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## An Analysis of the NISO Journal Transition Practices Guidelines and Its Implications for China (Postprint)

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### Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] Through systematic analysis of the content, characteristics, and application status of the Transfer Code of Practice, this study provides a basis for journal publishing management in China and offers reference for developing standards and specifications suited to China's national conditions in the digital publishing environment.

[Method/Process] This paper elaborates in depth on three aspects of the U.S. Transfer Code of Practice: its main content and functions, transfer examples, and characteristics and features.

[Results/Conclusion] It is recommended that relevant institutions establish a working group to jointly study the development of online journals in China, ensure that no participant is subjected to unfair treatment, and primarily address the issues faced by purchasers and users of journals during the journal transfer process.

### Full Text

#### Preamble

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#### **Analysis of NISO's *Transfer Code of Practice* and Its Implications for China**

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## Abstract

**[Purpose/Significance]** By systematically analyzing the content, characteristics, and application of the *Transfer Code of Practice*, this study aims to provide a foundation for the management of periodical publications in China and guidance for developing standards and regulations suited to China's national conditions in the digital publishing environment. **[Method/Process]** This paper offers an in-depth examination of the *Transfer Code of Practice* across three dimensions: its main contents and functions, migration examples, and its characteristics and functions. **[Result/Conclusion]** The study recommends that relevant institutions establish a working group to jointly research the development of digital periodicals in China, with particular attention to preventing unequal treatment of any participants and effectively addressing issues faced by periodical subscribers and users during the transfer process.

**Keywords:** *Transfer Code of Practice*; National Information Standards Organization; transfer; standard publisher

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## 1. Background of the Transfer Code

In recent years, the phenomenon of journals changing publishers or publishing platforms—known as “journal transfer”—has become increasingly common. According to the *Transfer Code of Practice*, during the first ten months of 2006 alone, over 5,000 journals indexed by EBSCO changed publishers. The continuous flow of academic journals between publishers has long been an established feature of scholarly publishing, as academic communities frequently invite publishers to bid for journal publication rights, and larger publishers often acquire smaller journals, catalogs, or individual titles. However, journal transfers negatively impact libraries, intermediaries (such as subscription agents, link resolver managers, and large-scale discovery system providers), and readers, with the most common problem being broken online access or inability to subscribe. In most cases, journals continue publication but appear to vanish after migration, disrupting links to journal content in existing information systems and affecting reader subscriptions and access.

To address these issues in the scholarly communication community, the United Kingdom Serials Group (UKS) convened representatives from all stakeholder organizations and released the *Transfer Code of Practice* in 2006. In 2014, the UKS Transfer Working Group approached the National Information Standards Organization (NISO) to assume long-term maintenance responsibility for the Code. After a membership vote, NISO approved this undertaking and established a Transfer Standing Committee specifically tasked with encouraging broader publisher adoption of the Code, educating the three main stakeholder groups (libraries, publishers, and research societies) about the Committee and its work, reviewing proposed modifications and updates to the Code, and revis-

ing the Code when necessary.

## 2. Main Content and Functions of the Code

After thoroughly analyzing the current online journal environment, understanding market drivers, and completing legal reviews, UKS launched the *Transfer Code of Practice*. The Code clarifies why journals are transferred, what transfers involve, and where the most serious problems occur, identifying antitrust issues as among those that must be addressed. To date, the Code has three versions: the first published in April 2007, the second in September 2008 following feedback from publishers regarding business models, and the third released in March 2014 after NISO assumed responsibility. The third version includes key updates on handling new content types, user type descriptions, journal URLs and redirection, and the timing and content of communications. Detailed revision notes are available on the website ([www.niso.org/workrooms/transfer/](http://www.niso.org/workrooms/transfer/)). The following analysis focuses primarily on the third version.

### 2.1 Code Principles

The Code aims to establish a set of guidelines applicable when journals transfer from one publisher or platform to another, encouraging industry acceptance of these standards as a baseline for journal publishing quality and performance. The Code focuses primarily on online rather than print content. Publishers who publicly sign the Code and apply it in practice are considered “transfer compatible.” The Code encourages transfer-compatible publishers to use the Enhanced Transfer Alerting Service (ETAS, available at <http://etas.jusp.mimas.ac.uk/>) to proactively inform librarians and relevant agencies about journals entering or leaving publishing platforms.

### 2.2 Enhanced Transfer Alerting Service

Once publishers sign the Code, they can register transfer information, which is immediately pushed to the Transfer Alerting Service system. Librarians and other interested parties can register their email addresses to receive notifications about ownership transfers. In May 2012, the Code released an enhanced version of the alerting service, adding a searchable database to facilitate communication among all parties during journal transfers. The transferring publisher negotiates with the receiving publisher to ensure that all e-resource registrants receive notification about publisher or platform changes before the effective transfer date and registers to receive electronic alerts from the receiving publisher. The receiving publisher announces the journal transfer through the Enhanced Transfer Alerting Service within four weeks of signing the migration contract or four months before the effective migration date, whichever is later. The service consists of the following components:

- (1) **Transfer Mailing List.** The Code encourages library administrators, information professionals, and any other organizations interested in jour-

nal transfers to join the Transfer Mailing List. Each journal transfer is announced through the Enhanced Transfer Alerting Service, and organizations on the mailing list receive detailed logs, bibliographic information, and contact details for participating publishers via email.

- (2) **Journal Transfer Notification Form.** This form provides a simple way for publishers to transmit transfer information. Publishers receiving new journals are required to agree to use this service. Using the form requires login details, which are provided to any publisher supporting the Transfer Code.
- (3) **Transfer Notification Blog.** This blog page stores information about journals transferring in advance, serving as an archive of transfer information transmitted by publishers.

### 2.3 Specific Requirements for Different Stakeholders

**2.3.1 Primary Responsibilities of Publishers** The transferring publisher has two main responsibilities: (1) facilitating the effective and rapid migration of accurate, comprehensive information about subscribers and other authorized users to the receiving publisher to ensure uninterrupted access to journal content; and (2) promoting the effective and rapid migration of journal content to the receiving publisher.

The receiving publisher's primary responsibilities are: (1) ensuring that content is available to existing subscribers and other authorized users from the effective migration date; and (2) ensuring uninterrupted access to journal content for subscribers and other authorized users.

#### 2.3.2 Requirements for Handling Different File Types

- (1) **Digital Content Files.** The transferring publisher must provide all digital content files (current and archival, including all supplementary data) to the receiving publisher within four weeks of contract signing or four months before the effective migration date, whichever is later. If the transferring publisher is not the journal owner, it may only provide digital content files to the receiving publisher after obtaining explicit written permission from the journal owner.
- (2) **Other Digital Materials.** The transferring publisher must also reach agreement with the journal owner regarding whether to transfer applications or audio/video archives established for certain journals to the receiving publisher, and whether to migrate social media sites developed for certain journals that the owner manages.

**2.3.3 Requirements Regarding User Access** The transferring publisher must provide the receiving publisher with journal subscription lists within four weeks of contract signing or six months before the effective migration date,

whichever is later. If the subscription list is updated after this point, the transferring publisher must provide this updated information to the receiving publisher. The transferring publisher must provide the following types of user data: (1) individual institutions or consortium members that have purchased current print and/or electronic magazine subscriptions; (2) member subscribers (users paying annual fees); (3) individual subscribers (excluding member subscribers); (4) former subscribers (those who stopped subscribing by the end of the previous year); and (5) perpetual access users (those granted permanent access rights)—the transferring publisher will not limit these users' access rights or scope.

For each of the above categories, the transferring publisher will specify their subscription type (online only; print + online; print only) before providing the information to the receiving publisher. The Code does not require detailed information about subscribing institutions to be transferred, primarily to avoid disclosing information such as bulk purchase discount prices.

If the receiving publisher has received all digital content files but cannot provide access by the effective migration date, the transferring publisher must continue to provide access to existing users until the receiving publisher can provide file access or for six months after the effective migration date, whichever comes first.

The receiving publisher will provide access to existing users starting from the effective migration date. If the receiving publisher has not yet received all digital content files from the transferring publisher by that time, or has received all files but cannot provide access from the effective migration date, it must allow the transferring publisher to continue providing files on a non-exclusive basis until the receiving publisher can begin providing access.

**2.3.4 Provisions on Notification Timing** The transferring publisher will make every effort to inform all groups specified in the Code and other relevant organizations about the journal transfer within four weeks of signing the transfer contract or four months before the effective transfer date, whichever is later. The transferring publisher will provide the receiving publisher with a list of all copyright authorization channels for the transferred journal, such as EBSCO, ProQuest, JSTOR, etc.

The receiving publisher will inform all groups that should be notified under the Code about the journal transfer within four weeks of contract signing or four months before the effective transfer date, whichever is later.

### 3. Migration Example Under the Code

[Figure 1: see original paper] shows an example of a journal transfer notification form when a magazine transfers from the Taylor & Francis publishing group to SAGE Publications. Typical entries in this example include the following information:

- (1) **Contact Information and Transfer Compatibility.** In the example, the transferring publisher is Taylor & Francis Group and the receiving publisher is SAGE Publications.
- (2) **Specific Journal Information.** This includes the journal title, ISSN number, unique identifiers such as serial numbers and/or Digital Object Identifiers (DOI). The journal title in the example is *The Linacre Quarterly*, with a publication frequency of four issues per year.
- (3) **Transfer Details.** This includes the new Uniform Resource Locator (URL) for the title, the effective date of the transfer, etc. The transfer shown in [Figure 1: see original paper] takes effect on January 1, 2018, with the first post-transfer issue being Volume 85, Issue 1.
- (4) **Perpetual Access Details.** This includes digital preservation agreements and their URLs.

## 4. Characteristics and Functions of the Code

The Code focuses primarily on online content rather than print content, unless the Code specifically requires print subscription lists to be provided. After several years of promotion, the Code has developed the following characteristics and functions:

### 4.1 Created an Enhanced Transfer Alerting Service

NISO Transfer Standing Committee Co-Chair M. Allison noted that the Code's most commendable feature is the creation of the Enhanced Transfer Alerting Service, whose publicly searchable database helps publishers clearly understand the specific circumstances of journal transfers and enables librarians and readers to easily learn about migration news and search for information about past journal transfers. The ETAS service is currently provided through collaboration between UKSG, the Journal Usage Statistics Portal (JUSP), Jisc, and Cranfield University, with a commitment to continue for several years to come, and JUSP provides the hosting environment. Transfer-compatible publishers can use the Transfer Alerting Service to proactively inform librarians and third parties about journals entering or leaving publishing platforms.

### 4.2 Provides Ongoing Practical Support

The Transfer Standing Committee was established to provide practical support to publishers, librarians, and other stakeholders in the publishing process. The Committee offers informal advice to publishers and librarians encountering problems during journal distribution. To discuss or report any non-compliance with the Transfer Code, stakeholders can email the Committee co-chairs.

### 4.3 Continuous Updates Through Free Conference Calls, Webinars, and Websites

Since the Code's release, NISO has held annual public remote meetings to promote it. In February 2015, NISO held a public conference call discussing the transfer of Code maintenance to NISO, emphasizing the need for consistent guidance for the scholarly journal community to help publishers minimize disruption during journal transfers and enable stakeholders such as librarians and readers to continue accessing journal content. In May 2016, NISO held a free webinar, with slides and recordings freely available on the NISO website. NISO also continuously updates its Transfer Publishers webpage supporting the Code (<http://www.niso.org/standards-committees/transfer/transfer-publishers>).

### 4.4 Universally Applicable to Any Publisher

The Code is considered universally applicable to any publisher, regardless of whether third parties are involved or whether one publisher acquires another. Given that commercially reasonable efforts are made to reach transfer-compatible agreements with third-party-owned journals, any unsuccessful cases will not affect a publisher's transfer-compatible status. Transfer-compatible publishers are encouraged but not required to follow the Code when dealing with non-transfer-compatible publishers. The Code's implementation does not permit any illegal activities, including violations of competition, privacy, and data protection laws and regulations.

### 4.5 Voluntary Industry Best Practice Code

The Code does not replace contract terms, intellectual property rights, or intense market competition among publishers. In all journal transfers, the terms of negotiated contracts between parties prevail. However, publishers who sign the Code may choose to use commercially reasonable efforts to ensure that contracts for journals under their management align with the Code's specifications. The Code explicitly states that no publisher is forced to sign; each publisher is free to enter into contracts with substantially different terms. If a publisher does not sign the *Transfer Code of Practice*, the Code imposes no binding obligations.

## 5. Implications for China

In 1999, China's State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television issued a supplementary notice to the *Notice on Journal Verification and Re-registration*, which required that "journal transfers (journals moving from one province, autonomous region, or municipality to another) or name changes must be renumbered." In 2005, the Administration promulgated the *Periodical Publication Management Regulations*, which stipulate that periodical publishing units may not sell, lease, or transfer their unit names or the serial numbers, names, or layouts of published journals. These regulations have been in effect for over a decade. With the development of network technology and

the popularization of digital publishing, new challenges have emerged in China's online publishing world, including the gradual appearance of journal publisher or platform changes, while industry and national standards for digital publishing remain to be improved.

In June 2017, the General Office of the State Council issued the *Government Website Development Guidelines*, which specify requirements for website migration in the "Opening and Integration" section: "Government websites that need to be permanently taken offline due to inability to maintain, revocation or merger of the host organization, or according to intensive requirements should integrate and migrate their existing content. Integration migration requires application by the host organization, 逐级审核 (level-by-level review), and approval by the General Office of the provincial (regional, municipal) people's government or the General Office of the State Council department before initiation. The website to be migrated must prominently display migration announcement information on its homepage. After website migration, an announcement should be published on the higher-level government website or the same-level government portal website explaining where the original content has been moved. Such announcement information should in principle be retained for at least 30 days." This notice clearly stipulates that the government website migration process must be completed properly from start to finish, providing guidance and reference for journal transfers, and demonstrating that the Chinese government has begun to attach importance to various new changes brought about by network technology development. The digital publishing environment also requires the introduction of journal migration standards and norms suited to China's national conditions.

In summary, the Code offers several key implications for China:

### **5.1 Recommendation to Establish a Working Group to Jointly Research New Issues in China's Online Journal Development**

For example, representatives from libraries, publishers, intermediaries such as journal subscription agents, and other institutions related to the scholarly journal supply chain could form a working group. This group's goal would be to develop procedures and policies surrounding journal transfers between publishers in China to minimize disruption to stakeholders.

### **5.2 Avoid Discrimination Against Any Participants or Companies Affected by the Code/Standard**

Affected parties include publishers, societies, agents, libraries, and end users. The working group should create fair procedures for all parties, ensuring every aspect of the Code/standard serves legitimate business purposes. All affected parties should be provided opportunities to participate in developing the Code or standard. There should be no mandatory agreements forcing institutions to comply with standards; any party should have the freedom to follow or reject



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### Author Contributions

**Li Tang:** Responsible for paper review and proofreading.

**Zheng Huiling:** Responsible for data collection and literature search.

**Liu Chunhong:** Responsible for outline development and manuscript review.

**Jiang Ling:** Responsible for framework design, manuscript writing, and revision.

*Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.*

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