

## Wright brothers and the Nobel Prize

An article by Kantha<sup>1</sup> in *Current Science* drew attention to the reasons as to why the Wright brothers might have failed a Nobel Prize. Earlier, a letter titled 'The Wright Brothers' Claims to a Nobel Prize<sup>1</sup> was published in *The New York Times* (8 May 1909), in which Harlan Moore argued that the duo deserved either a Nobel Prize in Physics or the Nobel Peace Prize.

It is interesting to note that until 1974, access to documents such as nomination letters, experts and the Nobel Committee's reports on Nobel Prize in Chemistry or Physics for historical research was forbidden by the Swedish Academy of Sciences<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, the literature available before 1974 cannot be relied on. It raises questions as to why in 1909 *The New York Times*, extensively propagated for the Wright Brothers as deserving candidates for the Nobel Peace Prize. Moreover, the Nobel Committee database<sup>3</sup> does not list them as nominees for the prize.

Crawford's 'The Beginnings of the Nobel Institution – The Science Prizes, 1905–1915' chronicles the history of the Nobel Prizes in physics and chemistry<sup>2</sup>. He notes that in December 1908 Mittag-Leffler wrote to French mathematician Paul Painlevé, then at the École Polytechnique, suggesting him to draft a nomination proposal for the Wright Brothers, H. Farman and G. Voisin,

known for their contribution to aviation. The 22-page long draft was later translated to Swedish for the purpose of nomination. Two French (Painlevé and Henri Poincaré) and six Swedes nominated the four candidates<sup>4</sup>. Four of the nominators were mathematicians. Around the same time Mittag-Leffler started supporting theoretical physicist Henri Poincaré, and even asked some of his French colleagues to write to the members of the Nobel Committee in favour of Poincaré.

However, the question arises, why Mittag-Leffler changed his mind and started supporting Poincaré, though he asked Painlevé to nominate candidates for the Nobel Prize from the field of aviation? Crawford states this as Mittag-Leffler's trick to appease the experimental physicists in the Academy, and thought that by doing so they would not oppose Poincaré's candidature. But Arrhenius opposed the idea of nominating candidates from aviation. In his general report to the Nobel Committee, Arrhenius discredited the discovery and pointed out that it would ensue loss of life even from minor errors in the construction of airplanes. He also felt that in the present state, the invention could hardly benefit mankind<sup>5</sup>. *The Politics of Excellence*<sup>6</sup> highlights that such praxis continued in the following years, that is, many of the physics/chemistry Nobel Prize decisions were influenced by the

interests of individual members of the Nobel Committee.

1. Kantha, S. S., *Curr. Sci.*, 2012, **103**, 435–437.
2. Crawford, E. T., *The Beginnings of the Nobel Institution – The Science Prizes, 1901–1915*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987, p. 2.
3. [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/nomination/nomination.php?action=advsearch&start=71&key1=candcountry&log1=&string1=US&log10=&log11=&order1=year&order2=nomname&order3=cand1name](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/nomination/nomination.php?action=advsearch&start=71&key1=candcountry&log1=&string1=US&log10=&log11=&order1=year&order2=nomname&order3=cand1name), accessed 31 August 2012.
4. Stubhaug, A., *Gösta Mittag-Leffler – The Story of Gösta Mittag-Leffler*, Springer Verlag, Berlin, 2010, pp. 533–546.
5. Küppers, G., Weingart, P. and Ulitzka, N., *Die Nobelpreise in Physik und Chemie 1901–1929, Materialien zum Nominierungsprozess*, B.K. Verlag GmbH, Bielefeld, 1982, p. 21.
6. Friedman, R. M., *The Politics of Excellence – Behind the Nobel Prize in Science*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 2001.

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## How does UGC identify predatory journals?

'UGC's regulations on minimum qualifications for appointments of teachers and other academic staff in universities and colleges and measures for the maintenance of standards in higher education 2010' introduced Academic Performance Indicators (API) for tenure promotions for teachers working in universities and colleges. However, after API came into existence in 2010, there is an upsurge in the number of journals published in India. As API became the major criterion for appointments and tenure promotions, the number of research papers published by teachers working in universities and

colleges across India has also seen a huge increase. The ISSN (International Standard Serial Number) numbered journals have started to make their entry in large numbers. ISSN is in no way the criterion for determining the quality of journals. It is merely a standard for identifying the number of journals published in a country or worldwide. On what basis did UGC consider ISSN as one of the criteria for determining the quality of the journals for assigning more points?

What is interesting and more important here is that, because of the UGC guidelines for publishing research papers in

ISSN numbered journals, many predatory journals/publishers have come up, publishing articles without proper peer-review process. A recent letter published in *Current Science*<sup>1</sup> has shown that many of the articles published in these journals are merely copy–paste work (plagiarized ones). The list of predatory publishers/journals prepared by Jeffrey Beall, a librarian at the University of Colorado, USA, prompts us to think seriously about the growing number of predatory publishers and journals. A cursory look at the list of predatory publishers/journals available at <http://scholarlyyoa.com/publi->

## CORRESPONDENCE

shers/, indicates several such publications which have originated and are operating in India. To name a few: Abhinav (<http://www.abhinavjournal.com/index.aspx>) publishes three journals in three different subject domains, Academic Journals Online (AJO, <http://www.academicjournalsonline.co.in/>) publishes more than 30 journals in different subject domains, including computer science, agricultural science, and library and information science; Academic & Industry Research Collaboration Centre (AIRCC, <http://airccse.org/journal.html>) publishes as many as 70 journals across a spectrum of subjects; Bio-IT International (<http://bipublication.com/index.html>) publishes seven journals on bioscience and technology, and Mehta Press (<http://www.mehtapress.com/>) publishes more than 150 journals in different subject domains. Many of these journals have an ISSN number and are claimed to be

international journals (it is surprising that many of these journal titles start with 'international').

Many of these publishers have also claimed that their journals are indexed in international citation indexing databases such as SCIRUS, Open J-Gate, getCITED, Index Copernicus, etc. Articles published in e-journals and online mode get automatically indexed in *Google Scholar* or other similar indexing databases. Some of the journals have also mentioned their impact factor. Impact factor for journals can be obtained easily using simple mathematical formulation. This is completely misleading and unethical.

In such a case, how does UGC determine the quality of the articles or journals? Do the appointment or promotion committees really look into this matter at the time of appointments? What they want is only the number of publications

and where these articles have appeared (international or national journals). UGC guidelines are also tailor-made in such a way that the number of publications is the major criterion for appointments and tenure promotions, and not their quality. There is no mechanism to identify the quality of the journal articles or the predatory publishers and journals. There is immediate need to develop a mechanism to identify such predatory publishers and blacklist them. Otherwise, good research and researchers would suffer.

1. Foster, K. R. and Chopra, K. L., *Curr. Sci.*, 2012, **103**, 1258–1259.

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## Uncited SSCI publications in China

The *Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI)*, developed by the Institute for Scientific Information, is a citation database covering journals of social sciences across several disciplines. It fully indexes 2996 journals across 56 social sciences disciplines. It also indexes indi-

vidually selected, relevant items from over 3300 of the world's leading scientific and technical journals. China has now started catching up in social sciences. In recent years, the visibility of China's social sciences research outputs in the *SSCI* database has increased signifi-

cantly<sup>1</sup>. However, the share of citations is rather low<sup>2</sup>.

A search 'Peoples R China' in publications addresses in the *SSCI* database on 15 January 2013, returned 48,580 items, out of which 21,921 have never been cited. *Pnc*, the percentage of publications

**Table 1.** Top 10 most productive *SSCI*, *SCI* and *A&HCI* subjects of the 21,921 *SSCI* publications from China

<i>SSCI</i> subject	<i>U</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>Pnc</i> (%)	<i>SCI</i> subject	<i>U</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>Pnc</i> (%)	<i>A&amp;HCI</i> subject	<i>U</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>Pnc</i> (%)
Area studies	676	1,350	50.1	Psychology	2,183	9,358	23.3	Literature	1,080	1,347	80.2
Linguistics	798	1,646	48.5	Mathematics	397	1,731	22.9	Religion	188	257	73.2
Education and educational research	748	2,242	33.4	Nursing	241	1,201	20.1	Architecture	121	167	72.5
Social sciences – other topics	531	1,792	29.6	Computer science	494	2,572	19.2	Philosophy	443	637	69.5
Information science and library science	318	1,294	24.6	Public, environmental and occupational health	324	1,749	18.5	History	267	388	68.8
Psychology	2,183	9,358	23.3	Environmental sciences and ecology	461	2,548	18.1	Asian Studies	624	917	68.0
Business and economics	2,180	10,279	21.2	Engineering	466	2,704	17.2	Music	77	121	63.6
Nursing	241	1,201	20.1	Operations research and management science	317	1,913	16.6	Art	114	183	62.3
Public, environmental and occupational health	324	1,749	18.5	Psychiatry	385	2,364	16.3	History & philosophy of science	68	121	56.2
Psychiatry	385	2,364	16.3	Neurosciences and neurology	250	1,629	15.3	Archaeology	52	206	25.2

*U*, China's not cited in *SSCI* publications; *T*, China's *SSCI* publications.