

# Standardization of reference specification in English-language scientific journals in China

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## Abstract

The correctness of bibliographic references and citations for retrieving information is essential. However, many journals are still receiving manuscripts with reference formats different to those specified in the journal guidelines. Consequently, this increases the difficulty for editors to process the manuscripts and restricts the production process. This paper discussed the specification format of bibliographic references and citations in English-language scientific journals from the perspective of the reference specification itself. Based on the current four mainstream styles used in the bibliographic references and citations of international English-language scientific journals, combined with the reference examples of ten English-language scientific journals launched in China and our work experience, we suggested the specific suggestions on the standardization of reference specification in English-language scientific journals in China. It is recommended to simplify the essential information (author's name, article title, journal title, and year of publication) for bibliographic references and citations, add a hyperlink to the homepage of the reference cited, and prioritize adding the digital object identifier (DOI) of all the references. This standardization suggested can speed up the information processing of references, which can reduce the burden on authors and readers, save more time for editors to provide more services for scholars, and better realize the article links and communications on the Internet.

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## INTRODUCTION

Reference in an article can help readers find the literature cited and can reflect the basis of the researchers' previous work. In addition, it can represent the depth and breadth of their research, as well as reflect the authors' research philosophy. Therefore, the correctness of references as retrieved information is essential. To ensure that the reference information is correct, it is the responsibility of the authors to ensure that they have read all the literature cited and have provided the correct reference information. However, some manuscripts must be revised or withdrawn because the reference format differs from the requirements of the submitted journal. Many journals are still receiving manuscripts with mixed reference formats, or even using another journal's format. First, the current specifications for reference and various formatting requirements from different journals may confuse authors, and it is difficult to ensure that all references meet the requirements. Therefore, editors and authors often have to confirm the reference formats several times. Second, readers are not pedantic about the format of references because they are interested in accessing a reference source when required. Therefore, the multifarious reference styles waste the intellectual resources of editors and authors and directly affect the degree of standardization of reference information processing<sup>[1]</sup>. Besides, the increasing amount of literature and ways to access literature has increased the burden of searching, and we often find that the content retrieved is undesirable. The ISO 690: 2010 "Information and documentation—Guidelines for bibliographic references and citations to information resources"<sup>[2]</sup> only

requires that non-traditional information resources to be labeled with the type of medium, but not with the type of document for each type of information resource. The standard highlights the urgent need to free editors from the heavy workload of revising references, because formatting the references is an important part of processing a manuscript. Although some auxiliary software or professional services for revising reference formats have been created, it still requires significant editorial and authors' effort and time. Therefore, we should focus on the specification of references, as standardized information can be used more effectively.

### Origin and evolution of references and footnotes

The Chinese information and documentation—Rules for bibliographic references and citations to information resources (GB/T 7714-2015) defines a reference as an accurate and detailed entry of data about an information resource, or a part of it, located at the end of a text or in a textual source<sup>[3]</sup>. Modern referencing evolved from western footnotes, where both references and footnotes are annotations to the text of a paper. Footnotes were born as a scholarly norm in the 19<sup>th</sup> century during the Ranke era<sup>[4]</sup>. For modern scholarship, footnotes/references are almost indispensable. With their complement and support, scholars' arguments can be solid, rigorous, and well-documented. They have evolved as a result of a combination of modern factors that have not always been consistent and trustworthy, and have undergone controversy and criticism. These formats change in nature and content and vary in origin and style, reflecting the intellectual styles of scientific communities in different countries, the pedagogical

approaches of different graduate programs, the preferences of different journal editors regarding the literature, and the preferences of different journal editors in terms of literature. Footnotes are particularly important in the study of history, law, and antiquities. The combination of history and philology has legitimized footnotes<sup>[4]</sup>, and many antiquarian researchers emphasize the importance of complete numbers, precise citations, and accurate transcriptions<sup>[5]</sup>. In jurisprudence, footnotes have appeared very frequently<sup>[6]</sup>. Currently, the system of footnotes is still dominated by the western-constructed system, which is distinctly modern.

### Birth of modern references

Footnotes/references have undergone a complex and lengthy evolution. As footnotes have become a standard scholarly tool, the style has changed, and their form has evolved through a long period of exploration and evolution. In order to make the cited references more reliable, experiments with various new styles were started very early. The literature of the writings of the *Letter of Aristeas*, which survived among the Jews in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC had the advantages of brevity and clarity<sup>[7]</sup>. In the emerging schools of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and in the universities formed on its model, medieval scholars developed extremely high standards of precise citation and neat rules for abbreviating references for disciplines such as jurisprudence. Therefore, precise citations arise simultaneously with professionalism<sup>[4]</sup>. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the encyclopedic scholar Vincent of Beauvais incorporated his references into the text<sup>[8]</sup>. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, ecclesiastical historiography contributed many important elements and forms of scholarship, explicitly emphasizing the importance of repositories and the supreme value of primary sources. Athanasius Kircher was even bolder in his practice of publishing newly discovered Chinese documents<sup>[4,9]</sup>. Richard Simon devised what he called a new way of documentary proof in his *Critical History of the Text of the New Testament*, which appeared in 1689, by placing the original text of the article cited at the bottom of each page<sup>[10]</sup>. In the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, defenders of historiographical knowledge, such as Pierre Bayle, coined the form of the double narrative, arguing that citation form was as important as its content. Pierre and his contemporaries emphasized the fusion of cumbersome, precise references into a particular form<sup>[11]</sup>. By the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the importance of historiographical footnotes was self-evident. Scholars such as Jean Leclerc viewed footnotes as a sign of critical rationality in historiography and embodied this understanding in a specific scheme for writing footnotes, which, with the cooperation of authors and the publishers, eventually materialized in the publication of books, and thus historiographical footnotes in near-modern form were born. Anthony Grafton argues that footnotes as a norm spread through the 18<sup>th</sup> century historiography, and the systematic citation of literature became increasingly common. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the German positivist Leopold von Ranke pioneered a new form of literature citation, and historical works began to have footnotes. It was suggested that one number each line of each page or paragraph (already a common practice among ancient writers), and those notes should be placed at the end of the work, corresponding to the text. He even attempted to append the full references to the body of the text and brought it to its final realization<sup>[4]</sup>. Consequently, by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, footnotes had become routine. Thus, the modern reference as a scholarly norm was born.

### Development of the reference specification

Scholars have remarked that the citation form of footnotes should focus on the reader's perception and meet the practical needs of modernity. The first person to suggest this was Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, who emphasized that it was crucial that the form of the citation should not confuse readers, but rather highlight where the truth was located. Both Leibniz and Pierre attempted to find patterns of precise citation in the philological literature of their time, and Pierre emphasized that scholars should provide the exact titles and editions of the works cited. Jean Leclerc invented a theory of footnotes that emphasized the reader's perception. In his book, *Parrhasiana*, he analyzed both the form of footnotes in the literature and their function in scholarship. He strongly emphasized the modernity of footnotes in thought, which is a modern practical necessity, and broadly depicted a scheme of writing footnotes, which must be undertaken by scholars in cooperation with printers.

Modern printing technology changed the form of footnotes, and in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, long debates and discussions among authors, translators, and printers gradually produced a system of documentary annotation similar to the modern one. Authors and publishers worked closely together, both seeking to make every aspect of the text presented in appearance to reflect the content and guide the readers. Yet this process did not end successfully, and still does not. The unification of citation system is certainly not something that can be accomplished overnight<sup>[4]</sup>. However, especially in the internet age, people have become accustomed to replacing some of the functions of references with links, which, although they can only provide the source of the literature, are more direct and effective, saving time in reviewing the literature. In fact, some rigorous academic papers have started to add links within the text.

### Exploration of the reference specification

To better standardize and utilize references, several editors-in-chief, reviewers, and editors have discussed the problems and suggested countermeasures of English-language journal references, and also provided insights on the format of reference specifications in English-language journals. Li et al. highlighted the common problems in the reference specification in English-language scientific journals and provided corresponding solutions<sup>[12]</sup>. Zhou et al. discussed the common problems of medical English-language journal reference specification, and provided countermeasures and suggestions for standardizing English-language journal references<sup>[13]</sup>. Xie et al. analyzed the redundancy of journal title specification in the references of medical university journals in English-language and proposed corresponding policies and suggestions<sup>[14]</sup>. Liu illustrated details of the English-language reference review, and highlighted that authors could be asked to provide the first page of each article or the first page of the cited web information for checking<sup>[15]</sup>. Cheng highlighted the rules of reference specification in the form of English-language journals and the search methods, and required authors to provide the search page of references<sup>[16]</sup>. Some scholars have also suggested the modification reference formats. Wang suggested adopting the practice of omitting literature titles in subject areas or papers when a large number of references are cited; authors may be required to list literature titles during the

review process, but may not be required to do so when publishing. The literature title is considered unnecessary, and the author's name, year of journal, volume number, issue number, and page range are sufficient to locate original text<sup>[17]</sup>.

However, few scholars have explored the specific solutions to address the reference of English-language scientific journals from the perspective of reference specification. Furthermore, there are no unified standards, requirements, or specifications for the format of references in English-language scientific journals in China, and no discussion on the reference specification in English-language scientific journals launched in China has been found. With the vigorous development of China's English-language scientific journals and in the development process of striving for international academic discourse, it is necessary to begin standardizing the reference specification at the time of journal creation or even to lead the development of reference specification now, helping the development of English-language scientific journals in China.

Therefore, this paper proposes specific suggestions for the standardization of reference specification in English-language scientific journals in China based on the four mainstream formats of reference specification in international English-language scientific journals, combined with the reference specification from ten English-language scientific journals launched in China and our work experience. It is suggested to simplify the essential information of reference specification and add a hyperlink to the homepage of the paper on each reference, prioritizing the specification of digital object identifier (DOI). This reference specification can help speed up the information processing of references, which can reduce the burden of authors and readers, create more time for editors to provide more services to scholars, and better realize the dissemination of papers on the Internet.

## REFERENCE SPECIFICATION OF FOREIGN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE SCIENTIFIC JOURNALS

As of November 30, 2021, the Science Citation Index Expanded (SCIE) included 8,628 English-language journals, and the emerging sources citation index (ESCI) included 5,866 English-language journals<sup>[18]</sup>. Each journal has different requirements for the reference specification. Currently, there are four widely used reference formats for English-language scientific journals worldwide: American Psychological Association style (APA style), Harvard Reference system (Harvard style), Modern Language Association style (MLA style), and Chicago style. Since there are various reference types, this paper only takes the most common published journal papers that can be accessed online or downloaded in PDF as an example.

### APA style

APA style originated from 1929 and is a widely accepted style for writing research papers, mainly used for writing papers in social and natural sciences and psychology. It is a standardized method for writing citations and references in academic literature, using the author-year system<sup>[19]</sup>.

APA style consists of two main parts: in-text citation and end-of-text citation. The in-text citation refers to at least the author and the year of publication of the resource should be written when citing the resource in the text; for direct citations or generalized resources, the page number should also be placed after the cited text or sentence, e.g., Grady et al., 2019. The end-

of-text citation format means that the cited resources should be listed in alphabetical order after the text, as follows<sup>[20]</sup>:

Grady, J. S., Her, M., Moreno, G., Perez, C., & Yelinek, J. (2019). Emotions in storybooks: A comparison of storybooks that represent ethnic and racial groups in the United States. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 8(3), 207–217.

If the journal paper has a DOI, the reference should include the DOI. However, if the journal paper does not have a DOI but has a web address (uniform resource locator, URL), the reference should include the URL; if the journal paper does not have a DOI and is from a scholarly research database, the reference format should be the same as the reference of the printed journal paper and end with the page range<sup>[21]</sup>. There is an important signal in the latest edition, the 7th edition: the presentation of DOIs and URLs has been standardized and both are presented as hyperlinks. Even the label of "DOI" is no longer used and the words "Retrieved from" are used only when a retrieval date required. Furthermore, the book references have omitted the publisher location<sup>[19]</sup>.

### Harvard style

Harvard style, or "Author-date Referencing", is the most common format for social humanity papers in European and Australian universities, and originated in the 1950s in American academia.

Similar to APA style, the Harvard style requires authors to indicate the cited literature at the in-text citation and at the end of the full text in accordance with the format requirements, focusing on the author's last name or the creator of the content and its year of publication, including complete details of the source used, such as the author's name, year of publication, journal title, and the publisher and its location.

There is no specific version of the Harvard citation format; each university has its own citation guidelines, but all adhere to the Harvard style. The basic rules are as follows: Each reference should indicate the author's last name, first name abbreviation (last name first, first name abbreviation second), and the publication year in parentheses; if there are multiple citations by the same author, they are listed in the chronological order; if there are multiple citations by the same author and in the same year, lowercase letters are added after the year in the order of appearance in the paper, e.g., Ortega, SH. 2001a. The journal title is in italics and prior to the publisher's location<sup>[22–24]</sup>.

When citing a paper electronically, the URL or DOI and the date accessed should be added. The specific format is as follows:

Author(s) (Year) Article title. *Journal title*. Volume (Issue), Page numbers. Web address/DOI and date accessed.

### MLA style

MLA style is proposed by the Modern Language Association and is predominantly used in the writing academic papers in the humanities, such as English-language and literature. It consists of three parts: in-text citations, a list of cited literature, and content notes. Its specific specifications are very detailed and complex for different types of cited literature, using the author-year system.

MLA style encourages using of DOIs or URLs. Online papers should usually include either a URL or a DOI. If the paper is paginated and as part of a large work (e.g., an anthology or a journal), a page range may be provided in addition to the URL or DOI. The principle is that the author provides the reference

information that is useful to the readers, and the author may choose to add to it. The following formats can all be used<sup>[25,26]</sup>:

Berman, Russell. "The Necessity of Language Learning." *ADFL Bulletin*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2015, doi:10.1632/adfl.43.2.11.

Berman, Russell. "The Necessity of Language Learning." *ADFL Bulletin*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2015, pp. 11-14, doi:10.1632/adfl.43.2.11.

Goldman, Anne. "Questions of Transport: Reading Primo Levi Reading Dante." *The Georgia Review*, vol. 64, no. 1, 2010, pp. 69–88. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41403188.

### Chicago style

Chicago style is used predominantly in history, literature, anthropology, and art, and more in USA than in UK. The benchmark for this format is *The Chicago Manual of Style*, also known as the Turabian citation format. Citations are primarily made in footnote form, but in-text citation format with the author's name can also be used, using the author-year system.

Chicago style allows for in-text citations with the author's or organizer's last name throughout or abbreviated in parentheses, with the year of publication, and page numbers, such as (Goman 1989, 59), (Fairbairn and Fairbairn 2001), or (MHRA 2004). If a paper has one to three authors, their last names should be written in order; if there are four or more authors, the name of the first author should be written and the names of the other authors should be replaced with "et al.", e.g., (Brown et al., 2009).

Chicago style supports online access to papers that contain URLs or database names. The specific format is as follows<sup>[27,28]</sup>:

Keng, Shao-Hsun, Chun-Hung Lin, and Peter F. Orazem. "Expanding College Access in Taiwan, 1978–2014: Effects on Graduate Quality and Income Inequality." *Journal of Human Capital* 11, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 1–34. <https://doi.org/10.1086/690235>.

### Comparison analysis of APA, Harvard, MLA, and Chicago styles

To summarize the commonalities and differences between the four reference specifications, APA, Harvard, MLA, and Chicago styles, considering the irreversible trend toward the electrification of papers, a comparative analysis has been undertaken in discipline, citation system, in-text citation, and

end-of-text citation, and the essential information and link preference of the references are also listed in [Table 1](#).

These formats are used in almost all disciplines, with the essential information including author name, year of publication, article title, journal title, volume and issue number, and page number. DOI is the most recommended, or even mandatory, or at least encouraged. Harvard, MLA, and Chicago styles require a web link, while Chicago explicitly requires a DOI.

The giants of international scientific journals are already leading to change their referencing formats. In order to better demonstrate the global English-language technical journal referencing landscape today, the reference formats of three well-known journals, *Nature*, *Science*, and *Cell*<sup>[29–33]</sup>, are analyzed as examples ([Table 2](#)) in conjunction with the formats of the four reference styles mentioned above.

As shown in [Tables 1 and 2](#), through the examples of popular international reference styles and applications of English-language scientific journals, the essential information for the references in English-language scientific journals are typically consistent. In particular, *Nature*, *Science*, and *Cell* have formed their own unique reference systems, such as Nature Style. Some journals that collaborate with *Nature* use Nature Style directly; however, others use the author-year system and some use the number system. In the author-year system, in-text citations are based on the author's last name and year of publication, and the end-text citations are in alphabetical order. In general, although each journal has a different reference format, e.g., the titles are normal or italic and an issue number is included or not, the essential information is consistent, including the authors' name, article title, journal title, volume number, page number, year of publication, and DOI/URL. In particular, irrespective of the reference format, DOIs are encouraged or allowed to be listed in the references, and even DOIs or URLs are required to be listed. Clearly, there is an inevitable trend to add DOI in the end-text citation of references. Additionally, the DOI formats of *Nature*, *Science*, and *Cell* differ. Nearly all the references in PDF can be linked directly to the homepage of the paper cited, providing convenience and improving the academic dissemination of the paper.

**Table 1.** Comparison of the reference specifications of APA, Harvard, MLA, and Chicago styles.

Citation style	Discipline	Citation system	In-text citation	End-of-text citation	Essential information	Link preference
APA <sup>[19]</sup>	Social and Natural sciences, psychology	Author-year	The last name of the author, the date, and page number (John, 1995, p. 243) or (Grady et al., 2019)	In alphabetical order	Author's name, year of publication, article title, journal title, volume and issue number, and page number	DOI>URL>Print version
Harvard <sup>[22–24]</sup>	In almost all disciplines	Author-year	The last name of the author, the date (John, 2007)	In alphabetical order; by original title if no author	Author's name, year of publication, article title, journal title, volume and issue number, page number, DOI/URL, and accessed date	URL or DOI should be added to the electronic version
MLA <sup>[25,26]</sup>	Literature and linguistics	Author-year	The author's last name and page number (John 45)	In alphabetical order	Author's name, year of publication, article title, journal title, volume and issue number, page number, and DOI/URL	Encourage the use of DOIs or URLs
Chicago <sup>[27,28]</sup>	History, literature, anthropology, science of art, etc.	Author-year	The last name of the author, the date, and page number (John 1995, 234)	In alphabetical order	Author's name, year of publication, article title, journal title, volume and issue number, page number, and DOI	Support DOI



**Table 2.** Comparison of the reference formats of *Nature*, *Science*, and *Cell*

Journal title	Citation system	End-of-text citation (Example)	Essential information	Link preference
<i>Nature</i> <sup>[29,30]</sup>	Number reference	1. Kariuki, S. N. & Williams, T. N. Human genetics and malaria resistance. <i>Human Genetics</i> 139, 801–811, <a href="https://doi.org/10.1007/s00439-020-02142-6">https://doi.org/10.1007/s00439-020-02142-6</a> (2020).	Author's name, article title, journal title, volume number, page number, DOI, and year of publication	There is a DOI and the PDF can be directly clicked to the homepage of the paper cited
		2. Bethke, L. L. et al. Duplication, gene conversion, and genetic diversity in the species-specific acyl-CoA synthetase gene family of <i>Plasmodium falciparum</i> . <i>Mol Biochem Parasitol</i> 150, 10–24, <a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.molbiopara.2006.06.004">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.molbiopara.2006.06.004</a> (2006).		
		3. Matesanz, F., Téllez, M. A.-D.-M. & Alcina, A. The <i>Plasmodium falciparum</i> fatty acyl-CoA synthetase family (PfACS) and differential stage-specific expression in infected erythrocytes. <i>Molecular and Biochemical Parasitology</i> 126, 109–112, <a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/S0166-6851(02)00242-6">https://doi.org/10.1016/S0166-6851(02)00242-6</a> (2003).		
<i>Science</i> <sup>[31,32]</sup>	Number reference	1. D. H. Lin, A. Hoelz, The Structure of the Nuclear Pore Complex (An Update). <i>Annu. Rev. Biochem.</i> 88, 725–783 (2019). doi: 10.1146/annurev-biochem-062917-011901; pmid: 30883195	Author's name, journal title, volume number, page number, year of publication, and DOI	With DOI and PMID (Note: PMID is a unique identification number used by PubMed for each article, limited to articles deposited in the PubMed Center)
		2. M. Beck, S. Mosalaganti, J. Kosinski, From the resolution revolution to evolution: Structural insights into the evolutionary relationships between vesicle coats and the nuclear pore. <i>Curr. Opin. Struct. Biol.</i> 52, 32–40 (2018). doi: 10.1016/j.sbi.2018.07.012; pmid: 30103204		
		3. J. Mahamid et al., Visualizing the molecular sociology at the HeLa cell nuclear periphery. <i>Science</i> 351, 969–972 (2016). doi: 10.1126/science.aad8857; pmid: 26917770		
<i>Cell</i> <sup>[33]</sup>	Author-year	Sondheimer, N., and Lindquist, S. (2000). Rnq1: an epigenetic modifier of protein function in yeast. <i>Mol. Cell</i> 5, 163–172. 10.1016/S1097-2765(00)80412-8.	Author's name, article title, volume number, page number, and year of publication	Some have DOI, and some don't have DOI, but almost all references can jump directly to the paper's homepage
		Bondeva, T., Balla, A., Va'rnai, P., and Balla, T. (2002). Structural determinants of Ras-Raf interaction analyzed in live cells. <i>Mol. Biol. Cell</i> 13, 2323–2333.		

## English-language scientific journal references in China

Currently, the reference formats used by the English-language scientific journals launched in China are the original four formats mentioned above, as well as mixed formats, and even the Chinese APA format or the Chinese MLA format<sup>[34]</sup>. At the conclusion of 2021, there were 375 English-language scientific journals launched in China<sup>[35]</sup>, and this number is increasing. This paper attempts to summarize the reference specification applicable to China based on the exploration of ten English-language scientific journals with clear reference specifications and international academic influence (Table 3), considering the international reference format development trends simultaneously.

When combining the above analysis with GB/T 7714-2015<sup>[3]</sup> on the format of the published journal papers, it is evident that the reference format in English-language scientific journals in China varies and the citation system differs, while the number system is predominant. Although the format of references varies among journals, the necessary information is typically the same, including the author's name, year of publication, journal title, volume number, and page number. Among them, up to six authors' names can be listed, and authors beyond this number can be listed as et al.; all the journal titles are abbreviated; and the majority of journals have eliminated the labeling of issue numbers. Many journals do not enforce references to add DOIs or URLs; however, most still encourage

DOIs. Compared with most foreign English-language journals, the difference in reference styles is predominantly evident in the use of links. The leading international English-language scientific journals have marked the need to provide DOI in the references, and many journals have PDF files that can be linked directly to the homepage of the paper cited; however, many English-language scientific journals in China have not yet achieved this function.

## RESULTS

Under the development of globalization, network, and data, with the vigorous promotion of Open Access, as well as the global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and the development requirements of carbon neutral, people will definitely read more electronic papers in the future. In order to better standardize the production, management, organization, sharing, and utilization of digital resources, this paper suggests the following standardization for reference citation in English-language scientific journals launched in China.

1) In-text citation of references: Either number system or author-year system is acceptable.

2) End-of-text citation of references: Four essential items, author's name, article title, journal title, and year of publication; and one hyperlink to the homepage of the paper cited are recommended. The hyperlink here predominantly refers to DOI or URL (either DOI number or a URL with a head of

**Table 3.** Reference formats of ten English-language scientific journals in Chin.

Journal title	Basic format/Citation system	Author's name	Volume/Issue number	Link preference	In-text citation	End-of-text citation (Example)
<i>Cell Research</i> <sup>[36]</sup>	Nature style/Number system	All authors should be listed for papers with up to five authors; for papers with over five authors, the first only should be listed, followed by <i>et al.</i>	Volume number/—	Journal article, e-pub ahead of print.	Where a reference is to appear next to a number in the text, for example, following an equation, chemical formula or biological acronym, citations should be written as (ref. X) and not as superscript. Example: "detectable levels of endogenous Bcl-2 (ref. 3), as confirmed by western blot."	[1] Rosenzweig R, Moradi S, ZarrineAfsar A, Glover JR, Kay LE. Unraveling the mechanism of protein disaggregation through a ClpB-DnaK interaction. <i>Science</i> 339, 1080–1083 (2013). [2] Liang D, Tatomer DC, Luo Z, <i>et al.</i> The output of protein-coding genes shifts to circular RNAs when the pre-mRNA processing machinery is limiting. <i>Mol Cell</i> <a href="http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.molcel.2017.10.034">http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.molcel.2017.10.034</a> (2017). [1] Van der Geer J, Hanraads JAJ, Lupton RA. The art of writing a scientific article. <i>J Sci Commun</i> 2010;163:51–9. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.Sc.2010.00372">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.Sc.2010.00372</a> .
<i>Engineering</i> <sup>[37]</sup>	Number system	All authors should be listed for papers with up to seven authors; for papers with over seven authors, the first six only should be listed, followed by <i>et al.</i>	Volume number/—	Use of the DOI is highly encouraged.	Indicate references by number(s) in square brackets in line with the text. The actual authors can be referred to, but the reference number(s) must always be given.	[1] Battal T, Bain C D, Weiss M, Darton R C. Surfactant adsorption and Marangoni flow in liquid jets: Experiments. <i>J Colloid Interface Sci</i> 263(1): 250–260 (2003)
<i>Friction</i> <sup>[38]</sup>	Number system	All authors should be listed for papers with up to ten authors; for papers with over ten authors, the first ten only should be listed, followed by <i>et al.</i>	Volume number/Issue number	—	Indicate references by number(s) in square brackets in line with the text. The reference number(s) must always be given.	—
<i>Horticulture Research</i> <sup>[39]</sup>	Any readable style of format references can be submitted. The authors are responsible for the accuracy of reference information.	—	—	—	—	—
<i>Light: Science &amp; Applications</i> <sup>[40]</sup>	Nature style/Author-year	All authors should be listed for papers with up to five authors; for papers with over five authors, the first only should be listed, followed by <i>et al.</i>	Volume number/—	DOI is needed in the e-pub ahead of print.	Where a reference is to appear next to a number in the text, for example, following an equation, chemical formula or biological acronym, citations should be written as (ref. X) and not as superscript. Example: "detectable levels of endogenous Bcl-2 (ref. 3), as confirmed by western blot."	Belkaid, Y. & Rouse, B. T. Natural regulatory T cells in infectious disease. <i>Nat. Immunol.</i> 6, 353–360 (2005). Bonin, M. <i>et al.</i> F-ara-A pharmacokinetics during reduced-intensity conditioning therapy with fludarabine and busulfan. <i>Bone Marrow Transplant.</i> <a href="http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/sj.bmt.1705565">http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/sj.bmt.1705565</a> (2007).
<i>Nano Research</i> <sup>[41]</sup>	Number system	References with more than ten authors must list the first ten authors, followed by "et al."	Volume number/—	—	References to the literature are cited by number in square brackets at appropriate locations (before a period, comma, etc.) in the text.	[1] Zhou, K. B.; Wang, X.; Sun, X. M.; Peng, Q.; Li, Y. D. Enhanced catalytic activity of ceria nanorods from well defined reactive crystal planes. <i>J. Catal.</i> 2005, 229, 206–212.

(to be continued)

**Table 3.** (continued)

Journal title	Basic format/Citation system	Author's name	Volume/Issue number	Link preference	In-text citation	End-of-text citation (Example)
<i>National Science Review</i> <sup>[43]</sup>	Oxford SciMed/Number system	For over 3 authors, list the first three and add <i>et al.</i> must give the exact authors' last names.	Volume number/—	For references published online in advance of print publication, provide the journal abbreviation followed by the digital object identifier (DOI) number in parentheses.	The reference marker comes before punctuation in the main text of the manuscript.	Journal article: Kennedy T and Jones R. Effect of obesity on esophageal transit. <i>Am J Surg</i> 1985; 149: 177–81. Online journal article: Qiao D, Chen W and Stratagoules E <i>et al.</i> Bile acid-induced activation of activator protein-1 requires both extracellular signal-regulated kinase and protein Kinase C signaling. <i>J Biol Chem</i> 2013. doi: 10.1074/jbc.M908890199.
<i>Research</i> <sup>[43]</sup>	Chicago style/any style. If accepted, <i>Research</i> will reformat the references in Chicago style. All numbered consecutively in the order of their first citation.	For articles with six or more authors, the first three authors are listed followed by 'et al.'	Volume number/—	DOIs, if available, should be included for each reference.	Citations of references in the text should be identified using numbers in square brackets e.g., "as discussed by Liu [9]"; "as discussed elsewhere [9,10]".	[X] Author initials and surname, "Title in sentence style," Journal title, vol. (volume number), no. (issue number), pp. (page numbers separated by an en-dash), Year. [1] J. D. Watson and F. H. C. Crick "A structure for deoxyribose nucleic acid," <i>Nature</i> , vol. 171, no. 4356, pp. 737–738, 1953.
<i>Signal Transduction and Targeted Therapy</i> <sup>[44]</sup>	Nature style/Author-year	All authors should be listed for papers with up to five authors; for papers with more than five authors, the first only should be listed, followed by <i>et al.</i>	Volume number/—	—	In the text they should appear as superscript numbers starting at one and at the end of the paper they should be listed (double-spaced) in numerical order corresponding to the order of citation in the text.	1. Belkaid, Y. & Rouse, B. T. Natural regulatory T cells in infectious disease. <i>Nat. Immunol.</i> 6, 353–360 (2005). 2. Bonin, M. <i>et al.</i> F-ara-A pharmacokinetics during reduced-intensity conditioning therapy with fludarabine and busulfan. <i>Bone Marrow Transplant.</i> <a href="http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/sj.bmt.1705565">http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/sj.bmt.1705565</a> (2007).
<i>The Innovation</i> <sup>[45]</sup>	Based on Cell Press/Number system	List the names of all authors when there are no more than four authors; if there are five authors or more, list the first three authors followed by <i>et al.</i>	Volume number/—	—	Unpublished data, abstracts, and personal communications may be cited within the text only. Submitted articles that have not yet been accepted should be cited as data not shown, unpublished data, or a personal communication.	1. Leach, N.T., Sun, Y., Michaud, S., <i>et al.</i> (2007). Disruption of diacylglycerol kinase delta (DGKD) associated with seizures in humans and mice. <i>Am. J. Hum. Genet.</i> 80, 792–799.

Note: For all the listed journals, year of publication and the page range (or article number) for each reference are needed; the journal titles are all abbreviated.

<https://doi.org/>). If there is a DOI, add the DOI at the end of the reference cited; if there is no DOI, add the URL.

To further facilitate readers, journals are suggested to construct direct links in the references of the PDF of papers, so that readers can directly visit the homepage by clicking<sup>[46]</sup>. Page number can be deleted because increasingly more papers replace page number with article number. Provided the DOI or URL of the paper is available, the paper can be retrieved. Journals can retain their own unique format, such as each of the first letter of the journal title are capitalized or not. The reasons for recommending this reference specification are as follows:

1) Publishing industry standardization and development trend

As early as November 2010, the DOI system was officially approved by the International Organization for Standardization as the international standard ISO26234. Information and documentation—Rules for bibliographic references and citations to information resources (GB/T 7714-2015)<sup>[3]</sup>, which began to be implemented in China on December 1, 2015, clearly highlights DOI as a reference item. Over 40,000 foreign scientific journals use DOI to identify papers, and nearly 7,000 journals in China have applied DOI for their papers. The total number of DOI in scientific journal papers worldwide is more than 70 million<sup>[47]</sup>. Furthermore, the Web of Science launched a new journal citation database, ESCI, in November 2015, which also requires that new applications for entry to add DOI to their references. With the development of information technology and internet, DOI has been widely used in the international publishing community as an effective tool for the standardization of digital publishing and information services because it is a permanent and unique codeword to identify digital resources<sup>[48]</sup>. Therefore, reference specification should comply with the publishing industry standardization to add the DOI.

2) Improved attention to references by authors

Less citation items can effectively improve the processing speed of manuscripts. Editors often suffer from authors' lack of attention to references, most likely because authors find that references vary between journals, and it may be time consuming to revise all of them; even if they do, it is still difficult to conform exactly to the journal's requirements, so they may change them casually or not at all. The proposed reference specification in this paper shows only the essential information. Subsequently, editors can be freed from the time consuming work of dealing with a large number of references and devote more to providing authors with multidimensional and in-depth scholarly services. The publisher's production can also reduce the typesetting time caused by the various reference formats. Besides, the overall quality of the layout of the paper will be improved and fast publishing will be more easily achieved.

3) Hyperlink promotion of the dissemination of papers

DOI can solve the problem of unstable URLs and facilitate the retrieval of literature; however, it can solve the problem of connecting the priority digital version with the print version, facilitate the labeling of priority digital publication papers, and help enhance the web link function of citations<sup>[49]</sup>. When there is no DOI, the URL can also improve the retrieval efficiency, saving the time of authors. Providing hyperlinks to the cited paper may increase the paper being accessed number and improve the authors' scholarly dissemination. Simultaneously, considering the diversification of paper presentation in the future, like videos, papers will be disseminated on the web first.

4) Common development of all stakeholders

The addition of DOI and URL can increase the speed of reference production. For librarians to retrieve and organize information, DOI is also useful beyond reference range linking and document identification. Due to its inherent stability, DOI is suitable for creating deep-linked electronic reserves<sup>[50]</sup>. Therefore, the applicable reference specification will provide more convenience for information processing and dissemination to the relevant stakeholders in the life cycle of a paper, including authors, editors, publishers, readers, and librarians. In addition, the early improvement of the reference specification in English-language scientific journals in China will improve the overall strength of the development and facilitate the creation of more influential English-language journals in China. We should make full use of the web to improve the dissemination efficiency of our papers, and creating hyperlinks to the homepage of the paper cited is undoubtedly a very effective way to do so.

## DISCUSSION

The reference formats of domestic and foreign English-language scientific journals have the following characteristics:

1) Simplification of the reference items. Certain papers in *Science* are no longer referenced with the title of the paper, but only the name of the first author, journal title, volume number, and page number. The reduction in the number of reference items can reduce the time taken for authors to check the references. In addition, for readers, it can ensure that the references can be found accurately; for publishers, it can save typeset workload; and for editors, it can reduce the time taken to check and revise the references.

2) Informatization of academic dissemination. Increasingly more journals, both domestic and foreign, have started to add links to references. Clicking on the links can directly lead to the homepage of the paper cited, which highlights the importance that journals attach to web dissemination. This can save readers' time searching the literature; therefore, papers with links to references are more likely to be clicked, viewed, read, shared, and cited. However, there are still many English-language scientific journals in China lacking this function, which will inevitably weaken the academic dissemination of their papers.

3) DOI annotation convergence. Certain domestic English-language scientific journals have begun to suggest, encourage, or even require the addition of DOIs or URLs, e.g., *Engineering* emphasizes to ensure that the data provided in references are correct and actively encourages the use of DOIs. *National Science Review* also suggests that DOIs are required for references published online prior to the publication of the print version. *Research* states that it is the author's responsibility to ensure that the information in each reference is complete and accurate; if so, each reference should contain a DOI. The most common way in which DOIs are used is to identify journal papers, and its greatest advantage is that the corresponding paper is directly and accurately available through DOI. Therefore, in the future, DOI will not change because of its convenience and stability (because DOI forms a URL with a head of <https://doi.org/>, which is more desirable than the URL displayed). It has been widely accepted and used by readers, and will bring great convenience to the majority of readers.

4) Specific format personalization. The specific format of references varies among journals, such as how many authors'



names are presented, whether the authors' names are abbreviated, whether the last name is in front or the first name is in front; whether the journal title is abbreviated and italicized; and whether the volume number is italic and bold, etc. Each journal adheres to its own unique style, and the diverse reference formats enrich the presentation of journals.

## CONCLUSIONS

We discussed the specifications of bibliographic references and citations in English-language scientific journals in China from the perspective of the reference specification. The specific suggestions on reference specification in English-language scientific journals in China are proposed on the basis of APA, Harvard, MLA, and Chicago styles, the exploration of ten English-language scientific journals in China with clear reference specifications and international academic influence, and work practice. For the end-of-text citation of references, it is recommended to include four essential items: author's name, article title, journal title, and year of publication; and one hyperlink to the homepage of the paper cited is recommended. The hyperlink here primarily refers to DOI or URL (either DOI number or a URL with a head of <https://doi.org/>). This specification will reduce the burden on authors and readers, increase the speed of information processing of references, better enhance the impact of academic communication, and help the long-term development of English-language scientific journals in China.

## Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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