

Chinese University Journals: Status and Suggestions

Xian JIA

Journals that are published by individual universities and contain mainly papers from them are common in China. However, Chinese university journals face a variety of editorial and other difficulties. This article summarizes the status of Chinese university journals and proposes improvements.

Status of Journals

There are more than 1000 universities and colleges in China. Each publishes at least one journal. Some universities publish versions of their journals in different languages; about 30 university journals are published in both English and Chinese. In total, there are about 2000 Chinese university journals. They cover natural science, humanities, social science, medical science, engineering, agricultural science, and other fields. University journals in the natural sciences number close to 1000 and account for one-fourth of science and technology journals in China. Most university journals are published bimonthly or quarterly; a few are monthly.

Almost all Chinese university journals are multidisciplinary. In general, they contain articles in several disciplines. This breadth makes the journals difficult to classify and hampers searching for and managing information in them. That is a major reason that some indexing database systems are unwilling to include Chinese university journals. In 2000, only four Chinese university journals were covered by the Science Citation Index; in 2003, only 37 university journals were indexed

XIAN JIA is an editor at the Journal of University of Science and Technology Beijing.

by the Engineering Index.

Most researchers are engaged in one research field and are interested in reading the journals in it. In the specialized journals, the needed information is abundant and concentrated. Therefore, researchers prefer those journals to more general journals, such as Chinese university journals. Chinese university journals have few frequent readers, and their total citation frequency and impact factor are lower than those of some other Chinese academic journals.

Chinese university journals serve as a window for displaying university academic achievements. Those editing and publishing the journals emphasize their social benefit, not their economics. Generally, the print runs of Chinese university journals are very small: 200 to 400. Most of the copies are exchanged with other editorial offices; there are few subscribers. Accordingly, Chinese universities publish these journals at an economic loss.

Commonly, each Chinese university journal contains articles in many specialized fields, such as materials science, mechanical engineering, computer science, metallurgy, mathematics, chemistry, and biology. However, the editorial department often consists of two to four editors. Typically, an editor can be knowledgeable about one of the fields but not all. Sometimes, academic errors in the papers cannot be found and corrected before publication, and this decreases the journal's quality. Therefore, these journals have declined in credibility and in number of subscribers.

Because Chinese universities publish their journal's largely to display their research, they favor intramural papers even when those from other institutions are of higher quality. Overall, intramural papers constitute about 30% to 85% of the

papers in Chinese university journals. The percentages of intramural papers tend to be 70% to 85% in journals of leading Chinese universities, 40% to 70% in journals of typical Chinese universities, and 30% to 60% in journals of technologic academies. The academic quality of the journals depends strongly on the quality of their universities' research.

Suggestions

In recent years, because of the globalization of the economy and the wider networking of information, competition between journals has been increasingly fierce, and the problems of university journals increasingly severe. Therefore, reforms are needed. First, Chinese universities should cooperate with one another to run journals, and the editorial departments should collectivize to improve the journals and to make efficient use of human and financial resources. Second, universities should merge journals similar to each other and reduce the number of general ones; university journals should specialize to make every journal distinctive and avoid overlaps in disciplines. Third, the number of manuscripts obtained from other institutions should be increased to enhance the quality of published papers. Fourth, a stable editing contingent of high academic level should be built up to ensure the quality of university journals, which is the key to their survival and development. Fifth, the publishers should market the journals vigorously. Last, to enlarge the international influence of university journals and promote their healthy development, electronic versions should be developed. 