

Retraction and Research Integrity Education in China

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Abstract This article draws the attention of research managers and policy makers to the issue that to become a science power curtailng misconduct is the daunting challenge that emerging countries simply cannot ignore. Systematic and orchestrated efforts are needed to foster and institutionalize research integrity education among all stakeholders.

Keywords Retraction · Research misconduct · Research integrity education

The year 2017 has witnessed attention-grabbing news on China's research integrity. *Tumor Biology*, a former Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) journal retracted 107 articles on April 21,—and all originated from China. This epic-scale retraction again put China in the spotlight of the scientific community, only 2 years since the 2015 three-wave large-scale retractions from BioMed Central, Springer, and Elsevier publishers (Lei and Zhang 2017). According to the official website of *Tumor Biology*, the retractions are all due to fake reviews.

A handful of explanations have been offered with a list of scapegoats named. The China Association for Science and Technology (CAST) denounced the

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irresponsibility and carelessness of *Tumor Biology* and Springer Publisher in gate-keeping. They cast doubts on their practices of using author-nominated reviewers without verifying information. This charge seems valid, evidenced by the fact that the same article written by the same set of coauthors was published and appeared twice in the batch of 107 retractions.

Some blamed the Chinese culture and its deeply rooted tolerance toward misconduct as the law cannot be enforced when there are many offenders. Some condemned predatory journals eliciting fraud by overworked clinical researchers. Some deplored the “publish or perish” dogma paving the way for all sorts of academic misbehavior. Many insisted that the universities should be held liable for research fraud, as they did not publicize findings and penalize the culprits in the past. And some scholars condemned the global manufacturing industry of publications, insisting that doing research, publishing research, and evaluating research should be limited to a few qualified individuals rather than the extant huge scientific workforce.

Retraction is a no-win situation for all stakeholders: for authors (funding restrictions, demotions, firings), for research affiliations (soiled reputations, jeopardized names), for journals (the loss of high-quality submissions and the decreased chance of being indexed in commercial publication databases in the future), and for publishers (the loss of fame, poor evaluations).

Admittedly, retractions and scientific misconduct are not unique to China. Yet the large scale and sheer growth of Chinese retracted articles provide a telling glimpse into the nonneglected phenomena. In order to realize its ambition of “world-class universities, world-class disciplines”, curtailing misconduct is the daunting challenge that China simply cannot ignore. Systematic and orchestrated efforts are needed to foster integrity among all stakeholders, including but not limit to: researchers, research organizations, journal editors, publishers, reviewers, funding agencies, and whistle-blowers (Kornfeld et al. 2017).

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