

China scientists edit embryo genes to resist HIV

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AFPBEIJING (AFP-Jiji) — Chinese genetic scientists must not be put off sensitive research by ethical concerns, the team behind a controversial study on modified human embryos said last week as debate erupted over the paper.

Researchers from Guangzhou Medical University said they used gene-editing technique CRISPR to artificially induce a mutation in human cells and make them resistant to HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

Their paper, which appeared recently in the *Journal of Assisted Reproduction and Genetics*, is only the world's second published account of gene editing in human embryos.

Critics said the study — intended as a proof-of-principle exercise — was unnecessary and lacked medical justification, and strongly cautioned against the broader ethical implications of the slippery slope of human genome modification.

“This paper doesn't look like it offers much more than anecdotal evidence that [CRISPR] works in human embryos, which we already knew,” George Daley, a stem cell biologist at Children's Hospital Boston, told science journal *Nature*.

Tetsuya Ishii, a bioethicist at Hokkaido University, denounced the research as “just playing with human embryos,” *Nature* said.

In a statement issued by the hospital where they carried out their research, the Guangzhou team brushed aside such concerns, focusing instead on the “incalculable” size of the future market for disease treatments.

“The assessments of those outside the field are not authoritative, and the research environment will continue to evolve,” they said.

“For us what is most important is that we diligently complete our research and stick to the path we believe in, acquiring independent intellectual property rights ... so that we do not have to defer to others.”

Such perseverance, they said, will ensure “our own position in the international community,” adding, “The future market for the treatment of diseases through gene editing is incalculable.”

Speaking to China’s state-run Global Times newspaper, the paper’s lead author Fan Yong said, “It is the pioneers that will make the rules in this field.”[Speech](#)

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