



WJG sets an example of internationalization for other Chinese academic journals

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CREATIVE PEOPLE DESERVE APPLAUSE

During the application period for the “Special Fund for Key Academic Journals” of the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC) in early 2002, I came to know Professor Lian-Sheng Ma and *World Journal of Gastroenterology* (WJG), which he created. Since then, I have had close contact with him. As a successful entrepreneur and pharmacologist, he has devoted himself to the creation of academic journals by applying his past successful experience in the pharmaceutical industry to the academic publishing field. This shift carried a great personal risk but it has worked out well for the Chinese academic publishing industry. Professor Ma is always willing to listen to and incorporate other people’s opinions and suggestions, and can thereby, provide creative ideas. He likes making friends and therefore keeps close contact with a number of government employees, scientists and publishers. During regular telephone or face-to-face conversations, Professor Ma often pushes me to give an in-depth opinion on the feasibility of his ideas. When WJG was initially supported by the NSFC “Special Fund for Key Academic Journals” in 2002, it was published bimonthly. Within a few years, WJG has become a weekly journal. Such rapid development has far exceeded my expectations and is a marvel in the Chinese academic publishing industry. For this reason, I have full confidence in the rapid development of Chinese academic journals in the next few years.

According to the traditional view, the basic conditions for Professor Ma to create international English-language medical journals are not very good. However, he is very good at exploiting the strengths of the journals to compensate for their inadequacies. For this reason, he can adeptly manage the overall operation of the journal and perform better than many other scientists and pub-

Abstract

Supported by the “Special Fund for Key Academic Journals” of the National Natural Science Foundation of China, *World Journal of Gastroenterology* (WJG) has become a high-impact international clinical medical journal due to the great efforts of Professor Lian-Sheng Ma, Editor-in-Chief, and his team over several years. Now, WJG has successfully achieved a high degree of internationalization and sets a good example for other Chinese academic journals.

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lishers. More importantly, he is not merely satisfied with issuing orders for the management of the journal operation. Instead, he always becomes personally involved in specific affairs, and therefore, has total control over the journal. He always participates in every aspect of journal production, whether the editing process or the design of the online version, constantly poses questions and suggests modifications, and immediately takes action. He not only has goals and ideas but also can find solutions to any problems that are encountered. These aspects constitute the basis for his success.

I was particularly touched by what Professor Ma did during the summer of 2003 while the severe acute respiratory syndrome epidemic was raging in Beijing. While many institutions came to a semi-standstill, Professor Ma launched the online version of *WJG* during that period. The overall outlook of online *WJG* is impressive and comparable to that of some world-renowned journals. At the beginning, thousands of visitors came to the site per day. Now, this figure has grown to tens of thousands, and *WJG* has become a leader among Chinese academic journals. Professor Ma's work style and creative spirit have rarely been seen in traditional Chinese publishers, because he has closely linked his personal interests (economic interests and social image) to the development of *WJG*.

The success of *WJG* has brought a fresh outlook to the Chinese academic publishing industry. Professor Ma should feel proud of his contributions, which have been made at a time when China is still not open to publishing privately funded academic journals. I hope that more successful and courageous Chinese entrepreneurs will become involved in the Chinese academic publishing industry; an area that remains to be developed, and one that can provide tremendous opportunities.

A JOURNAL REFLECTS A TYPE OF CULTURE

A journal not only reflects the experience and background of its editors/publishers, but also displays their unique personality and personal and cultural tastes. The readers can discover something beyond the contents of a journal. I have a habit of browsing world-renowned journals to capture changes in the overall trend and style of mainstream journals. I also look through *WJG*, from which I can glimpse inside Professor Ma's inner world and mind, and appreciate his efforts towards realizing his ambition to make *WJG* an excellent international journal.

With China's accession to the World Trade Organization and continuous rapid economic growth, its international status has been greatly improved. In recent years, a large number of foreign publishers and distributors have set up representative offices in China or have established cooperation with Chinese printers or publishers. I have had contact with more than 10 foreign publishers and therefore understand their primary intention and purpose. On many occasions, I have warned the publishers of

journals supported by the NSFC Special Fund for Key Academic Journals to develop such cooperation with prudence. *WJG* Press was not the first domestic publisher to establish cooperation with well-known foreign publishers, but it was the first that dared to discontinue such cooperation. In this way, Professor Ma seeks internationalization of *WJG* not to further his own reputation, but rather that of the journal.

The development of *WJG* over these years has not been smooth, and has had many difficulties. We have always been concerned about the overall situation of NSFC-funded journals, especially those like *WJG* that have incurred much controversy. Between 2004 and 2005, the self-citation rate of *WJG* was 20%, which exceeded the ISI standard, and this resulted in *WJG* being removed from Science Citation Index (SCI). To combat these arguments, Professor Zuo-Yan Zhu, the NSFC Vice President, pointed out at a meeting in January 2003 that the goal of Chinese academic journals should be to achieve internationalization, to be included in SCI, and to be a leader among international journals in the same field. There are many ways to achieve these goals. However, the most fundamental way is to improve the quality of the journals. Although many approaches are available to improve the impact factor of a journal in a short period, there is no doubt that a high-impact journal can be created only after its scientific quality is raised.

As mentioned above, in 2004, *WJG* drew wide criticism because of a high self-citation rate. I sensed that Professor Ma underwent tremendous pressure during that period. However, it is pleasing to know that he did not make any excuses or avoid problems, but spent a lot of time to establish the reasons for this and make improvements. Fortunately, these lessons have led to the subsequent rapid development of *WJG*.

Ms. Emilie Marcus, Editor-in-Chief of *Cell*, pointed out in a forum in 2006 that the presence of high-impact articles depends on strong inputs of financial and human resources. These words are easier said than done. How is financial investment achieved? Where should the funds be invested? How are talented scientists recruited and utilized? Coincidentally, in recent years, *WJG* has been practicing the above sentiments. This shows that great minds think alike.

Looking back on modern technological developments worldwide, it can be seen that the progress of all renowned journals has not been smooth, but full of ups and downs. To create a world-renowned journal, the sponsor has to spend a lot of time and effort, sometimes even for several generations. Such journals are more respected and their publishing model is worthy of being passed on to others. The history of *Science*, which was created by Thomas Edison, spans 125 years, while that of British *Nature* and *The Lancet* (created by the Wakely family) spans 137 and 183 years, respectively. Although these journals are not run by governments, they enjoy a great reputation worldwide. I believe that Professor Ma could have the confidence and courage to make *WJG* a world-renowned journal.

PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE OBTAINED DURING *WJG* DEVELOPMENT HAS GREAT SIGNIFICANCE

At the last meeting of the *WJG* working group, I mentioned that the reform of state-owned enterprises could provide a reference for the successful operation of academic journals. Here, I would like to discuss the implications of the rise of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) for the reform of Chinese academic journals.

In recent years, many entrepreneurs in China have been keen to read about the developmental history of the CCP, to gain a better insight into business management. As the world's largest political party (with nearly 70 million members), the CCP has been in existence for 85 years and has ruled China for more than half a century. What are the fundamental reasons for its sustainability? This question has attracted the interest of many domestic and foreign politicians and entrepreneurs. The rapid growth of China's national economy since 1979 has led state-owned enterprises into a new era of development. All enterprises are in competition with their rivals for the throne. The rise of new outstanding enterprises is often coupled with the fall of some previously successful companies. The rapid turnover of businesses has become a feature of the development of the Chinese economy. Survival is the main theme of business management in our times.

Ten years ago, entrepreneurs might have been successful merely by having the courage to go into business. In more recent times, however, the survival of enterprises has been more dependent on management rather than luck or back-door dealing. For this reason, entrepreneurs have been anxious to seek better management approaches: some have learned from the West, some from Confucianism, and others from the developmental history of the CCP.

Western management style has its own advantages, but it may not be suitable for Chinese enterprises. Although Chinese entrepreneurs hope to derive the essence from Western management style, they tend to spend a lot of time dealing with superficial matters. The Western business community has a history of 200 years and is very mature. Many excellent Western academic journals also date back for more than a century. A mature business environment provides Western academic journals with a

sound management system. In contrast, the development of Chinese academic journals has occurred mainly after 1976. As a result of market, cultural and policy differences, there is no appropriate management system available for Chinese academic journals. This developmental stage provides a better opportunity for publishers to display their talents.

In terms of business management, an important criterion for entrepreneurs to judge the feasibility of a management theory is whether it is practical (in relation to the situation in China). The core issue with which entrepreneurs are concerned is how to realize Western management style in China. The ultimate goal of businesses is to achieve a profit, therefore, they advocate the same laws as the CCP: survival of the fittest and natural selection. How to guarantee basic living conditions is their common primary goal in response to external challenges. The development of enterprise management has about 100 years of history. As a result, various types of business management theories have been proposed. Despite diversity, their fundamental purpose is to answer the same question: how is efficiency improved? The CCP can organize many citizens in a fairly orderly manner and has an extremely high level of organization that is universally acknowledged. High efficiency and strong executive power are its biggest features.

The operation of academic journals has its own laws. If an academic journal is not run in accordance with market or economic rules, but managed in a very superficial manner, the journal will not be successful. *WJG* is aiming to implement Western management style in China by obeying market and economic rules. The success of *WJG* will make a significant contribution to Chinese scientific and cultural development. I hope Professor Ma can keep a diary to record his management practice, which could be a great asset to later generations.

Our generation, which is involved in the reform of China's academic journals, should not overlook the development of *WJG*, because its preliminary success has been achieved by overcoming many obstacles and fighting against the inherent snobbishness of the traditional publishing industry that has existed in China for decades. I am very pleased that some of my ideas for creating outstanding international academic journals have been adopted and gradually realized by Professor Ma. I am also happy that *WJG* sets an example of internationalization for other Chinese academic journals.

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