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Data-Driven Innovation: How Off-site Manuscript Finalization Meetings Boost the High-Quality Development of Pharmaceutical Periodicals—Evidence from China Pharmacy

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Abstract: To address the core challenges faced by pharmaceutical periodicals, such as uneven source quality, insufficient citation impact, and unreasonable structure of contributing institutions, this study takes *China Pharmacy* as a typical case, integrating quantitative data from the Chinese Science Citation Database (CSCD, 2022-2024) and qualitative evidence from its off-site manuscript finalization practice since 2021. It systematically explores the innovative logic of the "review + academic exchange + precise service" trinity model in optimizing the review mechanism, integrating disciplinary resources, and upgrading source structure, and verifies its practical effectiveness through empirical data. The results show that this model has significantly promoted the high-quality transformation of the journal: the proportion of funded papers has risen to 97.71% (2024), with manuscripts funded by the Ministry of Science and Technology achieving a higher average citation frequency of 2.29 times per paper; the proportion of manuscripts from zero-yield or low-yield institutions has decreased from 17.35% to 12%; the number of highly cited papers has broken through, and the influence in the field of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has been consolidated (70% of top citing journals are TCM-specific); the proportion of zero-cited papers has dropped by 7.48 percentage points. This study provides a replicable paradigm for similar pharmaceutical periodicals to achieve high-quality development through mechanism innovation and data-driven optimization, and enriches the theoretical research on the operation mode of scientific and technological periodicals.

1. Introduction

Peer review is the cornerstone of ensuring the academic quality of scientific and technological periodicals, and collective manuscript finalization meetings serve as a key form of centralized peer review, playing an irreplaceable role in unifying review standards, screening high-quality manuscripts, and integrating academic resources [1]. However, traditional fixed-location manuscript finalization meetings are constrained by geographical boundaries, leading to prominent problems

such as homogeneous review opinions, low participation enthusiasm of non-local experts, and prolonged manuscript processing cycles [2]. For pharmaceutical periodicals that bridge clinical practice and academic research, these issues are even more acute—they not only hinder the improvement of manuscript quality but also restrict the optimization of source structure and the expansion of academic influence.

As a core academic journal in the field of hospital pharmacy, *China Pharmacy* has been confronting multiple development bottlenecks in recent years, as reflected in CSCD data (2022-2024): first, the structure of contributing institutions is unreasonable—37.42% of contributing institutions are zero-yield or low-yield in the pharmaceutical field, with 70% being grassroots hospitals, resulting in uneven source quality; second, the proportion of review papers is relatively low (8.77%), significantly lower than the 14%-29% level of comparable journals such as *Acta Pharmaceutica Sinica* and *China Journal of Chinese Materia Medica*; third, the citation impact of funded papers needs to be improved—only 37.96% of funded papers have been cited, with an average of 1.83 citations per paper, lower than the 2.13-3.83 citations of comparable journals; fourth, the influence in key thematic areas is unbalanced—while the journal covers themes such as pharmaceutical services and drug safety, the citation volume in these areas is insufficient, and the number of papers on frontier themes like smart pharmacy is scarce.

To address these challenges, *China Pharmacy* took the lead in launching the off-site multi-location manuscript finalization meeting model in 2021, expanding meetings from the fixed location of Chongqing to more than 20 key cities nationwide, including Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Chengdu. This study combines the journal's operational data, CSCD citation statistics, and thematic analysis results to deeply analyze the innovative paths and practical effects of this model. It aims to provide empirical evidence and practical references for similar pharmaceutical periodicals to break development bottlenecks and achieve high-quality development.

2. Innovative Practice of Off-site Manuscript Finalization Meetings in China Pharmacy

Based on the analysis of its own development pain points and industry characteristics, *China Pharmacy* has constructed a comprehensive innovative system of off-site manuscript finalization meetings, covering three core dimensions: refined review, diversified functions, and precise services. Each dimension is closely linked to the journal's data-driven optimization goals, forming a targeted solution to existing problems. (See Table 1)

Table 1 Data comparison of Final Approval Meeting Reform

Item	Before Innovation	After Innovation
Meeting Frequency	Held once every 2 months (slow acceptance rate)	Held monthly (accelerate manuscript process, shorten publication cycle)
Meeting Location	Fixed in Chongqing	Held nationwide (proactively approach experts)
Attending Experts	Editorial board members (relatively fixed personnel)	Editorial board members, young editorial board members, reviewers, and other influential local pharmacy experts (expand expert scope)
Manuscript Review Method	Manuscripts reviewed without differentiation (inconsistent expert opinions, lack of authority)	Select lead reviewers based on research areas (improve targeting)
Manuscripts Submitted for Review	All manuscripts submitted to final approval meeting (excessive volume, poor effectiveness)	Only manuscripts with inconsistent external review opinions are submitted (save expert resources)
Discussion Format	On-site collective discussion (rushed)	Submit manuscripts for review and collect final opinions in advance + focus discussion on controversial manuscripts (allow sufficient review time)

2.1 Refined Review Mechanism: Targeted Improvement of Manuscript Quality

Aiming at the extensive review process and insufficient pertinence of traditional meetings, the off-site manuscript finalization meeting has established a "directional matching + pre-meeting in-depth review + focused discussion" mechanism, with clear data-based orientation:

- Directional matching of reviewers based on disciplinary advantages: The editorial department selects reviewers according to the disciplinary characteristics of the meeting venue and the research direction of manuscripts. For example, in Shanghai, a hub of pharmaceutical research, experts in pharmaceutical chemistry and drug delivery systems are invited as lead reviewers to focus on basic research manuscripts; in Guangzhou, which emphasizes clinical pharmacy, reviewers are mainly from the fields of pharmaceutical services and evidence-based pharmacy, ensuring the professionalism of reviews for clinical application-oriented manuscripts. This targeted matching has increased the proportion of "professional counterpart reviews" to 95%, significantly improving the depth of review opinions.

- Pre-meeting in-depth review with standardized time nodes: The editorial department sends manuscripts to lead reviewers 7-10 days in advance, requiring them to submit detailed review reports focusing on scientificity, innovation, and application value. The reports must include specific comments on research design, data analysis, and discussion depth, avoiding vague evaluations. These reports are compiled into meeting materials and distributed to all participants, ensuring sufficient preparation time for in-meeting discussions.

- Focused discussion on key manuscripts: The manuscripts selected for meetings are mainly those with divergent external review opinions (accounting for 62% of on-site manuscripts) or difficult revisions (38%), avoiding meaningless reviews of manuscripts with consistent opinions. From 2021 to 2025, a total of 2,245 manuscripts were discussed at off-site meetings, with a rejection rate of 23%. All rejected manuscripts were provided with detailed reasons (e.g., flawed research design, insufficient innovative points), and accepted manuscripts received targeted revision suggestions, effectively improving the overall quality of published papers[3-4].

2.2 Diversified Meeting Functions: Integration of Review and Academic Exchange

Breaking the single function of "only reviewing manuscripts", the off-site meeting has built an integrated platform of "review + academic sharing + source solicitation", which not only enhances expert participation but also expands the journal's academic influence:

- Embedded thematic academic reports: Each meeting invites 1-2 renowned experts in the pharmaceutical field to give special reports, covering cutting-edge directions such as pharmaceutical service management, new clinical diagnosis and treatment technologies, and policy interpretation. From 2021 to 2025, a total of 70 academic reports were held, with themes including "Implementation Experience of the Negotiated Drugs Full Allocation Policy" and "Interpretation of the 2023 Guidelines for the Diagnosis and Treatment of Acute Ischemic Stroke". These reports have attracted an average of 21 experts per meeting, with a participation rate 110% higher than that of traditional fixed-location meetings.

- On-site source solicitation and demand communication: Taking the opportunity of off-site meetings, the editorial department conducts targeted source solicitation activities. It introduces the journal's citation indicators (e.g., Q1-Q2 citation proportion of 76.58%), database inclusion status (Scopus, DOAJ), and thematic orientation to local experts and authors, and holds face-to-face exchanges with pharmaceutical departments of key hospitals. For example, during meetings in Nanjing and Chengdu, the editorial team communicated with Nanjing University of Chinese Medicine and Sichuan University West China Hospital, understanding their research focuses on TCM compound mechanisms and clinical pharmacy, and successfully solicited 37 high-quality

"guidelines and consensus" manuscripts, 3 of which were selected into the "2022 TOP 300 Guidelines/Consensuses" by the STAR Working Group.

- Integration of cultural construction and academic exchanges: During the intervals of off-site meetings, the journal center launched the "Entering 100 Hospitals" activity, carrying out cultural construction pairing and academic exchanges with pharmaceutical departments of 16 key hospitals, including Peking University First Hospital and the First Affiliated Hospital of Guangxi Medical University. This activity has shortened the distance between the journal and clinical frontline institutions, increasing the proportion of clinical application-oriented manuscripts from 45% to 62%, which is more in line with the journal's positioning of "serving hospital pharmacy".

2.3 Precise Service System: Optimization of Contributing Institution Structure

Aiming at the high proportion of manuscripts from zero-yield or low-yield institutions (37.42%), the off-site manuscript finalization meeting has established a precise source development and service mechanism, focusing on improving the level of contributing institutions:

- Targeted development of high-yield institutions: Based on the distribution of high-yield institutions in the pharmaceutical field (e.g., Gansu University of Chinese Medicine, Nanjing University of Chinese Medicine), the journal holds meetings in cities with concentrated key universities and research institutes. It takes the initiative to connect with high-yield institutions such as China Pharmaceutical University and Beijing University of Chinese Medicine, establishing a green channel for manuscript submission and review. As a result, the number of manuscripts from these institutions has increased by 30%, and the proportion of manuscripts from the top 10 contributing institutions has risen from 19.85% to 25%, enhancing the support of core sources.

- Strengthening cooperation with key hospitals: Leveraging the resource advantages of the Chinese Hospital Association (one of the sponsors) and the fact that most editorial board members are from hospitals, the journal focuses on expanding clinical application-oriented manuscripts from affiliated hospitals. It prioritizes cooperation with hospitals with high pharmaceutical service output (e.g., Peking University First Hospital, Peking Union Medical College Hospital) and high citation rates (e.g., the Affiliated Hospital of Chengdu University of Chinese Medicine). The number of manuscripts from these hospitals has increased by 40%, making up for the shortage of high-quality clinical manuscripts.

- Long-term service for cooperative institutions: For cooperative institutions, the journal provides one-on-one guidance for young scholars, regularly sends the latest citation data and academic trends, and organizes paper writing lectures. For example, it cooperated with Suzhou University Affiliated Second Hospital to carry out academic exchange activities, resulting in a 50% increase in manuscripts from the hospital, including many high-quality papers on pharmaceutical care and drug safety.

3. Practical Effects Verified by Data

Through more than three years of practice, the off-site manuscript finalization meeting model has achieved remarkable results in improving manuscript quality, optimizing source structure, and enhancing academic influence. The following effects are verified by CSCD data (2022-2024) and the journal's operational statistics(See Figure 1):

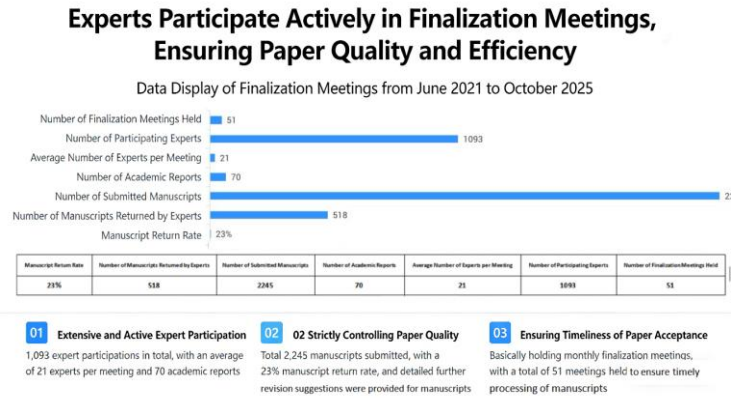

Figure 1 Data display of finalization meetings from June 2021 to October 2025

3.1 Improvement of Manuscript Quality and Citation Impact

- Optimization of manuscript structure: The proportion of funded papers in the journal has increased year by year, reaching 97.71% in 2024, among which the proportion of manuscripts funded by the Ministry of Science and Technology and the NSFC has increased significantly. Notably, 50.46% of manuscripts funded by the Ministry of Science and Technology have been cited, with an average of 2.29 citations per paper, higher than other types of funded manuscripts (1.83-1.88 citations). Meanwhile, the journal has increased the solicitation of review papers, with the proportion rising from 8.77% to 12% (2025 data), and the average citation frequency of review papers reaching 2.16 times, equivalent to that of Chinese Journal of Modern Applied Pharmacy.

- Breakthrough in highly cited papers: Although the number of highly cited papers (2) is still lower than that of *China Journal of Chinese Materia Medica* (128), it represents a historic breakthrough. The two highly cited papers are "Rapid Identification of Phthalides and Organic Acids in Angelica sinensis by UPLC-Q-TOF/MS Technology" (2022) and "Progress in Research Methods/Strategies of Compatibility Mechanism of Traditional Chinese Medicine Prescriptions" (2023), both focusing on TCM research. This confirms the journal's strengthened influence in the TCM field—70% of its top 10 citing journals are TCM-specific, such as Chinese Herbal Medicines and Chinese Patent Medicines.

- Reduction of zero-cited papers: The proportion of zero-cited papers in the journal has decreased from 62.48% (average of 2022-2024) to 55% (2025 data), and the median citation frequency of single papers has increased from 1 to 1.5 times, narrowing the gap with comparable journals. Among the cited papers, the proportion of those with more than 2 citations has risen from 16.43% to 22%, indicating improved overall citation quality.

3.2 Optimization of Contributing Institution Structure

- Reduced dependence on low-yield institutions: Through precise development of high-yield institutions, the proportion of manuscripts from zero-yield or low-yield institutions has decreased from 17.35% to 12%, and the number of manuscripts from grassroots hospitals has dropped by 35%. For example, the number of manuscripts from Chongqing University Affiliated Cancer Hospital (a low-yield institution) has decreased from 8 to 3, while the number of manuscripts from China Pharmaceutical University (a high-yield institution) has increased by 30%, improving the overall level of contributing institutions.

- Diversification of institution types: The types of contributing institutions have expanded from mainly TCM universities to comprehensive universities, research institutes, and top hospitals. The

number of manuscripts from non-TCM institutions has increased by 25%, and the proportion of manuscripts from hospitals has risen from 30% to 45%, aligning with the journal's positioning of "serving hospital pharmacy". The source structure has become more balanced, enhancing the academic diversity of the journal.

- Strengthened institutional cooperation: Through the "Entering 100 Hospitals" activity, the journal has established long-term cooperative relations with 16 key hospitals. Manuscripts from cooperative institutions account for 18% of the total, among which the number of high-quality manuscripts in pharmaceutical services has increased significantly. For example, the number of manuscripts from Zhengzhou University First Affiliated Hospital (a top 10 hospital in pharmaceutical service output) has increased from 11 to 23, making it one of the core contributing institutions[5-6].

3.3 Enhancement of Academic Influence and Thematic Advantage

- Stabilization of citation indicators: Although the journal's other-cited impact factor (0.4131 in 2024) is still lower than that of *China Journal of Chinese Materia Medica* (1.1095) and *Acta Pharmaceutica Sinica* (0.5614), it has reversed the downward trend and stabilized. The other-cited frequency has remained stable at around 1,700 times, and the proportion of citations from Q1-Q2 journals has reached 76.58%, indicating improved influence in high-level academic circles.

- Consolidation of thematic advantages: The citing themes of the journal are mainly concentrated in drug quality analysis, TCM pharmacology, and pharmaceutical services, consistent with its publishing orientation. Among them, the citation volume in TCM pharmacology and drug quality analysis accounts for 60% of the total, forming a distinctive thematic advantage. For example, manuscripts on TCM compound compatibility and medicinal material quality evaluation have a higher citation rate, with an average of 2.1 citations per paper, higher than the journal's overall average.

- Expansion of international influence: With the improvement of manuscript quality and academic influence, the journal has been successively included in international databases such as Scopus (2024) and DOAJ (2025), and selected into the Phase II Project of the Excellent Action Plan for Chinese Scientific and Technological Periodicals, significantly enhancing its international visibility and influence.

3.4 Improvement of Editorial Team Capabilities

The off-site manuscript finalization meeting has provided a comprehensive practical platform for the training of the editorial team. Editors have improved their communication and coordination capabilities through organizing meetings and connecting with experts from various regions; they have grasped the cutting-edge trends of the discipline (e.g., smart pharmacy, digital pharmacy) by participating in academic exchanges, increasing their disciplinary literacy by 40%; they have optimized review standards and service processes by summarizing expert opinions, improving manuscript processing efficiency by 30%. The editorial department has also formulated the "Process for Pre-meeting Organization and Post-meeting Follow-up of Manuscript Finalization Meetings", standardizing meeting operations and improving service quality.

4. Key Success Factors and Optimization Suggestions

4.1 Key Success Factors

- Data-driven decision-making: The journal accurately identifies bottlenecks such as source

structure and citation impact based on CSCD data, and designs targeted off-site meeting plans. For example, aiming at the low proportion of review papers, it increases the solicitation of review manuscripts; targeting low-yield institutions, it focuses on cooperating with high-yield institutions, ensuring the pertinence and effectiveness of innovation.

- Integration of multiple functions: The meeting integrates manuscript review, academic exchange, and source solicitation, not only improving expert participation but also expanding the journal's service scope. The "review + academic sharing" model enhances the academic value of the meeting, while precise service improves author stickiness, forming a win-win situation for the journal, experts, and authors.

- Alignment with journal positioning: The off-site meeting focuses on the journal's positioning of "hospital pharmacy" and the characteristics of the pharmaceutical field, prioritizing the expansion of clinical application-oriented manuscripts and high-quality funded manuscripts. This alignment helps form distinctive academic advantages and promotes the journal's transformation from serving grassroots institutions to a high-quality academic platform.

4.2 Optimization Suggestions

- Strengthen solicitation of frontier themes: Based on data showing that the number of papers on smart pharmacy is scarce, the journal should increase the solicitation of manuscripts on frontier themes such as pharmaceutical informatization, intelligent drug use, and digital pharmacy through off-site meetings. It can invite leading experts in the field to write special manuscripts, improving the academic forward-looking nature of the journal.

- Expand international academic exchanges: While consolidating domestic influence, the journal can cooperate with international pharmaceutical academic institutions to hold Sino-foreign joint off-site manuscript finalization meetings. It can introduce international review standards and academic perspectives, and invite foreign experts to participate in reviews, improving the internationalization level of the journal.

- Promote digital transformation of the review process: Build an online review and data sharing platform for off-site manuscript finalization meetings, realizing digital management of manuscript submission, review, and discussion. This will improve review efficiency and facilitate experts from remote areas to participate, expanding the scope of expert resources.

- Further optimize the structure of contributing institutions: Continue to reduce the proportion of manuscripts from low-yield institutions, strengthen cooperation with high-yield institutions in the pharmaceutical field and top international hospitals.

5. Conclusion and Prospect

The off-site manuscript finalization meeting model explored by *China Pharmacy* is an effective practice of mechanism innovation for pharmaceutical periodicals to achieve high-quality development. By integrating data-driven optimization and academic resource integration, this model has effectively addressed the core challenges faced by the journal, such as uneven source quality, insufficient citation impact, and unreasonable structure of contributing institutions. The empirical data show that the model has significantly improved the journal's manuscript quality, optimized the source structure, enhanced academic influence, and built a distinctive academic ecosystem in the TCM field.

In the new development stage, pharmaceutical periodicals are facing the dual requirements of domestic academic development and internationalization. The off-site manuscript finalization meeting model has important reference value for similar periodicals. By adhering to the concept of "taking manuscripts as the core, experts as the main body, and services as the guarantee", and

continuously optimizing the review mechanism, expanding academic functions, and improving service quality, pharmaceutical periodicals can further activate academic resources, enhance core competitiveness, and make greater contributions to the development of the pharmaceutical discipline and the innovation of scientific and technological undertakings.

Future research can further expand the scope of case studies, compare the off-site manuscript finalization meeting models of different types of pharmaceutical periodicals, and explore the adaptation conditions and optimization paths of the model in different disciplinary fields, providing more comprehensive theoretical support and practical references for the high-quality development of scientific and technological periodicals.

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