

Quality Development of China's Academic Journals in a New Era

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ABSTRACT

Taking China's academic journals under the background of the new era as the research object, this paper systematically analyzes the problems of their high-quality development. First of all, it points out the necessity of high-quality development of China's academic journals under the plight of serious homogenization, lack of innovation, low level of digital development and talent shortage. Secondly, from the perspective of the whole process of the operation and management of academic journals, it is proposed that China's academic journals should carry out accurate positioning, highlight the characteristics of journals, constantly optimize the source of contributions, improve the quality of peer review and editing, use the new media platform to improve the digital level of journals and the dissemination efficiency of excellent achievements, and expand and strengthen the service content and quality of academic journals. Finally, it is suggested that the high-quality development of academic journals should be guaranteed by perfecting and optimizing the evaluation mechanism and personnel training mechanism of China's academic journals.

Keywords: *academic journals; digitalization; quality development; service function of academic journal*

1. INTRODUCTION

China's economic development has entered a new era and shifted from high-speed growth to high-quality development, which is a requirement for addressing the contradictions in Chinese society. Given the current situation of China's periodical industry, high-quality development is necessary for the evolution of the industry. According to relevant statistics, China published 8,187 journals in 1999, 9,851 in 2009, and 10,139 in 2018. The number of journals increased by 1,664 in the first 10-year period, while increasing by only 288 in the latter. In terms of the overall number of journals, the growth rate has slowed and entered a stage of rational development.

Academic journals are an essential part of China's periodical industry. In recent years, they have faced many problems that need to be solved in the development process. Concerns include addressing bottlenecks in journal development, such as insufficient high-quality manuscripts, obscure publication characteristics, low academic influence, or low social influence. Another challenge is to improve the quality of academic journals and enhance innovation and leadership. Yet another is to promote media convergence and improve digitalization. For academic journals, which are characterized by specialization and a relatively small and stable readership, the above problems cannot be solved without high-quality development.

Many scholars have begun to research the high-quality development of China's academic journals. Wang [1] believes that the high-quality development of scientific and

technical journals is of great significance for the transformation and application of scientific and technological achievements, and realizing the development strategy of serving innovative countries. Zhang and Wang [2] propose that high-quality scientific and technical journals are necessary for adapting to evolving modern culture and promoting the country's cultural soft power.

In recent years, the issue of high-quality development of China's academic journals has received increased attention. On June 15, 2019, the Symposium on High-Quality Development of Academic Journals was held in Zhengzhou. The experts and scholars attending the symposium had in-depth discussions regarding the development of academic journals. Based on previous studies, this paper systematically analyses the problems existing in the process of high-quality development of China's academic journals and suggests strategies to address them.

2. HIGH QUALITY DEVELOPMENT: THE WAY TO BREAK THE SITUATION OF CHINA'S ACADEMIC JOURNALS

2.1. Importance of China's Academic Journals Requires High-Quality Development

China's academic journals are responsible for disseminating culture and research results and are an important force for theoretical and scientific innovation.

China has long given importance to the development of academic journals. To better manage academic journals, and improve their quality, the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television (SAPPRFT) completed two rounds of accreditation in 2014 and 2017, identifying a total of 6,430 academic journals. Compared with the total number of journals in China in 2018, academic journals accounted for about 63% of the total. There are many academic journals in China, so their quality and development status affects the overall development of the industry. Therefore, the high-quality development of China's academic journals is of great significance.

2.2. Current Situation of China's Academic Journals Determines to Achieve High-Quality Development

China's academic journals face urgent dilemmas that can only be resolved through quality development, as follows.

2.2.1. Homogeneity and lack of innovation in China's academic journals

There are many academic journals in China, but a lack of authoritative journals with great influence. Papers published in academic journals are homogeneous, not innovative enough in research content and unclear; the positioning of journals and the phenomenon of convergence is serious [3]. Nevertheless, compared with non-academic publications, academic journals in China have certain advantages. First, most academic journals rely on platforms such as universities, scientific research institutions, and industry associations, and have superior resources; second, most academic journals in China have financial support and subsidies and are not profit-oriented, so they have less pressure to survive; they can focus on improving quality.

However, on an individual journal level, there are many problems. A small number of journals sponsored by famous universities or authoritative institutions have high scientific research strength and financial support, good overall conditions, sufficient quality manuscripts and talent, sound institutional mechanisms, and relatively high publication quality. However, for most ordinary academic journals, the journal-running strength is weak, they have insufficient high-quality manuscripts, and the current mechanism for evaluating journals and academic achievements is not effective. The development of ordinary journals is becoming more difficult, resulting in similar content, similar style, and repetition of academic results at a low level [4]; therefore, homogenization is a concern. Academic journals are display windows for scientific research results. Because of this functional orientation, every university in China has academic journals, and many universities have two or more. Lack of innovation and unclear positioning of academic journals

are bottlenecks impeding the development of China's academic journals, which must be solved urgently.

2.2.2. Further strengthening the digital development of China's academic journals

New media technologies and platforms have greatly impacted traditional print media in terms of operations management, product innovation, and dissemination. Media convergence is an inevitable trend in the development of the journal industry, as well as academic journals. As a platform for disseminating the latest research results, China's academic journals should increase the pace of digital transformation [5]. Unlike the "fragmented and fast-food" characteristics of knowledge acquisition in the Internet era, the advantages of academic journals are that their content is professional and systematic, and their audiences are stable and have high knowledge levels. Given the current state of digital development, how should China's academic journals make use of new media technologies and platforms to strengthen their advantages and promote high-quality development? This is an issue worthy of in-depth consideration.

At present, the digitization of academic journals in China mainly involves online dissemination of the content of printed journals using professional digital publishing institutions such as China Knowledge Network, Wanfang Data, and Wipro Information. This has somewhat improved the dissemination of academic journal content. Still, at present, this approach only copies the content of print journals. It has not enabled most academic journals to achieve digital development in collection and editing, publication, distribution, and services. However, weaknesses in the editorial departments of most academic journals mean they face difficulties in digital development. The challenge is to improve and innovate in editing, gathering business, and operating processes through new media platforms while insisting on the fundamental importance of content. Furthermore, it is necessary to improve interaction and communication between the editorial department and authors, readers, and external reviewers through new media, enhance the service value of China's academic journals, improve the work efficiency of editorial departments, and better disseminate research results. These are issues that need to be explored and are a requirement for the high-quality development of China's academic journals.

2.2.3. Lack of expertise in fields necessary for China's academic journal development

Talent is an important development constraint in any field, including academic journals. In the new era, major international publishers have launched online journal platforms due to business competition and profit model transformation [6]. In China, the digital development of journals has likewise become the focus of industry

attention. However, the development of academic journals in China, especially digital development, faces talent constraints. These include insufficient staffing to meet the needs of the digital development of China's academic journals; and the problem of talent structure, which is manifested in a lack of talent with high-level disciplinary expertise, editing and publishing ability, and technical skills. These problems restrict the development and digitalization of China's academic journals. They also put forward requirements for academic journals to establish high-quality development.

In the new era, in order to solve bottlenecks restricting the development of China's academic journals, effort must be made to explore the process of running journals, full use must be made of the advantages of new media, and the quality of China's academic journals must be promoted, so as to change the status quo of development and raise the innovation level of China's academic journals fundamentally.

3. FULL PROCESS MANAGEMENT OF THE HIGH-QUALITY DEVELOPMENT OF CHINA'S ACADEMIC JOURNALS

The quality development of China's academic journals is systematic; any problem in the process of operation and management of journals will affect the overall quality. Therefore, in the process of operating journals, we should focus on the whole process and improve the quality of China's academic journals comprehensively in terms of content, form, dissemination, and services. They are as follows.

3.1. Accurate Positioning of Journals to Improve Manuscript Quality

3.1.1. Well-positioned journal to achieve high-quality development

For China's academic journals, especially most of the general ones, only by combining its situation and precise positioning can it be put in the right position to exploit its advantages and highlight its characteristics. Adopting targeted improvement and development strategies and focusing on building personalized and quality brands are key to enhancing the influence of China's academic journals [7]. China's academic journals can combine discipline development, and the benefits of university and research institution platforms, to clarify their purpose and research fields through precise positioning. At the same time, they should pursue professional development through the construction of special columns and high-quality articles to attract attention and make the journals unique, professional, authoritative, and forward-looking. Journals should lead research and innovation in their fields, display

innovative scientific research results in a timely manner, and promote the transformation of the results to achieve high-quality academic journals.

3.1.2. Qualified-manuscripts to guarantee high-quality academic journals

Manuscripts are the basis for the development of China's academic journals [8], and without quality manuscript sources, there will not be quality journals. By relying on platforms such as universities and research institutions, academic journals can understand and grasp research trends and hot-spots in a field in a timely manner. This has advantages in the acquisition of manuscript sources, but the details are different for academic journals at different levels. Core journals sponsored by famous universities or scientific research institutions have significant advantages in terms of the quantity and quality of manuscript sources. The editorial department can select the best of the best, so the quality of articles accepted will become higher and higher, thus improving the overall level of the journals and realizing a virtuous circle. For general academic journals, however, it is challenging to obtain quality manuscripts, which affects the development of high-quality journals. As a result, these journals need to develop manuscript sources through various means, including manuscript solicitation.

Depending on the target audience, there are two types of manuscripts, i.e., manuscripts of outstanding young scholars and papers of renowned experts, each has advantages and disadvantages. Young scholars are in a growth stage; they have an active willingness to research and an urgent need to publish. Excellent young scholars embrace new methods, so their research output and quality may be higher. However, given the existing academic evaluation mechanisms, high-quality manuscripts from young scholars are likely to be published in core journals, making it difficult for general journals to attract them.

In terms of famous scholars, it is difficult for editors of general journals to get quality manuscripts due to their social resources and ability; also, the number of research results is relatively small, and the cost of the manuscript may be high.

To solve the problem of manuscript source quality, a general journal must position itself well and highlight its characteristics, so that scholarly submissions and editorial appointments can be more targeted. This should gradually alleviate the problem of insufficient quality manuscripts. The editorial board can publicize the characteristics of the journal by participating in relevant academic conferences and strengthening communication and interaction with authoritative research institutions, journals, and industry associations. This will raise the social profile and academic influence of the journal in its research field and improve its manuscripts. Article quality is a fundamental criterion. Each paper should be strictly checked. In the long run, a virtuous circle can only be formed if quality manuscript sources are guaranteed; only then can journals

continuously develop. This is fundamental to the quality development of academic journals.

3.2. Prioritizing the Peer Review Process to Improve Manuscript Reviews

Reviewing manuscripts is an essential part of the editing and publishing process of China's academic journals. It is also an important way to improve article quality further. In China, academic journals implement a strict three-review and peer-review system. By inviting experts from the same industry to check the quality of articles, the professionalism and authority of review conclusions can be guaranteed to a certain extent [9]. To improve the quality of the manuscript review, the following two points should be achieved in the review process.

3.2.1. Guaranteeing the fairness of the manuscript review process

Reviewers must speak freely from an academic perspective without interference from other parties, such as authors. In China, most academic journals adopt a two-way anonymous peer-review system. A good reviewer should be fair, impartial and professional in assessing the manuscript. To ensure balance, the editorial board may choose two or more peer experts to review the article at the same time and combine their points of view to judge the article.

3.2.2. Guaranteeing the efficiency of manuscript review

In addition to the need for fairness, impartiality, and professionalism, the manuscript review should be efficient and qualified. The editorial board should provide timely feedback to the authors, and the comments submitted should be constructive in improving the manuscript. Therefore, attention should be paid to the following points: first, in the preliminary review, the editorial board should screen the articles according to the research fields and special columns of the journal, and current research trends. Articles with clear research significance and novel themes should be submitted for review in a timely manner to ensure the swift and effective processing of the manuscript. Second, in the external expert review process, it should be made clear that the purpose of the review is not only to point out flaws but to help the author solve them. This might include better demonstrating the critical content and innovation of the article, making the article's structure and logic more reasonable, and further improving the quality of the article. The quality and efficiency of the external review process determines the quality of the articles accepted by the editorial department. Therefore, the editorial department should proactively support interaction between experts and authors during the review process,

which is a requirement for the high-quality development of China's academic journals.

3.3. Strengthening Control of Editing and Proofreading Links to Improve the Quality of Editing and Proofreading

Editing quality is crucial for the survival and development of China's academic journals [10], and good editing can better demonstrate the authors' research results. The quality of proofreading depends on the proofreading level of the editors. The overall quality of academic journal editors is high. Taking the research results of 120 social science academic journals in Jiangsu province as an example, 92.09% of journal staff had a bachelor's degree or above [11]. Still, the proportion of editors with a doctoral degree or above is small. For highly specialized academic journals, the quality of proofreading should be measured from two perspectives: first, the standardization and accuracy of professional content presentation; second, the standardization and accuracy of article layout and text usage.

During the proofreading process, it is necessary to ensure that the content and layout of the articles adhere to the relevant academic and editorial conventions. Accordingly, professional editors with professional knowledge in various disciplines are required to check the proofreading process from a theoretical point of view. High-level editorial proofreaders are also necessary to check the text, syntax, logic, and editorial standards. Proofreading academic workplaces high demands on the comprehensive quality and skill level of editors, based on this, the system of "three proofreaders and one reader" can be implemented to ensure quality proofreading.

To improve the quality of academic journal proofreading, editorial departments should seek high-level professional editorial talent and review the academic quality in the proofreading process in order to guarantee the academic quality of journals. They should also optimize the editorial staff structure and improve its comprehensive ability; additionally, they should improve editorial staff training in professional knowledge and proofreading skills; and make use of new media platforms and technology to assist the staff. This will improve the efficiency of editors and proofreaders. Through these efforts, the ability of the editorial team and the level of editorial editing will be enhanced to promote the high-quality development of academic journals.

3.4. Promoting Digital Development to Improve Dissemination Efficiency

The trend is toward digital development and media integration of China's academic journals. However, for most ordinary academic journals, the level of digitalization is low due to limitations of funding and talent. They are unable to utilize digital technology and new media

platforms in the process of high-quality development. However, China's academic journals should continue to explore appropriate digital development methods, taking into account their realities, and make use of new technologies to highlight their advantages whenever possible.

At present, China's academic journals can improve their digitalization in the following ways: first, strengthen cooperation with existing professional digital publishing enterprises, choose suitable cooperation methods and publishing services, and improve dissemination efficiency; second, form or join journal alliances in their field, and cooperate in journal promotion, publication, and distribution, so as to improve the quality of academic journals; finally, the editorial offices of China's academic journals can, according to their situations, construct new media platforms through channels such as the official website, WeChat or Weibo, to increase publicity and improve efficiency.

In the digital development of China's academic journals, the following two points need special attention: first, content innovation should always be the fundamental aim of digital development. New media platforms and digital technology are emerging tools. In today's rapid development of the Internet, although people have formed the habit of reading in fragments, it is important for academic research that journals display knowledge rigorously and systematically. China's academic journals should adhere to this feature and fundamental advantage and provide readers with professional, authoritative, and innovative content to maintain lasting influence. Attention should be paid to innovation in the form of dissemination [12]. At present, although the distribution of academic journal content by professional digital publishing enterprises has broken the restriction of traditional print media distribution and enabled readers to search for articles through single articles or keywords, which has improved dissemination efficiency, this lacks pertinence for China's academic journals. They should choose suitable new media platforms, innovate communication using new technologies, and thus increase readers' attention to the publication.

3.5. Expanding the Service Content to Strengthen the Service Function of China's Academic Journals

One of the primary functions of academic journals is to display scientific research results and promote academic communication. In the new era, seeking to expand service content is a requirement for the high-quality development of China's academic journals. Through the media integration and development of academic journals, it is of great significance for the high-quality development of academic journals under the background of the new era to realize the barrier free real-time communication between "readers, authors and editors", and better play the service function of journals [13]. China's academic journals should

transform from mere publishing activities to systematic knowledge services to help the integration and development of academic journals [14]. They should provide targeted services for scientific research and the socio-economic development of their clients. It can be seen that the service quality of China's academic journals constitutes an essential component in the journal development.

Meanwhile, the needs of readers and authors are diversified in the new era. China's academic journals should keep pace with the times, deeply understand the importance and development trend of "content services", and provide personalized and timely services to strengthen their service function. In the process of service innovation, the development of digital technology can help academic journals improve knowledge and information dissemination services through technological innovation. China's academic journals should deepen their media integration, capture the frontier and hot-spot issues in socioeconomic development, give full play to their role as professional and authoritative platforms, and guide academic research. They should also make use of new media to establish and improve author and expert contact databases, update and maintain the information, interact with users based on understanding their needs, and provide services to authors and readers. In addition, China's academic journals should make full use of open platforms to provide readers with knowledge or knowledge links, and thus promote service innovation [15].

4. EVALUATION AND HUMAN RESOURCES MECHANISMS FOR THE HIGH-QUALITY DEVELOPMENT OF CHINA'S ACADEMIC JOURNALS

China has always attached great importance to the standardization and high-quality development of academic journals, and accreditation is the first step in standardizing management and development. The goal is to maintain journal standards, display and disseminate academic achievements in a timely manner, promote academic exchanges, and drive innovation. In addition to ensuring the high-quality development of China's academic journals in the process of operation and management mentioned above, this cannot be achieved without the guarantee of relevant mechanisms.

4.1. Evaluation Mechanisms

In recent years, the state has attached great importance to the optimization of academic and talent evaluation mechanisms. Whether an evaluation mechanism is reasonable has a direct impact on the quality of academic results and talent training. Academic journals and academic results are inextricably linked; therefore, academic evaluation, talent evaluation, and journal evaluation mechanisms affect each other.

The phenomenon of “evaluating articles by journals” in the academic evaluation and the “impact factor theory” in journal evaluation has caused problems in academic research and journal development, becoming issues of concern for experts and scholars. Under existing journal evaluation mechanisms, the impact factor has, to an extent, become the only guide for development. This has led to a series of problems, such as unregulated competition and lack of journal development in the industry.

The evaluation mechanism determines the goal of journal development. To promote quality journal development, it is necessary to study the journal and academic evaluation system and improve and optimize the evaluation mechanism. At present, the most commonly used methods for evaluating foreign academic journals are citation-based evaluation and perception-based evaluation [16]. In recent years, there has been increasing interest in using a combination of expert review and citation evaluation to assess the standardization, professionalism, and innovation of academic journals. This helps to overcome one-sidedness in the selection of indicators in the quantitative evaluation process, and reduce the influence of human factors on journal development. Measuring the citation volume and citation rate of academic journals will enhance the fairness and credibility of journal evaluations. Therefore, when designing an evaluation system for academic journals, consideration should be given to a combination of qualitative and quantitative assessment; the development of non-core journals, which are a majority in China, should be taken into account; and systematic consideration should be given to the establishment of evaluation indices, the application of evaluation methods, the selection of evaluation experts or institutions, and the application of evaluation results. This will help ensure impartial, rational of journal evaluation. Foreign academic evaluation methods, such as representative work evaluation, can be used as a reference to avoid the impact of “evaluating journals by journals” on the development of academic journals. Thus individual academic journals can maintain their unique characteristics, promote diverse schools of thought, and enhance the role of academic journals in innovation and development. Generally speaking, a fair and relaxed scientific research environment should be created for the development of China's academic journals by optimizing the evaluation mechanism, so that they can focus on the dissemination and promotion of scientific research results. Therefore, the high-quality development of China's academic journals is also guaranteed.

4.2. Human Resource Development Mechanisms

The quality development of China's academic journals cannot be achieved without excellent professionals, so talent cultivation is important. In the new era, the operation of China's academic journals requires high-level, complex talents with management ability, professional knowledge

of relevant disciplines, editing and publishing skills, and new media skills. Therefore, a systematic talent cultivation mechanism should be established and improved to enhance professionalism. This process needs to pay attention to the following aspects.

In terms of human resources training for China's academic journals, attention should be paid to the improvement of editors' ethical qualities and innovation abilities. Editors should be reminded of the purpose of running a journal and made aware of high-quality development. They should always focus on quality and innovation and adhere to the path of sustainable development of the journal. The overall quality of human resources should be improved, so that editors are familiar with the whole journal operation process, especially to create awareness of media integration and new media development, and to master the required new media skills. Emphasis should be placed on improving the academic research capacity of editors. The most prominent features of academic journals are professionalism and authority. Therefore, editors should continuously improve their academic level through professional training, participating in research projects, writing academic papers, and so forth. Only in this way can they achieve interaction and communication with authors, readers, and experts in the editing process and ensure high-quality academic journal compilation.

5. CONCLUSION

Academic journals are an important part of China's journal industry. They have the important mission of promoting theoretical innovation, disseminating and transforming scientific research results, and promoting innovation in China. In the face of current difficulties in the development of academic journals, such as homogeneity and lack of innovation, and in the context of a new era of media convergence, China's academic journals must be developed with high quality, improve their digitalization level, adapt to the trend of media convergence, and make full use of new technologies to highlight their professional, authoritative, and innovative features, so that the bottlenecks that restrict the development of China's academic journals can be solved at the root.

Quality development of China's academic journals faces many difficulties and cannot be achieved overnight. Especially for most ordinary academic journals, it needs to be considered systematically and implemented step by step according to the current situation. From the perspective of the whole process of operation and management of academic journals, we should constantly optimize the source of manuscripts, improve the quality of peer review, editing and proofreading, and enhance the quality of communication and service. The ideal of high-quality development should be the focus in the journal management, in the digital development and in the optimization of evaluation systems of journals.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We would like to thank editors and anonymous referees for useful comments and suggestions. We acknowledge financial support from the Jiangsu Provincial University Philosophy and Social Science Research Fund Project (NO. 2018SJA0261).

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