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Abstract

In response to the frequent disputes over the recognition of international journal rankings in citation verification services at university libraries, this study surveys 102 university libraries nationwide that are qualified as Ministry of Education sci-tech novelty search workstations, and analyzes the types and causes of such disputes. The results show that journal quartiles are widely used in the recognition of international journal rankings, but implementation standards vary, and the disputes involved can be classified into eight categories. On this basis, the study further applies multiple institutional logics theory to analyze the logics of different actors in the research ecosystem, and proposes recommendations such as designing a hierarchically nested rule system, rebalancing the power structure of research evaluation, and establishing a mechanism for resolving contradictions and disputes, thereby providing optimization solutions for addressing related disputes under the current evaluation paradigm.

Full Text

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Disputes and Governance Concerning International Journal Tier Recognition in University Library Publication-and-Citation Verification Services*

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Abstract In response to the frequent disputes over the recognition of international journal tiers in university library publication-and-citation verification services, this study investigates 102 university libraries nationwide that are qualified as Ministry of Education sci-tech novelty search workstations, and analyzes the types and causes of such disputes. The study shows that journal zone classification is widely applied in recognizing international journal tiers, but implementation standards are inconsistent, and the disputes involved can be summarized into eight categories. On this basis, the study further applies the theory of multiple institutional logics to analyze the logics of different actors in the research ecosystem, and proposes suggestions such as designing a hierarchically nested rule system, rebalancing the power structure of research evaluation, and establishing a mechanism for resolving contradictions and disputes, thereby providing an optimized approach for addressing relevant disputes under the current evaluation paradigm.

[Keywords] publication-and-citation verification; international journals; tier recognition; dispute resolution; multiple institutional logics

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Introduction

In recent years, China's research evaluation system has been developing toward diversification, and journal evaluation plays an important role within it. In the practice of international journal evaluation, many universities use the *Journal Citation Reports* (JCR) released by Clarivate and the journal zone classification table released by the Documentation and Information Center of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (for brevity, hereinafter referred to as the "CAS") as the basis for classifying international journal tiers. The publication-and-citation verification services provided by university libraries, in turn, offer assistance for journal tier recognition and provide reference evidence for research evaluation, professional title assessment, award applications, talent-program applications, and other work.

With changes in the research evaluation system, publication-and-citation verification work has revealed many problems urgently awaiting resolution, such as low service efficiency, difficulty in defining document types, inconsistent definitions of citations by others, and disputes over co-authors, journal zone classification, and the recognition of publication-and-citation verification institutions[1-3]. Among these, the recognition of international journal tiers based on journal zone classification occupies a core position in academic evaluation. Discussions of journal zone classification have mainly focused on the rationality of journal zoning methods and technologies[4-5], the consistency and fairness of zoning implementation standards[3], inconsistencies in zoning results caused by differences in retrieval time[6], and controversies over the choice between the basic edition and the upgraded edition[2]. Existing studies mostly start from the perspective of library work, discussing the responsibilities, rights, and roles of libraries and pointing out problems of absent norms and institutional deficiencies. However, disputes over journal tier recognition in publication-and-citation verification work are not merely differences in technical operations; their essence lies in the collision and interweaving, within the same field, of multiple logics in the research evaluation system, such as administrative supervision, academic autonomy, technological governance, and market competition. Therefore, starting from a single perspective often makes it difficult to grasp the full picture, and it is urgently necessary to construct an analytical framework capable of integrating multiple actors and their intrinsic motivations for action.

Accordingly, on the basis of extensive investigation, this paper conducts an in-depth analysis of disputes over international journal tier recognition in publication-and-citation verification work. Through discussion from the

perspective of multiple institutional logics, it helps stakeholders build bridges for cognitive adjustment, enabling all parties to objectively understand the decision-making dilemmas of others in disputes. Within a collaborative framework of multiple institutional logics, it proposes an operating mechanism that is both inclusive and practicable, with the aim of realizing a leap in research evaluation from technical correction to ecological reconstruction.

1 Investigation of International Journal Tier Recognition and Disputes

1.1 Introduction of the Problem: A Typical Dispute Case in Journal Zone Recognition

Disputes over the timeliness of journal zone classification are among the relatively common dispute events[2-3,7]. Figure 1 shows the changes in the zone classification of a paper in the SCI journal *Laryngoscope* during its publication process. The publication of this paper went through multiple time points, including submission, acceptance, online publication, inclusion in SCI, and formal publication, and the journal's zone classification changed during this process.

As shown in Figure 1, a university teacher, A, submitted a manuscript to *Laryngoscope* in June 2021. At that time, the journal was classified as a Zone 1 Top journal in the CAS journal zone classification. The paper was accepted on December 7, 2021, and on December 20, 2021, the *2021 Journal Zone Classification Table of the Documentation and Information Center of the Chinese Academy of Sciences* (hereinafter, such documents of different years

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...(hereafter referred to as the *20xx Journal Ranking Table*) was released[8], the journal was still a Q1 Top journal. The paper was then published online and was indexed by the SCI database on January 3, 2022; however, the paper was not formally published until September 2022. On December 21, 2022, the *2022 Journal Ranking Table* was released[9], and the journal was downgraded to Q2. According to the common rules for search-and-citation verification work, from

the time the paper was indexed by SCI on January 3, 2022, until the *Journal Ranking Table* was released on December 21, 2022, the journal ranking indicated in the paper retrieval certificate should be Q1. If calculated by the paper's publication year, year N (i.e., the year of formal publication), then from the moment the *2022 Journal Ranking Table* was released, the journal's ranking would be fixed as Q2. For universities that adopt the " $N + 1$ " year standard, the corresponding ranking for this journal would be Q3, as assigned in the *2023 Journal Ranking Table*[10]. For universities that use the most recent year as the standard, the latest applicable ranking would be Q3, as published in the *2025 Journal Ranking Table*.

Time points

- 2020.12.20 –*2020 Journal Ranking Table* released
- 2021.6.7 –Manuscript submitted
- 2021.12.7 –Accepted
- 2021.12.20 –*2021 Journal Ranking Table* released
- 2021.12.30 –Published online
- 2022.1.3 –Indexed by SCI
- 2022.9.23 –Formally published
- 2022.12.21 –*2022 Journal Ranking Table* released
- 2023.12.27 –*2023 Journal Ranking Table* released
- 2025.3.20 –*2025 Journal Ranking Table* released

Reference periods shown in the figure:

- 2020.12.20-2021.12.19 –Refer to the *2020 Journal Ranking Table* (major category: Q1)
- 2021.12.20-2022.12.20 –Refer to the *2021 Journal Ranking Table* (major category: Q1)
- 2022.12.21-2023.12.26 –Refer to the *2022 Journal Ranking Table* (major category: Q2)
- 2023.12.27-2025.3.19 –Refer to the *2023 Journal Ranking Table* (major category: Q3)
- 2025.3.20 to the present –Refer to the *2025 Journal Ranking Table* (major category: Q3)

Figure 1. Comparison of the publication time points of a paper and the release dates of journal ranking tables

After the paper was published, Teacher A did not promptly obtain a paper retrieval certificate. After the release of the 2022 or 2023 journal rankings, according to the common library rules described above, the journal would be classified as Q2 or Q3. However, the teacher hoped that the paper's level would be recognized according to the ranking at the time of publication, namely Q1. At this point, a divergence arose between the search-and-citation verification institution and Teacher A regarding the recognition standard; this is also one of the most common types of disputes encountered in actual practice.

1.2 Real-world background of the dispute: Survey of the application of journal rankings in university evaluation

1.2.1 Scope of the survey

Search-and-citation verification is an important auxiliary means for recognizing the level of international journal papers. It is presented in the form of a paper retrieval certificate and is used as a reference basis for research evaluation. Many university libraries in China provide search-and-citation verification services. Among them, university libraries qualified as Ministry of Education science and technology novelty search workstations enjoy relatively high recognition for the paper retrieval certificates they issue, owing to their comprehensive databases and professional retrieval teams. Therefore, this study investigated the search-and-citation verification practices of 102 domestic libraries qualified as Ministry of Education science and technology novelty search workstations[11]. The survey found that, except for the Shenzhen University Town Library, which is a public library, all the others are located in public undergraduate university libraries.

1.2.2 Survey of the adoption of journal rankings

By examining the service content on search-and-citation verification service web-pages, the author investigated the relevant circumstances of libraries in recognizing international journal levels. The data show that the search-and-citation verification websites of 6 university libraries could not be accessed normally; 20 did not present content related to journal rankings in their search-and-citation verification work; and 76 university libraries explicitly stated that rankings could be indicated in search-and-citation verification. Among them, 48 university libraries allowed users to choose either JCR rankings or CAS rankings; the numbers of universities that indicated only JCR rankings and only CAS rankings were both 14. It can be seen that, in the recognition of international journal levels, JCR rankings and CAS rankings remain among the commonly used indicators.

1.2.3 Survey of the adoption of journal-ranking years

The annual dynamic changes in journal rankings and the lag in the release of their data have led to different standards for adopting rankings in practice. The survey found that 58 institutions clearly specified the year of ranking data that

could be used in search-and-citation verification. Among them, 50 could provide ranking data for the latest year; 56 could provide ranking data for the paper's publication year; and 8 each adopted data from the year before publication, the year after publication, or a user-specified year. In addition, 38 did not specify the particular data year, and 6 could not be accessed normally.

1.3 Systematic classification of disputes: Major types of disputes in the recognition of international journal levels

The preceding analysis shows that, as a quantitative tool for academic evaluation, the international journal ranking system has been widely applied and recognized within research evaluation systems. This system is dynamically adjustable, as reflected specifically in the release of annual indicators, the iteration of disciplinary classification systems, and the upgrading of algorithmic models. These changes have caused the CAS Journal Ranking Table to display significant non-continuous leap-like characteristics. In structural contradiction to this, the evaluation of research outputs, as the terminal verification stage of the knowledge-production cycle, has a strongly extended evaluation period. Many universities adopt a five-year retrospective system for achievements in talent evaluation and appointment, while major evaluations such as the National Science and Technology Awards may require coverage of key outputs across a scholar's entire career. This demand by evaluation subjects for a diachronic dimension is markedly mismatched in time and space with the synchronic updating of ranking indicators, becoming an important cause of numerous disputes in the recognition of international paper levels. In summary, these disputes can be divided into the following eight categories, as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1 Types of Disputes in Determining Grades of International Journals

No.	Type of dispute	Main manifestation
1	Conflict in timeliness determination	The lag in the impact factor (IF) and journal rankings, together with the practice of annual updates, leads to changes in standards for evaluating research outputs and creates strict cutoffs by time point, triggering disputes in research rewards and professional-title evaluations.
2	Changes in the naming rules for journal ranking tables	After 2018, the naming rule for the CAS Journal Ranking Table changed from the “impact-factor statistical year” to the “year of publication of the ranking table” ; this change in naming rules has caused systemic contradictions.
3	Cross-year gap in the release of journal ranking tables	The 2024 CAS Journal Ranking Table was released in February 2025, and the version was changed to the <i>2025 Journal Ranking Table</i> ; the 2024 journal ranking table is no longer being released.

No.	Type of dispute	Main manifestation
4	Mixed use of versions	From 2019 to 2021, the basic version and upgraded version of the CAS Journal Ranking Table coexisted, and different disciplines or universities adopted inconsistent selection standards.
5	Disputes over retroactive treatment after journal title changes	After a journal changes its title, there is a lack of unified rules for determining the rankings of historical outputs, leading to the phenomenon of “one journal, two zones.”
6	Disputes over disciplinary classification	The CAS Journal Ranking Table includes both broad and narrow subject categories; for interdisciplinary journals, the assignment of rankings under broad and narrow categories gives rise to disputes over those categories.
7	Confusion over warning journal lists	Whether historical warning-journal lists remain permanently valid, and whether journals removed from such lists can be recognized again, have become focal points of dispute.

No.	Type of dispute	Main manifestation
8	Recognition dilemma for ESCI journals	ESCI journals are mistakenly regarded as SCIE journals; although they have IFs, they have not been fully accepted by mainstream domestic evaluation systems.

1.3 Conflict in Timeliness Determination

The conflict in timeliness determination essentially stems from the contradiction between the dynamic adjustment of research evaluation systems and the static attributes of research outputs. Taking the aforementioned case of university faculty member A' s submission to *Laryngoscope* as an example, according to the rules for retrieval-and-citation certification, in the paper retrieval certificates issued between January 3 and December 21, 2022—that is, before the release of the 2022 ranking table—the journal grade was Zone 1. However, under the “paper publication year” standard, after the 2022 ranking table was released, the journal had to be recognized as Zone 2. If a university adopts the “ $N + 1$ ” year standard, the paper is classified as Zone 3. Some universities also apply the “latest year” standard, in which case the paper is classified as Zone 3 according to the most recent current ranking table, namely that for 2025. Because of differences in university rules, the same paper may be assigned different grades, such as Zone 1, Zone 2, or Zone 3, exposing the lack of unified norms in the current retrieval-and-citation certification process for determining the time anchor used in journal-grade recognition—such as the indexing date, acceptance date, official publication date, or release date of the ranking table.

1.3.2 Changes in the Naming Rules for Journal Ranking Tables

For many years, the naming rules for JCR quartiles were tied to release in mid-to-late June of the year following the impact-factor statistical year, but the naming rules for the CAS Journal Ranking Table changed in 2018. Before 2018, the year in the CAS journal ranking reports referred to the impact-factor statistical year. For example, in November 2017, CAS released the *2016 Journal Ranking Table*. After 2018, the year in the CAS journal ranking reports referred to the year in which the ranking table was released. For example, in December 2021, CAS released the *2021 Journal Ranking Table*.

For institutions that use the paper publication year as the evaluation standard, this change means that the publication year corresponding to the CAS rankings underwent a substantive change; it also became one of the main reasons why the

ranking year for international papers is selected according to the standard of “one year before paper publication” or “one year after paper publication.” Therefore, some views suggest that papers published in year N should be evaluated with reference to the CAS ranking-table data released in year “ $N + 1$ ” [2].

1.3.3 Cross-Year Gap in the Release of Journal Ranking Tables

On December 13, 2024, CAS issued an announcement stating that the 2024 Journal Ranking Table would be released in March 2025, with the version renamed the *2025 Journal Ranking Table*. This also means that the rule of naming tables by consecutive years has developed a gap, jumping directly from the *2023 Journal Ranking Table* to the *2025 Journal Ranking Table*. Against the background of a cross-year gap in the release of the CAS Journal Ranking Table, if universities implement ranking standards according to different time points—such as the paper publication year, the year before paper publication, or the year after paper publication—they will face problems such as confusion in evaluation logic, biased results, and failure in research management. For universities that apply the paper publication year as the standard, since CAS did not release a *2024 Journal Ranking Table*, when recognizing papers published in 2024 they may refer to either the *2023 Journal Ranking Table* or the *2025 Journal Ranking Table*. This will cause their actual operational standard to evolve from the previously defined “ $N + 1$ ” year into the “ $N + 2$ ” year. Similarly, those that adopt standards based on the year before paper publication or the year after paper publication face the same logical confusion.

1.3.4 Mixed Use of Versions

For the 2019–2021 journal ranking tables, CAS implemented a dual-track system consisting of a basic version and an upgraded version. The two differed significantly in disciplinary classification, indicator algorithms, and update mechanisms, but different universities applied inconsistent standards when selecting among them, further intensifying the fragmentation of the research evaluation system. For example, for a paper published by a scholar in a journal ranked in Zone 1 in the basic version, if evaluated according to

may be downgraded to Zone 2 under the upgraded-version criteria, causing it to face the problem of “devaluation” in cross-institutional mobility or project evaluation. At the same time, by introducing mechanisms such as the journal transcendence index and a three-year citation window, the upgraded version has enabled some domestic Chinese journals to move rapidly into higher zones. For example, the Chinese-language edition of *Chinese Science Bulletin*, with an impact factor of only 1.1, jumped from Zone 4 in 2023 to Zone 1 in 2025, triggering widespread controversy. In the zoning system, this journal is labeled as subject to “homogeneous and equivalent evaluation of Chinese- and English-language science and technology journals” ; the official description states that “Chinese-language science and technology journals indexed by the WoS platform are assigned to zones according to Chinese citation data and expert opinions.” By

contrast, traditionally well-known international journals such as *Nano Letters* unexpectedly fell from Zone 1 in 2023 to Zone 2 in 2025[12]. Since 2022, the Chinese Academy of Sciences has no longer released the basic-version journal zoning list. Although the era in which the basic version and the upgraded version operated in parallel has passed, this change in calculation rules has subjected the zoning method to doubts about “black-box operation.”

1.3.5 Controversies over retrospective recognition after journal title changes

The retrospective zoning controversy over historical outputs caused by journal title changes is concentrated in the contradictory phenomenon of “one journal, two zones,” in which papers from the same journal before and after a title change receive different evaluations because of the absence of clear rules for zoning recognition. It should be noted that journal title changes usually fall into two situations: one is that only the title changes while the ISSN/EISSN remains unchanged; the other is that both the title and the ISSN/EISSN change. In the former case, the journal’s IF and JCR zone remain unchanged. In the latter case, although the journal remains an SCIE journal, its IF undergoes a transition period of up to two years. In the year of the title change, the old title has an IF while the new title does not; in the second year after the change, both the new and old titles have IFs, but because the articles carried by the new journal are relatively recent and citation accumulation is insufficient, its IF and JCR zone are often relatively low; in the third year after the change, the new journal is recalculated using complete data and obtains a normal IF and JCR zone. To avoid disputes, some universities adopt a “one-size-fits-all” strategy, requiring outputs to be recognized only under the current journal title. To a certain extent, this fragments the continuity of research and gives rise to controversy.

1.3.6 Controversies over disciplinary classification

The CAS zoning system implements a parallel mechanism of broad categories and subcategories. Because there is a mismatch between classification logic and evaluation orientation, it has encouraged researchers to make strategic choices of “seeking the high and avoiding the low,” thereby generating disputes in the academic evaluation process. The CAS broad-category zoning system assigns journals to 13 disciplines, with each journal corresponding to a single zone, whereas the subcategory zoning refers to the JCR subdivision into 178 disciplines and allows the same journal to obtain multiple zones in different subcategories[2,13]. This design leads to the phenomena of “broad-category suppression” and “subcategory elevation.” For example, *Social Science & Medicine* was classified as Zone 2 in the broad category of Medicine in 2025, but it ranked in Zone 1 in two subcategories, namely “Public, Environmental & Occupational Health” and “Social Sciences, Biomedical.” Because broad-category zoning is simple in classification and low in management cost, it is usually adopted as the assessment benchmark, but researchers tend to classify publications according to the high-zone attributes of subcategory zoning.

1.3.7 Confusion over warning journal lists Since 2020, the Chinese Academy of Sciences has annually released the *International Journal Warning List*, with the aim of reminding the academic community to guard against academic misconduct and low-quality journals. However, whether historical lists remain continuously valid and whether journals that have been removed from the list can be recognized again have become major sources of confusion in the classification of international journals. According to the official statement of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the warning list is the result of annual dynamic evaluation, and journals that have made corrections and achieved results may be removed from the following year's warning list. For example, *Sustainability* was warned in 2020 but has not been listed as a warning journal since. In actual implementation, however, many domestic universities often merge and use warning lists from previous years, resulting in a situation in which, once a journal has been warned, even if it has subsequently been removed, outputs published in it may still not be recognized. For example, Article 14 of the *Measures of Henan University for the Management of Scientific and Technological Paper Publication*[14] stipulates: "From the date on which the Chinese Academy of Sciences publishes the journal warning list, papers published in warned academic journals shall not be reimbursed for related publication expenses, shall not be counted toward scientific research contribution points, and shall not be recognized in various types of review and evaluation." This means that even if a journal has made rectifications, related papers published in that journal are still not recognized. Such a "one-size-fits-all" approach runs counter to the CAS recommendation that the list for the current year should be the standard[15], thereby aggravating researchers' cognitive confusion.

1.3.8 The recognition dilemma of ESCI journals The recognition dilemma of ESCI-indexed journals stems from their different indexing standards from SCIE, divergent perceptions within the academic community, and ambiguous institutional positioning. First, as an emerging subset of the WoS Core Collection, ESCI is positioned as a reserve database for SCIE, and its inclusion standards are lower than those of SCIE. Consequently, in university research evaluation systems, it is often excluded from the category of high-quality journals. Even when the impact factors of some ESCI journals exceed those of SCIE journals, they still find it difficult to shed the label of being "second tier" [16-17]. Second, because ESCI-indexed journals have been integrated into the WoS Core Collection, and because the 2025 CAS journal zoning table incorporated ESCI journals into the evaluation system and assigned them to zones, researchers may mistakenly believe that they are journals indexed in the SCIE database. Finally, in administratively led research evaluation systems, the lack of clear definition and policy guidance regarding ESCI-indexed journals further places their recognition in an awkward situation.

2 Analysis of the multiple institutional logics in international journal-level recognition

In the ecosystem of research evaluation, the recognition of international journal levels has formed a complex governance field involving multiple actors. To analyze the roots of the disputes within it, theoretical tools capable of penetrating surface phenomena and revealing deeper institutional drivers are needed, such as stakeholder theory, conflict management theory, and multiple institutional logics theory. Stakeholder theory focuses on identifying and balancing the interest relationships among different parties and can clarify the composition of actors in disputes, but it is difficult for it to reveal the deeper logic and value appeals behind their behavioral choices[18]. Conflict management theory is strong in providing resolution strategies, but has limited explanatory power for structural disputes arising from contradictions in institutional design[19]. By comparison,

Multiple institutional logic theory can connect actors' behavior at the micro level with institutional structures at the macro level. By dissecting the deeper logic of actors' cognition and decision-making, it more profoundly reveals the roots of controversy. Existing studies have shown that institutional change often involves the coexistence and conflict of multiple institutional logics; the conflicting demands among different logics can easily cause policy texts to remain at the level of principled advocacy and lack operability. Their roles and effects must therefore be understood from the perspective of the interrelations among institutional logics[20]. Accordingly, this paper adopts the framework of multiple institutional logics to analyze the issue of recognizing international journal rankings.

Multiple institutional logics refer to the coexistence, within a given social field or organization, of multiple stable institutional arrangements and mechanisms of action, which together shape and guide the behavioral patterns of that field or organization. Under this analytical framework, the interaction mechanisms of different logics within the same field can be grasped from three core dimensions: the coexistence of logics, the conflict and coordination among logics, and the hierarchical nesting of logics. The coexistence of logics is manifested in the fact that the same organization or individual may be simultaneously influenced by multiple logics; for example, universities both follow the professional logic of the academic community and are constrained by the administrative logic of government[21–22]. The conflict and synergy among logics are reflected in the possibility that different logics generate tensions because of differences in goals, values, or resource allocation—for instance, the conflict between market logic, which pursues efficiency, and professional logic, which emphasizes quality; they may also achieve coupling through compromise or innovation[23]. The hierarchical nesting of logics means that macro-level institutional logics and micro-level practical logics permeate one another, forming a multi-level nested governance structure[24].

Based on the analytical perspective of multiple institutional logics, and according to the institutional roles of different actors in the ecosystem of journal-ranking recognition, this paper selects five key actors in the field of journal-ranking recognition for analysis. The action logics of these actors are relatively independent while also interwoven with one another, together constituting the overall picture and core content of this study.

2.1 Documentation and Information Center of the Chinese Academy of Sciences: The Logic of Technical Governance

The development of the CAS journal partition table began in 2000, with the original intention of correcting the then prevalent neglect in China's research community of differences in journal IF values across disciplines. Since 2004, the CAS journal partition table has been released externally in Excel format, and it has since undergone several important adjustments. Key changes in its development process—such as adjustments to subject classifications, determination of the official name, and changes to naming rules—have had considerable effects on the indicator data and practical application of journal partitions.

The technical-governance logic of the Chinese Academy of Sciences is to introduce multimodal algorithmic models and dynamic tracking mechanisms so as to achieve precise adaptation of the evaluation system, restructure its underlying rules, and build a more objective academic evaluation system. Its core objective is to construct a flexible evaluation framework that takes into account both disciplinary differences and the timeliness of research outputs, thereby improving the system's ability to identify high-quality academic outputs while restraining short-term utilitarian behavior. Although the CAS journal partition table has consistently advocated that journal-partition results should be used only as a reference for individual evaluation, in actual research evaluation, applications based on this standard are quite widespread. Some universities may not fully adopt the CAS journal partition standards, but they have nevertheless optimized and adjusted their own systems on that basis[12].

2.2 Government Departments: Administrative Logic

Undoubtedly, in research evaluation, government departments provide guidance and regulation by issuing relevant policies, and they are an important driving force. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the research evaluation system has successively gone through stages of initial development, adjustment, reform, and improvement[25], and has generally tended toward scientization and rationalization. Evaluation of journals has always been one of its important components. In particular, documents such as *Several Opinions on Accurately Understanding the Role of Scientific and Technical Journals in Academic Evaluation* and *Several Opinions on Regulating the Use of SCI Paper-Related Indicators in Higher Education Institutions and Establishing a Correct Evaluation Orientation* clearly state that the positive role of journals in aca-

demographic evaluation should be brought into play in a reasonable manner. The formulation and implementation of these documents have guided the development of the research evaluation system at the macro level, with particular emphasis on diversifying the evaluation system and avoiding excessive reliance on a single quantitative evaluation method, in order to enhance the comprehensiveness and objectivity of academic evaluation[26]. At the practical level, however, because journal partitions are intuitive and operable, they are still widely used as reference bases in many research evaluation scenarios.

Administrative logic is manifested in the use by government of policy tools such as research funding allocation and institutional rankings to link journal rankings with resources, thereby strengthening the instrumentality of the evaluation system; however, this may neglect disciplinary differences and academic autonomy[27]. The administrative logic of government departments lies in encouraging the construction of a flexible, diverse, and non-absolutized academic evaluation system, so as to promote the healthy development of academia and the improvement of research quality.

2.3 Universities: The Consultative Logic of the Academic Community

High-level academic papers are crucial for universities to enhance reputation, attract talent, and secure funding; therefore, the formulation of policies for recognizing paper rankings is of vital importance. For universities, policy formulation is itself a relatively complex process. It must integrate the policy orientations of government departments at all levels, take into account the disciplinary characteristics of the university, draw on the experience of peer institutions, and be developed only after multiple rounds of investigation and discussion with academic experts. National-level policies provide macro-level guidance for the recognition of paper rankings. Because policy orientations may differ among different departments, universities need to formulate specific implementation rules within the national policy framework and coordinate with different departments to ensure policy continuity and consistency. Academic evaluation standards and requirements differ across disciplines, so policy formulation must fully consider the characteristics and needs of the university's disciplines. Through exchanges with peer institutions, universities can draw on successful experiences and practices to provide references for their own policymaking. The participation of academic experts is an indispensable part of the policymaking process, and their opinions and feedback are crucial for ensuring the scientificity and rationality of policies.

In essence, university policies for recognizing paper rankings are the product of interactions among the logic of administrative authority, the consultative logic of the academic community, and the logic of market competition. Their core function lies in aligning with national orientations in research evaluation in order to obtain recognition from the administrative system, with high-ranking papers serving as "academic

“hard currency,” directly linked to institutional rankings, success rates in talent recruitment, and access to competitive funding. Policy standards also guide teachers’ research directions, indirectly affecting disciplinary layouts and the cultivation of distinctive strengths. The logic of universities is to guide researchers, in accordance with their own disciplinary plans, toward publishing high-level papers. As for the criteria for evaluating papers, universities have considerable autonomy so long as they do not violate national policies; therefore, policy documents differ from one university to another. In addition, stakeholders within universities also differ in how well they understand policy content and the details of implementation.

2.4 Paper Authors: The Logic of Market Competition

For paper authors, in order to seek career advancement or compete for projects, they often give priority to submitting to journals in higher zones, ensuring that published papers receive more attention and citations, thereby enhancing their own academic influence. At the same time, they also closely follow universities’ methods for recognizing and evaluating research outputs, so as to ensure that their research achievements receive reasonable evaluation and recognition.

The grade of a published paper is often directly linked to research assessment, so authors care greatly about the rules by which paper-grade standards are formulated; these rules have the most direct impact on them. However, the overall cycle from topic selection, writing, submission, and publication to final release is relatively long, during which the journal’s grade may change. Which time point should be used as the basis for determining the grade has always been a focus of controversy. In the current field of academic production, paper authors’ core demand is to maximize both the academic value recognition and institutional rewards of their research achievements; therefore, they generally hope that the journals in which they publish will be graded as highly as possible.

2.5 University Libraries: The Logic of Rule Implementation

Against the background of the digital transformation of the academic evaluation system, university libraries have broken through their traditional positioning as literature service institutions and have gradually developed into key hubs in academic governance networks. In the identification of international journal grades, libraries mainly undertake the following three key functions. First, as centers of literature information resources and providers of information services, libraries’ core function is to rely on evaluation data such as journal IF and citation frequency to provide researchers with in-depth information services, helping them gain a comprehensive understanding of journals’ academic influence and recognition, thereby providing professional evidence for their publication decisions. Second, as supporters of research evaluation, libraries play a supporting role in research evaluation by providing classification and identification standards for international journals, helping researchers understand the specific requirements of their universities regarding the grading of international papers. Third, as

academic service institutions, libraries play a third-party role in the identification of international journal grades, ensuring the objectivity and authority of the evaluation of academic achievements.

In the practical work of publication and citation verification, the logic followed by university libraries is mainly to comply with the relevant institutional documents of their universities or the needs of paper authors, objectively displaying the IF and zone information of academic achievements, so as to safeguard the fairness of academic evaluation and help researchers better publish and obtain recognition for their academic outputs.

3 Strategies for Responding to Disputes over the Identification of International Journal Grades

3.1 Design of a Hierarchically Nested Rule System

This section proposes a rule-system design for resolving disputes over journal classification, constructing a six-dimensional interactive model of actors that covers vertical transmission across the national, institutional, and disciplinary levels; horizontal penetration by paper authors; technical linkage by journal-zone publishing units; and implementation, certification, and coordination by libraries (see Table 2). The close linkage and coordinated cooperation among all levels are related not only to the rationality and credibility of evaluation results, but also to a crucial transition in China's research governance paradigm from "follow-up management" toward "innovative governance."

Table 2 Hierarchical system structure and definition of actor roles

Level	Functional Positioning	Source of Authority	Rule Attribute	Typical Actors
National policy anchoring layer	Value anchoring and legitimacy endorsement	Policy documents	Rigid principles	Ministry of Education, Ministry of Science and Technology, National Natural Science Foundation of China
Institutional implementation detail layer	Policy translation and resource allocation	University statutes	Flexible details	University research offices, personnel offices, academic committees

Level	Functional Positioning	Source of Authority	Rule Attribute	Typical Actors
Disciplinary dynamic-adjustment layer	Professional autonomy and standard calibration	Consensus of the academic community	Dynamic consensus	College academic committees, disciplinary review panels
Paper-author penetrating layer	Rule implementation and feedback adaptation	Influence of research achievements	Agentic practice	Researchers, faculty teams
Technical-intermediary layer for journal-zone release	Technical intermediation and provision of quantitative scales	Data algorithms	Semi-rigid standards	Chinese Academy of Sciences, Clarivate
University-library implementation and coordination layer	Rule certification and data hub	Certification authority	Procedural rigidity	Library research evaluation departments, subject librarian teams

3.2 Rebalancing the Power Structure of Research Evaluation

In a hierarchically nested research evaluation system, the rebalancing of the power structure must proceed around the core contradictions and governance logics of different levels. First, at the national policy level, current policies such as “breaking the five-onlys” have weakened control by quantitative indicators, but grassroots units such as universities face the predicament of having no standards to follow; it is therefore necessary to rebalance the contradiction between rigid constraints and flexible empowerment. For example, a negative list for research evaluation could be issued, allowing universities and other research institutions to innovate autonomously within positive-list areas such as representative works, social service, and major innovation, thereby stimulating grassroots vitality while maintaining strategic resolve. Second, at the institutional implementation level, in pursuit of disciplinary rankings and the like, universities often uniformly adopt a particular zoning standard, which to a certain extent restricts the distinctive development of some disciplines; it is necessary to coordinate the tension between management efficiency and disciplinary distinctiveness. For instance, consideration could be given to having the university level set basic journal catalogs for each discipline as minimum standards,

The authority to formulate journal ranking catalogs that embody disciplinary characteristics should be delegated to the college and university levels, with only bottom-line review authority retained, thereby rebalancing administrative intervention and academic autonomy. Again, at the disciplinary level, disciplinary committees may be dominated by powerful scholars, intensifying conflicts between academic consensus and small-group interests; institutional design should therefore be used to curb the privatization of power. For example, anonymous voting mechanisms may be adopted in journal additions or rule-making, with results disclosed in a timely manner, and cross-disciplinary experts may be invited to participate in revising journal catalogs, so as to break internal interest loops and rebalance professional authority with interest-based bargaining.

3.3 Establishing a Mechanism for Resolving Conflicts and Disputes

First, a cognitive coordination mechanism should be constructed by creating the role of “policy translator.” A cross-departmental team of disciplinary policy coordinators may be established to interpret the logic of policy design, disciplinary particularities, and details of policy implementation. Under the leadership of bodies such as academic committees, joint meetings should be convened from time to time, and two-way communication and translation channels between hierarchical levels should be established, so as to break down the “cognitive cocoons” in the research evaluation process to the greatest extent possible. In university libraries, librarians responsible for verification of retrieval and citation must not only understand policy documents, grasp evaluation rules, and be familiar with journal quartile rules, but also directly face authors in determining journal grades; they are therefore highly familiar with all links in the evaluation process. Accordingly, their key bridging role in the coordination mechanism can be fully brought into play.

Second, the design of the institutional transition period should be optimized, and a dynamic adjustment mechanism should be established. The core objective of the journal evaluation system is to encourage researchers to conduct innovative research through policy guidance, and the evaluation of academic papers is precisely one form of encouragement. Since it is encouragement, a buffer period may be established for the evaluation of published papers. During the buffer period, scholars should be allowed to continue using the old standards or to use mixed standards, with a gradual transition and dynamic adjustment to reduce resistance to reform. The specific optimized design is shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Correspondence Between Types of Disputes and Governance Recommendations

		Customized governance recommendation
No.	Type of dispute	
1	Conflict over timeliness determination	Establish a buffer period based on the principle of “adopting the higher standard” ; uniformly take the time when the paper is indexed by SCIE as the starting point for determination; establish a mechanism for marking the quartile-version of cross-year research outputs.
2	Changes in journal quartile naming rules	Handle by stages: for papers in year $N \leq 2022$, adopt the “ $N + 1$ ” standard; for papers from 2023—2025, select the higher value according to the major-category quartile among available quartile tables; after 2026, refer to data from the year before publication and the current year, and select the higher value according to the major-category quartile.
3	Cross-year gaps in the release of journal quartiles	Same as above: adopt the principle of “selecting the higher value” as a unified solution for abnormalities in the release cycle.

		Customized governance recommendation
No.	Type of dispute	
4	Mixed use of versions	For papers during the dual-track parallel period (2019–2022), allow recognition according to the higher value between the basic-version and upgraded-version quartiles.
5	Disputes over retrospective handling of renamed journals	If only the journal title changes, the quartile follows the data of the old journal; if both the journal title and ISSN change, the quartile of the new journal shall prevail.
6	Disputes over disciplinary classification	Clarify that the major-category quartile is the benchmark; if it is indeed necessary to mark a minor-category quartile, the paper's major-category quartile must also be marked simultaneously, so as to avoid selective indexing.

		Customized governance recommendation
No.	Type of dispute	
7	Confusion over lists of early-warning journals	Universities should take the latest annual early-warning list of the Chinese Academy of Sciences as the standard, and retrospective use of historical lists is strictly prohibited; after a journal is removed from the list, its recognized qualification is automatically restored; it is recommended that the Chinese Academy of Sciences establish a public certification system for “warnings that have been lifted.”
8	The recognition dilemma of ESCI journals	Clarify the positioning of ESCI journals at the institutional level; encourage university academic committees to recognize their value by strengthening peer review, establishing independently recommended journal lists, and other means.

These recommendations require coordinated authorization at the university level, with multiple departments such as the personnel office, research administration office, and library jointly formulating specific implementation rules. The university research administration office may serve as the primary responsible body, taking the lead in formulating “Detailed Rules for the Implementation

of Research Evaluation Measures,” while functional departments such as the personnel office and library are responsible for concrete implementation, and disputed issues are submitted to the academic committee for adjudication. Although the implementation of detailed rules may encounter resistance due to increased administrative management costs, such problems are not difficult to overcome. In fact, some universities have already formulated corresponding detailed rules for journal quartiles and cross-year gaps in releases [28], providing feasible examples for institutional implementation.

Third, institutional channels for facilitation should be improved, and a hierarchical appeal system should be constructed. In the process of determining journal grades, when paper authors have questions about a journal’s evaluation grade, they usually need to communicate with a particular staff member in departments such as the personnel office, science and technology office, or library. Although the relevant staff have a certain degree of say in the determination process, because the details of determination involve many aspects such as policy, paper publication, and journal quartiles, communication and confirmation on multiple fronts are still required. Therefore, constructing a reasonable appeal channel is a key path for achieving a balance between procedural justice and academic autonomy. The author recommends establishing an “Arbitration Committee for Disputes over the Recognition of Research Outputs,” forming a progressive dispute-resolution framework through a combination of professional stratification and procedural stratification. Regardless of the level within the academic community at which relevant feedback is received, the mechanism should be triggered to review the dispute, providing the parties with multiple pathways for rights relief. This mechanism takes into account the institutional logic of both efficiency and fairness,

This can provide an important reference for universities in optimizing their dispute-resolution mechanisms.

4 Conclusion

The CAS journal partition table plays an important role in the evaluation of research performance in China. Therefore, discussion of the determination of international journal grades in university library citation-verification services has important practical significance. This study argues that the effectiveness of dispute resolution depends on the triple coupling of “academic evaluation mechanism—institutional elastic correction—dispute-resolution channels.” Relying solely on a single governance path based on administrative authority or technical rationality may exacerbate institutional failure.

From the perspective of citation-verification work, this study explores disputes over the determination of international journal grades. Because citation-verification work is situated at the final stage in which the value of academic papers is realized, journal partition tables, as technical tools, have been endowed with an excessively heavy evaluative function; purely technical

fine-tuning alone can hardly fully reconcile the differentiated demands of all parties. Reform of the evaluation system is destined to be a gradual process under multi-party bargaining. As long as the evaluation paradigm of “judging papers by journals” exists, related disputes may continue to exist. By deconstructing the generative logic of disputes in citation-verification work and proposing governance suggestions, this paper aims to provide optimized solutions for alleviating conflicts under the current evaluation paradigm, with the hope of serving as a transitional bridge toward more scientific evaluation. It is hoped that these preliminary reflections can stimulate critical discussion across sectors on the essential issues of academic evaluation. Only through collaborative innovation among multiple actors and dynamic governance can the improvement and progress of the research evaluation system be jointly promoted.

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A Study on the Compensatory Effect of Librarians' Body Language on Reader Service Demand Gap

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Abstract This study focuses on the often-overlooked compensatory role of librarians' body language in addressing service demand gaps. Grounded in service compensation theory, nonverbal communication theory, and expectation confirmation theory, a mechanism of "body language-emotional connection-expectation recalibration" is constructed. Taking 8 different types of libraries in Guangdong Province as the research setting, data from 246 reader questionnaires and 83 librarian questionnaires were collected and analyzed using descriptive statistics, regression/variance analysis, and structural equation modeling. The findings reveal that positive body language significantly alleviates readers' perception of service inadequacy, with eye contact and facial expressions exhibiting the most prominent effects. The compensatory effect is stronger in

high-interaction scenarios such as reference consultations. Readers' age, educational background, and frequency of use significantly moderate their perception of this compensatory effect. Theoretically, the study elucidates the mechanism and contextual boundaries of how nonverbal communication compensates for service gaps. Methodologically, it provides an operational scale and a model framework. Practically, it informs body language strategies tailored to different scenarios and user groups, offering direct value for optimizing reader experience and enhancing precision in service delivery.

Keywords Librarian; Body language; Service demand gap; Compensatory effect; Reader service

(Continued from p. 63)

Controversies and Governance in International Journal Rankings in the Index and Citation Checking Services of University Libraries

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Abstract To address the frequent controversies surrounding international journal rankings in the index and citation checking services of university libraries, this study conducts a survey of 102 university libraries certified as Sci-Tech Novelty Search Workstations by the Ministry of Education in China, analyzing the types and causes of these controversies. The findings indicate that journal ranking tiers are widely applied in the evaluation of international journals. However, the implementation standards vary significantly, leading to eight typical categories of disputes. Building on these findings, this study further employs the theory of multiple institutional logics to analyze the differing logics of various actors within the research ecosystem. Accordingly, recommendations are proposed, including the design of a layered and nested rule system, rebalancing the authority of research evaluation entities, and establishing mechanisms for resolving contradictions and disputes. These measures offer practical solutions for addressing controversies under the current evaluation paradigm.

Keywords Index and citation checking; International journal; Grading certification; Dispute resolution; Multiple institutional logics

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

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