

**STATE, *DANWEI*, AND KNOWLEDGE  
PRODUCTION IN CHINA: A STUDY OF  
ACADEMIC JOURNALS IN  
COMMUNICATION**

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## Abstract

Knowledge is not driven by the “immanent laws,” but produced and reproduced in the orbit of a given power structure and social milieu. The dissertation aims to explore the nexus between power and knowledge in China by examining how social science journals produce and disseminate academic knowledge. Scholarly publishing serves as the quality control mechanism and communication channel in science. Since the 1990s, the significance of core academic journals has been further strengthened by the sweeping diffusion of quantitative evaluation system which made journal ranking the most salient yardstick. This central position calls for a thorough empirical study of the nature, structure and practices of journal publication in transitional China.

The thesis focuses on the institutional practices of journal publishing. It addresses questions around the political-economic contexts and institutional structure of journal publication, the nature and dynamics of gatekeeping, and the mechanism of academic hegemony. Specifically, there are three broad clusters of questions. (1) How do scholarly journals situate in the larger contexts of state power, academic marketplace and the *danwei* system? How do journals as a homogeneous institution establish ties with other organizations and develop practices of gatekeeping to cope with the uncertainties posed by these forces? (2) What is the nature and dynamics of editorial work and gatekeeping processes? To what extent editorial decisions are reached through personal discretion and negotiation among gatekeepers? (3) How do state power, money, local interests and *guanxi* networks influence the process and outcome of scientific gatekeeping? How do these external or internal factors determine the authors’ access to journal editors and the editorial decisions done to the manuscripts?

Theoretically I draw on the literature from a variety of fields that examine the

political economy, sociology, and organization of cultural production. The empirical data used in this study includes (1) field notes, (2) transcripts from semi-structured interviews with editors and researchers from different universities, and (3) published journal articles from sample issues and archival materials collected from field observation and in-depth interviews. Following a general approach of grounded theory, I try to provide a “thick description” of the contexts, determinants, processes, consequences, and limits of journal publication.

I shall begin with a political economic analysis of the legitimation, stratification and commercialization of scholarly publishing, in relation to state power and academic marketplace. It then describes the institutional arrangements of local support system, internal appointment of editorial personnel and the editor-dominated reviewing approach; such arrangements were developed to cope with the political, economic and professional uncertainties of the macro-level environments. I shall then analyze the social practices of editorial decision making, the rise of anonymous reviews and its implications for the legitimacy of journal publication. I shall also examine the influences of *guanxi* networks on the process and outcome of scientific gatekeeping.

The study concludes that journal publication in China is based on a “*danwei*” system, distinct from the peer review system in the US and other countries. Under the *danwei* model, journal organizations are co-opted into the state orbit through corporatist relationships of licensing and *danwei* affiliation. This model also results in a review process primarily controlled by internal editors. Overall, the privileged organizations monopolize the decision-making power, and the decisions are often made for non-academic reasons. The *danwei* system has kept academic autonomy of social sciences in general and communication in particular at bay.



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