

Science Journal Pulls 60 Papers in Peer-Review Fraud

A scientific journal has retracted 60 papers linked to a researcher in Taiwan, accusing him of “perverting the peer-review process” by creating fraudulent online accounts to judge the papers favorably and help get them published.

Sage Publications, publisher of [The Journal of Vibration and Control](#), in which the papers appeared over the last four years, said the researcher, Chen-Yuan Chen, had established a “peer-review and citation ring” consisting of fake scientists as well as real ones whose identities he had assumed. It said that in at least one case, Mr. Chen, who also uses the first name Peter, reviewed his own paper using one of the aliases.

In all, Mr. Chen, an associate professor of computer science who resigned in February from the [National Pingtung University of Education](#) amid an investigation, appears to have created 130 email accounts that were used in reviewing the papers. A spokeswoman for the publisher said it had contacted all the accounts but received no replies.

Sage said that the retracted papers all had at least one author or reviewer implicated in the ring, and that it was possible that other scientists were involved in the activity.

Chen Chien-huang, the university’s chief secretary, said by email on Friday morning that the university is still looking into the case. “We are continuing to investigate according to the materials just publicized by JVC,” he wrote. “Whether there are other professors involved is still under investigation.” He said the university did not know Chen-Yuan Chen’s whereabouts.

The retractions were first reported on the blog [Retraction Watch](#).

The journal — whose former editor, [Ali F. Nayfeh](#), an emeritus professor of engineering at Virginia Tech, resigned in May as the investigation was drawing to a close — publishes studies on subjects like signal analysis and noise control. Among the retracted papers was one titled “Ant-Inspired Collective Problem-Solving Systems.”

The publisher said it and Mr. Nayfeh first suspected misconduct last year and eventually contacted the university. The spokeswoman for Sage said it was never able to talk with Mr. Chen directly.

Mr. Nayfeh could not be reached for comment. [Mehdi Ahmadian](#), another Virginia Tech professor and one of three senior editors appointed to replace Mr. Nayfeh, referred a request for comment to the publisher.

Most scientific and other academic journals use peer review, in which papers are accepted based partly on the judgment of independent researchers. Many publishers, including Sage, have set up systems in which the process is conducted online. The spokeswoman said Sage did not have any concerns about

its system.

Most retractions related to fraud involve cases where data was fabricated or altered. But there have been a few other cases in which researchers have tried to manipulate the peer-review process. In 2012, Retraction Watch reported on a [South Korean plant researcher](#) who created fake email accounts so that he could review his own papers. When the fraud was uncovered, over 30 papers were retracted.

Michael B. Eisen, a biologist at the University of California, Berkeley, and a critic of peer review, said that in many countries, including Taiwan, academic institutions have an “almost explicit” formula for promotions based on the quantity, rather than quality, of published papers.

“That creates room for various forms of shenanigans,” he said. “It doesn’t surprise me that much that something like this happens.”