

# Who Published in Chinese Predatory Journals? A Study on the Authorship of Blacklist Journals

Jie Xu<sup>1</sup>, Zixian Wang<sup>2</sup>, and Wenhui Tang<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> School of Information Management, Wuhan University, China. xuj@whu.edu.cn.

<sup>2</sup> School of Information Management, Wuhan University, China. whu-wangzx@whu.edu.cn.

<sup>3</sup> School of Information Management, Wuhan University, China. 2015302480035@whu.edu.cn.

**Abstract.** This poster reported a study which examined 93,653 authorship records of 67 predatory journals listed in a well-known blacklist in China. By collecting and analyzing each author's full name and affiliated institution information, their organization distribution were studied. Then the authorship dataset was compared and matched up with the records in the biggest full-text academic literature database China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) to identify each authors' publishing productivity (number of publications) and influence (number of downloads). The results showed that those who publish in predatory journals are young and inexperienced researchers from teaching-intensive universities all over the country, and most of them are from eastern coastal and developed areas of mainland China. The study also showed that some productive and influential researchers had the experience of publishing in predatory journals.

**Keywords:** Predatory Journals, Author, China, Scholarly Communication.

## 1 Introduction

Predatory journals are those that have low standards and quality, accept almost any paper regardless of the number of corrections, leading to a short timeline to publication, and have an unsubstantiated peer review process [1] [3] [12] [14]. They will publish any kind of study for profit, with little regard for scientific concerns [4] [26]. In the past few years, the number of predatory journals grew quickly [8] [20]. According to Shen and Björk's study, the number of active predatory journals increased from 1,800 in 2010 to 8,000 in 2014, and the articles of which increased from 53,000 to 420,000 at the same time [26].

China has suffered from a huge number of so called profit-seeking trash journals [15]. Many universities and institutions have established their own blacklist of predatory journals and suggest their researchers and students not publishing their research results in such journals. For example, Huaqiao University announced a blacklist of journals with high self-citing rates and bad reputation. If a paper published in these listed journals, it will not be counted when evaluating the author's performance. Moreover, the author who published with such journals will even got warned or punished [31].

On June 20, 2018, East China University of Political Science and Law released a blacklist of predatory journal which contains 67 titles of social science journals published in Chinese language (see the website <http://yjsy.ecupl.edu.cn/63/86/c4127a91014/page.htm>). This list attracted much attention not only because it had been widely distributed through social media in China, but also it provided clear and specific standards for the reason why choosing these journals for the first time in China. According to the list, journals with following features can be recognized as predatory journals.

- Publish more than 100 papers in one issue
- Have multiple versions for one issue (such as academic version, public version, online version, mass media version, etc.)
- Have different publishing frequencies for the same journal (weekly version, semimonthly version, etc.)

As one of the most well-known and frequently updated journal blacklist in China, the list provides an ideal sample for us to investigate the authorship of predatory journals. The aim of this study is to investigate who published articles in these predatory journals in China.

## 2 Literature Review

The negative effects of predatory journals on the science world have reached such high levels that many studies have been conducted [19] [29]. The increasing popularity of predatory publishing destroyed the trust of scholarly communication and discussed its far-reaching influence on scholarly publishing [1] [17].

Some research focused on the authors who produce content for predatory journals. According to Bohannon (2013), many of these journals' submissions were from developing countries, clustering in India, Nigeria, as well as the United States and United Kingdom. Simón (2016) found that Nigeria was one of the countries of origin for researchers publishing in predatory journals. Xia, *et al.* (2015) examined articles in the Beall's listed journals and found that most authors were from India, Nigeria and Pakistan contributed highest, and most of them were young and inexperienced scholars. Shen and Bjork (2015) studied 262 authors who published in predatory journals and suggested that the majority of them were from developing countries. However, Moher *et al.* (2017) found that a substantial number of articles published in biomedical journals seemed likely to be predatory was published by authors from high- and upper- middle-income countries, with some even affiliated with high-ranked universities. Some study revealed that institutions with the highest share of publication in predatory journals were among the most reputable and well-known universities in Iran [9]. In Italy, about 2300 researchers had published at least once in a journal covered by Beall's list, and predatory publications seemed more likely to be chose in engineering, economics and business disciplines [2]. Some studies showed that academics at all South African and Brazilian universities were engaging in this practice [18] [22].

Besides authorship scattering, researchers also investigated the reason why researchers published in these journals [14] [21] [23] [24] [25]. They found that social identity

threats, unawareness, high pressure and lack of research proficiency were the main reasons [14]. Some said that acceptance likelihood was the main reason for researchers to choose predatory journals [25].

Chinese authors formed one of the biggest group who have published in predatory journals according to existing studies [10] [13]. Plenty of researchers payed close attention to Chinese academic authors' misconduct in scholarly publishing [5] [11]. But only a few studied Chinese language predatory journals or predatory journals published in China [30] [32]. Even if these studies noticed China published predatory journals, most of them are based on Beall's list. Hardly any researches chose samples based on a national or local list.

### **3 Date Collection**

This study uses 67 journals listed by East China University of Political Science and Law (<http://yjsy.ecupl.edu.cn/63/86/c4127a91014/page.htm>) as samples.

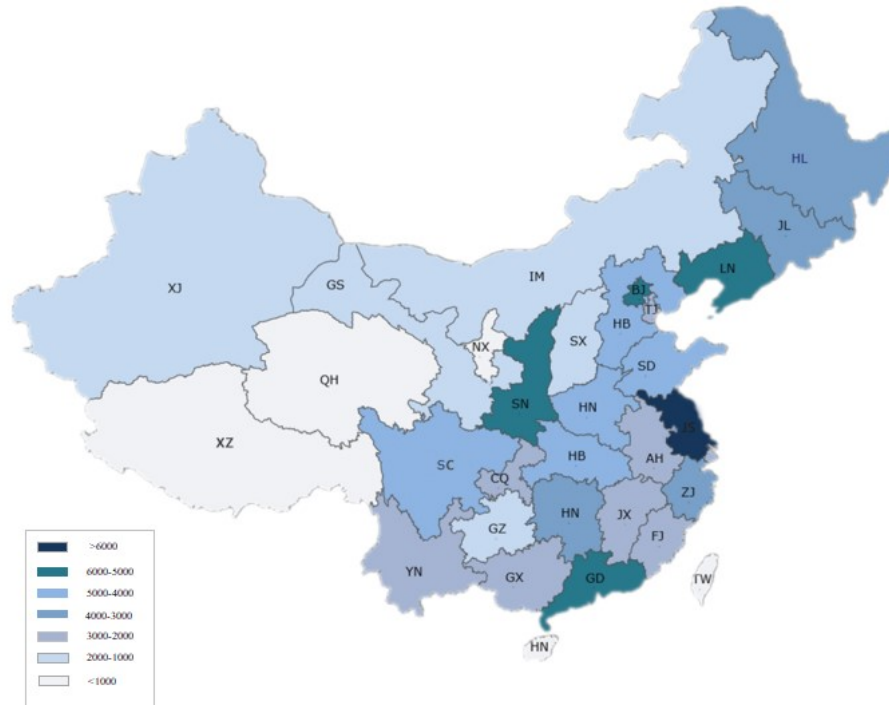
As mentioned before, the list is the most well-known and frequently updated blacklist in China which presents clear and specific standards for choosing journals. That is why we use this list as the source of identifying predatory journals. With a self-developed WebCrawler program, a total of 62,374 articles' bibliographic data was collected on 8th, August, 2019. All these papers were published in 2018. After data mining and cross checking, a total of 93653 authors were identified. By searching from the biggest online scholarly full-text database China, the National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), each author's affiliated institute was recognized, and their other publications indexed by CNKI were collected for further analyzing.

## **4 Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 Geographical Distribution**

With the authors' affiliated institutional information, the geographic location distribution was identified and showed in Fig. 1. As we can see, the predatory authors came from all 31 provinces in all over China. Most authors located in eastern coastal areas and developed provinces, such as Jiangsu and Zhejiang. These places enjoy a high level of economic growth and S&T development.

For example, Jiangsu is one of the provinces in China whose economic and educational development is at higher level. There were a total of 7722 authors came from Jiangsu, accounting for 8.42% of all authors.

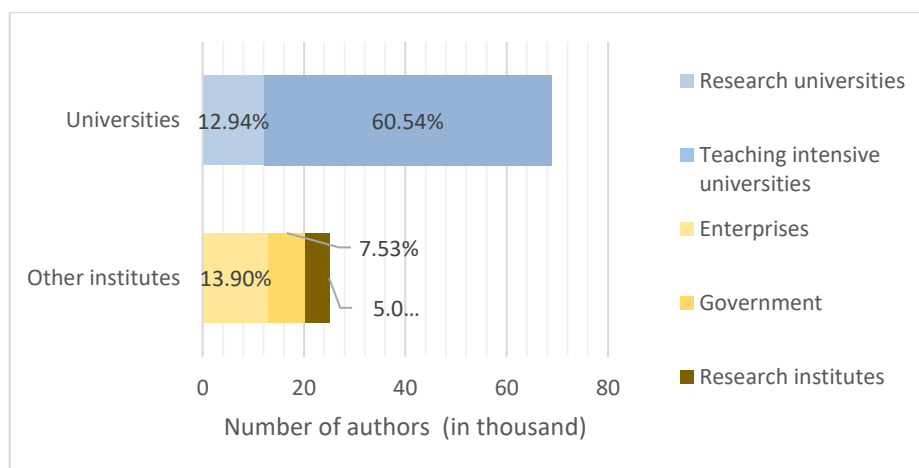


**Fig. 1.** Geographical Distribution

This reveals that the distribution of authors who published papers in predatory journals were consistent with the distribution of Chinese research populations. This conclusion run counter to some existed studies which focused on other countries [7] [17] [14] [27] [28] [29].

#### 4.2 Organization Distribution

The authors' affiliated institutional information was collected and analyzed in this study. The authors who published papers in the listed predatory journals were from various institutes, not only universities and research institutes but also enterprises, governments or even military systems (see Fig. 2). In this study universities were classified into research university and teaching intensive university, according to the list of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China [16].



**Fig. 2.** Organization Distribution

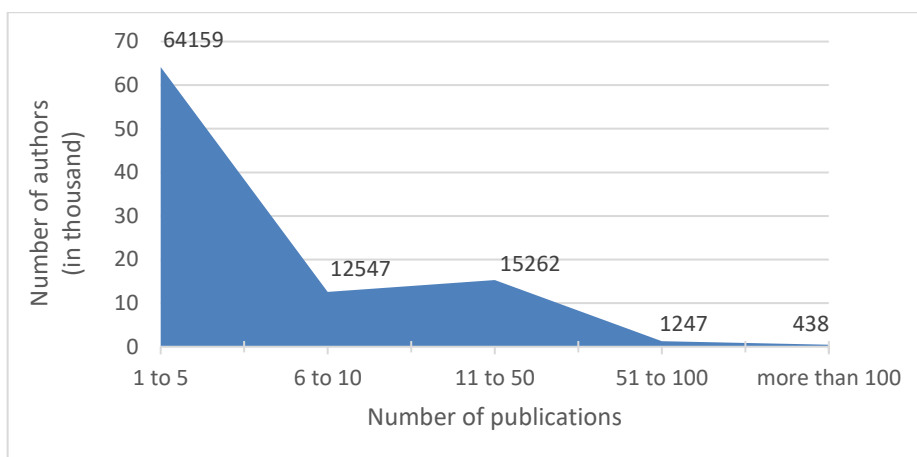
A total of 68,823 authors were university researchers, accounting for 73.48% of all. Among them, 12124 (12.94%) authors were from research universities. Among this, 206 authors were from top university (university of "211" and "985" projects in China). This finding confirmed the results of some previous studies which showed scholars from top research university also published papers in the journal. However, compared with teaching intensive universities, the average number of publication for individual author who come from research universities was low. It is not clear if the reason why top university researchers also publish in predatory journals is that they have high pressure of publishing or is that they don't know how to distinguish predatory journals.

But it is true that the number of publications is widely recognized as an important metric for evaluating scholar's academic performance, and the growing pressure of publishing, known as the saying "publish or perish", can be catalyst to their publishing in predatory journals [24].

### 4.3 Author's Productivity and Influence

In this research, we used the total number of publications and total downloads of published articles to indicate authors' academic productivity and influence.

Our statistic showed that about a quarter of authors who published in listed predatory journals have no other academic publishing experience (see Fig. 3). It may be caused by the degree requirements of some Chinese universities, which require graduates to publish a paper in order to qualify for graduation. So some graduate students take the risk in order to publish papers as soon as possible even if knowing that they are predatory journals. However, surprisingly, we identified 438 (0.46%) authors who have published more than 100 papers indexed by CNKI. The most productive one who have published 772 articles. This extreme case is from Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, whose main research area is finance, investment and marco-economy management.



**Fig. 3.** Distribution of the number of publications by authors

In regard to downloads, the average number was 105. However, a total of 2123 (2.26%) authors whose average downloads was 24377 times. Among these authors, 834 were from research universities. The most downloaded author is from Peking University, top II research university (QS World University Rankings) in mainland China. This evidence suggests that some experienced and reputable researchers also published in predatory journals. Further analysis shows that most of these highly downloaded authors are not the first authors of papers in predatory journals, so they may not submit these journals proactive.

## 5 Conclusions

This study found that authors who published in Chinese predatory journals were widely distributed in all provinces in China.

The results showed that those who publish in predatory journals are young and inexperienced researchers from teaching-intensive universities all over the country, and most of them are from eastern coastal and developed areas of mainland China. Although most authors were from teaching intensive universities or didn't have much academic publishing experiences, a few influential authors from top universities were involved in such practice.

One limitation of this study is its reliance on blacklist of predatory journals from humanities and social science fields as one of the primary sources of information. Although this blacklist is widely recognized, it doesn't cover the STM domain, so sample bias still exists.

In conclusion, this research is a pilot studies to investigate those who published in China predatory journals. In the future, we are about to explore the relevant factors which influence researchers to publish in these journals. At the end, we would like to ensure that predatory journals no longer gain the favor of researchers.

## References

1. Bartholomew, R.E.: Science for sale: The rise of predatory journals. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 107(10), 384–385 (2014).
2. Bagues, M.F., Labini, M.S., Zinovyeva N.: Working Paper A walk on the wild side: An investigation into the quantity and quality of "predatory" publications in Italian academia. *Research Policy* 48(2), 462-477 (2017).
3. Berger, M.: Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Predatory Publishing but Were Afraid to Ask. ACRL 2017, Baltimore, Maryland (2017).
4. Bohannon, J.: Who's afraid of peer review? *Science*, 342(6154), 60–65 (2013).
5. Chen, W., Xing, Q.R., Wang, H., Wang, T.: Retracted publications in the biomedical literature with authors from mainland China. *Scientometrics* 114(1), 217–227 (2018).
6. Clark, J., Smith, R.: Firm action needed on predatory journals. *BMJ Clinical Research* 350(210), 1–2 (2015).
7. Demir, S.B.: "Predatory Journals: Who Publishes in Them and Why?" *Journal of Informetrics* 12(4), 1296-1311 (2018).
8. Eriksson, S., Helgesson, G.: The false academy: predatory publishing in science and bioethics. *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy* 20(2), 163–170 (2017).
9. Erfanmanesh, M., Pourhossein, R.: Publishing in Predatory Open Access Journals: A Case of Iran. *Publishing Research Quarterly* 33(4), 433-444 (2017).
10. Frandsen, T.F.: Why do researchers decide to publish in questionable journals? A review of the literature *Learned Publishing* 32(1), 57–62 (2019).
11. Hvistendahl, M.: China's Publication Bazaar. *Science* 342(6162), 1035–1039 (2013).
12. Jalalian, M. Mahboobi, H.: Hijacked journals and predatory publishers: Is there a need to re-think how to assess the quality of academic research? *Walailak Journal of Science and Technology* 11(5), 389–394 (2014).
13. Kozak, M., Iefremova, O., Hartley, J.: Spamming in scholarly publishing: A case study. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 67(8), 2009–2015 (2016).
14. Kurt, S.: Why do authors publish in predatory journals? *Learned Publishing* 31(10), 141–147 (2018).
15. Lin, S. & Zhan, L. Trash journals in China. *Learned Publishing* 27(2), 145–154 (2014).
16. Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China.: The list of higher education institutions across China in 2019. [http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb\\_xxgk/s5743/s5744/201906/t20190617\\_386200.html](http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xxgk/s5743/s5744/201906/t20190617_386200.html). last accessed 2018/09/06.
17. Moher, D., Srivastava, A.: You are invited to submit.... *BMC Medicine* 13(1), 180 (2015).
18. Mouton J and Valentine A. The extent of South African authored articles in predatory journals. *South African Journal of Science* 113 (7/8), (2017).
19. Nwagwu, W.E., Ojemeni, O.: Penetration of Nigerian predatory biomedical open access journals 2007-2012: a bibliometric study. *Learned Publishing* 28(1), 23-34 (2015).
20. Oermann, M H et al.: Study of Predatory Open Access Nursing Journals. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 48(6), 624-632 (2016).
21. Omobowale, A.O., Akanle, O., Adeniran, A.I., Adegboyega, K.: Peripheral scholarship and the context of foreign paid publishing. *Current Sociology* 62 (5), 666-684 (2014).
22. Perlin, M.S., Imasato, T., Borenstein, D.: Predatory publishers threaten to consume public research funds and undermine national academic systems – the case of Brazil, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2018/09/06/predatory-publishers-threaten-to-c>

- consume-public-research-funds-and-undermine-national-academic-systems-the-case-of-brazil/. last accessed 2018/09/06.
23. Shaghaei, N et al.: Being a deliberate prey of a predator: Researchers' thoughts after having published in predatory journal. *LIBER Quarterly* 28(1), 1–17 (2018).
  24. Shaw, C.: Hundreds of open access journals accept fake science paper, <http://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2013/oct/04/open-access-journals-fake-paper>. last accessed 2013/10/04.
  25. Shehata, A.M.K., Elglab, M. F. M.: Where Arab social science and humanities scholars choose to publish: Falling in the predatory journals trap. *Learned Publishing* 31(3), 222–229 (2018).
  26. Shen, C., Björk, B.C.: 'Predatory' open access: A longitudinal study of article volumes and market characteristics. *BMC Medicine* 13(1), 230 (2015).
  27. Simón, A.: Pitfalls of predatory journals: A personal account. *Comprehensive Psychology* 5, 1–5 (2016).
  28. Truth, F.: Pay big to publish fast: Academic journal rackets. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* 10(2), 54-105 (2012).
  29. Xia, J., Harmon, J. L., Connolly, K.G., Donnelly, R.M., Anderson, M.R., Howard, H.A.: Who publishes in “predatory” journals? *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 66(7), 1406–1417 (2015).
  30. Xia, J., Li, Y., Situ, P.: An Overview of Predatory Journal Publishing in Asia. *Journal of East Asian Libraries* 2017(165), 8-18 (2017).
  31. Xinhua.: China issues guidelines to strengthen scientific integrity, [http://english.www.gov.cn/policies/latest\\_releases/2018/05/31/content\\_281476166645336.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/policies/latest_releases/2018/05/31/content_281476166645336.htm). last accessed 2019/05/31.
  32. Wang, L., Du, Y., Tang, B.: The Quantitative Definition of “Predatory Journals” in China: JPI Index. *Shanxi Library Journal* 03, 5-9 (2018).