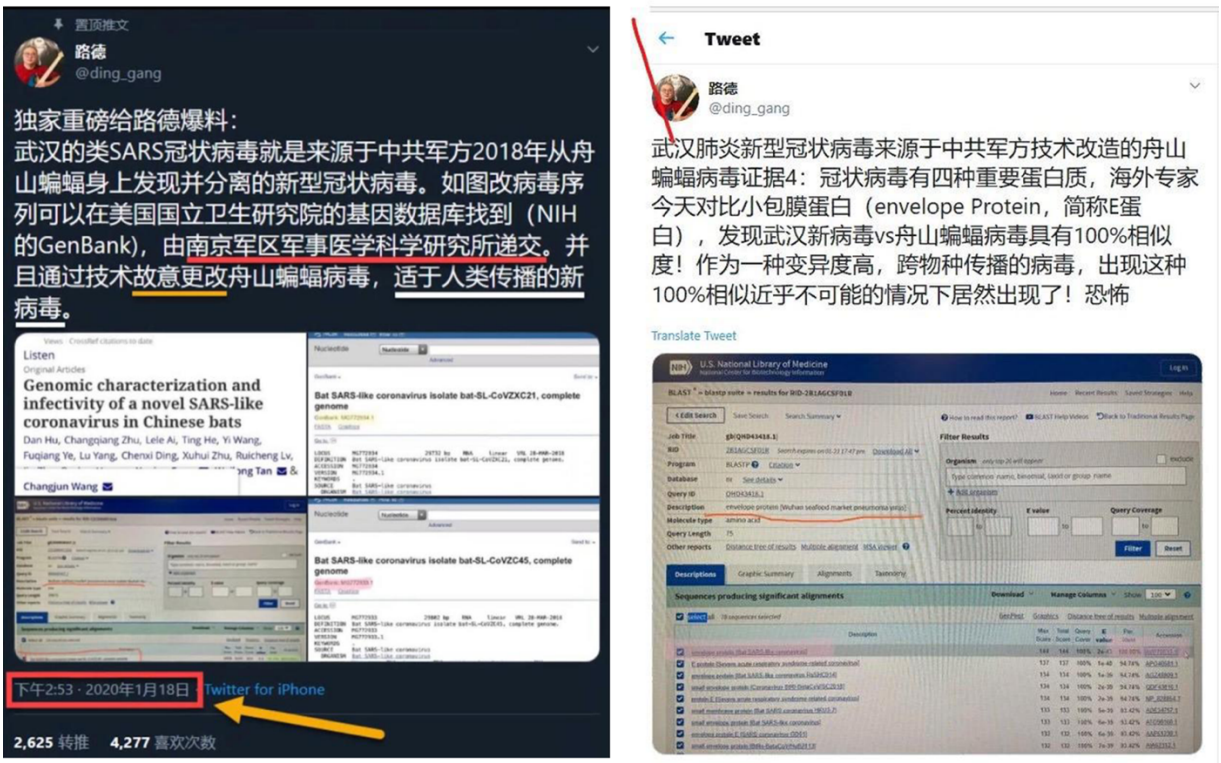

Figure 2. On January 18th, 2020, Dr. Yan (then anonymously) revealed the lab origin of SARS-CoV-2 on Twitter via Lude's account (路德@ding_gang, now closed by Twitter).

Figure 3. Select comments from Dr. Kang's blogs encouraging publication of the findings officially.

2. Authors using pseudonyms in the Yan reports

Except for Dr. Yan, the rest two authors are all using pseudonyms. The CNN article has used this fact to attack our reports with an intention to mislead people to believe that using pseudonyms is a sign of questionable science.

It is not exaggerating to state that, by publishing our reports and thereby confronting the CCP government, we have practically assumed the role of whistleblowers. How whistleblowers and/or protestors are treated by the CCP is no secret – plenty of examples can be found in the Hong Kong protests. What happened to Dr. Yan's mother recently is another example and probably more suggestive than others in this case (Figure 4). Clearly, *using pseudonyms was a mechanism to provide a layer of protection for the co-authors and their families back in China*. The lack of compassion of the CNN reporters here is shameful and mirrors the mentality of the communist dictators, which in a way spells out the underlying connection between them.

Figure 4. Dr. Yan interviewed by Tucker Carlson on Fox News on Oct 6th, 2020.

3. A few of our citations are in non-traditional formats

The CNN article also blamed the Yan reports of citing references that were published in formats other than peer-reviewed articles or preprints. The exact ones they marked as non-peer reviewed and therefore questionable are references 7, 10, 11, 13, and 22 in our first report. These five "questionable" references were cited in the introduction of our first report, the purpose of which was to show that the natural origin theory of SARS-CoV-2 is being widely questioned and that journals censor opinions suggesting a lab-origin of this virus. These five citations play no role in supporting our main scientific analysis or conclusions.

We had a total of 111 references for the first report and 123 references for the second report. Clearly, the five citations that are in non-traditional formats are a small fraction of our overall references. Importantly, all our references were carefully chosen based on their scientific merits and/or relevance. By tracing these references as guided by the logic of our reports, one can easily find how the gain-of-function research has matured in this area, who are the experts, what techniques are preferred by certain experts for certain steps, how marks of genetic manipulation present in the SARS-CoV-2 genome match those technical preferences, who owns the backbone/template used for the lab-creation of SARS-CoV-2, who has been engaged in promoting the natural origin theory while having close ties to the CCP government, etc.

Clearly, CNN nitpicked on the format of a few citations and at the same time ignored the robust evidence that our citations have provided overall.

4. Affiliation to the Rule of Law Society and the Rule of Law Foundation

CNN also bashed on our affiliation with the Rule of Law Society and the Rule of Law Foundation. The fact that these two sister organizations are founded and supported by Mr. Steve Bannon and Mr. Miles (Wengui) Guo was used by CNN to suggest involvement of Mr. Bannon and Mr. Guo in our reports.

However, this claim of CNN is completely false.

The science in the Yan reports were produced entirely and exclusively by us scientists with Dr. Yan being the leading and corresponding author. None of the other parties (the two organizations, Mr. Bannon, or Mr. Guo) contributed to the work or altered our reports in any way.

~~Importantly, it was the twin organizations who helped Dr. Yan flee Hong Kong. If not for their help, Dr. Yan would have been disappeared by now as her secret revelation of the truth of COVID-19 since January had come to the attention of the CCP government. Dr. Yan chose the two organizations as our affiliation only to show her gratitude toward them for having saved her life and given her a chance to now stand in front of the world and speak publicly about the truth of COVID-19.~~

~~Furthermore, these two sister organizations are the hope of numerous freedom-loving, decent people of China. These people have donated their money to and/or worked along with the organizations in exposing corruptions, protecting whistleblowers, and bringing the rule of law to the land of China. Their sacrifices are honorable, which include some people losing their lives in the fight against the CCP regime. As fellow Chinese, we feel enormously honored and proud to have represented the two organizations and the humble and decent people of China who support these organizations in publishing our reports.~~

(*Comments on July 24th, 2021*: Because the ROLF & ROLS unilaterally requested to have our reports and publications closed, which violated the rules of scientific publications, we have changed our affiliation in responding to this situation. Relevant contents in the above paragraph were crossed out because we believe our earlier views on this matter were misled and such descriptions do not truthfully reflect real events.)

5. CNN's invited scientists failed to point out any scientific problem of the Yan reports

CNN also invited scientists to comment on our reports. However, to our great disappointment, **none of the criticisms offered by these scientists has any scientific substance**. Although they repeatedly labeled our science as bad or "shoddy", not a single person was able to challenge any specifics in our reports.

5.1 Drs. Nancy Connell and Gigi Gronvall from the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security

Although Drs. Connell and Gronvall published, in collaboration with two colleagues of theirs, a self-claimed peer-review on our first report, the scientific merits in their review are extremely scarce. There, they have engaged in a similar disinformation campaign: they repeatedly distorted our original statements and/or took our descriptions out of contexts, through which they falsely labeled our analyses or opinions as mistaken and thereby created room to insert their otherwise-unjustified criticisms.

Judging from their review comments, Connell, Gronvall and colleagues are poor in all relevant areas of biological research (virology, molecular biology, evolutionary biology, structural biology, and biochemistry) to serve as reviewers for our reports. As mentioned in page 28 of our second report, our point-to-point response to their "review" is being prepared and will be published soon. We hope our response and this experience of theirs can help them develop the knowledge that underqualified peer-reviews hurt the scientific community (and probably reviewers themselves too) more than help.

5.2 Dr. Angela Rasmussen from Columbia University, Center for Infection and Immunity

Dr. Angela Rasmussen has appeared on multiple interviews, where she repeatedly attacked the Yan reports and Dr. Yan herself. However, all of Dr. Rasmussen's criticisms are non-factual and almost none of them concerns the science in our reports. The only scientific-like issue she was able to raise (in her interviews at the Daily Beast and at National Geographic, but not here on CNN) was on the furin-cleavage site. She said "*the authors claim that SARS-CoV-2's cleavage site is 'unique' and unseen elsewhere in nature*". However, our actual description was "*within the lineage B of β coronaviruses and with the exception of SARS-CoV-2, no viruses contain a furin-cleavage site at the S1/S2 junction*" (page 12 of our first report). She not only distorted our statement here but also ignored our other statement that "*furin-cleavage site at this location has been observed in other groups of coronaviruses*". Dr. Rasmussen either did not understand the scientific details described in our report or intentionally distorted our statement to invent room for her criticism.

Clearly, Dr. Rasmussen is unqualified to judge our reports scientifically as she is either lacking the necessary knowledge to understand our reports properly or unable to function in an unbiased manner in facing this issue.

So, where then does Dr. Rasmussen's enthusiasm come from for her to go around lashing out attacks on the Yan reports and Dr. Yan? A quick look at Dr. Rasmussen's academic status reveals that she is an associate research scientist at the Center for Infection and Immunity at Columbia University. The director of this center is Dr. W. Ian Lipkin. Dr. Lipkin is a co-author of the influential *Nature Medicine* article "The Proximal Origin of SARS-CoV-2", the misleading nature of which has been exposed in the Yan reports and by others.

Figure 5. Dr. Nanshan Zhong and Dr. W. Ian Lipkin on February 2nd, 2020 (Link to original article).

Importantly, in the Yan reports, we also indicated the close ties that Dr. Lipkin has with the CCP government. Dr. Lipkin started working with the CCP government in 2003 during the SARS epidemic. Since then he has been heavily engaged in collaborating with CCP's laboratories, which include Dr. Nanshan Zhong's State Key Laboratory. Early in this pandemic, Dr. Lipkin took an invited trip to China

to investigate and advise on the management of the outbreak, which was the only occasion a western virologist was invited by the CCP government to do so (Figure 5). The close relationship between Dr. Lipkin and the CCP government is also exemplified by the most prestigious awards given to him by the CCP government (Figure 6). On January 8th, 2016, Dr. Lipkin was awarded the *China International Science and Technology Cooperation Award* for his contributions in helping the CCP government control the SARS epidemic in 2003. The award is, according to Dr. Lipkin himself, "the highest possible award any foreign scientist could be given". On January 3rd, 2020, when the current pandemic just started, Dr. Lipkin was invited to visit the Chinese Consulate in New York for the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the founding of the CCP government. In this meeting, Dr. Lipkin was honored with a medal, which was awarded once again for his significant contributions during the SARS epidemic in 2003.

Figure 6. The CCP government gave the highest awards to Dr. Lipkin in 2016 (top left) and in 2020 (top right), who had then praised China for its management of the pandemic (bottom).

Such a high-level of engagement between a western expert and the CCP government is not common but also not unprecedented. When it happens, however, bribing of the foreign expert by the CCP government is frequently involved, where money, fame, and various other benefits would be provided by the CCP government in exchange for the foreign person's expertise and/or influence.

As a non-independent academic researcher, Dr. Rasmussen clearly works under the supervision of Dr. Lipkin. In addition, Dr. Rasmussen and Dr. Lipkin share a research grant (Figure 7). The career dependence of Dr. Rasmussen on Dr. Lipkin is evident. It is, therefore, very reasonable to believe that Dr.

Rasmussen's frequent appearance on various interviews and her frenetic attack on Dr. Yan and our reports were influenced by Dr. Lipkin.

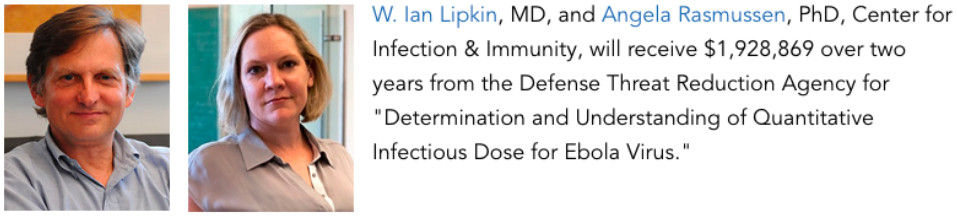

Figure 7. Dr. Lipkin and Dr. Rasmussen have a shared research grant (link).

The tactic used here by Dr. Lipkin is far from being noble. As a world expert in coronaviruses, Dr. Lipkin is morally obligated to detail his honest opinions about the Yan reports publicly. We invite Dr. Lipkin to have a live debate with Dr. Yan on the origin of SARS-CoV-2.

5.3 Dr. Anna Mapp and Ms. Amanda Peiffer from University of Michigan Life Sciences Institute

As reported by CNN, Dr. Mapp and her student Ms. Peiffer were the ones who identified the "problematic" formats of five of our citations and accused us of copying contents from a blog, both of which are blunt disinformation as we have explained in sections above. We feel extremely unfortunate that, when engaging themselves in the discussion of an important question that the world is facing, Dr. Mapp and Ms. Peiffer displayed utterly poor qualities as scientists. Their inability to do simple fact-check, their lack of logical thinking, and their chattering of baseless criticisms ("shoddy") with no scientific support altogether demonstrate that certain aspects of the scientific training in Dr. Mapp's lab are of serious concerns.

5.4 Dr. Daniel Lucey from Georgetown University

Dr. Lucey was the one whose opinion appeared to be less biased in the CNN article. He understood the need of using pseudonyms by the co-authors, which we appreciate. It is true that Dr. Lucey had met with Dr. Yan in September. During that meeting, Dr. Lucey was convinced by contents of the Yan reports that fall into his expert area. However, as admitted by Dr. Lucey himself, he is not a molecular virologist and therefore was not able to understand or vouch for other parts of our reports. Dr. Lucey also was not able to understand how a government-engineered virus would be released upon its own population. This opinion of his is understandable. The CCP government and the Chinese people are two different things, which many people, including some Chinese people, could not tell apart. The sacrifice of Chinese people does not really dishearten the communist dictators. Rather, it has often been used by the party leaders to advance their own political and personal agendas. People living under democratic systems are often too kind to believe the plots of dictators and/or totalitarian governments (Figure 8).

Figure 8. A post by a twitter user illustrating the cognitive gap between a normal person and a dictator.

6. A call to the CCP scientists and the coronavirus research community

While offering no counter-arguments scientifically, CNN and its invited scientists deeply politicized the issue. Their approach muddles the matter and drives the world away from the true cause of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Along this line, CNN has also claimed that Dr. Yan did not respond to their interview requests. However, the truth is that Dr. Yan did respond to CNN's request. In her response, Dr. Yan insisted that she would only do a live interview, which CNN refuses (Figure 9). Dr. Yan's concern was that CNN would edit her interview before broadcasting it. It cannot be clearer now which direction CNN's editing would go.

Figure 9. Dr. Yan's tweet posted on Oct 22nd, 2020, clarifying that her request for live interview only with CNN was not accommodated.

What we sincerely hope is that people analyze the science in the Yan reports in an unbiased manner. The issue we are facing here is not a political one. It is about global health and humanity. It was the scientific evidence and logical thinking, not politics, that led us to uncover the role of the CCP government in this global pandemic. Our conclusions may appear to be political only because the scientific evidence proves so (although we ourselves do not consider unrestricted bioweapon or unrestricted biowarfare as political issues).

Just like in a cancer treatment, the most important thing is correct diagnosis, which should be followed by tumor localization and surgical removal. Without these, cancer recurrence would be hard to avoid.

Consistent with this argument, ironically, the CCP government seems to be in agreement with us here as *they have repeatedly stated that the origin of SARS-CoV-2 is a scientific question and could only be answered by scientists.* What is in odds with this spirit though is that no scientists from the CCP's side have responded to our scientific reports, including many prominent virologists: *Drs. Malik Peiris, Wuchun Cao, Ruifu Yang, Zhengli Shi, Fang Li, etc*.

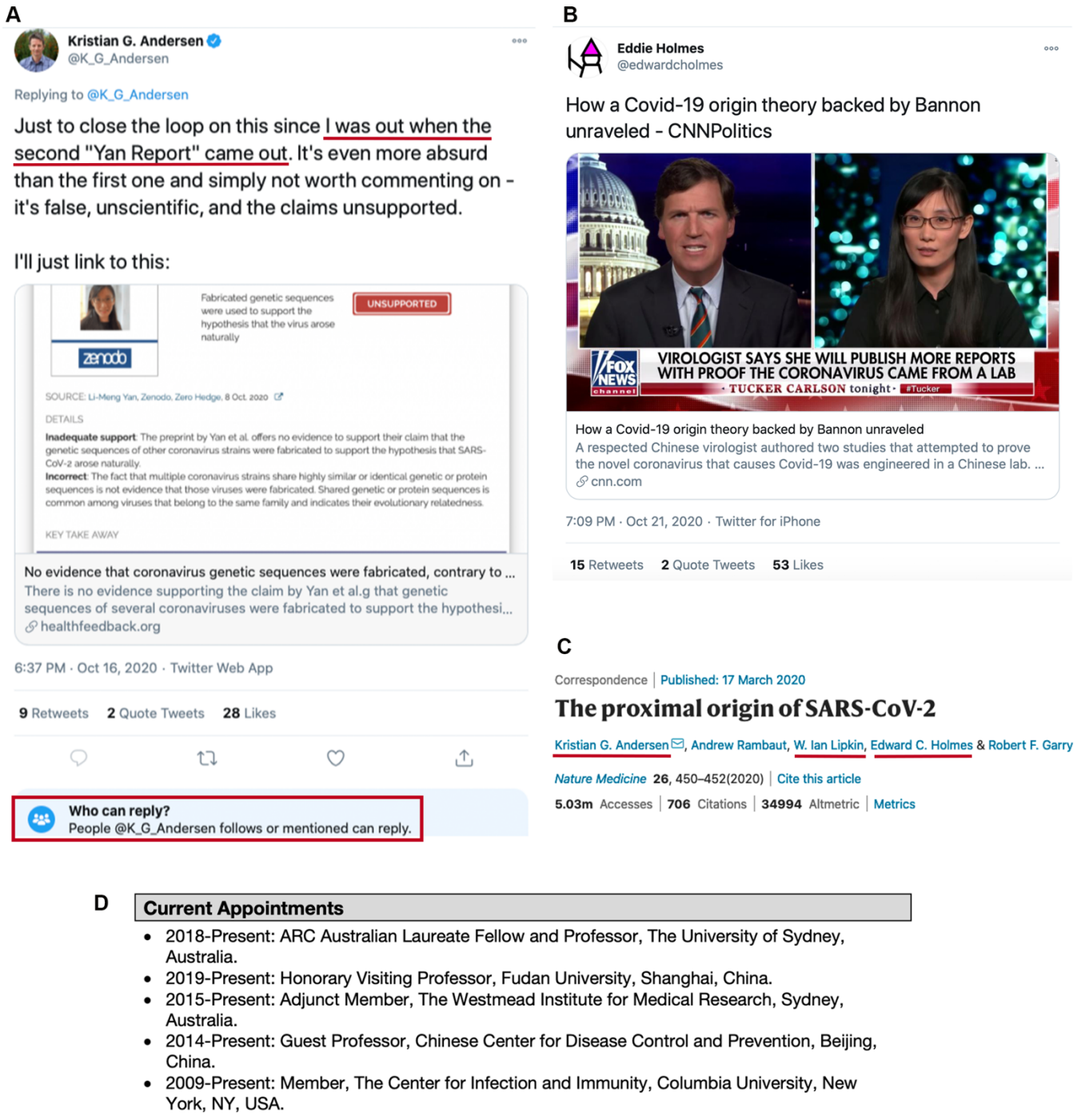

Figure 10. Some authors of the Nature Medicine correspondence continue to promote the natural origin theory of SARS-CoV-2. *A: tweet sent by Dr. Kristian Andersen on Oct 16th, 2020. B: tweet posted on Oct 21st, 2020, by Dr. Edward Holmes citing the CNN article. C: author list for the Nature Medicine correspondence. Dr. Lipkin is a co-author as well. D: The career status section from Dr. Edward Holmes' academic CV.*

A few western coronavirus experts are voicing their opinions in favor of the natural origin theory of SARS-CoV-2. Dr. Kristian Andersen from the Scripps Research Institute has been very active on twitter promoting this theory, although he kept silence for eight days upon the publication of our second report (Figure 10A). Dr. Edward Holmes, ARC Australian Laureate Fellow and Professor at the University of Sydney, is another enthusiastic supporter of the natural origin theory (Figure 10B). These two scientists are co-authors, together with Dr. Lipkin, of the influential *Nature Medicine* correspondence (Figure 10C). While their scientific arguments in the correspondence were weak to begin with, their current arguments grew even weaker scientifically to the point that there appears to be none. Like Dr. Lipkin, Dr. Holmes also works closely with the CCP laboratories. He had collaborated with Dr. Yong-Zhen Zhang on publishing the first genome sequence of SARS-CoV-2. He was also a co-author on two publications where fabricated coronaviruses (pangolin coronaviruses and the RmYN02 bat coronavirus) were reported by laboratories under the control of the CCP. Not surprisingly, Dr. Holmes holds visiting/guest professor positions in China, one at Fudan University and the other at the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Figure 10D). He is also a member of the Center for Infection and Immunity at Columbia University, which is under the direction of Dr. Lipkin.

Besides these individuals, the rest of the coronavirus research community has largely remained quiet.

While low-quality peer-reviews have been produced by self-volunteered scientists outside of the coronavirus field, *no such reviews or any other type of official response about the Yan reports have been produced by any coronavirus expert*.

However, this is a historical moment for the field of coronavirus biology. Fabricated SARS-CoV-2-like coronaviruses (RaTG13, RmYN02, a series of pangolin coronaviruses) have made their ways through your peer-review process to be published on top scientific journals. A global health crisis is being caused by a suspicious coronavirus, the origin of which can be fully understood only by you. The world is waiting, and any delay or dishonesty in sharing your expert opinion on this issue would be judged harshly by history. Your thorough analyses of the matter and your official statements reporting them are now due.