



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

October 28, 2022

Case No. F-2021-07160/FL-2022-00076

Mr. Sainath Suryanarayanan, PhD
U.S. Right to Know
4096 Piedmont Ave. #963
Oakland, CA 94611

Dear Mr. Suryanarayanan:

This letter is in response to your request dated June 8, 2021, under the Freedom of Information Act (“FOIA”), 5 U.S.C. § 552. Thus far, the Department of State has located 21 responsive records subject to the FOIA. Upon review, we have determined 1 record may be released in part and 20 records must be withheld in their entirety.

An enclosure explains the FOIA exemptions and other grounds for withholding material. Where we have made redactions, the applicable FOIA exemptions are marked on the record. The records that were withheld in full are exempt from release pursuant to FOIA Exemption 5, 5 U.S.C. § 552 (b)(5). All non-exempt material that is reasonably segregable from the exempt material has been released and is enclosed.

For your information, Congress excluded three discrete categories of law enforcement and national security records from the requirements of the FOIA. *See* 5 U.S.C. 552(c). This response is limited to those records that are subject to the requirements of the FOIA. This is a standard notification that is given to all our requesters and should not be taken as an indication that excluded records do, or do not, exist. To the extent another agency asserts that it can neither confirm nor deny the existence of certain records, the Department of State will similarly take the position that it neither confirms nor denies the existence of those records.

We will keep you informed as your case progresses. If you have any questions, your attorney may contact Savith Iyengar, Assistant U.S. Attorney, at savith.iyengar@usdoj.gov. Please refer to the case number, F-2021-07160/FL-2022-00076, and the civil action number, 22-cv-04359, in all correspondence about this case.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Hickson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Diamonece Hickson
Chief, Litigation and Appeals Branch
Office of Information Programs and Services

Enclosures: As stated.

The Freedom of Information Act (5 USC 552)

FOIA Exemptions

- (b)(1) Information specifically authorized by an executive order to be kept secret in the interest of national defense or foreign policy. Executive Order 13526 includes the following classification categories:
- 1.4(a) Military plans, systems, or operations
 - 1.4(b) Foreign government information
 - 1.4(c) Intelligence activities, sources or methods, or cryptology
 - 1.4(d) Foreign relations or foreign activities of the US, including confidential sources
 - 1.4(e) Scientific, technological, or economic matters relating to national security, including defense against transnational terrorism
 - 1.4(f) U.S. Government programs for safeguarding nuclear materials or facilities
 - 1.4(g) Vulnerabilities or capabilities of systems, installations, infrastructures, projects, plans, or protection services relating to US national security, including defense against transnational terrorism
 - 1.4(h) Weapons of mass destruction
- (b)(2) Related solely to the internal personnel rules and practices of an agency
- (b)(3) Specifically exempted from disclosure by statute (other than 5 USC 552), for example:
- | | |
|----------------|---|
| ARMSEXP | Arms Export Control Act, 50a USC 2411(c) |
| CIA PERS/ORG | Central Intelligence Agency Act of 1949, 50 USC 403(g) |
| EXPORT CONTROL | Export Administration Act of 1979, 50 USC App. Sec. 2411(c) |
| FS ACT | Foreign Service Act of 1980, 22 USC 4004 |
| INA | Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 USC 1202(f), Sec. 222(f) |
| IRAN | Iran Claims Settlement Act, Public Law 99-99, Sec. 505 |
- (b)(4) Trade secrets and confidential commercial or financial information
- (b)(5) Interagency or intra-agency communications forming part of the deliberative process, attorney-client privilege, or attorney work product
- (b)(6) Personal privacy information
- (b)(7) Law enforcement information whose disclosure would:
- (A) interfere with enforcement proceedings
 - (B) deprive a person of a fair trial
 - (C) constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy
 - (D) disclose confidential sources
 - (E) disclose investigation techniques
 - (F) endanger life or physical safety of an individual
- (b)(8) Prepared by or for a government agency regulating or supervising financial institutions
- (b)(9) Geological and geophysical information and data, including maps, concerning wells

Other Grounds for Withholding

- NR Material not responsive to a FOIA request excised with the agreement of the requester

From:	"Stilwell, David R" (b)(6)@state.gov>
To:	Fritz, Jonathan D (b)(6)@state.gov>; EAP-CM-Office-DL <EAP-CM-Office-DL@state.gov>; EAP-FO-Principals-DL <EAP-FO-Principals-DL@state.gov>; INR-China-Small Group <INR-ChinaSmallGroup@state.gov>
Subject:	RE: How did covid-19 begin? Its initial origin story is shaky. from The Washington Post
Date:	Fri, 3 Apr 2020 15:06:44 +0000

This doesn't hurt.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/business-21350013>

The Italian fashion capital being led by the Chinese

By Sylvia Smith Business reporter, BBC News, Tuscany

• 12 February 2013

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Italian fashion capital being led by Chinese

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Media captionItalian fashion capital being led by Chinese

The transformation of a town in Tuscany from a traditional stronghold of the Italian textile industry into a capital of cheap clothing is causing widespread discontent among locals who complain they are losing out to the Chinese on their own turf.

But the Chinese view the rapidly expanding fast-fashion market in Prato, a satellite town of fashionable Florence, as an opportunity for Italian companies to exploit the desirability of the "Made in Italy" brand in new ways.

According to Marco Landi, president of the Tuscany branch of trade body CNA, which represents small and medium-sized firms, the remaining 3,000 small-scale Italian enterprises in Prato's industrial district face unprecedented upheaval.

Italian companies can't compete on price, their strength lies in the area of aesthetics
Xu Lin, Chinese entrepreneur in Italy

"As a result of backdoor globalisation, Italian businesses are being forced to restructure," he says.

"At the moment there are approximately 4,000 Chinese-run clothing factories in Prato. These new production dynamics are compelling the remaining Italian businesses based there to rethink their markets."

'Can't compete'

The long thread of history connecting Prato with textiles stretches back to the 12th Century, when garment manufacturing was regulated by the wool merchants' guild.

Before the arrival of the Chinese, thousands of small Italian textile units were a source of cheap "Italian made" clothes, producing them on the side from Italian-made fabric - often with the help of hired Chinese workers.

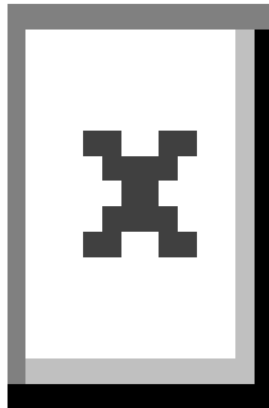


Image caption Italy-based Chinese model Lu Chen says China wishes to learn Italian fashion skills

But the Chinese have beaten the Italians at their own game by setting up their own businesses and driving down prices by importing far cheaper fabrics from China.

The Prato industrial zone now accounts for more than 30% of Italy's textile imports from China.

"More than half of Italian-owned businesses in the industrial zone have gone to the wall over the past decade," Mr Landi continues. "There are now more Chinese garment manufacturers than there are Italian textile producers."

The Chinese newcomers have opened up the market in mainland China in a way Italians never could. They are exporting millions of low-cost garments bearing the Made in Italy tag in a seemingly

unregulated export drive. They have also notched up increased demand in Europe through cost-cutting.

But Xu Lin, a Chinese entrepreneur who set up Giupel, a clothing business, in Prato more than 10 years ago, believes that economic currents are set to favour Italian companies if they innovate and wake up to new opportunities.

"Italian companies can't compete on price, their strength lies in the area of aesthetics," he says.

"Italian textile companies have long outsourced the early stages of tissue production. But they have the traditional skills needed for the unique finishes and state-of-the art features that come at the end of the fabric production chain. The same is true of clothes."

'World leaders'

Prato still remains the world's fabric development leader - a sort of laboratory where future fabric trends are tested out.

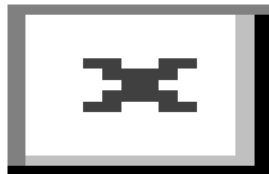


Image caption Xu Lin says that while Italian companies cannot compete on price, they have other advantages

Italian companies invest heavily in technological research producing innovative textiles for the couture end of the market.

Mr Xu believes that there is a burgeoning market back home not only for cheap apparel, but for the most expensive and refined Italian garments and fabrics.

"Hand-made in Tuscany is the best you can find," confirms Ermanno Scervino, one of Italy's top couture designers. "Its artisans are the most creative in the world and that is why my business is here in Florence and not in Milan or Paris."

Mr Scervino uses Tuscan specialist knowledge to produce original technological fabrics for each of his collections. He is planning to open shops in Shanghai and Beijing within the coming year.

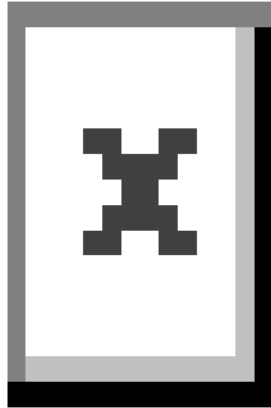


Image caption Chinese signs can be seen in Prato

The long hours put in by the Chinese in Prato are helping fill High Street chains such as Primark, H&M and Topshop in Europe with trendy, disposable fashion. But the Chinese have already raised their sights to the top end of the fashion market.

Lu Chen, a 24 year-old Chinese model living in Italy, says that young Chinese are studying at fashion schools in Italy in order to pick up the Italian design skills - the benchmark for international couture fashion .

"The Chinese really connect with the best quality Italian fashion and want to learn how to replicate that," she says.

Mr Xu says that he is already employing Italians as designers and in key factory positions.

"If the Chinese weren't in Prato and the clothes were made in mainland China instead, the Italians would be suffering far more," he says. "We have helped the Italians by ensuring the Made in Italy brand is ever more popular in China."

As Mr Scervino fits an exquisite leather and silk skirt in his Florentine studio on the tall and elegant Ms Lu, he expresses doubts that flair and chic can be taught in schools.

"You need to live in a country where beauty, art and craftsmanship have been treasured since the Renaissance," he says.

"It isn't something you can copy. I have Chinese customers in my shops around the world who want to buy Italian flair and handwork. It's unique and that is what wealthy people seek."

From: Fritz, Jonathan D. (b)(6)@state.gov>

Sent: Friday, April 3, 2020 8:18 AM

To: EAP-CM-Office-DL <EAP-CM-Office-DL@state.gov>; EAP-FO-Principals-DL <EAP-FO-Principals-DL@state.gov>; INR-China-Small Group <INR-ChinaSmallGroup@state.gov>

Subject: How did covid-19 begin? Its initial origin story is shaky. from The Washington Post

David Ignatius runs through the possible origins...

https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/how-did-covid-19-begin-its-initial-origin-story-is-shaky/2020/04/02/1475d488-7521-11ea-87da-77a8136c1a6d_story.html

April 2, 2020 at 6:56 p.m. EDT

The story of how the novel coronavirus emerged in Wuhan, China, has produced a nasty propaganda battle between the United States and China. The two sides have traded some of the sharpest charges made between two nations since the Soviet Union in 1985 falsely accused the CIA of manufacturing AIDS.

U.S. intelligence officials don't think the pandemic was caused by deliberate wrongdoing. The outbreak that has now swept the world instead began with a simpler story, albeit one with tragic consequences: The prime suspect is "natural" transmission from bats to humans, perhaps through unsanitary markets. But scientists don't rule out that an accident at a research laboratory in Wuhan might have spread a deadly bat virus that had been collected for scientific study.

"Good science, bad safety" is how Sen. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.) put this theory in a Feb. 16 tweet. He ranked such a breach (or natural transmission) as more likely than two extreme possibilities: an accidental leak of an "engineered bioweapon" or a "deliberate release." Cotton's earlier loose talk about bioweapons set off a furor, back when he first raised it in late January and called the outbreak "worse than Chernobyl."

President Trump and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo added to the bile last month by describing the coronavirus as the "Chinese virus" and the "Wuhan virus," respectively. China dished wild, irresponsible allegations of its own. On March 12, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Lijian Zhao charged in a tweet: "It might be [the] US army who brought the epidemic to Wuhan." He retweeted an article that claimed, without evidence, that U.S. troops might have spread the virus when they attended the World Military Games in Wuhan in October 2019.

China retreated on March 22, when Ambassador to the United States Cui Tiankai told "Axios on HBO" that such rumors were "crazy" on both sides. A State Department spokesman said Cui's comment was "welcome," and Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping pledged in a March 27 phone call to "focus on cooperative behavior," a senior administration official told me.

To be clear: U.S. intelligence officials think there's no evidence whatsoever that the coronavirus was created in a laboratory as a potential bioweapon. Solid scientific

research demonstrates that the virus wasn't engineered by humans and that it originated in bats.

But how did the outbreak occur? Solving this medical mystery is important to prevent future pandemics. What's increasingly clear is that the initial "origin story" — that the virus was spread by people who ate contaminated animals at the Huanan Seafood Market in Wuhan — is shaky.

Scientists have identified the culprit as a bat coronavirus, through genetic sequencing; bats weren't sold at the seafood market, although that market or others could have sold animals that had contact with bats. The Lancet noted in a January study that the first covid-19 case in Wuhan had no connection to the seafood market.

There's a competing theory — of an accidental lab release of bat coronavirus — that scientists have been puzzling about for weeks. Less than 300 yards from the seafood market is the Wuhan branch of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Researchers from that facility and the nearby Wuhan Institute of Virology have posted articles about collecting bat coronaviruses from around China, for study to prevent future illness. Did one of those samples leak, or was hazardous waste deposited in a place where it could spread?

Richard Ebright, a Rutgers microbiologist and biosafety expert, told me in an email that "the first human infection could have occurred as a natural accident," with the virus passing from bat to human, possibly through another animal. But Ebright cautioned that it "also could have occurred as a laboratory accident, with, for example, an accidental infection of a laboratory worker." He noted that bat coronaviruses were studied in Wuhan at Biosafety Level 2, "which provides only minimal protection," compared with the top BSL-4.

Ebright described a December video from the Wuhan CDC that shows staffers "collecting bat coronaviruses with inadequate [personal protective equipment] and unsafe operational practices." Separately, I reviewed two Chinese articles, from 2017 and 2019, describing the heroics of Wuhan CDC researcher Tian Junhua, who while capturing bats in a cave "forgot to take protective measures" so that "bat urine dripped from the top of his head like raindrops."

And then there's the Chinese study that was curiously withdrawn. In February, a site called ResearchGate published a brief article by Botao Xiao and Lei Xiao from Guangzhou's South China University of Technology. "In addition to origins of natural recombination and intermediate host, the killer coronavirus probably originated from a laboratory in Wuhan. Safety level may need to be reinforced in high risk biohazardous laboratories," the article concluded. Botao Xiao told the Wall Street Journal in February that he had withdrawn the paper because it "was not supported by direct proofs."

Accidents happen, human or laboratory. Solving the mystery of how covid-19 began isn't a blame game, but a chance for China and the United States to cooperate in a crisis, and prevent a future one.

Read more from David Ignatius's archive, follow him on Twitter or subscribe to his updates on Facebook.

Sender:	"Stilwell, David R" <StilwellDR@state.gov>
Recipient:	Fritz, Jonathan D <FritzJD@state.gov>;

EAP-CM-Office-DL <EAP-CM-Office-DL@state.gov>; EAP-FO-Principals-DL <EAP-FO-Principals-DL@state.gov>; INR-China-Small Group <INR-ChinaSmallGroup@state.gov>

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