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REUTERS FACT CHECK APRIL 7, 2020 / 10:45 AM / 2 MONTHS AGO

# False headline claim: Harvard Professor arrested for creating and selling the new coronavirus to China

4 MIN READ

A viral claim on social media alleges the U.S. government has “just discovered and arrested” Dr. Charles Lieber from Harvard University, for “manufacturing and selling” the new coronavirus to China. Different iterations of the claim have been shared in multiple languages over 79,000 times on Facebook as of April 7,2020, according to Crowdtangle. ( [here](#) , [here](#) , [here](#) ).

Some posts include a genuine news report from an ABC station, along with false video descriptions. One post claims: “USA just discovered the man who manufactured and sold the Coronavirus bio-weapon to China; Dr Charles Lieber, Head of Chemistry and Biology department at Harvard University, USA. He was just arrested today, according to American department sources. #StaySafe”

While the Department of Justice did arrest Dr. Charles Lieber, chair of the Chemistry and Chemical Biology Department at Harvard University, this was not for creating the new coronavirusnor nor for selling it to China. Lieber and two non-Harvard Chinese researchers were charged with lying about their alleged links to the Chinese government. Reuters reported on his arrest [here](#) .

The charges were part of an aggressive effort by U.S. authorities to block what they say are Chinese attempts to steal American scientific and technological advances.

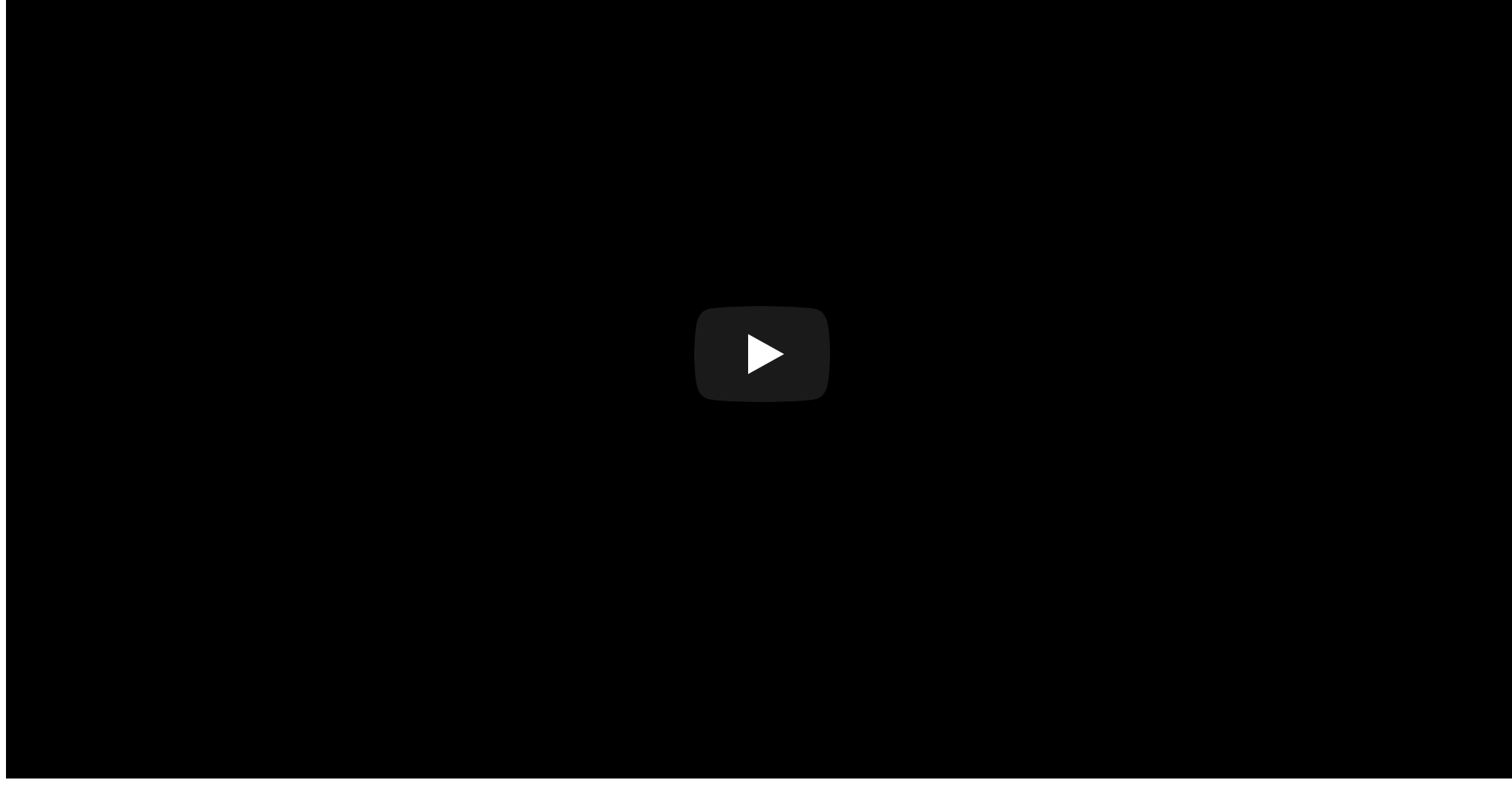
On January 28,2020, prosecutors charged Lieber with lying about participating in China’s Thousand Talents Plan, which aims to attract research specialists working overseas.

A press statement by the Department of Justice(DoJ) on this case is visible [here](#) .

According to the DOJ, “Unbeknownst to Harvard University beginning in 2011, Lieber became a “Strategic Scientist” at Wuhan University of Technology (WUT) in China and was a contractual participant in China’s Thousand Talents Plan from in or about 2012 to 2017.”

In exchange for various payments (salaries and grants) , Lieber provided services for the Thousand Talents Program for WUT. Lieber was accused of lying about his involvement.

Misleading posts online pair actual news footage about Lieber’s arrest with written claims that he was arrested for creating the new coronavirus and selling it to China. The original news reports by WCVB Channel 5 Boston and CBS Boston can be seen [here](#) and [here](#) .



The Reuters Fact-Check team previously debunked allegations on the new coronavirus being genetically designed or produced in a lab [here](#) .

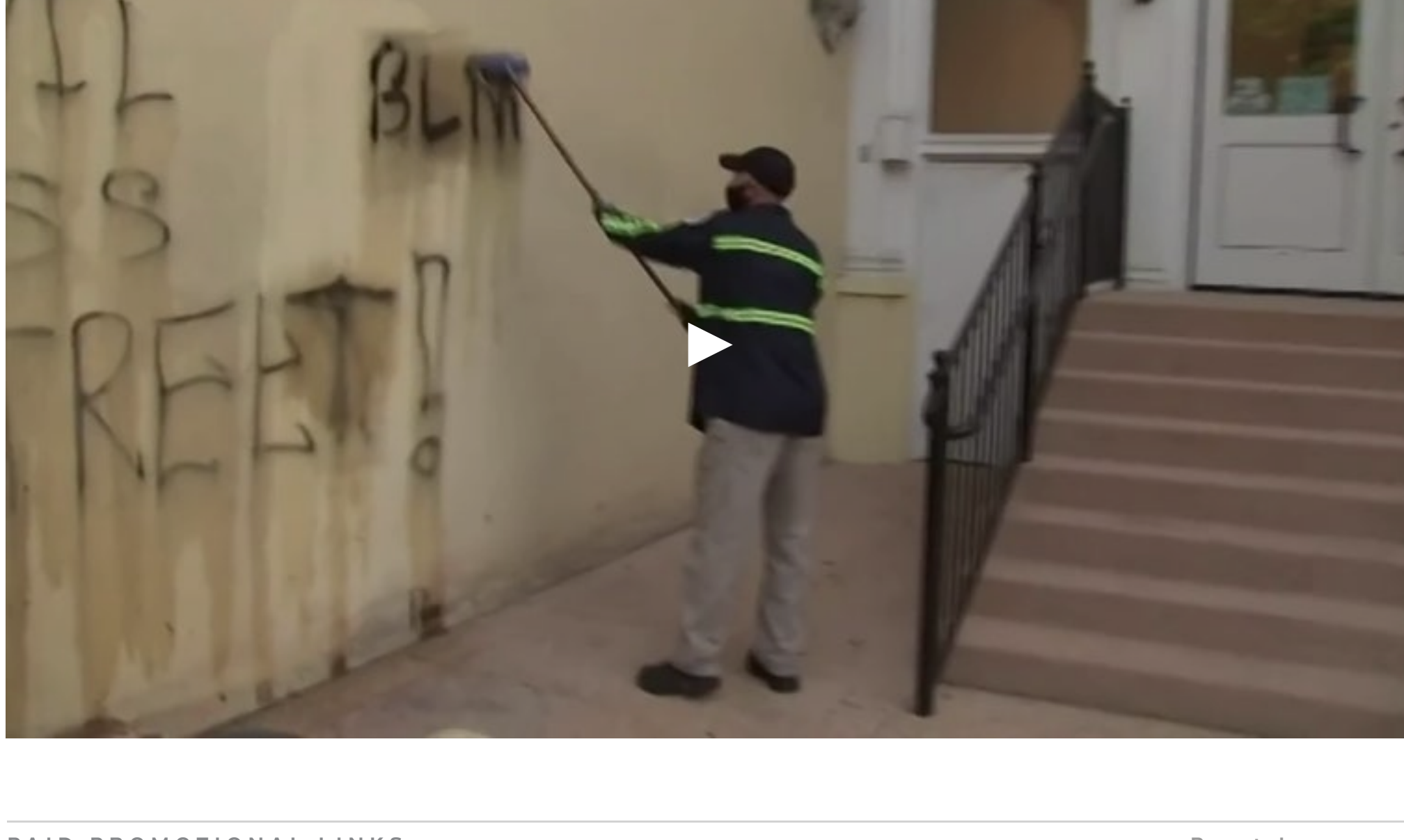
## VERDICT

False headline: Harvard’s Dr. Charles Lieber was arrested on January 28,2020,for lying about his alleged links to the Chinese government on a research program, not for creating or selling the new coronavirus.

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