

Missing: Scientist Who Gene Edited Baby Is Being 'Re-Educated'



By Alex Berezow — December 4, 2018



Credit: The He Lab/Wikipedia [1]

China has a nasty habit of making people disappear. It doesn't really matter how important the person is, either.

Chinese actress Fan Bingbing is known all over the world. However, she wasn't paying her fair share of taxes, so she disappeared for a while. When she [resurfaced](#) [2], she gleefully sang the praises of the ruling Communist Party. Likewise, Meng Hongwei, the head of Interpol*, ran afoul of somebody in the Chinese government. He too went missing, and it's since been revealed that he is [under investigation](#) [3].

The pattern here is pretty straightforward: If you're a Chinese citizen, don't irritate the Chinese government. Otherwise, you'll be subject to re-education and then possibly deployed as a pawn of the regime. Apparently, the Chinese scientist who gene edited a baby is now learning this lesson the hard way.

Scientist Who Gene Edited Baby Goes Missing

He Jiankui gained international notoriety overnight when he reported that he gene edited babies to be resistant to HIV. While that sounds nice, the fact is that gene editing is not yet ready for clinical trials. It is unambiguously unethical to perform this kind of experiment on human beings at this stage of R&D. Period. Not surprisingly, Dr. He was [universally condemned](#) [4] by scientists.

His behavior certainly didn't help matters. [He worked in secret](#) [5], even hiding the experiment from his university's administration. Ultimately, *that* is probably what doomed him. This is China, after all, and anything remotely important is operated by Communist Party apparatchiks. Most likely, he

angered or embarrassed a bureaucrat with sufficient power to get him detained.

But embarrassed a bureaucrat about what? China isn't exactly a beacon of human rights. The government is thought to have [imprisoned at least one million Muslim Uighurs](#) [6] in "re-education camps." And it's not like China all of a sudden developed a concern for scientific ethics. The government, with the enthusiastic support of President Xi Jinping, actively promotes pseudoscience, possibly making [China the global leader in biomedical fraud](#) [7].

It will be interesting to see what Dr. He has to say when he re-emerges. It's a safe bet that an apology to the Communist Party will be among the first things.

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**Fans of "Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego?" will remember that Interpol is an international crime fighting agency.*

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Source URL: <https://www.acsh.org/news/2018/12/04/missing-scientist-who-gene-edited-baby-being-re-educated-13646>

Links

[1] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/He_Jiankui#/media/File:He_Jiankui_\(cropped\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/He_Jiankui#/media/File:He_Jiankui_(cropped).jpg)

[2] <https://www.smh.com.au/world/asia/missing-chinese-superstar-resurfaces-faces-97m-fine-for-tax-evasion-20181003-p507ix.html>

[3] <https://www.cnn.com/2018/10/07/europe/missing-interpol-president-china-meng-hongwei/index.html>

[4] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2018/11/27/scientist-created-world%E2%80%99s-first-gene-edited-babies-why-uproar-13624>

[5] <https://www.apnews.com/13303d99c4f849829e98350301e334a9>

[6] <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-45812419>

[7] <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/02/28/is-china-the-world-leader-in-biomedical-fraud/>

[8] <https://interland3.donorperfect.net/weblink/weblink.aspx?name=acsh&id=1>