



New Developments in Publication Ethics in China

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The rapid development of network technology has brought new vitality to academic research and publishing, but it also breeds various kinds of misconduct. China has not been immune to this trend, and in recent years, the Chinese government and related organizations have realized the seriousness of the problem and have launched a series of initiatives to promote research integrity and ethics in academic publishing.

As early as 2006, the China Association for Science and Technology (CAST) carried out research projects on research integrity and ethics in scientific journals. Since 2008, various text-checking software programs have been used in China to detect plagiarism in submitted and published articles. One widely used program, developed by CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure), relies on comparison with a full-text database of Chinese academic journals to prevent potential plagiarism, forgery, and manipulation in submitted and published articles.

Many conferences, seminars and webinars have been organized in China to set up relevant publishing standards, norms, strategies, and solutions to cope with publication misconduct. In addition, a number of statements and initiatives have been publicized to fight misconduct related to research integrity and publication ethics, including “Joint Declaration to Protect Copyright and Resist Academic Misconduct” (2010; signed by 38 Chinese journals), “Proposal for Construction of Academic Ethics and Academic Atmosphere” (2010; issued by the Society of China University Journals), “Joint Statement to Promote and Develop Publication Ethics in Chinese Medical Journals” (2011; issued by Chinese Clinical Trial Registration and Publishing Collaboration), and “Joint Declaration of CAST-Supervised Scientific Journals to Strengthen Publication Ethics of Scientific Jour-

nals and Create Good Academic Atmosphere” (2012). Moreover, to curb fraud related to theses and dissertations, the Ministry of Education issued a regulation targeting problems of buying or selling or organizing to buy or sell a degree thesis; ghostwriting or organizing to ghostwrite a thesis; plagiarizing works written by others; and forging data, etc.

In 2012, the General Administration of Press and Publication of China (GAPP; now the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television of China [SAPPRFT]) issued an official notice requiring that publication of academic works must carry forward the spirit of science and put an end to academic misconduct. SAPPRFT has enforcement powers, as shown in the case of the *Digest of Economic Life*. After the publishing rights were transferred to a company in 2013, inferior-quality academic articles were published, and thus SAPPRFT revoked the digest’s publication license.

In 2014, SAPPRFT issued a notice proposing to implement strict publishing qualifications for academic journals, establish and improve the publication access system, explicitly prohibit nonacademic journals from publishing academic content, and charging publication fees. The regulatory agency further mandates that journal publishers pay attention to research integrity and publication ethics, take meaningful steps against academic misconduct, prohibit ghostwriting, and put an end to plagiarism and misappropriation of credit.

To further promote research integrity and publication ethics in China, the First Beijing International Publication Ethics Conference of Medical Journals was held in Beijing in June 2013 (a second meeting occurred in Shanghai in April 2014). The event was sponsored by the Health News and Publicity Center of the Chinese Ministry of

Health, the Medical Journal Branch of China Periodicals Association, and the Chinese Medical Association Publishing House. The event was organized by the Chinese General Practice Press, and the Chinese Clinical Trial Registry/West China Hospital, Sichuan University, and supported by some other learned societies and academic database providers.

More than 200 delegates from 115 journals attended this conference. The invited speakers included Dr. Suzanne Morris, ombudsman of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE); Prof. Michael Berkwits, former secretary of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), and currently *JAMA* Deputy Editor; Prof. Douglas Altman, of the EQUATOR (Enhancing the Quality and Transparency of Health Research) Network and the CONSORT (Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials) group, and director of the Centre for Statistics in Medicine in Oxford; and many other academic and medical institutions and learned societies worldwide. The talks covered various publication ethics issues, including preventing misconduct in editing and publication, medical research reporting and clinical trial transparency, clinical trial registration, and authorship of research reports.

The Chinese Committee of Medical and Health Journals on Publication Ethics (CCMHJPE), the first of its kind in China, was launched during the conference, which aims to develop guidelines and regulations related to publication ethics for Chinese medical journal editors and publishers. The

committee will also be a platform for exchanging information and educating editors and publishers in China about publication ethics. The mission of the committee is to set up, disseminate, and implement publication ethics regulations for medical journal editors and publishers; to ensure fairness, responsibility, and transparency in health research; to allow the public access to research data, methods, and comparative information; and to improve society's trust in health research. The delegates of the conference agreed that there should be regular future meetings and that membership should be expanded among the medical journals.

The committee is in the process of organizing the following activities: formulating unified publishing-related standards and guidelines, including clinical trial registration policies and guidelines for dealing with various forms of misconduct; promulgating best practices; establishing appropriate mechanisms to investigate into ethical problems confronted by member journal editors; gradually cultivating teams of experts and research personnel among the member journal editors; and exchanging ideas with international societies and peers.

The setting up of the Chinese publication ethics committee is only the first step. There will be many challenging jobs confronting the new committee. However, with strong support from the Chinese government and related bodies as well as from many international organizations, the committee can surely realize its full potential in promoting research integrity and publication ethics in China in the near future.