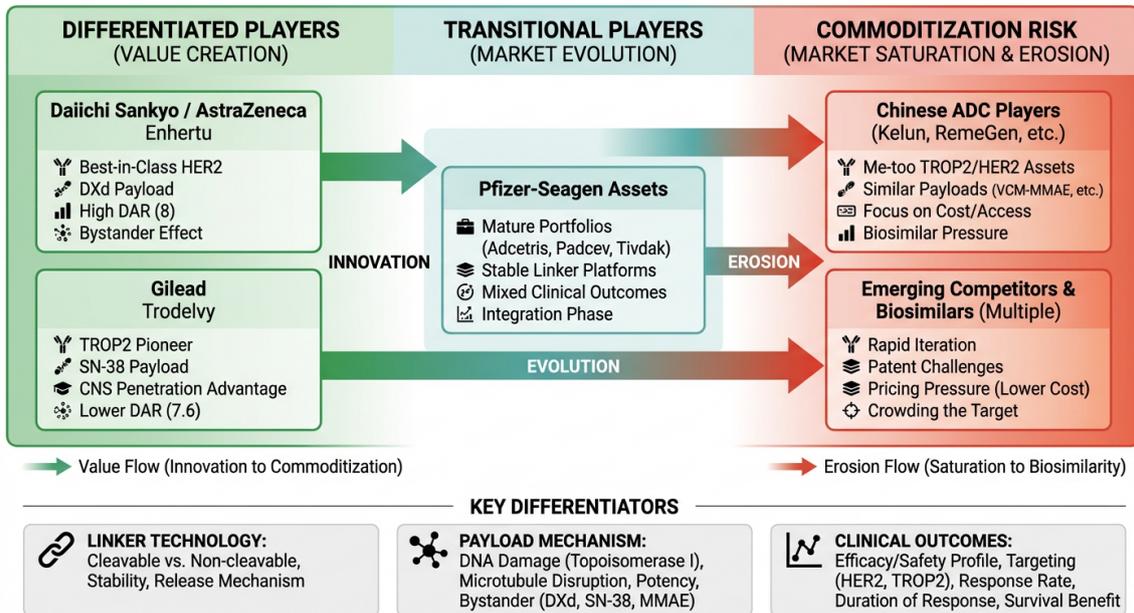


ADC Oncology Pair Trade Analysis

Strategic Assessment of Differentiated vs. Commoditized Players



Investment Research Report

February 2026

Sector: Oncology / Biotechnology
Sub-sector: Antibody-Drug Conjugates
Market Cap Focus: Large Cap Pharma & Mid-Cap Biotech
Investment Horizon: 12–24 months

This report provides strategic analysis for investment research purposes. All information is derived from publicly available sources. This is not investment advice.

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1 Executive Summary

1.1 Investment Thesis Overview

The antibody-drug conjugate (ADC) oncology market represents a compelling pair trade opportunity as the sector bifurcates between truly differentiated platforms and increasingly commoditized me-too assets. With global ADC revenues reaching approximately USD 12 billion in 2024 and projections exceeding USD 30 billion by 2033 [1, 2], the sector offers substantial alpha generation potential for investors who can correctly identify winners and losers in this rapidly evolving competitive landscape.

Core Thesis: Technology platform differentiation—specifically linker chemistry, payload mechanism, and drug-antibody ratio (DAR) optimization—creates durable competitive moats. Players with proprietary platforms targeting validated antigens with differentiated clinical profiles warrant long exposure, while me-too assets facing commoditization pressure from Chinese competitors warrant short consideration.

1.2 Key Findings

- **Market Structure:** The ADC market is consolidating around validated targets (HER2, TROP2) while simultaneously fragmenting into emerging targets (B7-H3, Claudin 18.2, FR α , Nectin-4). First-movers with differentiated technology retain pricing power.
- **Technology Differentiation:** Platform advantages derive from three pillars: (1) linker stability and cleavability, (2) payload potency and bystander effect capability, and (3) site-specific conjugation enabling optimal DAR. Enhertu's DXd platform (DAR 8, membrane-permeable payload) sets the benchmark.
- **Safety Signals:** Interstitial lung disease (ILD) remains the key class effect for topoisomerase I-based ADCs, with 10–15% incidence for T-DXd. Importantly, this is manageable with proper monitoring and does not negate clinical benefit [3].
- **Competitive Dynamics:** Chinese ADC players (Kelun-Biotech, RemeGen, Biocytogen) are rapidly building pipelines—China now accounts for 25% of traditional ADCs and 54% of bispecific ADCs globally [4]. This creates commoditization pressure for undifferentiated assets.

1.3 Investment Recommendations

Position	Company/Asset	Rationale
LONG	Daiichi Sankyo / AstraZeneca (Enhertu)	Best-in-class HER2 ADC, DXd platform, expanding indications, strong clinical data
LONG	Gilead (Trodelvy)	TROP2 pioneer, CNS penetration advantage, differentiated safety profile
WATCH	Pfizer-Seagen Portfolio	Strong assets (Padcev) but acquisition integration risk; pipeline depth uncertain
SHORT	Me-too TROP2 developers	Commoditization risk from Chinese competitors, limited differentiation
SHORT	Undifferentiated HER2 late-entrants	Market saturation in HER2 space, pricing pressure inevitable

2 Target Landscape Mapping

2.1 Current ADC Target Universe

The ADC oncology landscape is organized around validated molecular targets with established tumor expression patterns and clinical proof-of-concept. As of early 2026, 15 ADCs have received FDA approval targeting 16 distinct indications [5]. Figure 1 illustrates the expression patterns of key ADC targets across major cancer types.

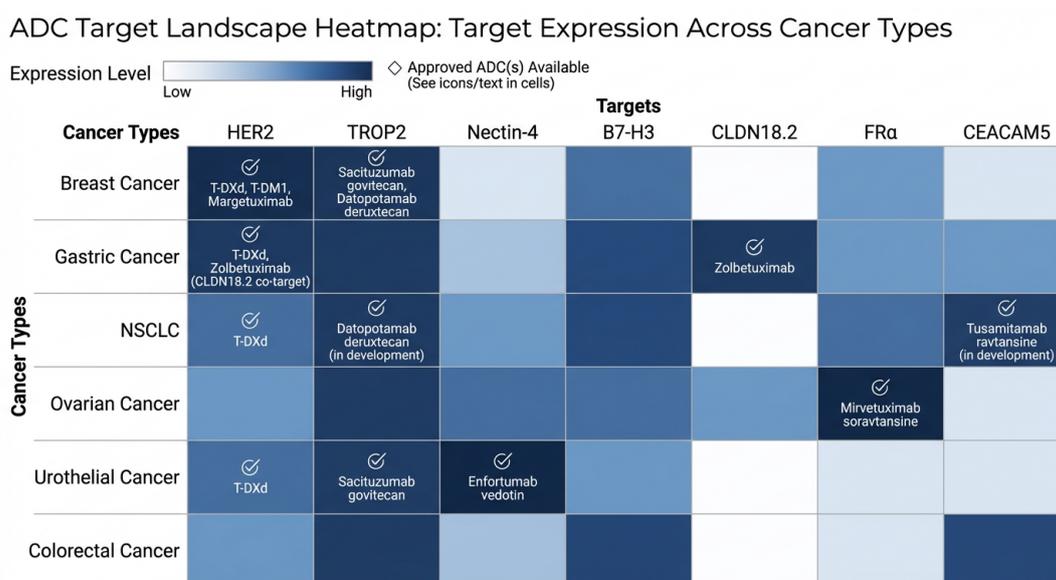


Figure 1: **ADC Target Expression Landscape.** Heatmap showing relative target expression levels across major cancer types. Darker shading indicates higher expression. Targets include established (HER2, TROP2) and emerging (B7-H3, Claudin 18.2, FR α) antigens.

2.2 HER2: The Benchmark Target

HER2 (Human Epidermal Growth Factor Receptor 2) remains the most validated ADC target, with three approved agents generating substantial revenue:

- **Enhertu (trastuzumab deruxtecan, T-DXd):** USD 3.7 billion in 2024 revenue [1]. Approved for HER2+ breast cancer, HER2-low breast cancer, HER2+ gastric cancer, and HER2-mutant NSCLC. The paradigm-shifting DESTINY-Breast03 trial demonstrated superiority over T-DM1 with 28.8 months median PFS vs. 6.8 months [6].
- **Kadcyla (trastuzumab emtansine, T-DM1):** Roche's first-generation HER2 ADC, now facing competitive displacement from Enhertu in most settings.
- **HER2 Pipeline Saturation:** Multiple late-stage HER2 ADCs from Chinese developers risk commoditizing this space. The differentiation will come from payload innovation and indication expansion.

Investment Implication: HER2 is a “winner-take-most” market. Enhertu's clinical superiority and indication breadth create a durable moat. Late entrants face significant market access challenges.

2.3 TROP2: The Emerging Battleground

TROP2 (Trophoblast Cell Surface Antigen 2) represents the most competitive ADC space with three approved or near-approved agents:

- **Trodely (sacituzumab govitecan):** Gilead's TROP2 ADC achieved USD 1.3 billion in 2024 (+24% YoY). Key differentiator: superior CNS penetration with median OS exceeding 30 months in brain metastases patients [7].
- **Datroway (datopotamab deruxtecan):** AstraZeneca/Daiichi Sankyo's second TROP2 entry, FDA approved January 2025. Uses the same DXd payload platform as Enhertu.
- **Competitive Threats:** Kelun-Biotech's sacituzumab tirumotecan (licensed to MSD) enters Phase III in 2025 as potential "best-in-class" contender [4].

Real-world comparative data from ASCO 2025 revealed critical differentiation: T-DXd showed longer time-on-treatment than Trodely in HR+/HER2-negative disease (4.8 vs. 3.2 months, HR=0.801, $p < 0.00001$), but Trodely demonstrated superior sequencing advantage in HR-/HER2-null tumors [7].

Investment Implication: TROP2 is becoming a commoditized target. Differentiation will depend on clinical positioning (HR status, brain metastases) and safety profiles rather than target alone.

2.4 Emerging Targets: Next-Generation Opportunities

2.4.1 B7-H3 (CD276)

B7-H3 represents the most promising emerging ADC target with pan-cancer expression validated across 156,791 samples spanning 50 cancer types [8]. Key pipeline assets:

- **MGC026 (MacroGenics):** Phase I in multiple solid tumors (NCT06242470), topoisomerase I payload
- Expression correlates with poor prognosis in prostate, ovarian cancers; potential for broad indication coverage

2.4.2 Claudin 18.2

Zolbetuximab (IMUGLANZI) approval in 2024 validates Claudin 18.2 as a gastric cancer target. ADC development ongoing with CMG901 in Phase II.

2.4.3 FR α (Folate Receptor Alpha)

Mirvetuximab soravtansine (ELAHERE) approved 2022 for ovarian cancer; expansion trials ongoing. Second-generation assets in development.

2.4.4 Nectin-4

Enfortumab vedotin (Padcev) dominates urothelial cancer; NSCLC expansion data expected 2025 (EV-302).

3 Differentiation Assessment: Linker/Payload Technology

3.1 ADC Technology Architecture

The therapeutic efficacy and competitive positioning of ADCs depends critically on three technology pillars: (1) antibody selection and engineering, (2) linker chemistry and stability, and (3) cytotoxic payload mechanism. Figure 2 illustrates the ADC mechanism of action.

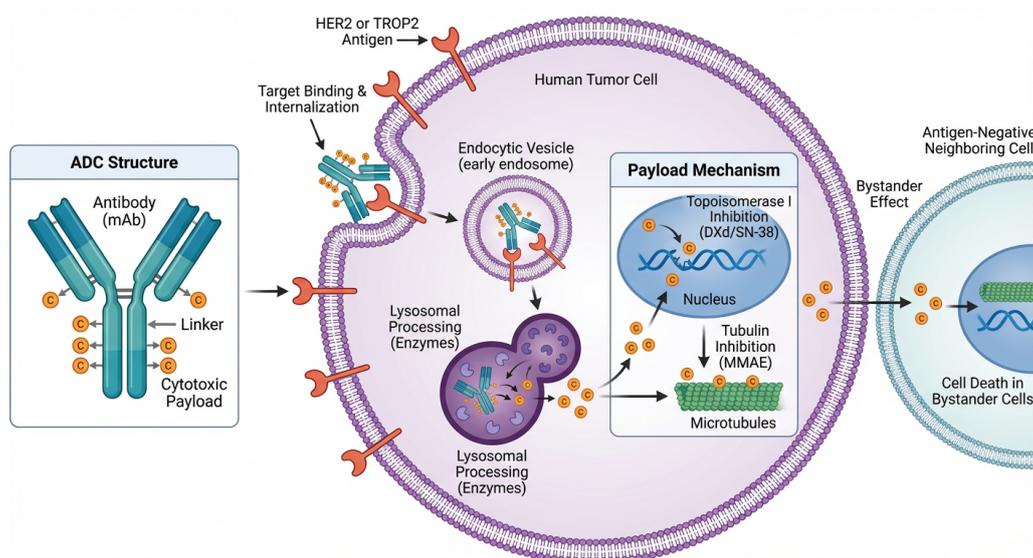
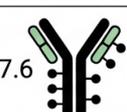


Figure 2: **ADC Mechanism of Action.** Antibody-drug conjugates achieve tumor selectivity through: (1) target binding, (2) receptor-mediated internalization, (3) lysosomal processing, (4) payload release, and (5) bystander effect on neighboring cells.

3.2 Payload Technology Comparison

Figure 3 presents a comparative analysis of approved ADC technology platforms.

Platform	Payload Type	DAR (Drug-to-Antibody Ratio)	Linker Type	Bystander Effect	Key Differentiator
 Enhertu / T-DXd	 DXd (Topo I inhibitor)	 8	 Cleavable tetrapeptide	 Strong	 Membrane permeable payload
 Trodelvy / SG	 SN-38 (Topo I)	 7.6	 pH-sensitive cleavable	 Strong	 CNS penetration
 Adcetris (Brentuximab vedotin)	 MMAE (Tubulin inhibitor)	 4	 vc-PAB cleavable	 Moderate	 Stable in plasma
 Kadcyla (T-DM1)	 DM1 (Maytansine)	 3.5	 Non-cleavable (MCC)	 None	 Reduced systemic toxicity

Legend: Icons represent properties. Colors indicate different ADC Platforms (Okabe-Ito palette adapted). Shapes enhance encoding.

Figure 3: **ADC Technology Platform Comparison.** Key differentiators include payload class (topoisomerase I vs. tubulin inhibitors), drug-antibody ratio (DAR), linker type, and bystander effect capability.

3.3 Topoisomerase I Inhibitor Payloads: The New Standard

The topoisomerase I inhibitor class (DXd, SN-38) has emerged as the dominant payload platform for next-generation ADCs:

- **DXd (Deruxtecan):** Exatecan derivative with potent cytotoxicity. Features membrane permeability enabling robust bystander effect. Used in Enhertu (DAR ~8) and Datroway.
- **SN-38:** Active metabolite of irinotecan. Used in Trodelvy (DAR ~7.6) with pH-sensitive linker enabling CNS penetration.
- **Competitive Advantage:** Topoisomerase I inhibitors overcome resistance mechanisms affecting tubulin inhibitors (MMAE/DM1) in heavily pretreated patients.

3.4 Linker Technology and Drug-Antibody Ratio (DAR)

Linker design critically impacts pharmacokinetics, toxicity, and efficacy [9]:

Linker Type	Example ADC	Mechanism	Advantage
Cleavable (tetrapeptide)	Enhertu	Lysosomal protease	High DAR tolerance
pH-sensitive	Trodelvy	Acid hydrolysis	CNS penetration
vc-PAB (cleavable)	Adcetris	Protease cleavage	Established safety
Non-cleavable (thioether)	Kadcyla	Lysosomal degradation	Reduced systemic release

Site-Specific Conjugation: Next-generation ADCs increasingly employ engineered cysteine residues or non-canonical amino acids for homogeneous DAR distribution, reducing the DAR 0 (inactive) and DAR 8+ (unstable) species that plague conventional lysine conjugation [10].

3.5 Differentiation Score Card

ADC	Payload	DAR	Bystander	Indication	Score
Enhertu	DXd (Topo I)	8	Strong	Broad	9/10
Trodelvy	SN-38 (Topo I)	7.6	Strong	Focused	8/10
Padcev	MMAE (Tubulin)	4	Moderate	Expanding	7/10
Kadcyla	DM1 (Tubulin)	3.5	None	Narrow	5/10
Me-too TROP2	Various	Various	Variable	TBD	3-4/10

4 Safety Signal Analysis: The ILD Question

4.1 Interstitial Lung Disease Overview

Interstitial lung disease (ILD) and pneumonitis represent the most clinically significant adverse event associated with topoisomerase I-based ADCs, particularly trastuzumab deruxtecan (Enhertu). Understanding and contextualizing this safety signal is essential for accurate investment analysis.

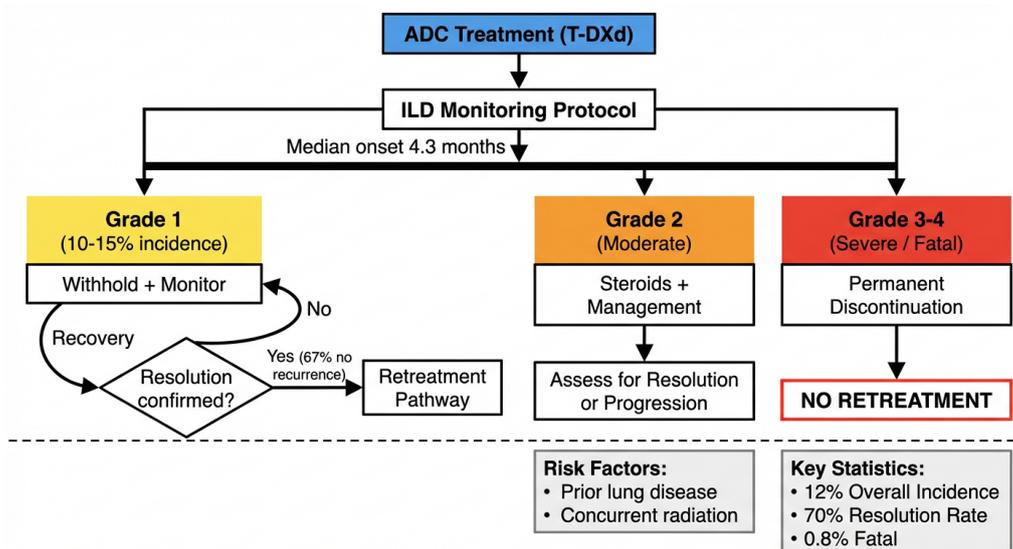


Figure 4: **ILD Safety Management Algorithm.** Clinical management pathway for ADC-associated interstitial lung disease showing grade-based interventions, monitoring protocols, and retreatment considerations.

4.2 Incidence and Clinical Characteristics

Pooled analysis of nine T-DXd monotherapy trials (n=1,150 patients) reported 15.4% adjudicated ILD/pneumonitis incidence [11]:

Trial/Setting	Incidence	Grade ≥ 3	Fatal (Gr5)
DESTINY-Breast03	10.5%	0.5%	0%
DESTINY-Breast04	12.1%	0.8%	0.8%
Pooled 9 Trials	15.4%	1.5%	0.4%
BCBM Cohort	10%	Low	0%

Key Clinical Points:

- Median time to onset: 4.3 months (range 0.9–23.7 months)
- Resolution rate: 70.3% with appropriate management
- Most events are Grade 1–2 and manageable with treatment interruption

4.3 Management and Retreatment

Contemporary management protocols emphasize [3]:

1. **Baseline Assessment:** Pulmonary function tests (FVC, DLCO >70% predicted), high-resolution CT
2. **Monitoring:** Serial HRCT every 6 weeks (cycles 3, 5, etc.)
3. **Grade 1 Management:** Withhold T-DXd, monitor closely, consider corticosteroids
4. **Grade ≥ 2 :** Corticosteroids mandatory, extended recovery period
5. **Grade ≥ 3 :** Permanent discontinuation

Retreatment Data: Of 45 patients retreated after Grade 1 ILD recovery, 66.7% experienced no recurrence. Recurrent events (n=8) were all Grade ≤ 2 with median onset 64 days post-retreatment [11].

4.4 Investment Implications

- **Manageable Risk:** ILD is a real but manageable class effect. The clinical benefit demonstrated in pivotal trials significantly outweighs this risk in appropriate patient populations.
- **Competitive Consideration:** All topoisomerase I ADCs carry ILD risk. This is not a differentiating factor between Enhertu, Trodelvy, and next-generation assets.
- **Label Implications:** Robust monitoring protocols and patient education mitigate liability concerns. No major market access issues have emerged.
- **Comparative Safety:** FAERS data shows distinct safety profiles—T-DXd emphasizes musculoskeletal/infection events (33%/17%) while Trodelvy shows broader GI/cardiovascular effects (15%/14%) [12].

5 Emerging Targets and Pipeline Scan

5.1 Pipeline Evolution Timeline

Figure 5 illustrates the ADC approval and development timeline, highlighting the acceleration of novel target development.

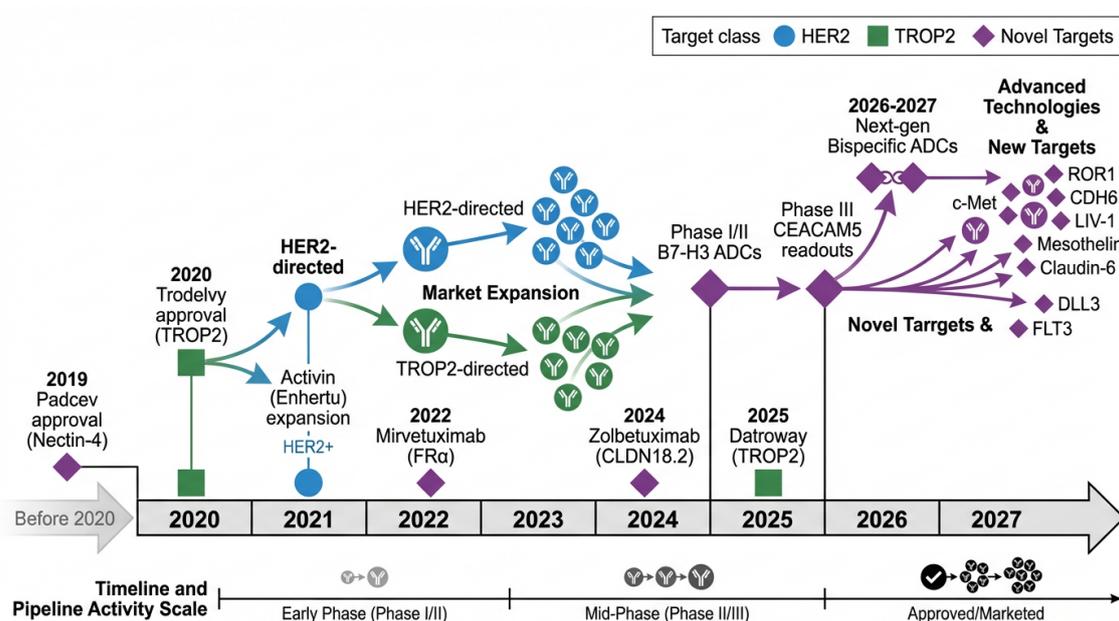


Figure 5: ADC Pipeline Evolution Timeline (2019–2027). Key approval milestones and emerging target development windows. Color coding indicates target class: HER2 (blue), TROP2 (green), novel targets (purple).

5.2 Phase III and Late-Stage Pipeline

As of early 2026, over 40 ADCs are in Phase III development globally, with 25+ new Phase I entries during 2023–2025 [2]:

Target	ADC	Company	Stage	Indication
HER2	Enhertu	Daiichi/AZ	Approved	Multiple
HER2	Multiple	Chinese	Ph III	Breast, gastric
TROP2	Trodelvy	Gilead	Approved	Breast, urothelial
TROP2	Datroway	AZ/Daiichi	Approved	HR+/HER2- breast
TROP2	SKB264	Kelun/MSD	Ph III	Breast (2025)
Nectin-4	Padcev	Pfizer	Approved	Urothelial
Nectin-4	Padcev	Pfizer	Ph III	NSCLC (EV-302)
FR α	Elahere	ImmunoGen	Approved	Ovarian
CLDN18.2	CMG901	Keymed	Ph II	Gastric
B7-H3	MGC026	MacroGenics	Ph I	Solid tumors
CEACAM5	Tusamitamab	Sanofi	Ph III	NSCLC

Target	ADC	Company	Stage	Indication
HER3	Patritumab der.	Daiichi	Ph III	NSCLC
c-Met	Teliso-V	AbbVie	Ph III	NSCLC

5.3 Chinese ADC Development Surge

China has emerged as a global ADC development hub, creating both opportunities and competitive threats [4, 13]:

- **Pipeline Scale:** Biocytogen leads with 23 ADCs (17 discovery, 6 preclinical); ProfoundBio ranks 8th globally with 13 ADCs
- **Modality Innovation:** China accounts for 54% of bispecific ADCs and 38% of dual-payload ADCs globally
- **Deal Value:** USD 24 billion in ADC deal value increase (18% CAGR 2015–2025)
- **Operational Advantage:** Phase I trials completed in 9 months vs. 2 years in US; cost-efficient manufacturing

Key Chinese Players to Monitor:

1. **Kelun-Biotech:** SKB264 (TROP2) licensed to MSD; potential best-in-class
2. **RemeGen:** Innovative modalities in Yangtze Delta hub
3. **Biocytogen:** Largest Chinese ADC pipeline
4. **ProfoundBio:** Rina-S (FDA Fast Track, ovarian cancer)

6 Thesis Synthesis: Long vs. Short Candidates

6.1 Investment Framework

Figure 6 presents the strategic positioning framework for ADC oncology investments, mapping players across technology differentiation and market position dimensions.

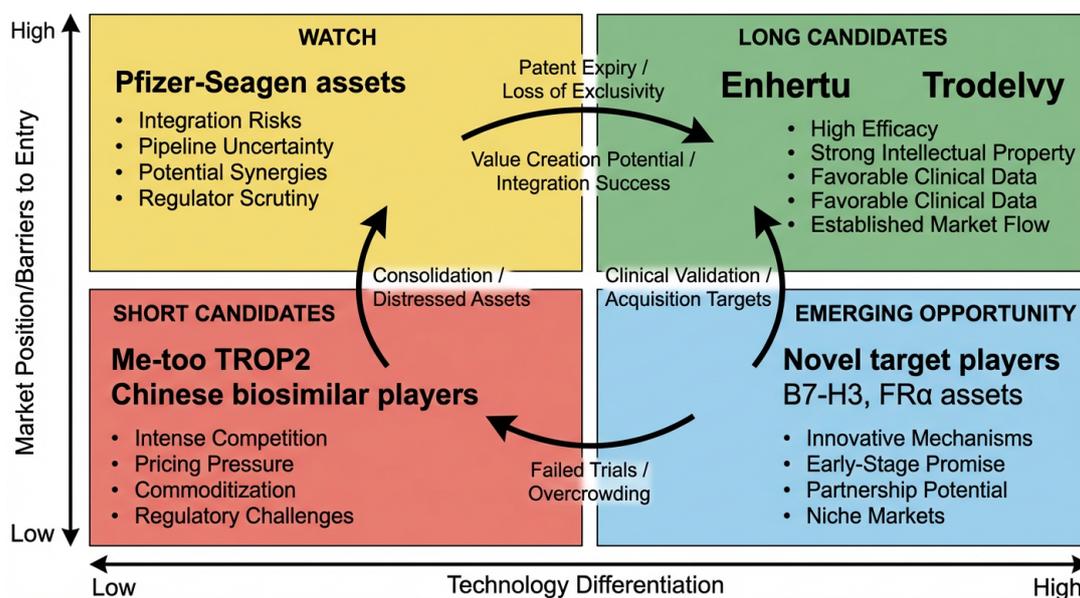


Figure 6: **ADC Investment Positioning Framework.** Quadrant analysis mapping technology differentiation (x-axis) against market position/barriers to entry (y-axis). Green zone indicates long candidates; red zone indicates short candidates.

6.2 Long Thesis: Differentiated Players

6.2.1 LONG: Daiichi Sankyo (TYO: 4568) / AstraZeneca (LON: AZN)

Thesis: Best-in-class HER2 platform with proven expansion capability.

Key Drivers:

- **Enhertu Dominance:** USD 3.7B revenue (2024), market-leading efficacy data across 4+ indications
- **DXd Platform Value:** Same payload now powering Datroway (TROP2); platform optionality
- **Pipeline Depth:** HER3 ADC in Phase III, additional targets in development
- **Indication Expansion:** HER2-low/ultralow breast cancer dramatically expands addressable market
- **Clinical Moat:** DESTINY trial franchise establishes superiority across settings

Risks: ILD safety signal management, Chinese competition in HER2 space, AstraZeneca partnership economics.

Valuation Consideration: Premium justified by platform leadership and expansion optionality.

6.2.2 **LONG:** Gilead Sciences (NASDAQ: GILD)

Thesis: TROP2 pioneer with differentiated CNS penetration profile.

Key Drivers:

- **Trodelvy Performance:** USD 1.3B revenue (2024), +24% growth trajectory
- **CNS Advantage:** Median OS >30 months in brain metastases—critical differentiator
- **Sequencing Data:** Superior outcomes in HR-/HER2-null when used first
- **Safety Profile:** Distinct from T-DXd; may be preferred in certain patient populations
- **Underappreciated:** Market may undervalue TROP2 franchise within broader Gilead portfolio

Risks: Datroway competition, Kelun/MSD best-in-class threat, limited indication expansion vs. Enhertu.

6.3 Watch List: Transitional Assets

6.3.1 **WATCH:** Pfizer (NYSE: PFE) – Post-Seagen Integration

Thesis: Strong asset base but integration risk and unclear pipeline prioritization.

Considerations:

- **Padcev (Nectin-4):** Strong urothelial position; NSCLC expansion potential
- **Adcetris:** Lymphoma leader but older-generation MMAE platform
- **Integration Risk:** USD 43B Seagen acquisition requires flawless execution
- **Pipeline Clarity:** Need to demonstrate post-acquisition R&D productivity

Catalyst: EV-302 NSCLC data (2025) could rerate Padcev franchise.

6.4 Short Thesis: Commoditization Candidates

6.4.1 **SHORT:** Me-Too TROP2 Developers

Thesis: Target-only approach without technology differentiation faces pricing pressure.

Rationale:

- Multiple TROP2 ADCs in late development without clear clinical differentiation
- Chinese competition (Kelun/MSD) offers potential best-in-class at lower cost
- Market access increasingly difficult with three approved/near-approved agents
- Reimbursement pressure as payers demand differentiation evidence

Specific Considerations: Companies pursuing TROP2-only strategies without novel payload or indication approaches face challenging competitive dynamics.

6.4.2 **SHORT: Undifferentiated HER2 Late-Entrants**

Thesis: HER2 ADC market is effectively closed to undifferentiated competition.

Rationale:

- Enhertu's clinical superiority (PFS >4x vs. T-DM1) establishes insurmountable bar
- HER2-low/ultralow expansion by Enhertu captures previously unaddressed patients
- Late-stage HER2 ADCs from Chinese developers may face market access challenges
- Pricing pressure in China insufficient to offset Western market barriers

6.5 Risk Factors

1. **ILD Class Effect Escalation:** While currently manageable, any fatality cluster could impact the entire topoisomerase I ADC class.
2. **Regulatory Surprise:** Accelerated approval reversals or label restrictions could disrupt positioning.
3. **Chinese Outperformance:** If Kelun/MSD or other Chinese assets demonstrate clear best-in-class data, current differentiation thesis requires revision.
4. **Reimbursement Pressure:** Payer pushback on ADC pricing could compress margins across the sector.
5. **Novel Target Failure:** If emerging targets (B7-H3, etc.) fail to deliver clinical utility, pipeline value erodes.

7 Conclusion

7.1 Summary of Investment Thesis

The ADC oncology sector presents a compelling pair trade opportunity centered on technology differentiation as the key determinant of competitive sustainability. Our analysis identifies:

- **Long Candidates:** Daiichi Sankyo/AstraZeneca (Enhertu platform) and Gilead (Trodelvy CNS franchise) offer technology-protected positions with expanding clinical utility.
- **Short Candidates:** Undifferentiated TROP2 and HER2 developers face commoditization pressure from Chinese competition and market saturation.
- **Key Differentiators:** Payload mechanism (topoisomerase I supremacy), DAR optimization, linker technology, and clinical positioning (CNS penetration, HR/HER2 status stratification) separate winners from losers.
- **Safety Context:** ILD remains manageable with appropriate protocols and does not negate clinical benefit in validated indications.

7.2 Catalysts to Monitor

Timeline	Catalyst	Impact
H1 2026	Kelun/MSD SKB264 Phase III readout	TROP2 competitive dynamics
H2 2026	Pfizer EV-302 NSCLC expansion	Padcev rerating potential
2026	B7-H3 ADC early efficacy signals	Novel target validation
2026–2027	Chinese ADC ex-China approvals	Commoditization pressure test
Ongoing	ILD incidence in real-world setting	Class effect monitoring

7.3 Final Recommendation

PAIR TRADE RECOMMENDATION	
LONG:	Daiichi Sankyo / AstraZeneca (DXd platform leadership)
LONG:	Gilead (Trodelvy CNS differentiation)
SHORT:	Undifferentiated TROP2/HER2 developers facing commoditization
<i>Investment Horizon: 12–24 months</i>	

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A Appendix: Approved ADC Summary

ADC	Target	Payload	Company	Indication
Enhertu	HER2	DXd	Daiichi/AZ	Breast, gastric, NSCLC
Kadcyla	HER2	DM1	Roche	Breast
Trodelyv	TROP2	SN-38	Gilead	Breast, urothelial
Datroway	TROP2	DXd	AZ/Daiichi	HR+/HER2- breast
Padcev	Nectin-4	MMAE	Pfizer	Urothelial
Adcetris	CD30	MMAE	Pfizer/Takeda	Lymphoma
Polivy	CD79b	MMAE	Roche	DLBCL
Blenrep*	BCMA	MMAF	GSK	Multiple myeloma
Elahere	FR α	DM4	ImmunoGen	Ovarian
Zynlonta	CD19	PBD	ADC Therapeutics	DLBCL
Tivdak	TF	MMAE	Pfizer	Cervical
Besponsa	CD22	Ozogamicin	Pfizer	ALL
Mylotarg	CD33	Ozogamicin	Pfizer	AML

*Withdrawn/re-approved status varies by region

B Appendix: Methodology Notes

This report synthesizes data from:

- Peer-reviewed clinical literature (NEJM, JCO, JAMA Network Open)
- Conference presentations (ASCO, ESMO, SABCS)
- Regulatory filings and FDA approval documents
- Market research reports (GlobalData, Beacon Intelligence, Straits Research)
- Company financial disclosures and earnings calls
- ClinicalTrials.gov registry data

All investment positioning reflects the author's analysis as of February 2026. This report is for informational purposes only and does not constitute investment advice.