

A DECADE OF PUBLICATION: MESSAGE FROM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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"Time does not pass, it continues"

Marty Rubin (1930–1994)²

LOOKING BACK

Head-scratching thoughts to present plausible activities for the Asia Pacific Research Unit (APRU), School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia of which I was appointed coordinator brought forth the idea of an academic journal. This notion struck me, and on reflection, recalled that I was totally clueless of publishing a journal entailed. Flipping through pages of scholarly journals helped, to some extent, in comprehending the tasks ahead, but on the other hand the said perusing almost dissuaded me from proceeding with what appeared to be a "presumptuous idea." Tapping the minds of others was the next round of action. In London, and later in Hull, the English said "Nay," apparently thought too problematic, sustainability issues, questionable quality; in short, too much hassle. Perhaps publication of an occasional paper series; not tight-down by any specific deadline as journal issues are bounded with, and the "occasional" really means occasional, nothing fixed and/or obligated. The Dutch, however, were encouraging. And in Leiden, the germ of an electronic journal (e-journal) was planted. The concretisation of the idea of a journal gradually emerged while mid-air on the Amsterdam–Kuala Lumpur flight. But it was the tussle between a conventional hard copy version and an e-journal that remained unresolved. The "How" was apparently not questioned, neither in London nor Amsterdam or Leiden thanks to the unquestioned confidence of my Anglo-Dutch circle of friends. The focus then was the concern of the "What," particularly the type of journal in the planning.

Happily I settled for an e-journal but I needed to know, or more precisely, to grasp the concept of an e-journal. An e-journal is internet-based and accessed via the "world-wide-web," all of which are unfamiliar territory in my rather insular world.

The conceptualisation process pondered with a name for the journal to start with. Why *International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies*? That was an e-mail poser from a senior mentor of mine. In particular, he zeroed in on "Asia Pacific." Why? The twenty-first century, I rationalised, shifted focus from the West, the Old World of Europe and the New World of North America, to the emerging East, especially the Asian realm and the Pacific Rim, hence, the "Asia Pacific." The pendulum of global attention, interests and concerns had increasingly swung and gravitated to the Asia Pacific realm.

Then there was the question of coverage: narrow and specific, or as wide coverage as possible. I decided on the latter, simply "everything under the sun," or more precisely, "everything 'non-science' under the sun" thus inclusive of the various branches of the humanities and social sciences. The paperwork for official approval proceeded without a glitch. Bureaucracy plodded along, and decision-making took a cautious, pedestrian mode; but formal approval was eventually secured. "This will be the last [journal] to be approved," declared the deputy vice chancellor (research and innovation). At last, a fruition of the paperwork, and *International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies* (IJAPS) came into being.

THE TASK

"Big" and "small" were the guiding principles in undertaking IJAPS. The latter represented the editorial team, keeping it a tight circle lest being weighed down. 1-2-3 represents one or a single editor-in-chief, two associate editors, and three members of the editorial panel that collectively addressed the day-to-day running of IJAPS. Complementing this "small" inner circle is the international advisory board that was not only premised on "big" (renowned) scholarly figures but also "big" (quantity) in two-figure numbers. The initial list had 15 members spread across a spectrum of academic disciplines as well as geographical locations. Once the "team" has been lined-up, approached, formally invited and officially accepted (no one

declined the invitation), planning begun with the inaugural issue of a two-issue outing per annum.

The infrastructure needed to be in place. The publisher of IJAPS invested in hardware and software of e-publishing. It was a learning curve for all involved with "uploads" and "downloads," "hits," and other ordinary normal words but with non-conventional meanings popping up now and then. Initially it was like a roller-coaster ride for me, the uninitiated and greenhorn of all things electronic who utilised the personal computer as nothing beyond a "glorified typewriter." Alas, one needed to move with the flow...

An academic journal is as good as the papers that it publishes. The obvious challenge is not only to be able to attract paper contributions but also quality papers that get through the double-blind review process. The former is a challenge in itself but the latter is a greater hurdle to overcome. Moreover, the reviewing process has its attendant difficulties, viz. building a pool of reviewers from a multitude of disciplines and specialities to tap on, reviewers with good work habits (read: keeping to deadlines), and persuading reviewers to re-read revised papers.

The initial years were undeniably difficult in respect to paper contributions owing to *inter alia* IJAPS being new, unfamiliarity and acceptance of it as an e-journal, its indexing portfolio, its editor-in-chief, editorial team and its publisher all came under scrutiny. IJAPS not only survived but also attained some measure of success even during this early period. Within four years (2009) of its inception, IJAPS was among five journals by Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia (Universiti Sains Malaysia Press) that was handpicked for potential global recognition. IJAPS was the sole humanities/social sciences journal. Consequently, additional resources were given to pursue this goal, notably the provision of a Research Officer appointed to assist the editor-in-chief who hitherto took on most of the burdens of editorial matters with the occasional helping hand from other members of the editorial panel. Shortly thereafter (2010) IJAPS gained entry into numerous databases including Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), EBSCO Host, Southeast Asian Serial Index (SASI), Bibliography of Asian Studies (BAS) and Genamics JournalSeek. Besides the highly regarded SASI, IJAPS was indexed in SciVerse Scopus and ranked in Excellence in Research Australia (ERA) by the Australian Research Council (ARC). This wide net of global acceptance and recognition by well-respected databases was indeed a boost to the standing of IJAPS in the

international scholarly arena. Submissions of papers increased in numbers, but more importantly, an increasing surge in the quality of contributions has been observed.

In order to accelerate the wide coverage of disciplines, topics, issues within IJAPS umbrella of contents, the thematic issue was adopted with a guest editor to oversee the specific theme. Several interesting themes had since been explored: globalisation (2007); higher education (2008); cultural resource management (2011); popular culture (2011); HIV/AIDS in China (2012); food (2012); and music in Asia (2013). Besides the publication of the public lectures delivered under the auspices of the APRU Eminent Scholar Series since 2010, Scholarly Viewpoints was launched in 2012 to tap the opinions, aspirations and wisdom of senior scholars with their long and fruitful years of experiences and observations.

Since 2010, IJAPS has embarked on a series of value-added features to further enhance its efficiency, visibility, "keeping-with-the-times" principle and audience's experiences. An automated online manuscript management system was introduced to ease submission by contributors that also allow them to track the "stages" and "progress" of their manuscript. A new website was launched to allowed e-mail subscription, social media integration, mobile version and search engine optimisation. The latest effort (2013) was publication in the EPUB format.

THE ROAD AHEAD

Creativity and innovation are the twin principles to carry IJAPS forward. The past decade had been challenging and illuminating. In looking back, several principles that were steadfastly and uncompromisingly held had certainly been beneficial, namely an unwavering commitment to quality publications, accommodating diversity and possessing an optimistic outlook.

If given another chance to begin all over again, little would have changed or another approach adopted.

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*Pisang emas dibawa berlayar
Masak sebiji di atas peti
Hutang emas dapat dibayar
Hutang budi dibawa mati*

Golden bananas are brought to sail
They ripened on top of a crate
Debts in gold are repayable
Moral debts are brought to the grave

Aziz Abdul Majid, Fazlina Mohamed Rouse, Akhiar Salleh, Professor Dato'
Seri Dr. Salleh Md. Yapaar, Puganesh Selvaraj, Associate Professor Dr.
Chan Huan Chiang, Associate Professor Dr. Ann Heylen, Associate
Professor Dr. Shakila Abdul Manan, Dr. Mohd. Farid Mohd Sharif, Dr.
Noraini Ibrahim, Dr. Idris Mansor, Zulkifli Musa

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