

Free, Uncensored Science and Credit for Truth

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Abstract

Censorship is the suppression of speech or, respectively, deletion of written communications each of which has likely truthful contents, but which may be considered objectionable, harmful, sensitive, or inconvenient to the government or media organizations as determined by a censor.

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Science is knowledge covering general truths or the operation of general laws. Thus, from a linguistic and logical point of view, these two words should never be tied together, unless a government or media organization is afraid of truths and thus has to suppress the communication of those truths.

So, censorship really should *never* have a place in science. Why then have people complained all the time about this or that kind of censorship in science?

Very recently, *Nature* published a series of articles condemning the so-called "censorship" occurred in an eastern country where at least some people do not believe the Darwinian evolution (Abbott, 2009). The alleged "censorship" is the withdrawing of a paper celebrating the 200 years birthday of Darwin from a planned publication. Whether or not that withdrawal of a paper from a peer-reviewed journal constitutes a censorship is debatable. But the suppression of more than two-thirds of the comments submitted to a presumably open discussion forum and then massive deletion of already published

comments by *Nature* is much closer to a censorship if not a censorship *per se*.

A more straight-forward and violent manifestation of censorship may be seen in a very recent case which is very ironic indeed.

In response to *Nature's* Editorial "It's good to blog" (Anonymous, 2009). I posted the following comment in its associated discussion forum entitled "Science, journalism or public discourse" (Clarke, 2009).

I think this Editorial is a really good one and hope that its spirit will penetrate every corner in this scientific world.

The attitude on "much to gain from the uncensored voices of researchers" is an even better one because censorship should have no place in blogosphere.

Let us review a well-known case where science has gained tremendously from the uncensored blogging.

The stem cell research scandal by Hwang was exposed initially with a blogging because the traditional channel had suppressed the exposure. I cannot imagine what would happen if the blogosphere also had the regular "blocks" as often seen in traditional communication platforms.

However, blogging would not be effective if the traditional journals just play the "see no evil hear no evil" game. Hwang's eventual downfall was due to *Nature's* dedication to find out the real problem of a Science Publication. Without *Nature's* big stature I do not think Science would easily give in.

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But what if Nature, Science and all the other "top" journals have positioned on the same side on a scientific issue, will the blogging be interested by anyone? Can the blogging really make a difference?

I have seen a massive blogging on the problems associated with the iPSC research at some very popular websites such as <http://im1.biz>, <http://blog.sina.com.cn/im1>, and <http://www.stemcell8.cn/index.php>. The blogging has lasted over a year and there was even a peer-reviewed Review coming out of this in a professional journal (Stem Cells and Development). However, has any "top" journal formally recognize the problems?

At the same time, I have also seen a massive deletion of some comments made by a person named "Shi Liu" on Nature's news on iPSC research. Some of these comments were later posted at the above popular websites and received many supports. So I am wondering if the new Editorial by Nature would be a forecast for some changes in Nature.

However, this comment was removed by Nature with a "hidden" notice in which the field of "reason for removal" was even left blank. Nature removed not only my comments but also my user account so that I had to establish a new user account to regain my access for making more comments. But my later comments as well as others' comments supporting my views were all removed very quickly. The moderator, who actually is the publishing executive editor of Nature, even condemned these truth-seeking comments as "spamming" and published an untrue conclusion that "this forum discussion is being abused by a spammer who is using a range of pseudo-identities" and "They are all by the same user, using different false identities." The moderator also engaged in serious discussions with those who posted very defamatory remarks and even straight personal attacks (calling me as "pest") on how to suppress my expression by blocking all of the IP (internet protocol) addresses that I have used.

That censorship plus slander continued despite my repeated protests and condemnations from others. Eventually that "open" blog was locked (to prevent any more direct posting) so that no protest can even be shown to public without the approval of the

moderator who is the publishing executive editor of Nature making that *spamming* defamation on me. Interestingly, only one comment was posted by that moderator during the long "locking" period of the comment window. The comment window was opened later. But as soon as my comment on the name-calling (still kept by Nature) against me was posted, my comment was quickly deleted and the window was locked again. However, those defamations of my person were still maintained by Nature until it received a legal lawsuit (TFCE, 2009). But the response of Nature towards that legal complaint was not the restoration of scientific criticisms but the complete deletion of many more comments made by the plaintiff and other critics.

If the communicative materials deleted by Nature had been harmful to society, then its censorship may have been perceived as correct censorship. But what Nature deleted are all facts that are truthful and beneficial to humanity and, by contrast, what Nature protected is unfortunately largely false and may even be harmful to human beings.

The scientific messages contained in the criticisms deleted by Nature are: iPSCs are more likely originated from rare somatic stem cells or even progenitor cells identified as "stem cells". The "induction" process may non-selectively activate cell reproduction and then stem cells or progenitor cells are selected or isolated out based on the use of some "stemness" marker(s). Briefly, the "reprogramming" may be just another term for the well-known transformation of normal cells into cancer cells.

These views on iPSCs are in sharp contrast with the mainstream views on iPSCs which claim that iPSCs are directly reprogrammed from normal somatic cells by an "induction" process with a few transcription factors which cause the de-differentiation of (terminally) differentiated (adult) cell back into pluripotent stem cells that are indistinguishable from embryonic stem cells (ESCs). Some mainstreamers even further claim that iPSCs are "genetically identical" to the recipient and are "cancer-free" and thus are "ethical" and "safe" replacements for ESCs for therapeutic cloning and regenerative medicine.

However, just as stated by the Nobel Prize winner Brian Josephson, "If scientists as a whole denounce an idea this should not necessarily be taken as proof that the said idea is absurd: rather,

one should examine carefully the alleged grounds for such opinions and judge how well these stand up to detailed scrutiny”(http://www.tcm.phy.cam.ac.uk/~bdj10/). My insightful knowledge on iPSCs actually has stood up the scrutiny of time because almost all the FACTS (objective observations, not subjective interpretations) are now in full support of my minority perspective on iPSCs.

Interestingly, those who have strongly opposed that initial minority perspective (Liu, 2007a-d; 2008) now even cryptically adopt (accepting the conclusions made in earlier PUBLICATIONS but giving no credit to the most relevant original PUBLICATIONS) that unpopular look of iPSCs (Liu, 2009a) by publishing some “fresh look” at iPSCs (Yamanaka, 2009). An iPSC authority who has played a major role in inducing a “top” journal to reject a solid criticism on flawed claims in his and others’ publications (Liu, 2007a-d; 2008) now even states that those different observations are “just unpublished” even though he was given copies of the published criticisms (Baker, 2009). These dishonest behaviors, credit robberies, and false statements were pointed out in various submissions to the journals publishing the untruthful information. But, amazingly, all of these journals have just ignored these truth-seeking submissions (Liu, 2009b; 2009c). Besides my above efforts, there are fortunately also a few other investigators who dare to outline the flaws of the iPS (and ES) field (Wilson, 2009), but, taken together, we currently witness a totalitarian regime-like censorship of some well-known journals towards the expression of truth and justified scholarly critique.

So how can it be that scientific communication is locked into some unscientific censorship and how could truthful scientists even be slandered in the public domain by some “top” journals? The answer is: because we lack true openness and transparency as well as genuine ethics that includes mutual respect in scientific communication (Liu, 2009d). Or, as even pointed out by Nobel laureate Josephson, some reports published in top journals are

“the agenda-driven” and thus censorship against criticisms on that agenda is noting but a nature of dictatorial publishing.

Thus, in order to promote truth and overcome censorship, we need a revolution in scientific communication (Liu and Radulescu, 2007; Liu, zhang and Radulescu, 2007). Let us say everyone should be given an equal opportunity in speaking out for truth and no censorship should be allowed in science. Let us urge those in power to give due credit to those individuals that have previously expressed insightful knowledge and, by contrast, sanction those intentionally spreading false information and communicating by way of slander rather than in a scholarly and truthful manner.

Note added in proof

Nature recently published an Editorial which asks changes in English libel law because “unjust burdens of proof” have been laid on the shoulders of the authors and/or publishers who are accused of defamation (*Nature* 459: 751, 2009). However, if responsible authors and journals write and publish nothing but the truth, what burdens would they have in proving the truth? *Nature’s* Editorial ends with a statement that “The English law needs to be changed... Only then can Britain claim to be a country that supports free speech”. However, *Nature* deleted the following comment in response to its Editorial: “I think scientists should have their freedom in speech and censorship should have no place in science. However, scientist should still abide any common laws governing all societies.”

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