

Until the issue of "what constitutes China's genetic resources" is resolved, it seems premature to enact laws concerning them. Given a realistic evaluation of the inequalities in resources, technology, and intellectual contributions between Chinese and Western science, international collaborations are unlikely to be based on equality for many years to come. It is thus imperative that those Chinese officials in the State Council who are now drafting regulations think deeply about the question, "What is our bottom line?"

Any collaboration that is exploitative in nature or does not benefit the population under study should, of course, be discouraged. But, China's interest would not be best served by simply acquiring some patent rights or technology. Also, China's reputed genetic resources would not be protected if left untouched or made inaccessible to foreigners. Because of the potentially far-reaching consequences of the regulations now being drafted and because China's need for technology and ideas is greater than foreign need for China's DNA, it might be prudent to form and consult an advisory committee of Chinese and international experts from the fields of genetics, medicine, epidemiology, ethics, and law before any regulations are made final.

In genetics, China's premier challenge is to build up a critical mass of highly competent and visionary scientists who will be able to bring Chinese genetics into the world community. This will require the development of sound policies and perhaps an overhaul of Chinese science. It may now be time for panels of international experts to begin participating in the process of evaluation of large scientific grant proposals and research institutions. It is certainly time to stop letting politics interfere with scientific research. The rise and fall of Lysenkoism and China's loss of many outstanding scientists during numerous periods of political turmoil serve as painful lessons. Science thrives on openness and the competition of ideas, and it suffers badly when subjected to political agenda.

**Sun-Wei Guo\***

*Institute of Human Genetics and  
Division of Epidemiology,  
University of Minnesota,  
Minneapolis, MN 55454-1015, USA*

**Chang-Jiang Zheng\***

*National Institute on Deafness and Other  
Communication Disorders,  
Bethesda, MD 20892, USA*

**C. C. Li\***

*Department of Human Genetics,  
University of Pittsburgh,  
Pittsburgh, PA 15261-0001, USA*

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\*The opinions expressed are the authors' own and do not represent those of their institutions.

## The Relaxation Response: Therapeutic Effect

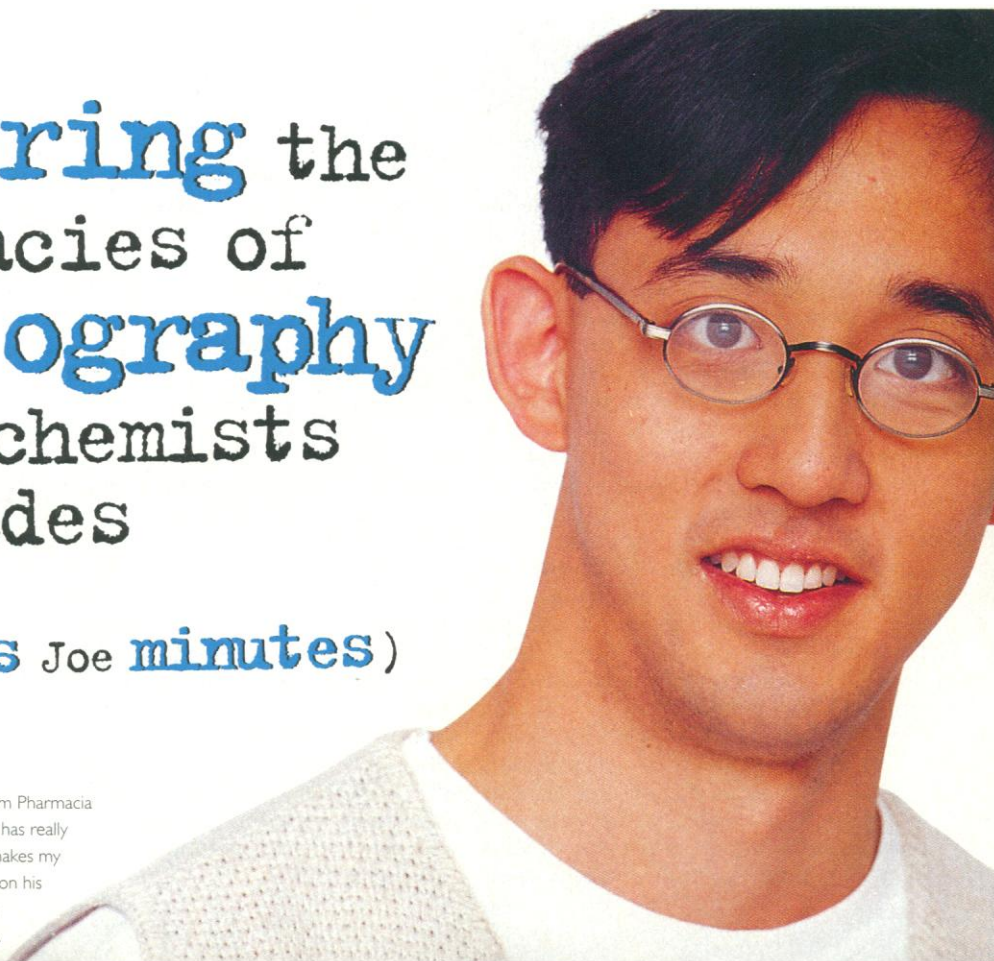
Irwin and Jack Tessman (Letters, 24 Oct., p. 561) write that there are discrepancies between my alleged publicizing of the therapeutic claims of the relaxation response and the published data. The data that they cite are in articles that I co-authored, but they compare these data with my comments published in *Time* (1). A lay magazine such as *Time* cannot always publish comments with the attention to detail that one would like. It is the data published in the peer-reviewed journals that I stand by.

According to the Tessmans, I essentially repeated these claims related to the relax-

# Conquering the intricacies of chromatography took biochemists decades

(Now it **takes** Joe **minutes**)

"Using the chromatography columns from Pharmacia Biotech and the technical support team has really minimized my purification time, which makes my PI happy," says Joe Yuan, who's working on his doctorate degree at The Johns Hopkins Medical Institute in Baltimore, MD, USA.



ation response in the 1996–1997 brochure of the Harvard Medical School continuing education course "Spirituality and Healing in Medicine-II." I believe they refer to the following passage in that brochure.

For more than 25 years laboratories at the Harvard Medical School have systematically studied the benefits of mind/body interactions. The research established that when a person engages in a repetitive prayer, word, sound or phrase and when intrusive thoughts are passively disregarded, a specific set of physiologic changes ensue. There is decreased metabolism, heart rate, rate of breathing and distinctive slower brain waves. These changes are the opposite of those induced by stress and are an effective therapy in a number of diseases that include hypertension, cardiac rhythm irregularities, many forms of chronic pain, insomnia, infertility, the symptoms of cancer and AIDS, premenstrual syndrome, anxiety and mild and moderate depression. In fact, to the extent that any disease is caused or made worse by stress to that extent this physiological state is an effective therapy.

I also stand by these statements. Many diseases have been documented to have stress as one etiologic or exacerbating component, but these diseases may also have other contributing factors that are best ameliorated by drugs, surgery, and other self-help treatments. Thus, my col-

leagues and I research and ultimately use multifaceted treatment approaches that include elicitation of the relaxation response as one component. Rarely do we advocate the elicitation of the relaxation response alone.

In addition, it is worth noting that the 1995 National Institutes of Health Technology Assessment Panel on Integration of Behavioral and Relaxation Approaches into the Treatment of Chronic Pain and Insomnia concluded, "A number of well-defined behavioral and relaxation interventions now exist and are effective in the treatment of chronic pain and insomnia." (2).

**Herbert Benson**

*Mind/Body Medical Institute,  
Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center,  
Harvard Medical School,  
One Deaconess Road,  
Boston, MA 02215, USA  
E-mail: hbenson@bidmc.harvard.edu*

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#### Priority Setting

I disagree with the statement, "the [Department of Energy] Panel has provided a *rare* example of scientists setting some painful priorities (emphasis added)" at the end (p. 378) of the 17 October News & Comment article "Panel sets out cuts under tight budget" by Robert Service (p. 377). Within a given field, scientists have always contributed to the setting of priorities. It occurs through proposal reviews, scientific meetings, science committee meetings, and numerous discussions on a regular basis. In pursuing scientific research goals, funding levels for the operation of facilities are further complicated by a decision made years ago (for better or worse) to separate the funding of research done at the facilities from the funding of the facility operation itself. Thus, the self-regulating aspect of research users paying the cost is absent.

Service may be referring to the more difficult problem of setting priorities across fields, for example, the worth of a new astronomical telescope versus a new synchrotron radiation facility, prioritization of which would indeed be rare. An attempt to outline criteria for such prioritization is included in a National Academy Press report,

What would you say to this statement: "minutes are all it takes to conquer the intricacies of chromatography"? Something like: "Prove it"? Good. The next time you need help with purification, contact Pharmacia Biotech.

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