Editing Practice

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Planning major national strategic topics for science and technology journals: Practice and reflection

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ABSTRACT

Background: This study was aimed at exploring effective methods for scientific and technological journals to serve national innovation-driven development. It also examined major strategic demands in this respect and their effects on journal quality and influence. **Methods:** This study identified topics related to major national requirements and development strategies for science and technology from special issues planned and published in the *Science & Technology Review*, such as "Suggestions for the 14th Five-Year Plan" and "Strategic Scientists". Particular focus was directed to the effects and achievements of "Suggestions for the 14th Five-Year Plan", which were examined on the basis of data from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure and other sources. **Results:** By pinpointing key time points for publication and focusing on major national strategic plans and requirements for science and technology, it is possible to attract leading experts in academia to independently or comprehensively participate in writing articles for journals. Such endeavors not only provide intellectual support for national innovation and development but also significantly increase the citation frequencies, download volumes, new media reading volumes, and reposting rates of journals. **Conclusion:** Focusing on major national strategic planning is integral to serving national innovation-driven development, promoting the development of disciplines, and cultivating excellent scientific talents. It also effectively improves the academic quality and social influence of scientific and technological journals.

Key words: science and technology journals, topic planning, major national strategies, science and technology strategy, special topics, leading authors, influence

INTRODUCTION

A report released by the organizers of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed that China should accelerate efforts to establish itself as a science and technology powerhouse, implement an innovation-driven development strategy, achieve excellent self-reliance in core technologies, and launch a series of major national scientific projects with strategic significance, overall planning, and foresight to enhance its capability for independent innovation. Scientific and technological journals are platforms for publishing and disseminating research results, and they are also the important parts in the country's innovation systems for science and technology.[1] Accordingly, editors must actively contemplate how their publications can play an important role in serving the nation's innovation system and technological development.

The formulation and implementation of a topic plan are important ways for publications to attract readers, highlight their characteristics, and maximize their influence.[2] Whether editors conduct topic planning and how well it is implemented directly determine the quality

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and impact of journals.[3] When scientific and technological journals carry out topic planning, actively combining major national strategies as topics for exploration can be instrumental in advancing national innovation and development. At present, however, most journal publishing professionals tend to focus on issues related to major technological events[4–6] and pivotal national projects[4,6,7] as well as topics from academic conferences[5–8] and technology hotspots,[9] among others. They use essential national strategies less frequently as references for topic planning. Although some science journals can combine major national demands for innovation with scientific and technological strategic plans when formulating topics, they generally devote attention to these matters only through special columns.[10–12] Minimal extensive discussions have been directed toward the use of major national strategies in designing thematic issues.

Planning and choosing topics for publication are responsibilities and commitments of scientific and technological journals in serving major national strategies and needs. The *Science & Technology Review* is the official journal of the China Association for Science and Technology, which closely integrates crucial strategic plans applied nationwide into the journal when soliciting manuscripts and has printed unique columns on these issues. In recent years, the journal has published a series of single articles related to national requirements and major strategies, and these pieces have produced favorable effects.[13] Especially with regard to China's major strategic domains, the journal has successively published special issues, such as "Suggestions for the 14th Five-Year Plan" and "Strategic Scientists". The special issue "Suggestions for the 14th Five-Year Plan" was based on planning of major national strategy topics, motivating many influential academicians and experts from various disciplines to craft related manuscripts. These efforts not only substantially contributed to the promotion of discipline development and scientific innovation, the cultivation of excellent talents, and the advancement of national science and technology development through technological journals, but they also cleared the way for achieving high citation frequencies, download volumes, reading volumes, and reposting rates on new media platforms. These accomplishments highlight the academic and social impacts of the approach employed by the *Science & Technology Review*.

With the "Suggestions for the 14th Five-Year Plan" special issue (Issue No. 3, 2021) as an example, this paper discusses the methods of selection for topics related to major national scientific and technological strategies and their resulting academic and social impacts, in addition to summarizing compilation experiences, with a view to providing a reference for technological journals to fulfill major national demands, advance significant national strategies, and enhance their own academic and social effects, among other functions.

FOCUS ON MAJOR NATIONAL STRATEGIC PLANNING AND SPECIAL ISSUE PUBLICATION

The year 2020 saw the completion of the 13th Five-Year Plan and the preparation of the 14th Five-Year Plan. On October 29, 2020, the Fifth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China passed the *Suggestions on Formulating the 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and Long-Term Goals Through 2035* (hereinafter referred to as "the *Suggestions*"). At this time, when the 14th Five-Year Plan had just begun, it was important and meaningful work for scientific and technological journals to extract topics related to national science and technology strategies from national development goals. Against this background, the *Science & Technology Review* planned to publish a special issue. The editorial staff derived insights from scientists who have achieved tremendous success to offer advice on strengthening China's national strategic initiatives for science and technology during the 14th Five-Year Plan period.

The specific requirements for such strengthening put forward in the *Suggestions* are as follows: "Strengthen basic research, pay attention to original innovation, optimize discipline and R & D layouts, promote interdisciplinary integration, improve common basic technology supply systems"; "Focus on artificial intelligence, quantum information, integrated circuit, life health, brain science, biological breeding, aerospace science and technology, deep earth and ocean, *etc.*"; "Implement a series of major national scientific projects with foresight and strategy"; "Promote the construction of state laboratories, reorganize the key laboratory system in China, *etc.*"

In addition, the *Suggestions* also proposes to stimulate creativity, perfect the mechanisms underlying scientific and technological innovation, enhance the quality and stability of ecological systems, and actively implement a national response to population aging, among other measures. When planning the special issue "Suggestions for the 14th Five-Year Plan", I analyzed the contents of the *Suggestions* and formulated specific directions for compilation. The special issue included topics regarding the frontier fields of science and technology (artificial intelligence, quantum information, integrated circuits, life health, brain science, biological breeding, aerospace science and technology, deep earth and sea, *etc.*), ecosystem, discipline layout, the construction of key laboratories in China, the training of talents in science

and technology, mechanisms underlying scientific and technological innovation, and population aging.

ANALYSIS OF THE CHARACTERISTICS AND INFLUENCE OF SPECIAL ISSUE TOPICS

The "Suggestions for the 14th Five-Year Plan" special issue encompassed 14 high-impact articles, including the following: "*Solidly Promoting the Integrated Circuit (IC) Industry of China: Mastering Law and Adhering to Innovation* (by Wang Yangyuan, academician)", "*Development and Innovation of Aeroengine Science and Technology* (by Chen Maozhang, academician)", "*Developing Deep-sea Science and Technology: Perspectives and Pitfalls* (by Wang Pinxian, academician)", "*Deep Space Exploration: Status, Expectation and Suggestion* (by Wuji, former director of the National Center for Space Sciences at the Chinese Academy of Sciences)", "*Development Status and Strategies of State Key Laboratories in China* (by Yan Jinding, a researcher from the High-Tech Research & Development Center of Ministry of Science and Technology)".

Features of the special issue

Manuscripts were rapidly compiled, and publication was timely

The *Suggestions* was passed at the end of October 2020, and in the following month, the *Science & Technology Review* launched a special planning for the issue on the 14th Five-Year Plan. In early February 2021, before the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference were held, as well as before the release of the Outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of China and Long-Term Goals Through 2035, the special issue "Suggestions for the 14th Five-Year Plan" was published. The planning, manuscript collection, and publication spanned only three months.

The special issue articles closely focused on technological fields of national priority, with strong emphasis on the achievement of targets

The special issue was driven by a clear goal—to provide advice and recommendations for science and technology development in China during the period spanning the 14th Five-Year Plan. The special planning was closely based on the *Suggestions*, with the issue's articles covering advanced fields, such as integrated circuits, aerospace technology, and deep earth and ocean as well as important aspects of scientific infrastructure construction, discipline layout, and science and technology talents, among other matters. The special issue thus provided academic theoretical support for improving the initiation of a new journey during the period covering the 14th Five-Year Plan. It held strong strategic significance in promoting the healthy and efficient development of science and technology in China.

The invited authors were leading academic experts at home and abroad who independently or comprehensively participated in writing the articles, ensuring the publication of an outstanding special issue

High-quality articles come from exceptionally qualified authors. The authors also implemented exhaustive revision and proofreading. Among the 14 published papers, seven were written by academicians of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Chinese Academy of Engineering, with these works accounting for 50% of the special issue. Of the 14 articles, nine (64%) had the sole author, of which five is the academician.

The articles were characterized by a strong scientific orientation and strategic significance

From professional perspectives, the experts discussed the development of integrated circuits, aerospace technology, ecological environment, and other fields during the 14th Five-Year Plan period as well as the construction of key national laboratories and the cultivation of first-class science talents. In terms of strategic significance, academician Wang Yangyuan, for example, pointed out that although China's integrated circuit industry has made great progress, there remain shortcomings, such as a low market share. China should shift from the Moore era of integrated circuit development to a period revolving around enhancing original innovation capabilities and strengthening basic technical research. Academician Chen Maozhang asserted that the country needs to fully protect and use achievements in the field of aviation engineering, pay attention to long-term data accumulation and experience, and infuse large investments in the field. He also proposed that China attach importance to fundamental research; the implementation of a nationwide system led by the government with the reasonable division of labor between academia, industry, research institutes, and enterprises. Academician Yang Wencai identified the need to vigorously promote a scientific spirit and ethical standards, protect the right to nominate primary innovative talents who can address future critical issues. At the same time, management departments for science and technology must pay more attention to discovering exceptional individuals who have made breakthroughs in original innovations and increasing support for these talents. From the perspective of major national science and technology strategies, the authors pinpointed problems existing in the development or training of personnel in his own discipline and put forward corresponding counter-measures. The special issue contributed to the promotion of the development of strategic national

science and technology fields as well as related disciplines and the cultivation of science talents while also effectively leveraging the functions served by the think tanks of academic journals.

The strong influence generated by cited data and media attention

Considerable academic influence

It has been a while since the third issue of the "Suggestions for the 14th Five-Year Plan" was published in 2021. An analysis of its citation frequency and download volume reflects, to some extent, the academic influence of the issue. Centering on the special issue "Suggestions for the 14th Five-Year Plan",[14] I collected information such as citations and downloads of articles in nine issues of the *Science & Technology Review* before and after the publication of the special edition in the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI). Data were collected on November 23, 2023. Due to the shortness of the articles in the Foreword section, they were excluded from the compilation of citation data.

Table 1 shows the citation frequency and download volume data on the papers in nine issues of the *Science & Technology Review*. The statistical analysis indicated an average citation frequency of 4.99 times per paper and an average download volume of 541.96 times per paper. The 14 articles from the special issue "Suggestions for the 14th Five-Year Plan" (Issue No. 3, 2021) had a total of 125 citations, with an average citation frequency of 8.93 times. The download volume for this issue was 10,181, with an average of 727.21 downloads per article. A comparison of this issue to others showed that it enjoys the highest average citation frequency and average download volume, which are greater than the mean by 78.96% and 34.18%, respectively. These findings reflect the strong academic influence of the special issue "Suggestions for the 14th Five-Year Plan".

Extensive media attention and social influence

After "Suggestions for the 14th Five-Year Plan" was published, some articles were appropriately adapted and released on the official WeChat account of the *Science & Technology Review*. The reading volume far exceeded that of ordinary articles. In 2021, among all the articles posted on the WeChat account, the article with the highest reading volume was from the special issue of interest (more than 14,000 times), which was nearly 5800 more than the figure for the article in second place. This article has been extensively disseminated.

The articles in the special issue have also been actively reprinted by media outlets, such as *People's Daily Online Science and Technology Channel*. Within two weeks, seven of the published articles were collectively reprinted more than 69 times on public WeChat accounts. Among these, "Development Status and Strategies of State Key Laboratories in China" was widely reprinted by authoritative media platforms, including *People's Daily Online Science and Technology Channel* and *S & T Ministry Official Public WeChat Account*, attracting widespread attention from industry circles and triggering extensive discussions.

The articles were also particularly organized for learning by universities, research institutes, and other units, thereby engendering a significant social impact. A case in point is "*Development Status and Strategies of State Key Laboratories in China*", which is the first systematic summary and review of national key laboratories in China's history. As soon as it was published, many university leaders and institute heads took careful note of and highly evaluated it. Some provincial science and technology departments, universities, and certain national key laboratories have specifically arranged study meetings to learn from and discuss the article. Overall, the media attention directed toward "Suggestions for the 14th Five-Year Plan" and the social influence that it has generated are relatively high, demonstrating the tremendous think tank value of scientific and technological journals.

THOUGHTS ON PLANNING FOR MAJOR NATIONAL STRATEGIC TOPICS

Pursuing attractive topics closely related to major national strategic plans

At the intersection of the 13th and 14th Five-Year Plans, a meaningful task for scientific and technological journals is to plan special issues based on major national demands for innovation and technological development. In this environment, editors of scientific and technological journals require the ability to capture such opportunities.

The editors of scientific and technological journals should actively concentrate on news dynamics and major national science and technology events, strengthen political awareness, raise their political positions, maintain sensitivity to major national strategies, reinforce their competencies in identifying topics from major national strategic needs, and link them with journal publication. For example, as soon as the *Suggestions* was issued, the editors of the *Science & Technology Review* immediately inquired into and disentangled the requirements for formulating national science and technology strategies, after which it rapidly planned a special issue on the recommendations for the 14th Five-Year Plan. Selecting topics grounded in pivotal national strategies makes it easier for scientific and technological journals to fulfill the function of a think tank. Editors must integrate knowledge, deepen

Table 1: Citation frequency and download volume data

Issue	Number of papers	Citation frequency	Average citation frequency per paper	Download volume	Average download volume per paper
23, 2020	15	103	6.87	9259	617.27
24, 2020	15	108	7.20	8690	579.33
1, 2021	22	125	5.68	14,704	668.36
2, 2021	22	64	2.91	8157	370.77
3, 2021*	14	125	8.93	10,181	727.21
4, 2021	19	55	2.89	7959	418.90
5, 2021	18	91	5.06	11,334	629.67
6, 2021	17	44	2.59	8692	511.29
7, 2021	14	39	2.79	4968	354.86

* is the special issue "Suggestions for the 14th Five-Year Plan".

their understanding of the significance and specific connotations of major national strategies, thoroughly scrutinize the nature of selected topics, and analyze their importance and urgency. Only when editors fully understand the meanings of selected topics and recognize their value can they plan attractive special issues that are consistent with essential national strategies. These achievements, in turn, enable publications to play an even more important role in serving China's innovation-driven development.

Maintaining regular contact with experts to maintain knowledge accumulation

The depth and breadth of knowledge accumulation in the editorial domain are closely associated with the development of scientific and technological journals. Editors not only need solid professional knowledge in science and technology but must also understand the dynamics characterizing various aspects of science and technology, accumulate sufficient knowledge, and apply what they have learned from one area to another. As an old saying goes, "Talking with you for one moment is much better than reading books for ten years". Experts who work at the forefront of research not only profoundly understand their own fields but also have a keen insight into the overall development of science. Reading expert reports or listening to visiting experts can promote the accumulation of scientific knowledge and improve sensitivity to scientific problems. For example, when planning the special issue "Suggestions for the 14th Five-Year Plan", I was able to propose topics related to key laboratories because I often interact with specialists, recognizing the importance of building national principal laboratories and thus encouraging highly influential contributions from authors.

Inviting leading authors to independently or substantially participate in writing through multiple channels

The study of communication shows that with greater authorial credibility come more persuasive information conveyed and more extensive audience recognition. The practices of multiple academic journals confirm that publishing articles written by distinguished authors can enhance the influence of a publication.[15,16] Such influence is also amplified by independent authorship.[17] These assertions find support in the practices implemented for "Suggestion for the 14th Five-Year Plan".

In the special issue "Suggestions for the 14th Five-Year Plan", articles written by sole author accounted for 64%, of which almost half of the authors are academicians. Collaboratively written articles had no more than three authors. Articles co-authored by two individuals accounted for 80% of all collaborations, and only one article was written by three authors. The communication with the authors indicated that all the invited authors participated in drafting, revision, and proofreading from beginning to end, thus personally controlling the quality of the articles. The publication of the special issue also confirmed that the invitation of esteemed authors to independently draft or exhaustively involve themselves in writing significantly enhanced the journal's academic and social influence. Therefore, when soliciting manuscripts, publications should seek contributions from more highly qualified authors because these individuals can provide excellent contributions given their outstanding achievements in scientific research.

The experience of publishing the special issue also showed that appealing topics are likely to attract eminent experts as writers. I have been responsible for the Foreword section, which is exclusively written by academicians, of the *Science & Technology Review* for many years. I often invite academicians to write articles. Due to the strategic importance of the topics selected for the "Suggestions for the 14th Five-Year Plan", it was relatively easy to invite academicians and highly qualified experts. Editors of scientific and technological journals

should select topics based on major national strategies and make it their mission to promote national science and technology development. They can identify and attract leading authors through various means, including a literature search and expert referrals. When compiling manuscripts, they can use the existing resources of experts and approaches such as document searching to choose leading scholars at the forefront of relevant fields.

Clearly defining the purpose of topic selection to experts who write articles and following up on writing progress in a timely manner

When writing a commissioned letter, editors should maintain an honest attitude and clearly express the purpose and content of a given publication. Only when goals are clear can experts contribute their professional wisdom in a more targeted manner as they craft extraordinary manuscripts that meet the requirements for a certain topic. For example, the invitation letter sent to expert contributors to "Suggestions for the 14th Five-Year Plan" explained the objective driving the publication of this special issue as well as its significance and value in promoting national science and technology development. This encouraged the experts to view national development from a broader perspective, integrating strategic goals, social concerns, academic dynamics, and more to write articles around certain fields or issues. Only by explaining the importance and purpose of a topic clearly can experts produce quality articles.

On the deadline for submissions, editors should inquire about missing manuscripts and any difficulties that authors may be facing, promptly addressing and alleviating their concerns. For submitted manuscripts, follow-up procedures should be expedited so that they can be published quickly.

Seizing opportunities and publishing in a timely manner

When planning for publications on major national strategic topics, it is necessary to coordinate and plan in a timely manner. The publication of journals should be promoted steadily, with appropriate schedules planned in advance. For example, the preparation of articles for inclusion in "Suggestion for the 14th Five-Year Plan" commenced at the beginning of November 2020, and the issue was published in mid-February 2021. This coincided with the start of the implementation of the 14th Five-Year Plan and came before the release of the Outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of China and Long-Term Goals Through 2035. Planning around important national strategic events requires editors to prepare in advance and make good use of key time points.

Paying attention to new media publicity and promotion

Whether scientific and technological journals are successful in publishing is related not only to their academic quality but also to the depth and breadth with which these works are disseminated.[18] Scientific and technological journals can expand information dissemination channels by leveraging new media platforms, thereby expanding target audiences and enhancing their own influence and comprehensive competitiveness.[19] For example, some articles from "Suggestions for the 14th Five-Year Plan" were widely read and reprinted through new media platforms.

Generally, academic papers are professional and meant for a narrow audience base. If they are not adapted, their dissemination on new media platforms would be limited. To conform to the characteristics of new media transmission, more effort should be put into adaptation. Publications can create articles that are easier to read on these channels by condensing content and highlighting key points, rewriting sentences for liveliness, improving the appeal of headlines, and so on.

CONCLUSION

The *Opinion on Deepening Reform and Cultivating World-Class Science Journals* jointly issued by the China Association for Science and Technology, Publicity Department of the communist party of China (CPC) Central Committee, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Science and Technology, emphasized that it is necessary to "strengthen advantages in disciplines in alignment with major national demands and strategic fields of science and technology development, address gaps and weaknesses, solidify the foundation for growth, build a system and ecological network that guarantees the continuous development of journals". Choosing topics based on major national needs and scientific and technological strategies is the responsibility of science journals. The practices involved in the publication of the special issue "Suggestions for the 14th Five-Year Plan" by the *Science & Technology Review* demonstrate that planning important themes centered on crucial national strategies can attract outstanding experts who can independently or exhaustively write articles. This not only enables journals to fulfill think tank functions, promote innovation and the development of disciplines, cultivate excellent talents, and advance national scientific and technological development, but also helps them improve citation frequencies, download volumes, reading volumes, and reprint rates on new media platforms. Ultimately, they significantly enhance their academic and social influence.

Science and technology journals should actively assume missions dictated by the times and closely monitor and deeply understand major national demands and science and technology development strategies. They must effectively carry out topic planning; ensure that selected topics are valuable, meaningful, substantial, and attractive; and make practical contributions to building a country with strong science and technology capabilities through concrete actions.

DECLARATIONS

Secondary publication declaration

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