

More Answers Needed for Resolving the Mystery on Publishing the Flowering Paper

Shi V. Liu

Eagle Institute of Molecular Medicine
Apex, NC 27502, USA

Corresponding with SVL@logibio.com

(Received 2007-05-04; accepted 2007-05-07; published 2007-05-08*)

HIGHLIGHT

A Letter asking *Science* for answers on the high level misconduct in its publication was rejected by *Science*. Then a Correspondence derived from this Letter was submitted to *Nature* but, interestingly, was rejected by *Nature*. Why?

ABSTRACT

Nature has used almost two pages to cover some background news on a recent *Science* retraction. However, some deep level questions relating to high level misconduct were not asked by *Nature* but were presented in this Correspondence. However, facing these questions aimed at revealing editorial misconduct and high level misconduct by a “top” scientist, *Nature* suddenly lost interest and stated that the “complaint does not meet *Nature*’s stated editorial criteria for publication.

KEY WORDS

High level misconduct, Retraction, *Science*, *Nature*, Justice, Editorial criteria, Editorial misconduct

Sir – In the News (446: 956-957, 2007) you reported the retraction by *Science* (316:367, 2007) one of its Breakthrough publications in 2005 (309: 1694-1696 and 1880-1885, 2005). You also question the “timing” of the retraction with the publication of two more flowering papers by *Science* as “the papers were pushed to publication” – a speculation that was denied by *Science*.

While your News has mainly focused on the Nilsson’s accusation of the data (mis)handling by a junior member of his research team, a more serious high-level misconduct has been ignored.

According to a published statement by Huang – the accused junior member – “Nilsson interrupted our original plan and asked us to rapidly do these experiments in order to catch up with two papers on FD gene that would be soon published”. After the experiments, “all original data were handled to other authors for making the final tables and figures and the paper [which was written by Nilsson] was

submitted to *Science* before he came back from a vacation”. All these quotations were translated from a Chinese publication posted in *New Threads* (<http://www.xys.org>).

To find the actual truth I, as the Editor-in-Chief of *Scientific Ethics* (<http://im1.biz>) wrote to Nilsson and asked him 10 questions including when and how he learnt that the two papers on FD gene that would be soon published. Nilsson so far still has not answered me. Meanwhile Huang, after he read the 10 questions which were also published in *New Threads*, contacted me and provided more inside information.

Apparently, Nilsson learnt the upcoming publishing of the other two flowering papers in May 2005 and then asked Huang *et al.* to rush on some experiments. Nilsson, and likely some other co-authors, finalized the presentations of the data obtained by Huang (some “bad” points were marked out but not deleted by Huang) and wrote

the paper for *Science*. So if there was a kind of data “falsification” misconduct, Huang should not be the person to be blamed, not to say the only person being blamed. In my judgment, a person intentionally engaged in data falsification would not leave a candid mark on the “bad” data points. It is also my logical sense to say whoever removed those “bad” points from the final presentation and did not offer public an explanation was actually falsifying the data.

By checking the publishing records of *Science* I found the publishing of Nilsson’s much later submitted paper in advance of the other two already accepted papers is an outright editorial misconduct. The submission dates for Abe *et al.*’s paper (*Science* 309: 1052-1056, 2005), and Wigge *et al.*’s paper (*Science* 309: 1056-1059, 2005) were respectively June 10 and May 3 of 2005, both were much earlier than the submission date (July 21 of 2005) of the Nilsson/Huang paper (*Science* 309: 1694-1696, 2005). But the dates accepted for publication for these three papers were respectively July 12, July 7, and August 3 of 2005. However, while the other two papers were only published regularly in print on August 12, 2005, the Nilsson/Huang paper was published first online on August 11 and then in print on September 9, 2005.

It is appalling to see how Nilsson treated the other two earlier papers that he was aware in his much later submitted paper. Instead of citing and also objectively placing those two earlier studies in suitable positions of scientific history Nilsson mentioned them only in the “Note added in proof”, as if he only became aware of those studies after he submitted the paper. Why would Nilsson be so dishonest in communicating scientific knowledge

and history? Is this kind of fact distortion or credit robbery more harmful and shameful than those data-manipulation types of “misconception”?

Science has rejected *Nature*’s speculation of pushing the recent two flowing papers for publishing. These two papers took a 40-day review period and thus *Science*’s action may be not that unusual. However, the Nilsson 2005 paper took only 13 days to accept and 21 days to publish online. Is this lightening fast speed of publishing an amazement of the working efficiency of *Science* or a smoking gun of the work abnormality in *Science*? Why should *Science* give Nilsson a much favored treatment by publishing his study even earlier than the other two already accepted submissions? Did some one run an inside track or even take a short-cut to reach the finishing line earlier?

Nilsson and *Science*: you both owe public many answers!

* This manuscript was submitted to *Nature* on 2007-05-04 but was rejected on 2007-05-07. The rejection of *Nature* stated that “On this occasion, the papers concerned were published in the journal *Science*, so your complaint does not meet *Nature*’s stated editorial criteria for publication. We suggest, therefore, that you refer your own investigation of this matter to *Science*, the journal in which the work was published.”

The publication above is the same as submitted to *Nature* except the added highlight, abstract and keywords.