

Exploring Open Access Publishing Strategies for Domestic Conference Literature: A Case Study of the Chinese Academy of Sciences Postprint

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] Addressing the problems and deficiencies in the current domestic conference literature publishing process, and building upon the advanced experience of existing foreign open publishing platforms for conference literature, this study uses the Chinese Academy of Sciences as a case study to explore strategies for open publishing of domestic conference literature. [Method/Process] We investigated the current status of conference literature management and publishing at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, analyzed the feasibility and constraints of establishing an open publishing platform for conference literature at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and then discussed the interests and needs of stakeholders involved in open publishing activities for conference literature, including researchers, conference organizers, publishing institutions, funding agencies, and libraries. [Results/Conclusion] We propose four recommendations and measures to promote the open publishing of conference literature at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, including: formulating a unified institutional policy for open publishing of conference literature, clarifying institutional division of labor and responsibilities, creating an open publishing platform, and establishing sound supporting mechanisms.

Full Text

Discussion on Strategies for Conference Proceedings Open Access Publishing in China — Taking Chinese Academy of Sciences as an Example

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Abstract:

[Purpose/Significance] Addressing the problems and shortcomings in current domestic conference proceedings publishing, and drawing on the advanced experience of existing foreign conference proceedings open access publishing platforms, this paper explores strategies for open access publishing of conference proceedings in China, using the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) as a case study. **[Method/Process]** The study investigates the current state of conference proceedings management and publishing at CAS, analyzes the feasibility and constraints of establishing an open access publishing platform for conference proceedings at CAS, and discusses the interests and needs of various stakeholders involved in conference proceedings open access publishing, including researchers, conference organizers, publishers, funding agencies, and libraries. **[Result/Conclusion]** The paper proposes four recommendations and measures to advance open access publishing of conference proceedings at CAS: formulating a unified institutional policy for conference proceedings open access publishing, clarifying institutional division of labor and responsibilities, creating an open access publishing platform, and establishing supporting mechanisms.

Keywords: conference proceedings; open access publishing; open access

1. Introduction

Since the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI) [1] first formally proposed the concept of “OA” in 2002, more than a decade has passed and the open access movement has achieved prosperous development. Compared with the “green OA” pathway represented by institutional repositories, the “gold OA” pathway represented by open access journals has gained greater recognition in the academic community due to its peer review procedures similar to traditional journals. The “gold OA” pathway, which realizes open access through open publishing, refers to authors publishing their academic results in open access journals or monographs that can be freely accessed by end users via the internet under certain licensing agreements, with authors typically retaining copyright [2]. Compared with subscription-based traditional journal publishing, open publishing differs significantly in terms of publishing philosophy, operational models, editorial processes, funding sources, copyright management, and journal evaluation [3].

In terms of funding sources, for example, open access journals currently mainly adopt the “author pays to publish, reader uses for free” model to cover publishing costs, where authors or their institutions pay article processing charges (APCs) to publishers. In recent years, the number of open access publications has increased dramatically. According to the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), as of May 2016, it had indexed 11,649 open access journals from 136 countries [4]. Additionally, according to statistics from the renowned publishing group Springer Nature, since 2016 alone, 14 new fully open access journals have been created, including *NPJ Clean Water* [5]. Meanwhile, the types of open

access publications have continuously expanded, from initial journal articles to research data, educational resources, and academic monographs.

However, compared with the substantial development of these open resources, the open publishing of academic conference proceedings has not received sufficient attention, and related research is also scarce. This not only hinders the maximization of conference resource impact but may also affect participants' enthusiasm for submission, thereby influencing conference quality and contradicting the original intentions of conference organizers.

2. Current State of Academic Conference Proceedings Publishing

Academic conferences are venues for researchers to exchange new ideas. Although conference proceedings are often not the most mature or complete, they typically represent the most novel and cutting-edge perspectives [6]. Foreign scholars C. Lisee et al., in their paper *Conference Proceedings as a Source of Scientific Information: a Bibliometric Analysis*, used bibliometric methods to demonstrate that conference proceedings age significantly faster than other types of resources [7].

Regarding the publishing and dissemination of academic conference proceedings, there are currently three main traditional models: publishing through commercial conference proceedings channels, publishing through regular issues, supplements, or special issues of cooperative journals, and informal publishing. While these three models have promoted the dissemination of conference proceedings to some extent, they all have various limitations in terms of timeliness, systematicity, sustainability, resource quality, recognition, and accessibility. Taking accessibility as an example, conference proceedings published through commercial channels are often prohibitively expensive. For instance, the Society of Photo-Optical Instrumentation Engineers (SPIE) publishes more than 350 volumes of conference proceedings annually, with each volume priced between \$70-250, which creates barriers for researchers to access these resources [8].

To address the deficiencies of traditional publishing models, some explorations and practices of open access publishing for academic conference resources have been conducted abroad, establishing several conference proceedings open access publishing platforms, such as Elsevier Procedia Series under the renowned international publishing group Elsevier, which has multiple sub-platforms for different disciplines. The Procedia Engineering platform alone has published 142 volumes of open conference proceedings since 2009 [9].

Although these conference proceedings open access publishing platforms differ in publishing entities, forms, and disciplinary coverage, they all adhere to open access principles and have significantly improved timeliness and accessibility compared to traditional conference proceedings publishing models. Taking the IOP Conference Series sub-platform *Journal of Physics: Conference Series*

(JPCS) as an example, its most recently published volume is from the 4th International Conference on Science & Engineering in Mathematics, Chemistry and Physics 2016 (ScieTech 2016). JPCS received the accepted papers submitted by the conference on April 6, 2016, and achieved online open access publishing on May 5 of the same year, basically meeting the timeliness requirements for conference proceedings [10]. These publishing platforms also have many valuable experiences in defining rights and responsibilities of stakeholders, resource quality control, copyright management, and value-added services [11].

In contrast, although the open access movement has received sufficient attention in China, to date, no specialized open access publishing platform for academic conference proceedings has emerged domestically, and the release and publishing of conference proceedings remain dominated by the traditional models mentioned above. This situation has resulted in limited dissemination of these conference resources and created inconveniences for readers in accessing them, which is also inconsistent with China's growing research strength and scientific management level.

3. Conference Proceedings Publishing and Dissemination at the Chinese Academy of Sciences

The Chinese Academy of Sciences (hereinafter referred to as "CAS") is China's highest academic institution for natural sciences, the highest advisory body for science and technology, and a comprehensive research and development center for natural sciences and high technology [12]. Regarding the current publishing and dissemination mechanisms for conference proceedings within the CAS system, the authors investigated several recent academic conferences in different disciplinary fields organized by CAS and analyzed their conference proceedings publishing and dissemination methods, as shown in .

As can be seen from , CAS currently still employs relatively traditional mechanisms for conference proceedings publishing and dissemination. While some research units choose to cooperate with internationally renowned publishers to publish conference proceedings, which to some extent ensures these resources have relatively high impact, relying long-term on supplementary journal forms or informal publishing methods is not a sustainable solution for the much larger number of other types of conferences. Based on this, the authors argue that from the perspectives of economy, systematicity, and sustainability, it is necessary for CAS to establish a unified open access publishing platform specifically for conference proceedings—CAS Proceedings.

4. Strategies for CAS Conference Proceedings Open Access Publishing

4.1 Feasibility and Advantages of Establishing a CAS Conference Proceedings Open Access Platform

4.1.1 Abundant Conference Proceedings Resources As one of China's most important research institutions, CAS has the country's largest group of research institutes, almost all of which are leading research institutions domestically or even internationally in their respective fields. These organizations individually or collaboratively hold numerous academic exchange activities at various levels annually, attracting large numbers of domestic and international researchers in various fields to participate and submit papers. According to data published by the CAS Bureau of International Cooperation, in 2014 alone, the CAS system organized or undertook 145 international academic conferences [13].

4.1.2 Emphasis on the Open Access Movement CAS attaches great importance to open access of academic resources and actively participates in open access movement practices. As early as 2003, then CAS President Lu Yongxiang signed the Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities in Berlin on behalf of Chinese scientists, demonstrating China's scientific community's support for open access. Subsequently, CAS adopted a series of effective measures to continue promoting the development of the open access movement. For example, in 2007, it proposed the construction framework for the CAS Institutional Repository Grid (CAS IR Grid) and put it into practice. Currently, the publicly accessible resources in this network have reached more than 680,000 items [14].

4.1.3 Practices of CAS Affiliated Library and Information Institutions

The CAS Library and Information Center bears the important responsibility of establishing a 全院 (institution-wide) scientific literature resource guarantee system and providing literature information and knowledge services. It is also a pioneer in the open access movement and open academic resource construction in China. Its Editorial and Publishing Center is actively experimenting with open access journal publishing. For instance, its hosted journal *Knowledge Management Forum* adopts a pure online publishing model, publishing by article and archiving by issue, implementing immediate and complete open access for published articles [15].

4.2 Difficulties and Constraints in Establishing a CAS Conference Proceedings Open Access Platform

As one type of open access publishing, the development of academic conference proceedings open access publishing is also affected by a series of common factors. The Study of Open Access Publishing (SOAP) project conducted by the

European Commission in 2010 carried out a large-scale online survey on the supply and demand of open access publishing among researchers from different disciplines worldwide. The results showed that journal prestige and quality, publishing costs, personal performance evaluation, and publishing speed became the most important factors influencing their choice of open access publishing [16]. Additionally, in terms of China's and CAS's specific circumstances, academic conference proceedings open access publishing also faces the following constraints.

4.2.1 Organizational Constraints Although CAS has more than 120 affiliated research institutes, its management of academic conferences is relatively loose, with no overall planning for conferences organized by various research institutions, let alone unified collection and management of literature produced at these conferences. The authors believe one reason is the lack of functional institutions or departments responsible for coordinating and organizing academic conferences at CAS; another reason is that CAS's affiliated research institutions are too numerous and complex and spread across the country, making the number and types of conferences held annually enormous and coordination difficult.

4.2.2 Funding Constraints The open access publishing model requires substantial funding support for peer review, platform operation and maintenance, and long-term preservation of resources. Currently, funding sources for holding academic conferences mostly include project grants, cooperative institution sponsorships, and participant registration fees, while conference organizers typically need to spend funds on venue rental, participant meals, conference proceedings publishing, honorariums for speakers and staff, and other aspects. Therefore, how to reasonably control the costs of conference proceedings open access publishing with limited funds is a practical issue that conference organizers must consider.

4.2.3 Publishing Policy Constraints Academic conference proceedings open access platforms are essentially formal publications and are therefore subject to China's *Regulations on Publishing Administration*, which clearly stipulate that only institutions with publishing unit qualifications can obtain serial numbers and publish publications [17]. The reality is that the vast majority of CAS-affiliated research institutions are not publishing units and have not obtained publishing qualifications, which directly affects the formal open access publishing of academic conference proceedings.

4.2.4 Paper Quality Constraints Conference proceedings peer review is usually organized by conference organizers. On the one hand, some organizers lower paper quality requirements in pursuit of quantity to quickly complete conference proceedings preparation; on the other hand, due to time and workload pressures, the review of conference papers often cannot involve repeated revisions through communication with authors as journal reviews do. Although

most CAS-affiliated research units are top research institutions in their respective fields, resource quality can still be uneven due to conference scale, positioning, organization format, and composition of conference organizing committees.

4.3 Stakeholder Needs Analysis

Compared with journals, academic conference proceedings open access publishing activities involve slightly more complex stakeholders, mainly including five participating entities: researchers, conference organizers, publishing institutions, funding agencies, and libraries, each with different interests and needs. The analysis is as follows.

4.3.1 Researchers Researchers can be discussed in two categories: submitting authors and readers. For submitting authors, they submit conference papers often not for commercial benefit but to obtain direct academic exchange opportunities with peers in their field, enabling their research results to be widely disseminated and receive effective feedback. At the same time, authors hope their accepted conference papers can be indexed by well-known databases and recognized in personal research evaluation. For readers, they hope to access peer-reviewed high-quality conference papers conveniently, timely, and at the lowest cost.

4.3.2 Conference Organizers Conference organizers are a unique entity in conference proceedings open access publishing activities. On the one hand, research institutions hold academic conferences to provide a platform for researchers from different research groups to exchange their latest research progress and results on certain topics; on the other hand, they aim to enhance the institution's reputation and status in the academic community by attracting high-level researchers and publishing high-quality conference proceedings. Additionally, conference organizers hope to keep the total cost of holding conferences within a reasonable range.

4.3.3 Publishing Institutions Publishing institutions are the implementing entities of conference proceedings open access publishing. For-profit commercial publishers' primary goal is to profit from publishing academic information. Foreign conference proceedings open access platforms such as BMC Proceedings [18] and Web of Conference Series [19] charge conference organizers fees based on the number of articles in the proceedings and types of services required. Non-profit academic publishing institutions place more emphasis on enhancing the visibility of their journals and attracting more high-level submissions to promote wide dissemination of academic information.

4.3.4 Funding Agencies Funding agencies are organizations that directly provide funding to participants in conference proceedings open access publishing, with funding objects being submitting authors, conference organizers, or

publishing institutions. Funding agencies' greatest interest is to ensure the results of their funded projects receive more attention and that their funded academic conferences generate greater impact. They also hope to optimize the use of funding. Currently, some major funding agencies worldwide have adopted mandatory regulations requiring open access for papers published from publicly funded research projects, such as the U.S. National Institutes of Health [20], UK Research Councils [21], and the European Research Council [22].

4.3.5 Libraries Libraries' direct need is to provide complete resources and satisfactory services to users with limited funding support. The emergence of open access and open resources has brought opportunities for libraries to alleviate the "journal crisis." In an open and digital environment, how to enhance libraries' functions as information service platforms and ensure efficient integration and dissemination of various types of information resources has become a new requirement for library work. Additionally, as supporting decision-making institutions for teaching, research, and discipline development, libraries also bear the responsibility of helping their institutions improve academic status and influence.

In summary, only through coordination and positive interaction among all stakeholders involved in conference proceedings open access publishing activities can optimal practical results be achieved. This requires decision-makers to design a set of conference proceedings open access publishing strategies that balance the rights and interests of all parties based on careful analysis of their interests and demands.

4.4 Recommendations and Measures

In response to the current state of academic conference proceedings publishing and dissemination at CAS, and drawing on the advanced experience of existing foreign conference proceedings open access publishing systems, the authors propose four recommendations and measures for CAS conference proceedings open access publishing work.

4.4.1 Formulate a Unified Institutional Policy for Conference Proceedings Open Access Publishing Policy formulation can provide normative requirements and institutional guarantees for all participating entities. Although CAS formulated an official policy in 2014 supporting open access for research results from funded projects, the policy targeted research papers published in journals and did not mention open access publishing of academic conference proceedings. Therefore, the authors believe it is necessary for CAS to research and formulate a unified institutional open access publishing policy for literature produced at academic conferences held by its affiliated research units, requiring these conference proceedings to be openly published through the CAS Proceedings platform and encouraging submitting authors to deposit accepted conference papers in their affiliated institutional repositories.

Considering the current diversity and complexity of conference organization forms at various institutes—for example, some institutions independently organize conferences, some collaborate with institutions outside the CAS system, and some serve as organizers for series conferences of well-known international academic associations—the policy cannot currently mandate that all participating institutes must openly publish conference proceedings via CAS Proceedings. The authors believe that during the initial operation phase of CAS Proceedings, mandatory or encouraging open access publishing measures should be adopted according to different conference organization forms. For the last case, since most well-known international academic associations already have their own standardized conference proceedings publishing channels, excessive requirements for open access publishing of these conference proceedings are inappropriate, but requests for partial open access of accepted articles could be proposed.

4.4.2 Clarify Institutional Division of Labor and Responsibilities Conference proceedings open access publishing activities require coordination and cooperation among multiple participating entities, making it necessary to research and formulate reasonable working mechanisms that clarify the division of labor and responsibilities of various institutions and functional departments. Regarding conference proceedings open access publishing within the CAS system, the authors believe a three-level management system can be established from top to bottom: the CAS Bureau of Science Communication, the CAS Library and Information Center and Science Press, and the library and information departments of each research unit, with respective responsibilities as follows:

- (1) As the institutional organization for 全院 (institution-wide) science communication and publishing management, the CAS Bureau of Science Communication should formulate guiding principles for conference proceedings open access publishing, require each research unit to implement open access publishing for conference proceedings, and provide a series of funding measures. It should also reasonably coordinate and plan the 全院 (institution-wide) academic exchange activities and explore the establishment of an academic conference evaluation mechanism to improve the overall quality of academic conferences from the source.
- (2) Given the theoretical and practical experience of the CAS Library and Information Center and Science Press in traditional and open access publishing, the authors believe these two institutions should collaborate to create the CAS conference proceedings open access publishing platform CAS Proceedings, establish a dedicated department responsible for daily operation and maintenance of the platform, authorize the Library and Information Center to formulate detailed implementation rules for CAS conference proceedings open access publishing, and require Science Press to utilize its publishing qualifications to apply for the platform's ISSN and domestic serial number.

- (3) As the library and information authorities of their respective institutions, the library and information departments of each research unit should be responsible for supervising the implementation of CAS conference proceedings open access publishing principles and detailed rules within their institutions. They should also take the lead in incorporating conference papers openly published via CAS Proceedings into the research evaluation indicator system from the perspective of submitting authors.

4.4.3 Create a Conference Proceedings Open Access Publishing Platform The CAS Proceedings platform is the physical entity and implementation foundation for promoting CAS conference proceedings open access publishing policies. The construction of this platform will help standardize CAS conference proceedings publishing activities and enhance the impact of conference papers.

In terms of platform organization, given CAS's broad disciplinary coverage, the authors believe it is suitable to adopt a format of dividing into albums (sub-platforms) by disciplinary field. Combining CAS's five academic divisions and the disciplinary attributes of research units, CAS Proceedings can be divided into seven sub-platforms: mathematical sciences, chemical sciences, geographical sciences, life sciences, engineering materials, information sciences, and management synthesis. Each research institute can choose any of these platforms to openly publish its conference proceedings based on the disciplinary theme of the conferences it organizes.

Regarding platform resource quality control, a case-by-case approach should be adopted according to conference organization forms. For conferences organized by CAS-affiliated research units, conference organizers can be authorized to take full responsibility for peer review of conference proceedings for cost and timeliness considerations. For conferences jointly organized by CAS-affiliated research institutions and external units, due to complex factors such as conference organizing committee composition, the CAS Proceedings platform needs to adopt a dual review mechanism: first examining the basic situation of the proposed academic conference to determine whether it has appropriate scale and influence, and then conducting a second review of the proposed conference proceedings content submitted by the conference organizer to make a final publication decision.

Additionally, regarding publishing cycles, considering the special timeliness requirements for academic conference proceedings, the CAS Proceedings platform should minimize publishing cycles to ensure timely and rapid publication of conference proceedings. Regarding access levels, the platform should adopt the lower-level CC-BY (Attribution) license by default to enable the broadest dissemination of published conference resources, although other types of CC licenses can also be provided when conference organizers or submitting authors have special requirements.

Finally, the CAS Proceedings platform should fully learn from existing foreign platforms, such as utilizing digital publishing conditions to include conference PPTs, audio and video materials in the platform; providing on-demand publishing services to issue print or CD-format open conference proceedings; improving value-added services by providing article-based statistical analysis functions and functions to push published conference papers to institutional repositories.

4.4.4 Establish Supporting Mechanisms Constructing a complete CAS conference proceedings open access publishing system also requires support from a series of supporting mechanisms. Only with coordination among these mechanisms can the sustainable development of the CAS Proceedings platform be ensured.

- (1) **Funding and Support Mechanisms.** The funding issue is key to ensuring the stable development of conference proceedings open access publishing activities, involving funding for CAS Proceedings platform operation and maintenance, funding for affiliated research institutions' open access publishing of proceedings, and article processing charges submitted by authors. The authors believe that during the initial construction phase, CAS should establish special funds to support the daily operation of the CAS Proceedings platform to ensure stable funding sources. After the platform's influence increases, other funding sources can be sought by providing paid conference proceedings open access publishing services and value-added services for institutions outside the academy. For affiliated research institutes, they can allocate a portion of conference registration fees collected from participants as open access publishing fees for proceedings. For submitting authors, conference registration fees are usually paid by their affiliated institutions or project funds, and this fee can be considered as already containing the article processing charge for conference paper open access publishing, thus not increasing their financial burden.
- (2) **Promotion and Feedback Mechanisms.** Compared with journals and monographs, open access publishing of domestic academic conference proceedings has not yet gained widespread recognition. Therefore, CAS should increase promotion of the concept of conference proceedings open access publishing and the CAS Proceedings platform through multiple channels, enabling more researchers to accept open access publishing of conference papers and more research institutions to understand the CAS Proceedings platform. Simultaneously, timely communication and feedback mechanisms should be established to continuously improve the service functions and user experience of the CAS Proceedings platform according to the specific needs of conference organizers and submitting authors.
- (3) **Academic Evaluation and Incentive Mechanisms.** Research evaluation is one of the important interests of researchers in submission. In the current evaluation system, open access published conference papers are

mostly not included in evaluation indicators, which will inevitably affect researchers' enthusiasm for submission. Therefore, CAS should take the lead in revising personal research evaluation indicators to include articles published on conference proceedings open access publishing platforms including CAS Proceedings in the academic evaluation system and adopt effective incentive measures to encourage researchers to publish research results in open access publications.

- (4) **Sustainable Development Mechanisms.** The CAS Proceedings platform may face issues such as low visibility and insufficient influence in its initial establishment phase. The authors believe that relevant managers should recognize reality, base themselves on the current situation, clarify short-term goals and long-term plans, and formulate long-term sustainable development mechanisms while ensuring the implementation of the above supporting mechanisms. On the one hand, they should seize new opportunities brought by the transformation of academic information exchange models, continuously innovate, and take meeting users' information needs to the greatest extent as their mission. On the other hand, they should focus on open access publishing of conference proceedings, highlight specialized characteristics, concentrate advantages to build a distinctive brand, gradually enhance the quality and academic influence of the CAS Proceedings platform, and strive to enter various authoritative abstracting and indexing databases.

5. Conclusion

Academic conference proceedings open access publishing shares many commonalities with journal paper publishing but also has its own characteristics. However, current domestic exploration and practice in this area are insufficient. The authors believe that CAS has the necessity and capability to make achievements in conference proceedings open access publishing by formulating unified policies, creating the CAS Proceedings open access publishing platform, and improving supporting work mechanisms to promote the timely, widespread, and efficient integration of conference proceedings into the academic exchange system, fully realizing their potential value, and demonstrating best practices for other domestic research institutions and universities to jointly advance China's open access cause.

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