Editorial

Growing contributions of Chinese authors in the plastic and reconstructive surgery literature

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The paper "*Global and Chinese publications in plastic surgery journals between 2010 and 2020: a bibliometric analysis*" by Zeng *et al.* (1) aims to quantity geographical publication rates over the past decade in the plastic surgery literature, and to specifically determine the Chinese contribution to this field.

From 35 journals, more than 55,000 articles were analyzed on a multitude of bibliometric variables. Chinese authors contributed to almost 10% of these articles, in second place behind publications originating from the United States. Moreover, the period of time studied demonstrated a steady increase in total number of Chinese publications, at a rate comparable to the Americans. These trends are continuous with prior data demonstrating an increase in scientific contribution to the plastic surgery field by Chinese authors from 2000 to 2009 (2).

Bibliometric analyses are complex studies, but when done right, serve many purposes. First, they are indicators of geographical trends in research development and innovation within a particular field. Understanding which parts of the world increase their scientific output can be valuable for seeking educational exchanges and collaborative research partnerships.

Second, funding allocations, as determined by governments, healthcare systems and private industry, are responsive to rates of scientific publication. It has been previously described that allocation patterns correlate with research output (3), and thus decision-makers often cite such studies to justify their spending. In this present study, more than 50% of papers were funded by the Chinese government after 2019, which is superior to any other country and 2.5X more than the American publications.

Third, important beneficiaries of bibliometric analyses are ultimately patients. In the era of globalisation of medicine, there is a nonnegligible value in knowledge about hotspots of research in a particular field, if one seeks a treatment or intervention that is not offered in a particular location. There is also a growing argument for promoting publications from emerging countries in order to expand horizons of thinking into a specific healthcare problem, with the ultimate goal of improving patient care for all.

Although total publication rates are informative, the true interest of a bibliometric analysis lies in the quality of published material, which can be characterized by the level of evidence, the impact factor of the journal and the citation counts. In this study, the authors found that the quality of articles from China lagged behind in terms of quantity compared with other countries. Indeed, in a previous study published by our group looking at publication rates in the top three plastic surgery journals in 2016, Chinese authors ranked sixth (4).

However, Chinese authors are steadily creating an expertise in specific subgroups of plastic and reconstructive surgery, such as novel fat grafting techniques, hypertrophic scars and computer-aided craniomaxillofacial surgery. With continued government funding and an increasing number of researchers, I am looking forward to the expanding presence of Chinese contributions in the plastic and reconstructive surgery literature over the next decade.

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