

Patent granted for work done by disgraced Hwang Woo-suk team

February 24 2014, by Bob Yirka

The United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) has granted a patent to Hwang Woo-suk for the technology behind the controversial work he and his team did a decade ago—at the time it was announced that the team had succeeded in cloning a human embryo and had even created a stem cell line to "prove" it. Shortly thereafter, however, the work by the team was discredited. The granting of a patent to the team does not suggest that the work done was in fact successful, but it has set off a round of criticism in the scientific community about the rubber-stamping of patents and the impact that it can have.

Hwang had his colleagues received international acclaim after they published a paper in the journal *Science*, describing their work—government officials in his home country of South Korea, fawned over him, describing him as a national hero. Unfortunately, it wasn't long before other scientists began finding problems with the work, and over time, it was found that Hwang and his team had faked their findings. Hwang was fired and prosecuted for misusing funds, though he still insists that the work he and his team did was real. Today, he heads an independent laboratory looking into cloning animals—the government has banned him from working on human cloning.

Hwang applied for patents on the work done by his team in countries across the globe, they've been granted in Australia, and Canada, and now the United States. The value of the [patent](#), however, is still debatable, as a patent on technology that doesn't work is generally considered to be worthless. Still, the issuing of a patent for work that is known to be

fraudulent has rankled many in the science and technology fields. The granting of a patent doesn't give any credence to scientific work, of course, but it does, apparently, offer some degree of respectability—or at least the perception of it.

Representatives for USPTO have acknowledged that they have known all along about the fraud perpetuated by the research team, but offer a reminder that the [patent office](#) still operates on the honor code—the office could not possibly verify that every patent it grants produces the outcome its maker claims. All that is required is that the application fulfills the requirements of the patent application process—Hwang and his team did just that and thus the patent was granted.

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