

Qinghua Yang

# Aegis or Achilles Heel: The Dilemma of Homology in Biopatents in the Wake of Novozymes



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## Table of Contents

Abstract	9
Acronyms and Abbreviations	11
I. Introduction	13
II. Novozymes – a Long and Hard Journey to Patent Validity	16
A. The Glucoamylase	16
B. The Patent	18
C. The Proceedings on Patent Infringement	20
D. The Proceedings on Patent Validity	21
1. The Patent Reexamination Board	21
2. The Courts of First Instance and Second Instance	24
3. The Supreme Court	25
E. Comments – a Good Will, but also a “Chicken Rib”	26
III. Homology as an Indication of Confidence	31
A. Supporting Data for Homology Claims is Not Necessary for the Patent Law	31
B. Supporting Data for Homology Claims is an Overwhelming Burden	34
C. Rethinking the Role of Homology Language	37
1. The Homology Language	37
2. The Technical Meaning of Homology	38
D. Species of Origin is Not an Effective Limitation	40
E. Concluding Remarks	42
IV. Novozymes may Create an Unclaimable Gap	44
A. Inventive Step and Support are One-Dimensionally Aligned by Homology	44

*Table of Contents*

B. Disparity in Views on Homology Creates an Unclaimable Gap	46
C. The Unclaimable Gap May Constitute a Discrimination	50
D. Downregulating Inventive Step is Not a Feasible Option	53
 V. Novozymes Mingles Sufficient Disclosure and Support	 56
A. Sufficient Disclosure and Support Have Different “Prior Art”	56
B. Novozymes Tests Support Using the Standard of Sufficient Disclosure	57
C. An Example Test Given by the EWHC	60
D. On Non-Working Variants – How to Avoid a “Negative Gap”?	61
 VI. Conclusion	 64
Annex I: Sequences of Cytochrome c from 17 Different Species	67
List of Works Cited	69

## Abstract

Biological inventions frequently involve polypeptides, proteins and nucleic acids. Sequences of these molecules are disclosed for patent application. To obtain a broader scope of protection, an applicant employs homology language to formulate the claims and create a homology range surrounding the disclosed sequence. This homology range encompasses sequences that are expected to perform similar functions as the disclosed one does. However, the homology claims face a hurdle that they may not be supported by the written description. In a recent case, *Novozymes*, the Supreme Court of China ruled that homology claims lack support, but a further limitation by species of origin could satisfy this requirement. In this thesis, it is found that species of origin is not an effective limitation. Homology, as the essence of the dispute in *Novozymes*, should have been adequately addressed by the courts. Homology dictates the skilled person's confidence on the functionality of unknown sequences, and is involved in multiple patentability requirements. Therefore, the assessment of support concerning homology shall not be isolated from other patentability requirements. An empirical study shows that the current views on homology are different in the requirements of inventive step and support, thus creating an unclaimable gap along homology values. This gap may constitute a discrimination to biotechnology. This thesis shows that the disparity in views on homology is caused by intermingling the requirements of sufficient disclosure and support. To fix this problem, an appropriate test is furnished for assessing the support requirement concerning homology claims. It may help to narrow the unclaimable gap, meanwhile avoiding prejudice to other inventions. A more reasonable scope of protection is expected to be conferred to sequence-related biological inventions in the future.



## Acronyms and Abbreviations

AA	Amino Acid
the Court	the Supreme People's Court of the People's Republic of China
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic Acid
EPC	European Patent Convention
EPO	European Patent Office
EWHC	the High Court of Justice of England and Wales
HFCS	High Fructose Corn Syrup
HL	House of Lords
JPO	Japan Patent Office
Paris Convention	Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property
the Patent Law	Patent Law of the People's Republic of China
PRB	Patent Reexamination Board
RNA	Ribonucleic Acid
SIPO	State Intellectual Property Office of the People's Republic of China
TBA	Technical Board of Appeal
TRIPS Agreement	Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights
UKIPO	Intellectual Property Office of the United Kingdom

### *Chinese Document Nomenclature*

Note: Chinese document identifiers are searchable as cited.

A brief translation of the Romanised Chinese characters is provided below:

Er Zhong Min San Chu Zi	First Instance Case, Civil Litigation, by the Third Chamber of the [place] Second Intermediate People's Court
Fa Shi	Judicial Interpretation Document issued by the Supreme People's Court
Gao Xing (Zhi) Zhong Zi	Final Instance Case, Administrative Litigation on Intellectual Property Law Matters, by the [place] High People's Court

## *Acronyms and Abbreviations*

Guo Fa	Official Document issued by the State Council
Jin Gao Min San Zhong Zi	Final Instance Case, Civil Litigation, by the Third Chamber of the Tianjin High People's Court
Yi Zhong Zhi Xing Chu Zi	First Instance Case, Administrative Litigation on Intellectual Property Law Matters, by the [place] First Intermediate People's Court
Zui Gao Fa Xing Zai	Retrial Case of Administrative Litigation by the Supreme People's Court