

The China Journal Excellence Action Plan: A Transformative Strategy for Global Science Publishing

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A Quiet Revolution in Scholarly Publishing

In recent years, China has embarked on one of the most ambitious journal development programs in the world, the China Journal Excellence Action Plan (CJEAP), known formally as the Excellence Action Plan for China's Scientific, Technical, and Medical Journals (EAP).

Launched in 2019 by the China Association for Science and Technology (CAST),¹ in collaboration with 6 major government agencies, including the Ministries of Education, Science and Technology, and Finance, the National Press and Publication Administration,² the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS),³ and the Chinese Academy of Engineering (CAE),⁴ the goal of this initiative is to create a group of internationally competitive, high-impact scientific journals that will establish China as a global player in scientific and scholarly publishing.

Now entering its second 5-year phase (2024–2028), the CJEAP is not just a program for funding scientific journals, it is also a coordinated national effort to move from a fragmented system toward a digitally integrated, internationally visible, and self-sustaining publishing ecosystem. As such, the CJEAP represents an important evolution in China's research communication strategy, and it also means a shift in global scholarly publishing.

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Origins: From Fragmentation to Strategic Coordination

The CJEAP originated from a 2019 policy document entitled “Opinions on Deepening Reforms to Cultivate World-Class STM Journals”,⁵ which stated that China had become a major producer of scientific articles; however, Chinese journals lacked international influence. The document framed journals as repositories of human civilization and engines of scientific development, calling for the creation of world-class outlets that could enhance China's scientific competitiveness and cultural soft power.

Phase I (2019–2023): Foundations of Excellence

Phase I of the CJEAP focused on upgrading journal quality and gaining international visibility, and was considered a success²:

- 166 Chinese journals ranked in the top 25% of their disciplines, globally.
- 55 journals entered the top 5%, 43 ranked in the top three, and 19 achieved first place in their categories.
- Over 120 new journals were launched, many in cutting edge fields such as materials science and biotechnology.
- Digital infrastructure expanded through platforms like Tsinghua University's SciOpen,⁶ enabling Chinese publishers to manage submission, review, publication, and access entirely within China.

By the end of Phase I, CAST reported an increase in the number of Chinese journals ranked in the global top 5% of their fields, from approximately 10 journals in 2019, to 55 journals in 2023.⁷

CJEAP is part of a national push toward “research sovereignty” and has led to China's Open Science Readiness Index (OSRI)⁸ and related efforts like the Open Access

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Journal Index (OAJ)⁹ and Open for Science¹⁰ platform. These initiatives are designed to strengthen China's role in global knowledge sharing while retaining control over its research dissemination infrastructure.

Phase II (2024–2028): Toward a National Publishing Ecosystem

Phase II of the EAP, launched in September 2024, was a change from journal-focused support to an expanded support structure for fostering integrated journal clusters, digital platforms, and talent development programs.

Its guiding principle, articulated by Liu Xingping of CAST, is "One leap, two mores, three combinations, and four priorities"⁷:

- One leap: From individual journal development to an ecosystem-wide approach.
- Two mores: Publish more high-level papers in Chinese-hosted journals and more high-quality journals on Chinese platforms.
- Three combinations: Integrate group publishing with digitalization, internationalization with localization, and public welfare with market mechanisms.
- Four priorities: Emphasize Chinese-language journals in key disciplines, English-language journals hosted on Chinese platforms, high-start journals in frontier areas, and cluster projects with strong digital capabilities.

Structural Overview

Phase II consists of 5 subprojects⁷:

1. English individual journals: Support for 200 existing English-language journals per year (50 leading, 150 emerging).
 - Funding: up to 1.5 million RMB (Chinese yuan)/year for leading titles; 500,000 RMB/year for each emerging title.
 - Institutions with the most selected titles include CAS, Tsinghua University, and Sichuan University.
2. Chinese-language journals: Support for 200 existing Chinese-language journals (100 leading, 100 emerging).
 - Funding: up to 300,000 RMB/year for leading titles; 100,000 RMB/year for each emerging title.
 - CAS and the Chinese Medical Association dominate selections in this category.
3. High-start journals: Support for 60 new journals (50 English-language, 10 Chinese-language) launched annually in strategic fields such as quantum science,

artificial intelligence, biomedicine, and green technologies.

- Examples of new English-language titles: *Allergy Medicine*, *Health Care Science*, *Eco-Environment & Health*, and *Science in One Health*.
4. Cluster (group) pilot projects: Support for 13 publishing clusters (up from 5 in Phase I) receiving tiered funding up to 10 million RMB/year.
 - Category A clusters include China Science Publishing & Media (CSPM)¹¹ and the Chinese Medical Journals Publishing House.
 - These 13 clusters manage more than 1,700 journals, roughly 30% of China's STM titles, via shared submission and publishing platforms.
 5. Training and talent development: Creation of large-scale national programs for editors and publishers.
 - Includes overseas exchange initiatives sending delegations to publishers in the UK, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States.
 - Implemented by the Society of China University Journals¹² and Peking University, with CSPM leading on domestic training.

Strategic Goals: From Quantity to Quality

Phase II aims to "fundamentally change the situation where high-level papers are mainly published abroad."⁷

This means encouraging Chinese researchers who now contribute about 30% of global research output but publish only 5% of papers in domestic journals to submit to Chinese publications.¹³ Rather than imposing publication quotas, Phase II links journal development, research evaluation reform, and funding incentives to make high-quality Chinese journals viable and rewarding outlets for leading research.

The program emphasizes:

- Raising journal quality to meet international standards of peer review, ethics, research integrity, and transparency
- Publishing more top-tier papers in Chinese journals, especially in English
- Expanding digital publishing infrastructure, ensuring content storage and access on domestic servers
- Encouraging multilingualism and local-language publishing to support domestic scientific literacy

CAST officials stress that journal evaluation will not be based just on Impact Factors but on originality, data integrity, and research significance.⁷ This is a challenge to the much-criticized citation-driven metrics that dominate Western evaluation systems.

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Table. Summary comparison between Phase I and Phase II of CJEAP.^a

	Phase I	Phase 2
Chinese-language leading journals	None	Supports 100 journals
Chinese-language high-start journals	None	Supports 5 journals
Funding for high-start journals	RMB 500,000 one-off grants	None
International digital publishing service platforms	3 units	None
Cluster pilot projects	5 units	3 units
^a Reprinted from reference 7. Abbreviations: CJEAP, China Journal Excellence Action Plan; RMB, Chinese ruan.		

Funding, Selection, and Oversight

CAST received 1,340 valid applications, including 1,310 individual journal projects and 30 cluster applications. After review, 400 journals and 13 clusters were selected for support.¹³

Selection criteria prioritize:

- Demonstrated editorial and ethical standards
- Consistent publication history (minimum 1 year)
- Indexed presence in domestic or international databases
- Domestic data storage and publication autonomy

For high-start journals, additional criteria apply:

- Institutional backing from national societies or universities
- Relevance to China's science and technology goals
- Commitment to domestic platform publication

This selection process underscores the policy's dual focus on academic excellence and information sovereignty, ensuring that distribution of China's research remains under Chinese control.

Beyond Journals: Cluster Publishing and Platform Sovereignty

One of Phase II's innovations is the cluster publishing model, which brings together journals by discipline under shared digital platforms.

These clusters are operated by major entities such as CSPM, Higher Education Press,¹⁴ and Tsinghua University Press. They provide economies of scale and a unified technological backbone for submission, peer review, and dissemination.

This approach is similar to Western publishing organizations (both commercial and nonprofit) but with a focus on self-sufficiency. Journals must host on Chinese-

built platforms, such as SciOpen, SciEngine, or institutional hubs maintained by CAS and universities.

Tsinghua's SciOpen⁶ is the premier example of this new publishing infrastructure. It hosts over 211 journals, including flagship titles like *Nano Research* and *Journal of Advanced Ceramics*, offering end-to-end workflow, from manuscript submission to content hosting to analytics.

Such platforms are intended to enable independence from Western service providers and facilitate integration with China's Open Science infrastructure. Beyond workflow and hosting, the infrastructure includes repositories, funder databases, and national identifiers such as the Basic Researcher Identifier (BRID), similar to ORCID, which now covers 1.6 million Chinese researchers.

The Link to Open Science

China's journal development strategy is closely tied to its Open Science agenda. As articulated by Prof Yang Wei, Chair of CAST's Committee on Open Science and Global Partnerships, at the 2025 STM Asia-Pacific Conference, "Open Science is the bridge to progress—dismantling barriers, transforming knowledge into a shared heritage for humanity."¹³

China's Open Science policies—guided by the UNESCO 2021 Recommendation¹⁵—aim to:

- Enhance journal quality and research integrity
- Build a federated open data and journal platform
- Create a national Open Science fund and infrastructure
- Strengthen partnerships with the Global South via the Open for Science¹⁰ network

These goals align with the EAP's emphasis on journal integration, digital infrastructure, and data localization.

For Western editors and publishers, journals in China will not only publish high-impact content but will also be a major player in the open research ecosystem.

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Implications for Western Publishers and Editors

China's EAP is already influencing global scholarly publishing. There are both opportunities and challenges for Western publishers and editors, in particular those managing international science journals.

Increased competition. As Chinese journals improve in quality and visibility, they may attract submissions that traditionally went to Western titles. Many Chinese researchers, incentivized by national funding and recognition, may choose domestic journals over international ones.

The rise of national publishing power. China's investment reflects a long-term strategy to reduce dependence on Western publishers and to retain both intellectual property and economic value. Chinese researchers are spending an estimated USD\$909 million on article processing charges (APCs) in 2024,¹³ much of it to foreign publishers. This gives the Chinese government an opportunity to redirect much of these resources to domestic Open Access (OA) outlets.

Collaboration opportunities. While competition is a growing reality, there are also opportunities for copublication, metadata integration, and editorial partnerships. Western publishers could collaborate with Chinese societies and universities on bilingual editions, special issues, or shared publishing infrastructure projects.

Pressure on OA models. China has moved toward affordable OA, benchmarking "reasonable APCs" at around \$1,200.^{16,17} This creates downward pressure on global APC pricing. For comparison, Western APCs often exceed \$3,000, raising equity concerns and prompting scrutiny from funders and authors alike.

A call for multilingualism and inclusion. Western publishers may need to accommodate dual-language publishing, translation services, or Chinese-language metadata to engage effectively with this evolving ecosystem. Doing so enhances accessibility and strengthens cross-cultural scholarly exchange.

The need for interoperability. CJEAP emphasizes localized data storage and national control. To maintain global discoverability, international systems like Crossref,¹⁸ ORCID,¹⁹ Scopus,²⁰ and Web of Science²¹ must work with Chinese platforms to ensure interoperability, especially as Chinese metadata and identifiers proliferate.

Global Relevance: Shifting the Center of Gravity

China's CJEAP shows a broader trend: the geographical rebalancing of global scientific publishing. In 2024, China accounted for nearly 30% of global OA articles,¹³ and its research and development investment continues to rise faster than any other nation.

Yet, until recently, fewer than 5% of Chinese-authored papers were published in Chinese journals,¹³ a statistic that the CJEAP is designed to change.

If successful, this transformation could:

- Elevate China-based journals into the global mainstream
- Reduce Western publishers' dominance over APC revenue streams
- Diversify the sources of editorial authority in international science
- Expand the linguistic and cultural diversity of the global research record

For the international community, over the next decade, the rise of high-quality Chinese journals presents both competition and collaboration for scholarly publishers.

From Imitation to Innovation

When China's Excellence Action Plan was first launched, many in the West viewed it as an attempt to replicate existing journal models. Five years later, it is clear that CJEAP represents a distinct publishing philosophy, one that blends national coordination, open science principles, and long-term investment in talent and infrastructure.

Phase II is moving beyond imitation toward systemic innovation:

- Linking journal publishing to data sharing and research integrity.
- Building domestic digital ecosystems like SciOpen.
- Promoting bilingualism and inclusivity in scientific communication.
- Training the next generation of Chinese editors to global standards.

The message for editors and publishers outside China is that the global publishing landscape is no longer unipolar. The center of gravity in scientific communication is shifting eastward, and engagement is necessary for everyone to benefit in the next phase of open, international scholarship. This is not just good for China, it is good for the world.

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