

They called it a conspiracy theory. But Alina Chan tweeted life into the idea that the virus came from a lab. | MIT Technology Review

By Antonio Regalado

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Alina Chan started asking questions in March 2020. She was chatting with friends on Facebook about the virus then spreading out of China. She thought it was strange that people were saying it had come out of a food market. If that was so, why hadn't anyone found any infected animals? She wondered why no one was admitting another possibility, which to her seemed very obvious: the outbreak might have been due to a lab accident.

Chan is a postdoc in a gene therapy lab at the Broad Institute, a prestigious research institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts, that's affiliated with both Harvard and MIT. She had worked in a few labs and knew they were not perfect places. In fact, she had often been the one to speak up about what was wrong. She'd been involved in a whistleblowing complaint about working conditions in a lab at Harvard. (Both Chan and Harvard have declined to comment on the details.) Chan always seemed to be the one who took a stand, even if it didn't bode well for her career. "I am stupid that way," she says. "A born shit stirrer."

[...]

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