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Mechanisms and Governance of Manuscript Outflow from Chinese Scientific and Technical Journals: An International Communication Perspective

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Abstract

According to the Blue Book on the Development of Chinese Scientific and Technical Journals (2025) and the 2025 Statistical Report on Chinese Scientific and Technical Papers, more than 95% of the international papers published by Chinese scholars appear in journals outside China, and as much as 97.9% of high-level papers are published abroad; the outflow of high-quality manuscripts has become a prominent bottleneck constraining the development of Chinese scientific and technical journals. From the perspective of international communication, this article conceptualizes manuscript outflow as a structural imbalance in the transnational flow of knowledge and, drawing on literature research, secondary data analysis, and policy text analysis, examines its scale, generative mechanisms, and governance practices. The study finds that manuscript outflow is not simply the outcome of competition in journal quality but the product of three nested mechanisms: evaluation, channel, and language. Policy practices represented by the Excellence Action Plan for Chinese Scientific and Technical Journals have achieved remarkable results in building new journals but remain insufficient in guiding the return of existing manuscript sources. Accordingly, the article proposes governance pathways in four areas: evaluation reform, channel construction, discursive independence, and network expansion.

Keywords:

scientific and technical journals, manuscript outflow, international communication, research evaluation, academic discourse power

1Introduction

Two authoritative reports released in the second half of 2025 placed the same set of figures on the table once again. The Blue Book on the Development of Chinese Scientific and Technical Journals (2025) shows that more than 95% of the international papers authored by Chinese scholars are published in journals outside China (China Association for Science and Technology Service Center [CAST Service Center], 2025). The 2025 Statistical Report on Chinese Scientific and Technical Papers, released in October of the same year, further reveals the structure of this output: in 2024, Chinese scholars published 154,900 papers in high-level

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international journals, accounting for 39.2% of the world total, and these papers were cited 1.0112 million times—both indicators ranking first in the world (Institute of Scientific and Technical Information of China [ISTIC], 2025). Yet even as output and prestige reach the top, manuscript sources continue to bleed. Based on the InCites database, Liu and Yang (2025) estimate that Chinese authors published 4.2001 million papers in 2024, of which 3.9297 million appeared in foreign journals—an outflow rate of 93.53%, rising to 99.63% in the social sciences. The imbalance is even more pronounced among the most prestigious outputs: in 2024, Chinese scholars published 147,000 papers across 376 high-level journals worldwide, of which 145,100 went to foreign journals (97.9%), while the share of Chinese first-authored SCI papers carried by domestic journals fell to a historic low of 4.7% (Ren et al., 2026). China is now one of the world's largest producers of scientific papers and, at the same time, a net exporter of high-quality manuscript sources: results are generated in Chinese laboratories, completed with funding from Chinese taxpayers, and then channeled by Chinese scholars into the communication systems of others.

Manuscript outflow is not a new topic, but existing discussions have largely followed two paths. The macro path addresses the inequality of the international scholarly communication system and the loss of discourse power—grand in scope but difficult to operationalize. The micro path explores how journals solicit, organize, and retain manuscripts—concrete in operation but inevitably scratching the surface. Between the two, a meso-level question is missing: why do manuscripts leave, and which institutional arrangements steer their flow day after day? This article takes that question as its point of entry. Manuscript outflow is observable, quantifiable, and attributable; like a reading on a thermometer, it signals a pathology inside the scholarly communication system, and following the symptoms leads to the lesion.

From the standpoint of international communication, the stakes of this issue far exceed the journal industry itself. Academic journals are pivotal channels for the transnational flow of knowledge, and the direction of manuscript flow is essentially a projection of the international communication order onto the academic field. Whoever controls the allocation of recognition controls the flow of manuscripts; whoever controls the channels of communication controls the pricing of knowledge; whoever controls symbolic domination controls the setting of agendas. The contest over manuscripts is, on the surface, a contest over articles; at a deeper level, it is a contest over international communication capacity. For government, the ownership of first-publication rights for high-level results bears directly on the knowledge reserves of the national innovation system and on scientific and technological security. For the journal industry, only by identifying the institutional causes of outflow can genuinely effective policy levers be found. For researchers, clarifying this structure is also an act of becoming conscious of the constraints on their own submission behavior. To have papers written on the soil of the motherland, it must first be possible for papers to be published decently in the journals of the motherland.

2Research Objectives and Methods

This study has three objectives. The first is to use the latest statistics to delineate the scale and structural features of the outflow of high-quality manuscripts from Chinese scientific and technical journals, avoiding argumentation from impression. The second is to dissect the generative mechanisms of outflow at three levels—evaluation, channel, and language—revealing a closed loop in which the three mechanisms are mutually

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embedded and self-reinforcing. The third is to assess the achievements and limits of existing governance approaches through policy practices such as the Excellence Action Plan for Chinese Scientific and Technical Journals, and on that basis to propose actionable governance pathways.

The methods fall into three categories. The first is literature research, which systematically reviews representative domestic and international work on the scholarly publishing landscape, research evaluation reform, and journal development, extracting theoretical resources and empirical evidence for mechanism analysis. The second is secondary data analysis, which reorganizes and compares publicly available data from the Blue Book on the Development of Chinese Scientific and Technical Journals (2025), the 2025 Statistical Report on Chinese Scientific and Technical Papers, InCites statistics, the World Journal Clout Index (WJCI) Report, and the annual reports of RELX Group; the most recently released version of each source is used. The third is policy text and case analysis, which takes national-level journal policies, evaluation reforms since 2019, and landmark events since 2025 as its objects, examining the tension between policy intent and actual effect. Analytically, this article adopts the basic stance of the political economy of communication, treating academic publishing as a communicative activity embedded in structures of power and interest rather than as a neutral carrier of knowledge. The three methods corroborate and complement one another: data delineate the phenomenon, mechanisms explain it, and cases test the judgments.

A clarification is in order. In this article, outflow refers specifically to Chinese scholars' practice of giving priority to publishing high-level results in journals outside China, together with its institutionalized causes; it does not refer to international academic exchange in the normal sense. International publication is itself the norm of a globalized science. The problem lies not in knowledge flowing out, but in the one-way hemorrhage in which knowledge flows out and nothing flows in. This is the basic premise of the analysis that follows.

3The Scale and Structural Features of Manuscript Outflow

Under the microscope of data, three structural facts emerge.

The first is the sheer scale and protracted stalemate of the outflow. As noted above, the outflow rate of Chinese-authored papers reached 93.53% in 2024 (Liu & Yang, 2025). This pattern is no short-term fluctuation. According to the Blue Book, in 2024 China had 247 journals indexed in SCI, which published about 40,000 papers over the year—1.7% of global SCI output—in stark contrast to the more than 830,000 international papers produced by Chinese scholars in the same year (China Association for Science and Technology Service Center [CAST Service Center], 2025). With the main body of manuscripts residing abroad over the long term, domestic journals can only absorb what remains; this is the common starting point of the many difficulties facing Chinese scientific and technical journals.

The second fact is that outflow is stratified along a quality gradient. The outflow rate in the social sciences approaches 100% (Liu & Yang, 2025). Although the rate is somewhat lower in the natural sciences, the concentration of high-level output abroad is even higher: 97.9% of papers in global high-level journals went to foreign journals (Ren et al., 2026). In other words, the more cutting-edge and potentially highly cited a result is, the more likely it is to be first published in a prestigious journal abroad, while what domestic journals receive is often what ranks lower in the author's submission sequence. Outflow is thus not merely a matter of

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quantity but of quality stratification: domestic journals face a structural cutoff of high-quality manuscript supply.

The third fact is a severe mismatch between the carrying capacity of domestic channels and the scale of manuscript supply. As of 2025, China had 558 English-language scientific and technical journals, more than 85% of which are indexed by major international databases, forming a preliminary pattern led by Q1 journals and supported by Q2 journals (Ren et al., 2026). Judged by impact indicators alone, progress has been rapid. Yet the same study points out that the article volume of these journals has not grown in step with their impact, and that 31 Journal Citation Reports (JCR) subject categories still have no Chinese English-language journal coverage (Ren et al., 2026). On one side is an annual torrent of more than 800,000 papers; on the other, the feeble carrying capacity of domestic journals. The supply–demand gap itself constitutes a rigid constraint on outflow. The main indicators are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Key indicators of the outflow of Chinese scientific papers and the carrying capacity of domestic journals

Indicator	Value	Data source
Share of Chinese scholars' international papers published abroad (2024)	Over 95%	Blue Book on the Development of Chinese Scientific and Technical Journals (2025)
Outflow rate of Chinese-authored papers (2024)	93.53% (3.9297 of 4.2001 million papers)	Liu and Yang (2025)
Outflow rate in the social sciences	99.63%	Liu and Yang (2025)
Share of high-level journal papers published abroad (2024)	97.9% (145,100 of 147,000 papers)	Ren et al. (2026)
Share of Chinese first-authored SCI papers carried by domestic journals (2024)	4.7%	Ren et al. (2026)
Number of Chinese English-language scientific and technical journals; international indexing rate	558 journals; over 85% indexed	Ren et al. (2026)
JCR subject categories without Chinese English-language journal coverage	31	Ren et al. (2026)

The data are on the table, but the explanation cannot stop at the popular verdict that domestic journals are simply not good enough. If quality were the only variable, one could not explain why, over more than a decade, the impact indicators of domestic journals have climbed steadily while the outflow rate has barely moved and the domestic carrying rate has even declined (Ren et al., 2026). To understand this rigidity, one must enter the level of mechanisms.

4The Generative Mechanisms of Manuscript Outflow

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4.1The Evaluation Mechanism and the Allocation of Academic Recognition

Behind the flow of manuscripts stands the baton of evaluation. SCI and the impact factor were originally tools for literature retrieval and bibliometrics; after entering China, however, they were gradually refashioned into the hard currency of research evaluation. Promotion reviews look at journal quartiles, performance bonuses count papers, discipline evaluations tally elite journals, and talent programs demand international visibility. As instrumental reason overwhelms value rationality, scholars' submission decisions become thoroughly institutionalized: the question is no longer where a study is best suited to appear, but where it will count. The analysis by Trueblood et al. (2025) of the incentive structure of academic publishing has broad applicability: when career advancement, grant funding, and publication are tightly bundled, chasing high-prestige journals ceases to be a personal preference and becomes a rational choice induced by institutions—what they call the prestige economy of academic publishing, whose misaligned incentives systematically distort knowledge production. In China this logic is magnified many times over, because evaluation results bear not only on personal standing but are directly convertible into substantial material resources.

The state has not stood idly by. Since 2018, a sustained campaign has been waged against the "five onlys" (the exclusive reliance on papers, titles, diplomas, awards, and talent titles), and regulators have issued successive documents making clear that SCI-related indicators should not serve as direct bases for professional-title appointments or resource allocation. Yet while policy reiterates its demands, practice rebounds layer upon layer. Tracking research on China's research evaluation reform shows that reform has indeed reshuffled the distribution of power in academic evaluation, but the inertia of quantitative evaluation has proved far more tenacious than expected (Zhao et al., 2026): the vacuum left by retiring indicators is quickly filled by new quantitative standards, as "only SCI" dons the new garb of "only elite journals" and "only talent titles." The baton is swapped again and again; what remains unchanged is the baton itself. Autonomous experiments at the university level deserve attention: some universities have compiled their own lists of recognized scientific and technical journals, bringing high-quality domestic journals into the scope of recognition and using list-based systems to counter the single dependence on SCI (Qin et al., 2025). Such experiments, however, remain scattered and have not formed universal constraints at the level of the national evaluation system.

A genuine turning point came in March 2026, when the journal ranking table of the National Science Library, Chinese Academy of Sciences, announced that it would no longer be updated or released; official media promptly published commentary calling for a farewell to "judging papers by their journals" and a return to the essence of innovation (Lu, 2026). The retirement of an indicator system that had operated for more than two decades and profoundly shaped the submission behavior of Chinese scholars shows that the consequences of evaluative alienation have been fully recognized at the policy level. Yet one must remain sober: indicators are easy to retire, but mindsets and interests are not. As long as resource allocation craves simple, comparable quantitative credentials, new substitute indicators may stage a comeback. The evaluation mechanism allocates academic recognition, and the flow of recognition steers the flow of manuscripts; this is the first engine that must be dismantled among the three mechanisms.

4.2The Channel Mechanism and the Pull of Publishing Oligopolies

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If the evaluation mechanism pushes manuscripts out, the international publishing oligopolies open their arms to take them in—and reap excess returns. The concentration of academic publishing exceeds what most people imagine. In a classic study of 45 million documents, Larivière et al. (2015) showed that in 2013 more than half of the world's papers came from five major publishing groups, a share rising to 70% in the social sciences. This pattern persists today and has been reinforced in new forms in the open-access era. Monopoly brings staggering profitability. RELX Group's annual report for 2025 shows that its Scientific, Technical & Medical segment—Elsevier—achieved an adjusted operating margin of 38.1% (RELX Group, 2026), a level beyond the reach of most physical industries and higher than that of many large technology companies. The raw material of such margins consists of research funded by public money in various countries and reviewing labor provided gratis by scholars worldwide—and, of course, the hundreds of thousands of Chinese papers flowing abroad each year.

Even more intriguing is the business-model conversion within the open-access transition. While holding high the banner of knowledge sharing, the publishing oligopolies have replaced subscription walls with toll gates: article processing charges rise with journal prestige, and publishing a paper in a prestigious journal can cost thousands of US dollars. Authors pay to publish, institutions pay to subscribe, and databases pay to integrate; the same publicly funded results are monetized over and over again (Larivière et al., 2015; van Bellen et al., 2025). As a major paper-producing country, China pays a substantial volume of publication fees to foreign publishing systems along with its outflowing papers each year—a public expenditure that can no longer be ignored. Manuscript outflow is a loss not only of discourse but of real money.

The oligopolies' moat is not only journal brands but the exclusivity of databases. van Bellen et al. (2025) revealed a long-overlooked mechanism: the systematic exclusion of thousands of small, non-English, non-Western journals from authoritative databases such as Web of Science and Scopus renders these journals invisible within the academic evaluation system—and invisibility is almost equivalent to nonexistence. Large commercial publishing groups are precisely the biggest beneficiaries of database coverage, and database exclusivity thus becomes a hidden pillar of oligopoly. Manuscript sources, brands, and databases form a self-reinforcing closed loop: scholars submit to oligopoly journals for visibility; oligopoly journals consolidate their position through manuscript inflow; databases consolidate their authority by covering oligopoly journals; and evaluation systems recognize oligopoly journals by relying on databases. China's manuscript outflow is drawn into precisely this loop.

The Chinese journal community is not unaware of this pattern, but its responses are themselves mired in dependence. A survey of journals funded in the first phase of the Excellence Action Plan shows systematic fourfold gaps between China's first-class English-language journals and top international journals, with the gap in publishing capability foremost among them: deep dependence on international platforms creates a structural contradiction between scaled development and the loss of autonomy (Gao et al., 2026). Going to sea in a borrowed boat is reasonable at a certain stage, but it means that channels, data, and pricing power all lie in others' hands. Manuscript outflow and platform dependence are mutually causal: while manuscripts remain abroad, domestic platforms cannot be built; and until platforms are built, manuscripts will not return.

4.3The Language Mechanism and Discursive Lock-in

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The third mechanism is the most hidden and the hardest to shake: the deep lock-in of language and discourse. English in contemporary science is no longer merely a tool of communication but a credential for admission. In a comparative study of OpenAlex, Scopus, and Web of Science, Simard et al. (2025) show that the geographic and linguistic coverage of gold and diamond open-access journals is severely imbalanced across databases: large numbers of journals run autonomously by scholarly communities in Latin America, Africa, and Asia are excluded from mainstream indexes—precisely the journals that carry knowledge production in local languages on local issues. The language barrier thus converts into a visibility barrier, and the visibility barrier into an evaluation barrier. Without writing in English, one cannot enter the databases; without entering the databases, one cannot obtain recognition; without recognition, scholars can only write in English and submit to English-language journals. The loop closes; the lock-in is complete.

Discursive lock-in has a further implication: the cession of agenda-setting power. When the topical preferences of elite journals become the weathervane of global scholarship, researchers in non-Western countries unconsciously tailor their own realities to others' questions; Chinese experience is reduced to a footnote to Western theory, and genuine local problems are shelved for being not international enough. The subjectivity of knowledge production is quietly lost in this day-after-day self-trimming.

Notably, this lock-in relies not on coercion but on voluntariness—precisely the core insight of Schiller's (1976) critique of cultural imperialism: the highest form of domination is to make the dominated internalize the logic of domination as their own need. Chinese scholars who submit to foreign journals are not coerced by anyone; on the contrary, every submission is the result of rational calculation—required for promotion, required for grants, required for academic reputation. When domination is internalized as rationality, each individual optimal choice aggregates into the worst collective outcome. The loss of discourse power follows. What topics are worth studying, what paradigms count as legitimate, whose results count as first-rate—the yardsticks of judgment are all held in others' hands. Manuscript outflow is the surface; the outflow of standards is the deeper layer. The former loses articles; the latter loses the power to define what a good article is.

5The Effects and Limits of Policy Practice

Nested together, the three mechanisms constitute a complete explanatory chain for manuscript outflow: the evaluation mechanism generates the motive, the channel mechanism provides the outlet, and the language mechanism locks the structure in place. Have China's recent governance practices struck at these vital points? The policy experiment represented by the Excellence Action Plan merits a cool-headed assessment.

The achievements are first visible in the rapid rise of newly launched journals. An analysis of 329 English-language journals founded between 2013 and 2024 shows that their relative impact indicators—impact factor, immediacy index, and article influence score—have exceeded the average level of international journals (Tian et al., 2025). The 2025 edition of the World Journal Clout Index (WJCI) Report provides further corroboration: 76 Chinese scientific and technical journals rank in the global top 5% by subject—9.5 times the number in the 2020 edition—and 362 rank in the top 25% (China Association for Science and Technology [CAST], 2026). Chinese-language journals are also gathering strength: a review of Chinese scientific and technical journals in 2025 shows steady gains in average impact per journal and in the number indexed by

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international databases, with a transition from the Excellence Plan to an excellence ecosystem in the making (Wang et al., 2026). Tearing an opening in a system ruled by venerable journals for over a century is no small feat; it demonstrates that a state-led, concentrated-investment model of journal building works.

The limits are equally plain. First, relative impact has risen, but absolute carrying capacity remains limited: the annual article volume of the new journals is low and their appeal to frontier top-tier results is insufficient (Tian et al., 2025), while the share of Chinese first-authored SCI papers carried by domestic journals is only 4.7% (Ren et al., 2026). Second, even first-class new English-language journals face the problem that their manuscript sources cluster domestically while their attractiveness to global high-quality manuscripts is inadequate, trapping them in the evaluation system's lock-in loop (Gao et al., 2026). In other words, English-language journals founded by Chinese scholars themselves still cannot bring back Chinese scholars' high-quality manuscripts, because the evaluation baton still points to prestigious journals abroad. Third, weaknesses in the supporting system constrain cluster effects: an empirical study of the Chongqing journal cluster found that 60% of journal groups are united in form but not in spirit, with core quality processes such as peer review, editing, and proofreading clustered at rates below 20% (Zhang et al., 2026). The overall judgment is that existing policy is good at building new journals but weak at changing the ecosystem: incremental construction has scored remarkable achievements while the stock pattern remains largely untouched, and the institutional chain of manuscript outflow has yet to be truly severed.

Policy has begun to respond anew. The 2025 Guide to Programs of the National Natural Science Foundation of China explicitly requires that no less than 20% of project-result papers be published in Chinese scientific and technical journals (National Natural Science Foundation of China [NSFC], 2025)—the first time the national funding system has used a hard quota to guide manuscript return. The journal community has also called for a dual return of papers and journals as a lever to deepen implementation of the Excellence Action Plan (Qi & Wei, 2025). A larger change came in March 2026, when the Chinese Academy of Sciences formally implemented a new rule that, across the entire academy, public fiscal funds would no longer be used to pay publication fees to some thirty high-fee international journals (Chinese Academy of Sciences [CAS], 2026). This measure—dubbed the payment suspension order by public opinion—marks the beginning of an institutional tightening of research funding's support for expensive overseas journals. The center of gravity of governance is shifting from supply-side journal construction to demand-side channeling driven jointly by evaluation and funding. The direction is right; the force remains to be seen.

6Findings and Discussion

Synthesizing the above analysis, this study arrives at three core findings.

First, manuscript outflow is institutional in nature, not qualitative. An outflow rate above 90%, a rate approaching 100% in the social sciences, and a 97.9% concentration of high-level papers abroad cannot be explained by gaps in journal quality; what truly drives outflow is the institutional force formed jointly by the evaluation, channel, and language mechanisms. Attributing outflow to the inferior quality of domestic journals is both inconsistent with the fact of their steadily rising impact and an unwitting cover for the real institutional causes.

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Second, the three mechanisms are not parallel but nested (see Table 2). The evaluation mechanism is the engine, generating the motive for outflow; the channel mechanism is the outlet, receiving outflowing results and profiting from them; the language mechanism is the lock, making the whole structure self-sustaining and hard to reverse. Together they form a closed loop: publish in prestigious English-language journals, gain evaluative recognition, obtain preferential resources—and thereby become still more dependent on prestigious English-language journals. Any single-point breakthrough will be dissipated by the inertia of the other links.

Table 2: The three mechanisms of manuscript outflow and their governance orientations

Mechanism	Core carriers	Mode of action	Governance orientation
Evaluation mechanism	Bibliometric indicators and the talent evaluation system	Allocates academic recognition and steers manuscript flows	Evaluation reform
Channel mechanism	Publishing oligopolies, authoritative databases, and fee models	Receives outflowing results and extracts excess returns	Channel construction
Language mechanism	English dominance, indexing rules, and agenda-setting power	Perpetuates the long-term solidification of the flow pattern	Discursive independence and network expansion

Third, existing policy exhibits an overall pattern of being effective on the increment but feeble on the stock. The Excellence Action Plan has successfully built a cohort of high-impact new journals, proving that a China speed in journal building is feasible; yet the new journals are likewise constrained by the evaluation lock-in and cannot bring back high-quality manuscripts, showing that without touching the evaluation mechanism, channel construction yields half the result for twice the effort. From the new funding-agency quota to the suspension of publication-fee payments to the retirement of the journal ranking table, the governance approach since 2025 has been shifting from the supply side to the demand side—the most substantive policy turn observed in this study.

7Governance Pathways

Targeting the three mechanisms and the limits of existing policy, the breakthrough must proceed in synergy across four fronts.

7.1Restoring the Academic Recognition Function of Domestic Journals

This is the fundamental cure—and the hardest one. First, the NSFC's 20% requirement should be steadily extended to national key research and development programs, talent programs, and discipline evaluations, so that domestic first publication turns from a soft exhortation into a hard constraint (NSFC, 2025). Second, the representative-works system should be deepened, evaluating the work itself rather than its carrier; after the ranking table's retirement, particular vigilance is needed against the comeback of substitute indicators (Lu, 2026). Third, universities and research institutes should be encouraged to compile their own journal recognition lists, substantively incorporating high-quality domestic journals into evaluation and exchanging multi-point list experiments for a systemic breakthrough in evaluation reform (Qin et al., 2025). If the evaluation end is not loosened, all other efforts merely labor in the service of outflow.

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7.2Strengthening the Carrying Capacity of Domestic Channels

Once evaluation is loosened, returning manuscripts require sufficient carrying capacity, and journal building must shift from launching new titles to strengthening the ecosystem. First, clustering should move from formal aggregation to substantive integration: the deep integration of core processes such as peer review and editing should be made a hard indicator in cluster assessments, rather than settling for shallow linkage at the communication level (Zhang et al., 2026). Second, the construction of autonomous publishing platforms should be accelerated: domestically developed platforms such as Founder Hongyun, SciEngine, and SciOpen have made substantive progress in full-chain operations, and their shortcomings in international dissemination and journal-group scale should be further remedied (Ye et al., 2026), keeping channel and data sovereignty in China's own hands. Third, high-starting-point new journals should be deployed to cover the 31 JCR subject categories still without Chinese journals (Ren et al., 2026), while the value of Chinese-language scientific and technical journals should be re-estimated: Chinese-language journals carry the unique functions of local knowledge accumulation and public service and should not continue to be marginalized amid the construction of English-language journals (Guo, 2025).

7.3Rebuilding Discursive Subjectivity in Knowledge Communication

The deep prerequisite for manuscript return is discursive independence. China should actively participate in building international academic evaluation infrastructure, expand the international influence of autonomous evaluation systems such as the WJCI, and support domestic citation databases in reaching maturity (CAST, 2026), gradually reducing dependence on any single Western database. It should raise the international visibility of Chinese-language results within the open-science framework, lowering language barriers through bilingual publishing, machine translation, and preprint platforms. Still more important is encouraging scholars to build autonomous knowledge systems grounded in Chinese problems: when Chinese practice can provide the world with irreplaceable increments of knowledge, the balance of language and channels will truly begin to swing back.

7.4Expanding Multilateral Networks for Knowledge Flows

A breakthrough does not mean closing the door. Domestic journals should be supported in forming alliances with diamond open-access journals and learned-society journals across the Global South, opening new spaces of cooperation in the vast terrain excluded by mainstream databases (Simard et al., 2025). China should participate in international publishing governance on an equal footing, making its voice heard on issues such as data sovereignty and pricing mechanisms. Through co-building platforms and mutual recognition of standards, going to sea in a borrowed boat can gradually be upgraded to going to sea in a home-built ship and even going to sea as a network. This is in the same lineage as the state's overall plan for promoting the flourishing development of academic journals (Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee et al., 2021), and it is the road China must travel from a large academic nation to a strong one.

8Conclusion

Manuscript outflow is a small incision, but what lies beneath it is the grand structure of the international

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communication order. The analysis in this article shows that the predicament of Chinese scientific and technical journals lies in the pull of the evaluation mechanism, the suction of channel oligopolies, and the lock of the language structure—three links nested into a loop that cannot be broken without systematic treatment. Encouragingly, signs of loosening appeared intensively in 2025–2026: the retirement of the journal ranking table, the suspension of publication-fee payments, the rise of excellence-program journals, and the growth of autonomous platforms. Institutional change is always slow, but once the direction is calibrated, time becomes a friend. When excellent Chinese results are willing to be first published in Chinese journals, and when Chinese journals are able to live up to that trust, the international communication of Chinese scholarship will no longer depend on others' channels and others' yardsticks, and academic discourse power will turn from a repeatedly appealed word into a self-evident fact.

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