

Think, Check... and Think Again

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Standard checks (indexing, impact factor, publisher) do not show who owns, funds or supervises a journal. Although these checks were inspired by and directly address Chinese-owned, English-language journals, these questions provide a preliminary framework for how journal ownership and sponsorship might be evaluated alongside existing criteria in the "Think, Check, Submit" checklist.

WHAT TO CHECK	ON THE WEBSITE?	WHERE ELSE THIS INFO IS FOUND
OWNERSHIP & AFFILIATION		
Why it matters: Every Chinese journal sits under a sponsor and a state supervisory body (the competent authority) with final responsibility for content. Knowing both tells you whose interests the journal answers to, and whether a role with it is an affiliation your employer or funder may ask you to disclose.		
☐ Owner or sponsor	Often (58%). About page; copyright line ("on behalf of")	JCR Country/Region; Scopus publisher; DOAJ society field
☐ Competent authority 主管单位	Rarely (2%). Almost never on English pages	Chinese-language site or masthead; not in Western indexes
☐ CN number (state license)	Platform-dependent. KeAi, SciOpen, HEP pages; 0 of 126 on Western platforms	Chinese-language site or print masthead
PUBLISHING		
Why it matters: Funding shapes incentives. State support is not a problem in itself, but it is rarely disclosed, and a Western publisher's name can suggest editorial oversight when its role may be hosting or distribution. Fees and subsidies show who pays and who benefits.		
☐ State funding	Never (0%). Not disclosed by any journal coded	Excellence Action Plan lists (45% of sample)
☐ Western publisher's role	Rarely stated. Copyright line: "on behalf of", "distributed by"	Compare JCR and Scopus publisher with the website
☐ APC and who pays	Usually. Author guidelines	DOAJ APC and waiver fields
EDITORIAL & POLICY		
Why it matters: An international board can lend credibility while decisions rest with the editor-in-chief and sponsor. Peer review is moving, unevenly, from in-house review to external review, and stated models are self-reported.		
☐ Editorial control	Yes. Board page: 93% of EICs at Chinese institutions; boards median 45% non-Chinese	Check affiliations, not just names
☐ Peer review model	Usually stated. Author guidelines (self-reported)	DOAJ review process field
PLATFORM & IMPACT		
Why it matters: Indexing and impact factors show standing, not governance. Journals that move platforms or change names can shed the signals readers rely on, and retraction histories are a check on integrity.		
☐ Moves and renamings	Rarely. Journal history, if any; 14+ moved since 2023	Scopus coverage years, status and publisher
☐ Indexing, impact, integrity	Partly. Home page claims	JCR (JIF); Scopus (CiteScore); Retraction Watch via Crossref

This checklist was derived from an in-progress study of 350 Chinese-owned, English-language journals indexed in Web of Science. Percentages are preliminary (231 websites from the 350-journal sample have been coded as of October 2026), and figures and findings will be updated as the evaluation and coding of the remaining websites is completed.

Project Background

Standard journal evaluation tools do not tell researchers who owns, funds or supervises a journal. This project tests that gap on one large and growing class of journals: English-language titles owned by Chinese institutions and indexed in Web of Science. Many are published with Springer Nature, Elsevier, Wiley, Taylor & Francis or Oxford University Press, carry high impact factors and recruit Western authors, reviewers and editors. Few make their ownership, government funding or supervisory structure visible.

China is now the world's largest producer of peer-reviewed research and is building a domestic journal publishing infrastructure to match. Since 2019 the Science and Technology Journal Excellence Action Plan has funded journals to reach international standing. Phase II (2024 to 2028) commits 1.2 billion RMB, including 120 new "High-Starting-Point" journals, most of them in English (Wang et al., 2026a; Cyranoski, 2019). Policy discussions propose that 20 to 50% of funded research appear in Chinese journals (Brainard, 2026; Wang et al., 2026a). About half of China's English-language STM journals are co-published with a Western publisher (Xu et al., 2019; Hyland, 2023). Behind that partner sit two Chinese layers: a sponsoring institution and a competent authority (主管单位), typically a ministry, party body or state academy with final responsibility for content (Wang, Halfman, & Zwart, 2021).

This ongoing project combines a literature review with a structured content analysis of 350 journals and aims to produce a practical checklist that librarians can use with researchers acting as authors, peer reviewers, and especially for prospective editors or board members, where a named, ongoing affiliation may need to be disclosed to employers and funders. **However, Chinese-owned journals are the test case – not the limit: the same questions about ownership, sponsorship and funding apply to any journal, and the aim is informed navigation, not avoidance and the overall goal of this project is to make ownership and sponsorship a routine part of journal evaluation, alongside indexing, impact and editorial practice.**

Research Methods and Sources

527 English-language journals associated with Chinese ownership were identified via Web of Science indexes (SCIE, SSCI, AHCI, ESCI). 231 were found by Chinese publisher address in the Master Journal List; 296 more are listed as Chinese in JCR but published under a Western address. (That 56% would be missed by a search on publisher location.)

- **Sample:** 350 journals were selected for further evaluation by establishing a stratified random sample by set and index tier with a 20% cap per publisher. The study also includes 15 illustrative cases drawn from discussions in the extant literature.
- **Coding:** Each journal's website is visited and reviewed as a researcher, recording what is disclosed, where, and how many steps it takes to determine the journal's owner and the source of its funding.
- **Matched data:** For some variables, information was more readily drawn from datasets made available through publishers or other indexes; in some cases ownership or funding status was not easily discovered or disclosed on the journal's website and required additional searching. Supplemental data sources included: Clarivate 2024 [Journal Citation Report](#), [Scopus Sources Source Title List](#) (August 2026), [The Directory of Open Access Journals](#) (DOAJ), the [Retraction Watch Database](#) (accessed via Crossref), and the CAST Excellence Action Plan selection lists (2019 and [2024](#)).

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