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著者	Graf, Friedrich Wilhelm
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How Can We Guarantee the Scientific Authenticity of the Humanities?

Friedrich Wilhelm Graf
(Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München)

Four years ago, in late September 2015, more than 130 high ranking scientists and other experts from Germany and Japan met in Tokyo to debate about the “Contributions to Promoting Scientific Integrity”. The bilateral symposium was jointly arranged by four organizations, that is to say by the JSPS, the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, the JST = the Japan Science and Technology Agency, the AMED = Japan Agency for Medical Research and Development and the DFG, the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft or German Research Foundation. The symposium dealt with an important topic: “Self-Regulation and Self-Commitment in Science and the Humanities”. Answers should be found to the question why since the late 1990s researchers in both countries as well as in the system of science as such have been confronted with quite some cases of scientific misconduct. So both, Japanese and German researchers, tried to identify causes for dishonest conduct in science and considered possible precautions.

Scientific misconduct is a global problem. It has to do with the rapid structural changes in the scientific systems of many advanced societies. Modern industrialized societies see research and technological development as basic instruments for the increase of national wealth and the improvement of their people’s health and standard of living. In order to achieve more and better prosperity they invest between 1.5 and 3.5 percent

of their gross domestic product in research and technological development. The very fast expansion of the scientific systems in many countries can be demonstrated by data. According to the “InterAcademy Partnership’s” “Guide to Responsible Conduct in the Global Research Enterprise”: “The number of researchers working in the world rose from 4 Million in 1995 to 6 million in 2008, and worldwide Research & Development expenditures rose from \$522 billion (current U.S. dollars) in 1996 to \$1.3 trillion in 2009”.¹

During the last ten years again the number of scientists has been constantly growing. This means: With many more people doing science and research in the various fields of the humanities than twenty or thirty years ago, the number of black sheep in the global scientific community will probably increase, too. This does not only refer to the sciences but to the humanities as well. On a national level and on various international levels academic institutions like universities or research institutes, funding agencies and political institutions like parliaments or Ministries for Science and Education therefore developed codes of conduct for responsible, trustworthy research or guidelines for the protection and strengthening of academic integrity. Let me just mention five of those international recommendations and codes of conduct for the improvement of ethically responsible behaviour in science and the humanities:

In 2007 the OECD, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the Global Science Forum published a Declaration: “Best Practices for Ensuring Scientific Integrity and Preventing Misconduct”.

Furthermore, on September 22nd 2010 the “Singapore Statement on Research Integrity” was published. It was signed by 340 people from 51

¹ The InterAcademy Partnership (Ed.), *Doing Global Science: A Guide to Responsible Conduct in the Global Research Enterprise*, Princeton 2016.

countries participating in the 2nd World Conference on Research Integrity. This group included scientists, ethicists, representatives from funding organizations and research institutions like universities as well as scientific publishers.

In addition, there are the “Montreal Statement on Research Integrity in Cross-Boundary Research Collaborations”, developed in May 2013 by the 3rd World Conference on Research Integrity as a global guidance to the responsible conduct of research, and the “Revised Edition” of “The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity”, edited in 2017 by ALLEA — the network of “All European Academies”.

Finally, two years ago the “American Association for the Advancement of Science” published “The Brussels Declaration” on “Ethics and Principles for Science & Society Policy-Making”.

All these declarations and codes share a common view: Scientific misconduct does not only damage any science and violates professional responsibilities. It affects society in general as it undermines or even destroys public trust in researchers and in the results of their work. Scholarly research aims to increase our knowledge of the world(s) around us and shall foster a better understanding of ourselves as finite human beings. It depends on the ability of critical self-reflection and the will to communicate openly with other researchers in the field. “It is underpinned by freedom to define research questions and develop theories, gather empirical material and employ appropriate measures.”²

So it needs succinct ethical principles, a highly developed sense of

² ALLEA — All European Academies (Ed.), *The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity*, Berlin 2017, p.3.

responsibility, the readiness for autocorrection, cooperativeness and the ability to constructively accept a variety of divergent world views as being legitimate. A good researcher should be aware of the danger of taking his personal point of view as the only legitimate one. He ought to know: Others may be right and even better.

In strengthening research integrity Japan and Germany have chosen different ways. The German way can be explained by the guidelines first published by the DFG in 1998 and revised in 2013 under the title: "Safeguarding Good Scientific Practice". This document in fact established a comprehensive system of self-regulation in all German academic institutions and scientific organizations. Please let me shortly describe the German Ombudsman-System which was installed by the DFG in 1999. Apart from local Ombudspersons or Ombudscommittees at universities and research institutes there is a nationwide committee, called "Research Ombudsmann", which is an independent, neutral body. Researchers who think that one of their colleagues shows misconduct can inform either the Research Ombudsmann of their university (and respectively the institute) or inform the national Ombudsman about their suspicions and ask for advice and support in matters relating to good scientific practice and its abuse. In case the suspicions are confirmed the national Research Ombudsmann will inform the Ombudsperson of the university (or research institute) or the local Committee of Inquiry on Allegations of Scientific Misconduct. I will not explain any more details but what I want to stress is the efficiency of the procedure: Whistleblowers are protected, and possible wrongdoers are forced to lay open and explain their research practices. Every year the national Ombudsman informs the public about his (or her) work and takes care that all cases of scientific misconduct are revealed.

The Japanese system is quite different. Certainly all of you know it much better than I do. MEXT, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture,

Sports, Science and Technology, has set up a special department for Scientific Integrity that in 2014 published “Guidelines Responding to Misconduct in Research”. And the JSPS has published a “Green Book” for teaching a Code of Conduct to students and young researchers. I am eager to know what the universities in this country have done so far to protect their scientific integrity and academic reputation. In my view they have a strong responsibility for promoting codes of conduct and the dissemination of these rules among students and researchers. They ought to raise the awareness for the problem of ‘fake science’.

The question I was asked to deal with is: “How Can We Guarantee the Scientific Authenticity of Humanities?” I do not think that we can really guarantee that all researchers in the humanities will observe proper ethical standards. Honesty and virtues like forthrightness, straightforwardness, fair-mindedness, fidelity, veracity, truthfulness, reliability and sincerity cannot be enforced by rules and institutions. They have to do with character-building, education, moral maps, religious beliefs and the “habits of the heart” (Ann Swidler/Robert N. Bellah). They may differ from culture to culture, and I am not sure whether honesty or authenticity in a ‘Mafia’-environment really mean the same as in academic contexts. I am not a cultural relativist who would say that academic fraudulence in China is just part of their cultural traditions, but not acceptable for Europeans or the Japanese. But one has to ask whether there are really global, that means general standards of best academic practice, i. e. standards that are commonly accepted in all cultures. Being a sceptical realist I am convinced: There will always be liars, fraudsters and double-dealers among us and proud peacocks who cheat because they only care for their individual careers, unfortunately. But there are at least four measures to fight against academic misconduct.

First: The humanities both in Japan and Germany need a much more

open culture of debating than we are having now. We need more controversies about methodology and more disputes about the problems we are confronted with. We have to talk critically and self-critically about the influences of ideologies and religious beliefs on our individual research agendas. Humanities are often strongly affected by the 'Zeitgeist' and the fashion of the day. So it is quite difficult to differentiate between respectable, reliable or sincere humanities on the one hand and bad Geistes- or Kulturwissenschaft on the other. Anyhow, more intellectual conflict discussed with fairness and respect may limit bad science and could even help to prevent scientific misconduct. One has to justify one's insights, and this means: one needs good reasons. Liers and swindlers do not have them.

Second: Here I would like to quote "The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity" again: "Research institutions and organisations demonstrate leadership in providing clear policies and procedures on good research practice and the transparent and proper handling of violations."³

Third: We need more "PUS"-activities: "PUS" is an acronym for "Public Understanding of Science". Since my student days I have published reviews and essays in leading German and Swiss newspapers. I am convinced that it is our moral duty as scholars to inform the people about the complexities, slowness (or tardiness) and contradictions of scientific research and not to tell them simple stories with clear-cut narratives. The "Lebenswelten" (life worlds) we explore as researchers in the humanities are full of cultural tensions, contradictions, ambivalence and ambiguities. Its only the producers of 'fake science' who believe in an easily manageable world and who reduce antagonistic complexity to simplified messages. As sincere and

³ Ibid., p.5.

responsible researchers we ought to tell the public that both the world we live in and we as human beings are much more opaque and complex than many of us may figure.

Fourth: Those who are guilty of scientific misconduct, be it fabrication, fraud and swindel, plagiarism or falsification, must be sanctioned. Most of the 'fake researchers' know precisely what they do. Therefore we have to take them seriously. One of the sanctions can be their exclusion of scientific organizations or academic institutions. Or they could be denied new funding for further 'research'. Above all, transparency is needed, and all cases of wrongdoing should be published. Scientific publishers are responsible for stopping the dissemination of books and articles that contain just pseudo-scientific fake-news. But I am sure we can all agree on the following matter, of course: Anyone accused of scientific misconduct and irresponsible research activities is to be presumed innocent until proven otherwise. Investigations in possible misconduct cannot mean to publicly pillory the researcher in question or put someone on the chopping block.