

Anomic Capital Intervention in International Academic Journals: Analysis of Publishing Disorder and Reflections on Governance

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Abstract

Objective: This study analyzes the disorder arising from anomalous capital involvement in international academic journal publishing to provide research references for the standardized management and ethical governance of China's academic journal publishing under the open access model.

Methods: Integrating data from the Cabells Predatory Reports and case studies on predatory journals from the InterAcademy Partnership, this study reveals the causes and ethical issues underlying the current proliferation of malpractices in international academic journal publishing from the perspective of anomalous capital involvement.

Results: International academic journals infiltrated by anomalous capital exhibit publishing malpractices including fraudulent peer review, cloning of reputable journals, derision of academic research, precision-targeted exploitation, and extortion through submission fee demands. From the perspective of anomalous capital involvement, ethical issues manifest as exacerbated ethical anomie, alienation of academic norms, targeted resource predation, and distortion of academic values.

Conclusion: By clarifying the essential nature of these problems and emphasizing source-level governance, this study advocates comprehensively enhancing researchers' capacity to identify academic anomie in scholarly publishing at the cognitive level, fostering proper academic values, and enabling researchers to consciously resist the temptation of anomalous profit-seeking through self-discipline in research integrity.

Full Text

Analysis and Governance of Publishing Chaos in International Academic Journals Involved in Capital Irregularity

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Abstract: [Purpose] Through analyzing capital irregularity intervention in the chaos of international academic journal publishing, this study provides a research reference for standardized management and ethical governance of academic journal publishing in China under the open access model. [Methods] Combining Cabells' predatory journal reports and International Association of Academies (IAP) predatory journal case data, this paper reveals the causes and ethical issues underlying the current proliferation of chaos in international academic journal publishing from the perspective of capital irregularity intervention. [Findings] International academic journals subject to capital irregularity intervention exhibit publishing chaos including false peer review, cloning of reputable journals, mocking academic research, precise targeted harvesting, and extorting authors through submission kidnapping. From the perspective of capital irregularity intervention, ethical issues include intensified ethical violations, alienation of academic norms, targeted resource plundering, and distortion of academic values. [Conclusion] Clarifying the essence of the problem and focusing on source governance requires comprehensively improving researchers' ability to identify academic misconduct in academic publishing at the cognitive level, fostering correct academic values, and actively resisting the temptation of irregular profit-seeking through scientific integrity.

Keywords: Capital irregularity intervention; Publishing chaos; Ethical governance; Predatory journals

Scientific activities cannot proceed without the normative and orderly involvement of capital, and academic publishing is no exception. As noted in the literature, "Academic publishing and academic journals have been intricately connected with commerce since their inception. From the most basic paper supply, printing services, and distribution to content editing, language polishing, and promotional activities, commerce plays an important role in scientific publishing" [1]. Commercial capital not only provides financial support for scientific publishing but also obtains reasonable profits according to market rules. The open access (OA) movement that emerged in the scientific publishing field in the 1990s brought new business opportunities for capital in scientific publishing. With the accelerated popularization of the Internet, a large number of open access journals have continuously emerged, making scientific communication more convenient, international cooperation increasingly frequent, and journal

operating costs significantly reduced. Supporters of open access have hailed it as a publishing revolution, and the utopian vision of academic sharing seemed within reach [2]. However, regrettably, as the international open access movement has developed in depth, capital's irregular intervention and misconduct in scientific activities have intensified. Academic resources have been controlled by monopoly capital and transformed into commodities, research output has become a bargaining chip for predatory publishers to raise prices, and the core functions of academic journals have been alienated into tools for capital profit [3]. Capital's overreach into scientific activities constitutes predation, and its irregular intervention, particularly disorderly involvement in violation of scientific norms, is leading scientific activities astray.

Scholars have previously explored the open access movement and predatory journals. Jiang Xiaoyuan et al. [2] revealed the business models behind open access journals and their destructive effects on the academic ecosystem. Li Xiaoye [4] proposed that the asymmetry between the number of domestic academic journals and the demand for paper publication in China has led to rent-seeking in academic publishing. Zhang Jun [5] argued that poor management and academic credibility and profit-first phenomena in domestic and international scientific journals have interfered with normal research output and publishing resources. Liu Zhongbo et al. [6], drawing on Merton's sociology of science, pointed out that predatory journals not only commodify the traditional academic publishing system but also lure resource-poor scholars with low publication fees. Tang Gengyan et al. [7] summarized characteristics of predatory journals including short review times, low journal quality, and large publication volumes. Existing literature has analyzed predatory journals themselves and discussed their negative impacts on the academic publishing ecosystem, but relatively few studies have examined the driving factors behind their emergence and development or provided empirical case analyses. Therefore, this paper conducts empirical case studies based on existing research, attempting to expose the current chaos in international academic publishing, reveal the essential factors behind the survival of predatory journals through phenomenological analysis, elaborate on the ethical issues from the perspective of capital irregularity intervention in academic publishing, and propose countermeasures for source governance at the cognitive level.

1. Publishing Chaos in International Academic Journals from Capital Irregularity Intervention

In the Internet era, open access provides new options for traditional academic publishing. However, in this new transformation of scientific communication, capital involvement has alienated into an irregular state that disregards norms and seeks malicious profit, turning the beautiful expectations for the open access movement into "bubbles." It is not difficult to find that after capital irregularity intervention, some open access journals neglect the quality of submitted papers, hollow out peer review processes, and focus more on charging high article

processing fees. Such chaos not only damages the good reputation of academic publishing but also indirectly lures scientific workers astray, leading to the alienation of scientific research and evaluation. Examining the current chaos caused by capital irregularity intervention in international academic journal publishing, the following practical problems should attract academic attention.

1.1 False Peer Review

The case of a paper titled “Get me off Your Fucking Mailing List” being absurdly accepted sufficiently demonstrates that false peer review indeed exists. In 2014, Australian researcher Peter Vamplew submitted this hoax paper to the open access journal *International Journal of Advanced Computer Technology (Online)*. The paper was properly formatted but contained only one sentence: “Get me off your fucking mailing list” [8]. Any journal editor who opened and briefly scanned the submission would have discovered its absurdity. Surprisingly, the article was immediately accepted as a formal submission and underwent “anonymous review,” with the review result being “excellent.” The author was subsequently notified that paying a \$150 article processing fee would secure publication [9]. That such a hoax paper could pass peer review and smoothly enter the publishing process sufficiently proves that the so-called peer review claimed by such journals is not credible. As noted in the literature, “predatory journals do not conduct peer review and do not seem to care whether the scientist submitting the manuscript is the actual author” [10]; what they truly care about is how to earn more publication fees.

Existing research has found that in 2017, Chinese authors accounted for 68.6% of publications in the open access journal *Oncology Letters*, 80.3% in *Oncotarget*, and 95.3% in *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Medicine*. Statistics show these three journals received article processing fees totaling \$1,535,100, \$31,014,800, and \$3,324,720 respectively from Chinese authors, with Chinese authors contributing over 760 million RMB to international open access journals in 2017 alone [2]. Follow-up investigations via Web of Science reveal no signs of abatement in this predation. As shown in Table 1, from 2018 to 2022, Chinese authors accounted for 74.68% and 96.08% of publications in *Oncology Letters* and *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Medicine* respectively. When international academic journals show such enthusiasm for publishing research results from scholars of a particular country or region, with publication ratios exceeding 90%, it raises suspicion: Has our country’s research level truly reached new heights to gain such widespread recognition from the international academic community? The true purpose of such massive publication by these international academic journals is self-evident. Capital irregularity intervention in academic publishing has caused academic journals to deviate from their functions; under such irregular intervention, whether scientific truth is disseminated—or whether what is disseminated is even scientific truth—no longer seems important, with malicious profit through article processing fees becoming the true purpose of such journals.

1.2 Cloning Reputable Journals

When predatory journals face a crisis of manuscript sources due to their notorious reputation and struggle to survive, imitating or even “cloning” reputable, legitimate academic journals becomes a convenient means of “gold digging.” The veterinary journal *Tierärztliche Praxis* under Thieme Group was once maliciously cloned [11]. As shown in Figure 3 [Figure 3: see original paper], this journal only publishes scientific experimental research in veterinary fields. Investigations revealed that the cloning publisher did not even care about the true meaning of the German word “Tierärztliche,” directly cloning a journal as *Tierarztilich Praxis* through letter combination while claiming it to be a multidisciplinary journal covering all topics and accepting submissions from any author willing to pay for publication. As shown in Figure 4 [Figure 4: see original paper], to make the cloning more convincing, the cloned journal *Tierarztilich Praxis* even republished articles already published in the original journal.

Obviously, cloned journals constitute a serious violation of academic publishing ethics. On the surface, this chaos represents unscrupulous publishers attempting to solicit submissions by borrowing the names of reputable academic journals, but its essence is academic fraud caused by capital irregularity intervention in academic publishing, completely disregarding academic publishing ethical norms and even blatantly violating the law, causing consequences such as duplicate submission and seriously damaging the legitimate rights and interests of researchers.

1.3 Mocking Academic Research

The open access journal *Neurology and Neurological Sciences: Open Access* published an article online in 2018 titled “Structural and functional brain differences in key opinion journal leaders” [12]. The “Materials and Methods” section stated “To avoid gender bias, we only recruited males”—a self-contradictory logical error that speaks for itself. Further investigation revealed that among the seven co-authors and four affiliated institutions listed in the article, four author names came from film and television characters and two institution names were fictional, as shown in Table 2.

Such papers have completely departed from the essence of science, and this represents just one example among thousands of operating predatory journals. These online journals that publish articles indiscriminately typically charge fees, lack peer review or other oversight processes, and give no consideration to potential adverse effects on scientific research [12]. Facts prove that occupying scientific publishing resources while ignoring content and even mocking scientific research has long breached the behavioral norms of scientific activities and violated the original purpose of academic journals and the ethics they should uphold.

1.4 Precise Targeted Harvesting

Predatory journals also exhibit characteristics of targeted harvesting, where published papers' authors are often concentrated in a few countries or regions. Research has found that predatory journals adopt different article processing fee pricing strategies for Indian versus non-Indian authors. "Publication fees for Indian authors mostly range below \$50 (averaging about \$32), with no journal charging Indian authors more than \$150 (the maximum being \$137). However, fees for non-Indian authors mostly fall in the \$51-200 range (averaging about \$131), with the highest fee reaching \$2,600. Compared to high-quality journals, this pricing strategy is quite attractive for Indian authors" [6]. Jiang Xiaoyuan et al. [13] conducted statistics on publications in open access journals such as *PLoS One*, finding that *PLoS One* published 28,116 papers in 2015, charging \$1,495 per paper, generating total revenue exceeding \$42 million; in 2015, *PLoS One* published 5,382 papers by Chinese authors, approximately 37% (about 2,000) of which were international collaborative papers; the open access journal *Tumor Biology* charged \$1,500 per paper, with over two-thirds of its papers in 2015-2016 originating from Chinese authors.

In fact, predatory journal publishing is merely a means of profit-making, and the capital irregularity intervention behind it cannot be ignored. With malicious capital support, predatory journals exploit the opportune moment when scientifically developing countries or regions strive to catch up according to the game rules of developed countries, achieving targeted harvesting of excess profits through precise commercial calculations and seemingly compliant publishing processes, highlighting the greedy nature of capital seeking profit. Even some originally legitimate journals have joined the gold-rushing ranks.

In 2019, the U.S. Federal Trade Commission sued OMICS Publishing Group because its journals engaged in false peer review and maliciously charged publication fees [14]. OMICS journals persuaded researchers to submit through false promises, not informing authors of mandatory high publication fees until before article publication, deliberately holding submitted articles "hostage" under the pretext that review would take months or years, typically not allowing withdrawal, and ultimately coercing authors to pay thousands of dollars in publication fees [15]. When authors strongly demanded withdrawal, they were informed that withdrawal still required payment [16]. As noted in the literature, "Scientific labor is a value-creating process, and its results should obtain corresponding returns after publication. Unless for specific commercial purposes, one should generally not continue to invest for the sake of publication" [17]. However, the open access model has made pay-to-publish a new norm, which the scientific community once viewed with great optimism, expecting rapid dissemination of knowledge and further development of scientific research. Yet OMICS Publishing Group's behavior has sounded the alarm for pay-to-publish: without strict regulatory constraints, capital irregularity intervention in academic publishing activities can only bring more troubles rather than convenience to scientists.

2. Ethical Reflection Behind the Publishing Chaos

Marx [18] pointed out that “the purposeful activity of capital can only be enrichment, that is, increasing or multiplying itself,” and capital possesses natural attributes of appreciation, competition, and expansion [19]. Scientific activities are fundamentally different: “Scientific truth first possesses objectivity, not subject to personal or group interests, thus can be summarized as universal. Precisely because of the objective nature of scientific truth, it can constitute the common heritage of human society and thus possesses communality” [20]. Capital and science form sharply opposing positions in terms of value orientation and cannot completely move in the same direction. Capital’s intervention in scientific activities must necessarily be premised on profit acquisition, and the academic community does not completely deny capital’s involvement in scientific activities, since “science is not a sector that can independently engage in material production; it cannot obtain the funds needed to maintain its operation by directly serving consumers. It must depend on its ‘patrons’” [21]. If capital intervenes in scientific activities in ways that violate scientific norms and ethics, it will inevitably severely damage the benign interactive relationship between capital and science, triggering a series of behaviors that violate scientific ethics. Research on ethical issues caused by predatory journals has elaborated viewpoints regarding concealed journal identity, wasted funding investment, destruction of the scientific publishing ecosystem, and weakened academic credibility [22], mainly discussing ethical issues from the perspective of predatory journals’ own characteristics. However, analyzing from the perspective of capital irregularity intervention in academic publishing reveals at least four additional ethical issues.

2.1 Capital Expansion Exacerbates Ethical Violations

As important channels and resources for scientific publishing, academic journals should fulfill their functions of dissemination and sharing. Due to the emergence of open access as a new blue ocean, large amounts of capital have irregularly flowed in, and predatory journals, with malicious capital support, disregard academic norms that should be observed, making profit-making their primary purpose. According to statistics, from 2008 to 2018, there were over 42,000 academic journals worldwide, including approximately 33,100 English-language journals and 9,400 non-English journals, with journals publishing an average of 3 million articles annually [23]. Alongside the development of the open access movement, the number of predatory journals has exploded, increasing from approximately 1,800 in 2010 to 8,000 in 2014 [6], and exceeding 16,000 by March 2022 [23]. Predatory journals’ publication volume rapidly increased from 53,000 articles in 2010 to 420,000 in 2014, with approximately 4% of article citations coming from predatory journals, of which 22% involved citations from multiple predatory journals [24]. This demonstrates that behind the appearance of unprecedented prosperity in article publication in the international scientific publishing field, capital’s disorderly and irregular expansion has intensified

academic publishing chaos and ethical violations in academic publishing.

2.2 Targeted Plundering of Scientific Resources in Developing Countries

Due to urgent needs for scientific and technological modernization, developing countries often emulate the quantitative research evaluation methods of developed countries to motivate their scientific workers to catch up with world advanced levels, making publication in international academic journals a basic evaluation indicator. This provides an excellent opportunity for predatory journals with malicious capital support to reap excessive profits. As noted in the literature, “From the perspective of science and society, developed countries started scientific professionalization earlier, and many people deeply understand the relationship between capital and science. Besides commanding science with capital, they have also discovered a deviant path to enrich themselves through open access journals by exploiting loopholes in China’s scientific evaluation” [17]. From 2010 to 2019, Chinese authors published over 2.755 million SCI papers, accounting for 18.06% of global SCI papers [25]. In 2020, Chinese authors published 549,845 SCI papers, accounting for 25.85% of global SCI papers [26]. Faced with Chinese researchers’ growing demand for publication, foreign academic journals have smelled business opportunities, among which are “carefully crafted” gold-digging journals targeting Chinese scholars. Research shows that two-thirds of scholars publishing in predatory journals come from Asia and Africa, with 17 of the top 20 countries by publication number being from the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Iraq, Nigeria, and Egypt in the top 10 [24]. The obvious targeted plundering behavior of predatory journals constitutes not only naked extraction of scientific resources from developing countries but also further widens the gap in scientific resources between scientific powers and other countries or regions, hindering the sustainable development of science and technology in developing countries.

2.3 Triggering Comprehensive Alienation of Academic Norms

The various manifestations of academic norm alienation currently triggered by predatory journals are summarized from the perspectives of publishing behavior and fees, as shown in Table 3 and Table 4 [27]. Currently, journals that comply with academic norms should at least have the following five characteristics: strict peer review, professional editorial boards, stable and reliable manuscript processing systems, clear and reasonable publication fees, and mechanisms for accepting supervision and criticism with timely error correction [24]. In contrast, the publishing chaos caused by capital irregularity intervention has damaged the above norms to an unimaginable extent, and the irregular operations of “pay-to-publish” are comprehensively polluting the healthy ecosystem of academic publishing and scientific communication.

2.4 Distorting Researchers' Academic Values

The most basic value that researchers should uphold in scientific research is “an honest scientific attitude, respecting objective facts, and regarding facts and data as the supreme authority” [21]. In normal research output publication, there is no direct causal relationship between payment and publication. Except for advertising texts, it is not true that whoever can afford the page charges will definitely get their article published, and even advertising is subject to strict industry or normative restrictions. When capital irregularity intervenes in academic publishing activities, content quality is no longer the primary concern, and massive publication for profit becomes the journals' sole focus. The unspoken rule of “pay-to-publish” in predatory journals not only transforms what should be content evaluation into commercial transactions but also fosters the proliferation of academic misconduct, more seriously distorting researchers' value judgments regarding scientific research. The trend of researchers seeking publication for performance regardless of quality is intensifying. Approximately 14% of researchers worldwide (over 1.2 million researchers) are affected by predatory journals, wasting billions of dollars in research funding. A survey of over 1,800 researchers from 112 countries or regions showed that 14% admitted to publishing in predatory journals or attending predatory conferences, while another 10% were uncertain whether the journals they submitted to had predatory practices [24].

Possible reasons for researchers choosing to submit to predatory journals are shown in Table 5 [24]. Another survey on researchers' motivations confirms that predatory journals induce the following undesirable values [28]: (1) The quantity of published articles is more important than the quality of the target journal, making it difficult to resist the temptation of easy publication in predatory journals; (2) Submitting to prestigious journals is difficult and time-consuming, while predatory journals publish quickly and rarely require revisions; (3) Academic status advances rapidly for those publishing in predatory journals; (4) Predatory journals align with evaluation rules in some developing countries. If this continues, research norms will exist in name only, and scientific and technological self-reliance will be undermined.

3. Countermeasures: Clarifying the Essence of the Problem to Achieve Source Governance

The function of academic journals is to achieve scientific dissemination and sharing, with strict operational norms and publishing processes that form the foundation for academic journals as reliable sources of scientific knowledge dissemination. As Merton stated, academic journals must first consider whether submitted results are worthy of publication [29]. “Worthy of publication” stands in stark contrast to “pay-to-publish.” The preceding analysis of chaos in international academic journal publishing demonstrates that publishing predatory journals is a means of capital irregularity intervention in academic publishing,

with irregular profit-making as its essence. The current academic community's widespread use of warning lists is an effective way to guard against predatory journals, representing a method to curb their survival from the source of manuscripts. However, such lists are often based on research misconduct that has already occurred, leaving buffer space for predatory journals to profit irregularly.

To address capital's irregular intervention in academic publishing and return academic publishing to legitimacy where irregular profits are difficult to obtain, guidance and prevention should begin at the paper submission stage to cut off manuscript sources for predatory journals. Of course, not all researchers have lost their basic ethical awareness or are willing to sacrifice academic reputation to participate in the farce of capital irregularity intervention in academic publishing. Comprehensively improving researchers' ability to identify academic misconduct in academic publishing at the cognitive level and establishing correct academic values are important prerequisites for source governance of ethical issues in academic publishing.

3.1 Identifying Journal Identity

Researchers typically select appropriate academic journals for submission based on their research fields. With the increasing number of open access journals today, the pool of optional journals grows larger, while predatory journals continuously engage in "identity disguise," making it difficult for researchers to accurately identify them through personal experience alone. Reports from the International Association of Academies on predatory academic journals confirm that researchers, especially young researchers with limited submission experience, cannot effectively identify predatory journals. In this context, warning lists or journal "blacklists" from authoritative institutions remain the most convenient reference. It should be noted that journal identity also has ambiguity: some journals have prestigious reputations and have published many valuable papers but still aim for gold-digging. In such cases, reputation becomes an important discriminating indicator. If a journal is not recognized by high-level academic peers, researchers should be vigilant and pay further attention to the journal's social evaluation to make correct choices. Additionally, tracking whether the publisher to which a journal belongs is a predatory publisher also helps researchers effectively identify predatory journals.

3.2 Screening Publishing Processes

Academic journals have standardized publishing processes, typically including submission confirmation, editorial preliminary review, peer review, revision and acceptance, and editor-in-chief final review. Compared to traditional journals, open access journals mostly complete their publishing processes online, greatly improving publishing efficiency but also opening convenient doors for predatory journals. Behind significantly shortened review cycles may lie irregular operations under malicious capital support. Therefore, researchers should pay

attention to whether a journal's publishing process is standardized during submission, particularly whether the review cycle conforms to objective reality. If a paper is accepted within an extremely short time and payment is urgently demanded, the journal may be involved in false review. Submitting and publishing through third-party intermediaries should be approached with extreme caution.

3.3 Recognizing the Harm of Irregularities

Academic journals are important carriers for recording and exchanging scientific research results. Standardized academic journals should have normative mechanisms for evaluating, screening, and publishing manuscripts [9], mainly including registration of submissions, evaluation and screening, and editing and publishing. Registration of submissions confirms priority of scientific discovery, evaluation and screening assesses the scientific merit of research content, and editing and publishing achieves the recording, dissemination, and sharing of research results. Predatory journals lose publishing value and cannot effectively guarantee priority of scientific discovery; false peer review completely destroys the scientific credibility of research results; once predatory journals provoke public outrage and are removed from mainstream indexing databases, the dissemination and sharing of academic achievements also become difficult to achieve. If researchers submit to predatory journals merely for the sake of publication, they will cause irreparable damage to their own academic reputation and cannot contribute to science.

3.4 Consciousness of Research Integrity

Researchers' ethical reflection and consciousness of research integrity are important prerequisites for resisting the malicious profit-seeking of capital irregularity intervention in academic publishing. The current chaos in international academic journal publishing caused by capital irregularity intervention not only severely pollutes the global research environment but also misleads some researchers' ethical cognition. Before the single evaluation mechanism of "publish or perish" is fundamentally transformed, researchers must adhere to research integrity and resist the temptation of predatory journals. In addition to the rigid constraints of research integrity systems, researchers need regular self-reflection and integrity consciousness. As the saying goes, "Articles are eternal affairs, with gains and losses known only to the heart." In the era of big data and networks, every instance of research misconduct, even if unintentional, becomes an indelible stain. This applies to journals as well as scholars.

Throughout the history of scientific development, the shadow of capital has always existed, with capital and science both complementing each other and containing inherent gamesmanship. The current publishing practices of open access journals present a huge contrast to the publishing model expected by the academic community, and the essence of chaos in international academic journal publishing is the alienation caused by capital intervention in the academic

publishing process. In the process of capital irregularity intervention, predatory journals become tools or means, maliciously plundering scientific resources while disregarding academic publishing ethical norms.

Due to factors such as the current enormous scale of international academic journals and frequent updates to journal data, this study could not exhaust all existing cases of publishing chaos, offering only a limited glimpse in hopes of seeing the bigger picture from small details and understanding the end from the beginning. Academic publishing will eventually usher in a more open and inclusive era, and the integration and interaction between capital and science will inevitably become closer. While adapting to the development of the times, researchers should adhere to scientific ethical norms, clearly distinguish the relationship between capital and science, weigh the pros and cons, and act prudently. All parties should actively guide the normative involvement of capital in scientific activities and promote the sound development of scientific endeavors.

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Author Contributions

WU Dawei: Constructed the paper framework, designed the research plan, conducted the research, wrote and revised the paper.

XU Fei: Proposed the research concept, revised the paper framework, guided research implementation, and revised the paper.

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

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