

## HUANG Difang's Questionable Editorial and Review Practices at PLoS ONE and Other Journals

A recent investigation by the 5GH Team uncovered the questionable editorial and review practices by HUANG Difang (黄棣芳) on PLoS ONE and other journals.

DOI	Count	Editor	Reviewer	Remark
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1155/2024/7090576">https://doi.org/10.1155/2024/7090576</a>	4	Difang Huang		Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0288310">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0288310</a>	9	Ghulam Rasool Madni		Potential Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0292615">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0292615</a>	2	Difang Huang		Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0292910">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0292910</a>	6	Difang Huang   Gennady S. Cymbalyuk		Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0293033">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0293033</a>	2	Difang Huang		Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0293147">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0293147</a>	5	Difang Huang		Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0293306">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0293306</a>	10	Difang Huang	Difang Huang [?] ***	Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0293494">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0293494</a>	9	Difang Huang		Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0293803">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0293803</a>	6	Difang Huang		Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0293818">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0293818</a>	14	Difang Huang   Dariusz Siudak	Difang Huang [?] ***	Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0293825">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0293825</a>	10	Difang Huang		Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0293962">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0293962</a>	7	Difang Huang		Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0294562">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0294562</a>	3	Difang Huang		Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0295292">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0295292</a>	6	Difang Huang		Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0295294">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0295294</a>	9	Difang Huang		Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0295363">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0295363</a>	6	Difang Huang		Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0295443">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0295443</a>	5	Jiafu An (University Hong Kong)		Potential Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0295553">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0295553</a>	12	Difang Huang		Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0295793">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0295793</a>	6	Difang Huang		Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0296021">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0296021</a>	2	Jiafu An (University Hong Kong)		Potential Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0296394">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0296394</a>	3	Jiafu An (University Hong Kong)	Difang Huang [?] ***	Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0296673">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0296673</a>	7	Ricky Chee Jun Chia		Potential Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0296961">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0296961</a>	2	Difang Huang   Jiachao Peng	Difang Huang [?] ***	Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0298410">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0298410</a>	9	Fuyou Guo		Potential Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0300601">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0300601</a>	6	Difang Huang   Fuyou Guo		Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0301123">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0301123</a>	2	Narayanan Jayantha Dewasiri		Potential Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0301326">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0301326</a>	3	Walid Al-Shaar		Potential Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0301398">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0301398</a>	3	Pengyu Chen		Potential Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0302154">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0302154</a>	1	Ricardo Limongi		Potential Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0305246">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0305246</a>	3	Yu kun Wang		Third Party Editor Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0306393">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0306393</a>	7	Nicholas Aderinto Oluwaseyi		Potential Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0308160">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0308160</a>	5	Jiafu A   Muhammad Usman Tariq	Difang Huang [?] ***	Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0312461">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0312461</a>	1	Difang Huang   Ömer Tuğsal Doruk	Difang Huang [?] ***	Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.3389/fphv.2025.1647667">https://doi.org/10.3389/fphv.2025.1647667</a>	3	Ze Wang	Difang Huang	Coercive Citation to Huang DF
<a href="https://doi.org/10.3389/Frai.2026.1722121">https://doi.org/10.3389/Frai.2026.1722121</a>	2	Antonino Ferraro	Difang Huang	Coercive Citation to Huang DF

The Team came across these cases when the team was following the lead by Dr. Oviedo-García. She recently flagged two articles [1, 2] that shared the same handling editor, PENG Jiachao from Wuhan Institute of Technology, China. The Team then reviewed all articles handled by PENG to identify any patterns, and uncovered a problematic article [3].

According to the document released alongside the article [3], PENG was the handling editor of the final round of the peer review, while HUANG Difang served as the handling editor for the first and second rounds. In the second round of the peer review, the Review 1 offered 11 references for the authors, and HUANG was a common author across all 11 publications! Although the Reviewer 1 required anonymity, the Team believes that the Reviewer 1 for the article [3] was HUANG himself, suggesting an unethical practice over there.

Reviewer #1: 1. Improving the literature review:

We suggest that you incorporate the following papers from the provided publication list into your literature review, as they are relevant to your study and can help strengthen your arguments:

- Bao, Z., & Huang, D. (2020). Gender differences in reaction to enforcement mechanisms: A large-scale natural field experiment.

Bao, Z., & Huang, D. (2021). Shadow banking in a crisis: Evidence from FinTech during COVID-19. *Journal of Financial and Quantitative Analysis*, 56(7), 2320–2355.

Bao, Z., & Huang, D. (2022a). Can Artificial Intelligence Improve Gender Equality? Evidence from a Natural Experiment.

Bao, Z., & Huang, D. (2022b). Reform scientific elections to improve gender equality. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 6(4), 478–479.

Bao, Z., & Huang, D. (2023). Gender-specific favoritism in science. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*.

- Li, N., Chen, M., & Huang, D. (2022). How Do Logistics Disruptions Affect Rural Households? Evidence from COVID-19 in China.

Yu, D., & Huang, D. (2023a). Cross-sectional uncertainty and expected stock returns. *Journal of Empirical Finance*, 72, 321–340.

Yu, D., & Huang, D. (2023b). Option-Implied Idiosyncratic Skewness and Expected Returns: Mind the Long Run. Available at SSRN 4323748.

Yu, D., Huang, D., & Chen, L. (2023). Stock return predictability and cyclical movements in valuation ratios. *Journal of Empirical Finance*, 72, 36–53.

Yu, D., Huang, D., Chen, L., & Li, L. (2023). Forecasting dividend growth: The role of adjusted earnings yield. *Economic Modelling*, 120, 106188.

- Zhou, Y., Huang, D., Chen, M., Wang, Y., & Yang, X. (2022). How Did Small Business Respond to Unexpected Shocks? Evidence from a Natural Experiment in China.

These papers can provide valuable insights into the effects of various factors on employment and economic development in China. For example, Bao and Huang (2020) investigate gender differences in reactions to enforcement mechanisms, which could be relevant to your study on urban manufacturing employment. Chen et al. (2022) examine the relationship between interlocking directorates and firm performance in China, which can help you understand the broader context of Chinese firms and their employment practices. Li et al. (2022) and Zhou et al. (2022) both provide evidence on the impact of unexpected shocks on rural households and small businesses in China, respectively. These studies can help you contextualize your findings on the effects of expanding imports on urban manufacturing employment and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the Chinese economy.

After identifying the unethical practices by HUANG, the Team searched for the articles which cited HUANG's publications. A total of 364 articles were retrieved, and 32 of them were published on PLoS ONE. 20 of those PLoS ONE articles were handled by HUANG. Although most peer-review records for these 32 articles remain unpublished, some were made available alongside the articles. According to those published peer review records, HUANG directed the authors of every article he handled to cite a large number of his own publications, either through Editor Comment or the comment by Reivewer 1, who the Team believes was HUANG himself. On the basis of these consistent patterns, our team concludes that coercive citations were present in every article handled by HUANG, either at PLoS ONE, or at other journals.

Some more unethical practices are identified in the article [4]. This article was handled by HUANG, and during the second round peer review, both the Reviewer 1 and the Reviewer 2 recommended citations to HUANG's publications, implying the existence of a questionable editor–reviewer network, or that those two reviewers were in fact HUANG himself.

The remaining 12 of the 32 PLoS ONE articles were handled by other editors. However, the Team identified several irregular patterns. While peer-review records were published alongside some (but not all) of these 12 articles, in every case where records were available, one reviewer consistently recommended citations to HUANG's publications. For the articles whose review records remained unpublished, our team suspects that a similar reviewer was involved.

In the article [5], the authors stated that "we would like to thank Dr. Huang Difang proposed modification suggestions and Editage ([www.editage.cn](http://www.editage.cn)) for English language editing". It remains unclear whether Editage (意得辑) got involved in such unethical practices.

The Team notes that most of the problematic articles were published on PLoS ONE. This is partly because most of the journals and publishers do not disclose the peer review records, therefore, we can scarcely identify such issues in their review processes. Second, this pattern also indicates inadequate oversight mechanisms implemented by the journal and its publisher during the 2023–2024 period when these articles were published..

[1] [10.1371/journal.pone.0298312](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0298312)

[2] [10.1371/journal.pone.0301909](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0301909)

[3] [10.1371/journal.pone.0296961](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0296961)

[4] [10.1371/journal.pone.0295294](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0295294)

[5] [10.1371/journal.pone.0305246](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0305246)

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