Turning the Page: Re-examining Standards in Academic Journal Publication

Asian Studies Editorial Staff

ASIAN STUDIES: JOURNAL of Critical Perspectives on Asia, the journal published by the Asian Center, University of the Philippines Diliman, held a roundtable, **Turning the Page: Re-examining Standards in Academic Journal Publication** last 10 February 2014 at the GT-Toyota Asian Center Auditorium, Asian Center, University of the Philippines Diliman.

Fifty editors and staff members of journals based in universities and higher education institutions in Manila, Tarlac, Cebu, Baguio, Zamboanga, and Cagayan de Oro took part in the roundtable to discuss the following:

- Current state of journal publishing in the Philippines;
- Nature of trends, problems, and challenges of journal publishing;
- The relevance of mainstream standards of scholarship, e.g., citation indices;
- The role of English as the dominant medium of scholarship;
- The place of local and regional languages in academic publications and the issue of translations;
- Online publishing: advantages and pitfalls;
- Possible avenues for alternative standards of scholarship; and
- Strategies for cooperation and joint action.

The roundtable was held in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of *Asian Studies*, which came out with its maiden issue in November 1963. But more importantly, it was held in light of certain issues that have surfaced in academic journal publishing in the Philippines and in Asia, as a whole. Questions have been raised about the hegemony of Western standards of scholarship that are perceived to have marginalized the intellectual traditions of various Asian peoples and societies. These traditions may not be 'scholarly rigorous' in terms of mainstream academia, but have been nonetheless instrumental in the rise of great Asian civilizations and are seen to still possess contemporary value.

These traditions are also repositories of the multiple experiences of local communities over several millennia and can point to possible redefinitions of academic scholarship. The revival of the famous 5th-century center of learning, Nalanda University in Bihar, India, is a case in point. Its philosophy "seeks to recover the lost connections and partnerships that existed in the region called Asia, before the onset of historical forces that led to their dissolution" (Nalanda University, n.d.) and whose vision is "to harness the best talents for the creation and dissemination of new knowledge as well as for the recovery and restoration of valuable old insights which have suffered unintended neglect" (Nalanda University, n.d.).

The roundtable featured several speakers that shared their respective experiences and thoughts on journal publishing. Dr. Ramon Guillermo, Associate Professor at the Department of Filipino and Philippine Literature, drew on Jacques Ranciere's distinction between police and politics, and explained how the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) citation system determines what are "visible" and "invisible" in the world of scholarship; it determines what counts and doesn't as a publication from the perspective of academics.

Dr. Guillermo also discussed how ISI has penetrated and determined policies in the University of the Philippines (UP). He began with the establishment of the International Publication Award for UP faculty, under which those who publish in ISI-certified journals will receive at least PhP

50,000 (just over USD 1,000) per article. This is and has been a disincentive among faculty to publish in non-ISI Philippine journals, for which there is no "comparable reward."

Moreover, the question of tenure, promotion, and performance bonuses among faculty has been hinged on getting published in ISI journals, a scenario that has sidelined and devalued the publication of books. ISI does not keep track of book publications, however much cited and bought, and thus play a subsidiary role to international journal articles, which help accrue more points for promotion. Not only have books been devalued, but the vocation of teaching itself—including inspiring students— has been sidelined, becoming a mere "plus factor" to research and publications. Another instance of the dominance of the ISI paradigm, as it were, is found in Dr. Guillermo's debate with a fellow professor, who said that the administration of the university should fall on ISI-published faculty. In response, Dr. Guillermo said that an excellent publication record does not necessarily translate into superb administrative skills, among others.

The bulk of Guillermo's lecture focused on the impact of ISI on Philippine languages and its relation to the scholarship of Filipino academics in the country. Indeed, 94.5 percent of articles in Thomson Reuters Social Science Index from 1998 to 2007 were all published in English. As such, ISI's adoption of English has had a marginalizing effect on research produced in Filipino and other Philippine languages. Because most ISI journals are in English, this forces academics to write in the language, much to the detriment of, say, German, French, or in this case, Filipino. Eugene Garfield, Guillermo noted, writes and calls for dominance of English as a language of scholarship, calling it an "evolutionary process."

Dr. Guillermo concluded his talk by sketching possible alternatives, including the adoption of a National Citation Index, like the Thai Citation Index (TCI). The TCI is a citation of research published in Thai and functions, in Guillermo's words, as a "kind of alternative and also a kind of critique of the ISI system." While publishing in Thai has decreased Thai scholars' citations abroad, it has raised national visibility, as more

people are reading Thai research articles. Morever, a national database like the TCI has resulted in the rise of publications from ASEAN researchers, whose output "appear to be much greater than those of other regions." The lesson Guillermo drew on the TCI is that "research performance evaluations should take national databases into account in parallel" to that of international databases.

Guillermo also believed that we should "encourage in Asia and Southeast Asia polyglot" science, whereby we do not allow a single language to dominate in our discourse." He agreed that journals should be internet-based and be open-access, which raises readability, if not citation rate; and that countries should push for a national citation index like that of TCI, which would pave the way for a regional database of journals for, say, ASEAN. This would help Filipino scholars relate to their ASEAN counterparts, and contribute to building an ASEAN identity, whatever that may be.

The second speaker, Dr. Albert Alejo, was editor in chief of *Asia Mindanaw,* a journal based in Ateneo de Zamboanga University. He began by saying that "the critique of the so-called Manila-dominated academic journal editing and publishing is itself a Manila-based, -sponsored, -solicited, and -subsidized intellectual project." It was with this premise that he summed up the experience of Mindanao journals, critiqued Manila-centric scholarship, and posed alternatives.

Alejo interrogated the discourse of the "national" in the Philippines, citing its inadequacies and how Mindanao has been "misrepresented, underpresented, or not represented at all in Philippines." This he did by showing how national symbols do not account for the experiences of Muslims or how textbooks stereotype or demonize the people of Mindanao. Alejo noted that this kind of scholarship is reflective of the marginalization of Mindanao in the economic and intellectual life of the Philippines. He then proceeded to give an overview of the roles and functions of Mindanao-based journals, that of academists, activists, and archivists.

As a platform for academists, these journals publish abstracts of recent M.A. and Ph.D. theses or dissertations, most of which are written in academic English. Many are printed once a year and are multidisciplinary, blending articles on social sciences and humanities with those of the hard, biological sciences. Like many journals in the Philippines, Mindanao-based journals have low budgets and employ only part-time editors and staff.

Alejo describes the functions of these Mindanao-based journals. First, many of their editors are also activists in practice; they often publish issues that are current and of vital importance to Mindanao or to their local communities. The key consideration is less on citations and peer reviews than on practical component: can the articles, for instance, help in the peace talks and peace education? These matters should also be considered when assessing journals, which should not be evaluated on the basis of citations alone.

Lastly, journals in Mindanao often function as archivists; they serve as "custodians of documents;" publish speeches of University presidents and peace agreements; preserve institutional memory and history; and reprint relevant historical documents as far back as the American or even Spanish period which are deemed important in understanding contemporary issues." Some of these documents are not scholarly in the traditional sense, but they do fulfill a vital social and political function.

Alejo called on the need to theorize on these three concerns, and not just focus on "the philosophical and epistemological foundations of academic publishing." The latter, though a critique of Western scholarship, only ends up proving "that we can enter that kind of Western academic discussion."

Dr. Aileen Baviera and Sascha Gallardo, editor in chief and managing editor, respectively, of *Asian Politics and Policy*, published by Wiley-Blackwell, narrated, among other things, the experiences and concerns involved in running an international publication. Gallardo outlined the workflow of the journal and discussed the software that APP uses in

managing content and ensuring that manuscripts do not have plagiarized content. Dr. Baviera pointed out the following concerns of editors, which those in the Philippines also share: (1) turn-around time for manuscript reviews; (2) number of reviewers; (3) qualifications of the reviewers; (4) difficulty of looking for reviewers; (5) standards of a good peer review; (6) need to reconcile contradictory reviews; (7) diplomacy in handling harsh, offensive comments from the reviewers; and the (7) extent of revisions needed.

The concerns of authors are (1) length of the review process; (2) need to respond to reviews that say "data is too old or insufficient" or the methodology is wrong; (3) pressure to cite specific authors; and (4) ideological and epistemological differences between authors and reviewers.

Last are the concerns of reviewers: (1) appropriate choice of reviewer; (2) length of paper and time to review; (3) bad writing; (4) need for constant reminders; and (5) encountering articles that plagiarize the reviewers themselves.

Later in the roundtable, the open forum and breakout sessions yielded a variety of perspectives, thoughts, and concerns of the participants. They reiterated the points raised, qualified views, posed solutions to specific problems, and/or offered more nuanced arguments. Three major proposals were generated by the participants:

1. To formally establish a guild of editors of Philippine journals in the social sciences and humanities. A suggestion was later made to include science journals as well. This guild would be the organizational venue for implementing the proposals and suggestions made in the roundtable.

2. To continue the development of a National Citation Index, already been introduced by the Commission on Higher Education and Ateneo de Naga University. The Index can help facilitate the exchange of knowledge among scholars in and of the Philippines.

3. To hold regular seminars and academic writing workshops, which would help strengthen the culture of research and publication in the Philippines.

In support of the above proposals, as well as to address other issues, the following views and opinions were expressed during the open forum and breakout sessions:

- Among others, the common problems encountered by editors throughout the journal publication process are: lack of quality submissions; the preference of senior scholars to publish abroad; poor quality of reviews, including harsh assessments and lack of constructive criticisms; delays in publication; and problems on the distribution and circulation of the journal.
- All these compound to the fact that many faculty in Philippine universities have multiple teaching and administrative responsibilities, giving them less time to do research. As one editor pointed out, he was more productive in writing research during his retirement than when he was in the academe.
- To address these concerns and strengthen the culture of research in the Philippines, some editors suggested the following: give faculty less teaching loads so they can devote more time to research; institute regular writing workshops that will encourage new scholars; and teach scholars how to handle rejections, and to give and receive constructive criticisms. Both can help create a collegial atmosphere among and between faculty members.
- There is also a need to be more aggressive and proactive in soliciting manuscripts; adding incentives to authors and reviewers to finish on time; giving adequate

time for book reviews, commentaries, and literary outputs; sharing reviewers among journals; outsourcing technical editors; and boosting the connection between editors and reviewers to help improve the quality of an article.

- One academic spoke of "ISI fundamentalism," in which promotion can be obtained only if one is published in ISI-journals. ISI cannot be dismissed wholesale, however, since Filipino scholars still need to engage with the rest of the academic world. Another described how incentives for publishing in ISI-journals have contributed to a marginalization of publication in non-English languages. Still, another commented that citations in ISI- journals do not necessarily reflect the overall quality of a journal. The Impact Factor can be deceiving, since in some cases, a high rating was only due to a specific article being cited.

- Despite the dominance, as it were, of ISI, one former editor remarked that there really was a huge difference in overall quality between ISI and non-ISI journals. At the same time, however, he added that engaging in global standards need not mean being uncritically subjected to Western standards; getting peer-reviewers from Asia can help balance Western-oriented perspectives. Some editors expressed concern over how scholastic standards can be maintained as Filipino academics pursue alternatives and complements to ISI.

- All the same, many of the editors expressed the need to correct ISI-fundamentalism or at least provide more balanced metrics. "Reward those who are published in ISI but do not penalize those who are not," is one sentiment among editors. Also, one of them spoke of the need to "democratize the social scientific and

humanities research so that more universities will have more access to it." Some wanted to continually publish in non-English languages (or in any language one is comfortable with) while providing abstracts in English. And one editor mentioned that publishing in Filipino does not preclude having a global, international audience, since, as another pointed out, visitors to their journal's website came from outside the Philippines.

- Even as they were open to the idea of a National Citation Index, the editors expressed several concerns. A National Citation Index can be used and abused, and can reproduce yet another hierarchy within the Philippine academic community; after all, how does one choose which ones are included in the index? Plus, citation can be abused in so far as one can increase the citation of a journal simply because one knows the editor or the author of an article. As one editor puts it, "citation is a game that Western academics have mastered."

- The creation of such an Index should be paralleled with institutional responses from universities and related institutions. Specifically, one of the key issues raised is to strengthen the research culture in the Philippines and to find alternatives, if not supplementary ways of doing research, while maintaining high standards and building supportive research-conducive mechanisms. For instance, not everybody in universities does research and publishes accordingly, and more students take up the non-thesis tracks for their master's degrees, thereby diminishing research outputs. Plus, there is an apparent "contradiction between the objectives of research and publication: on the one hand, writing what is significant to the researcher or the institution; on the other hand,

- aiming and guiding towards an ISI or at least to a high-standard publication." It has also been observed that many scholars do not adopt 'publishable' outputs.
- One of the suggestions to overcome all these is to use graduate school as a training ground for researchers; to standardize/nationalize research outputs that are already publishable; to explore and legitimize other forms of research, not just theses, journal articles, and the like.
- Side by side with the question of alternative forms and standards of scholarship is the issue of what counts as academic knowledge and what quality scholarship means. This dovetails with the interrogation of citations. What do citations actually prove? As one editor puts it, Impact Factor, which is based on citations, is not necessarily indicative of a journal's quality. Another suggested the need to take into account the relevance of journal to its immediate environment.
- One is reminded of Albert Alejo's description of Mindanao journals earlier in the day. He had shown how journals in the region discuss "common, considered urgent local issues such as conflict, development, gender issues." This kind of involvement in social issues needs to be also taken into account when discussing the nature of academic knowledge and quality scholarship.
- Similarly, another editor raised the question of scholarship being communicated, citing, for instance, that publishing in Filipino won't necessarily mean it's useful. Publishing alone is not enough; what is essential are different skills and techniques to facilitate communication.
- The question of open access was also brought up. Many

editors were in principle open to the idea, but they expressed concern about how it will impact the financing of journal publication, about how journals will keep track of its readers, and about how it will increase citations for non-ISI journals, and what such an increase would mean for Impact Factor.

The February 10, 2014 gathering of Philippine journal editors and publishers was the first of its kind in the country and highlighted the issues that have long challenged academic publishing in non-Western societies. It will hopefully be followed by similar events that will, in the end, chart a new beginning and a restructuring of intellectual norms and practices suited to Asian societies and peoples.

Appendix: List of participants and affiliated journals/ publications

1. Filomeno Aguilar, Jr., Editor in Chief, *Philippine Studies*, Ateneo de Manila University
2. Erlinda Alburo, Editorial Board Member, *Journal of History*, Philippine National Historical Society
3. Albert Alejo, S.J., Editor, *Asia Mindanaw*, Ateneo de Zamboanga University
4. Sherlyn Almonte-Acosta, Editor, *Education Quarterly*, UP Diliman
5. Joel Ariate, Managing Editor, *Kasarinlan*, Third World Studies Center, UP Diliman
6. Maria Ela Atienza, Editor, *Philippine Political Science Journal*, Philippine Political Science Association
7. Nelia Balgoa, *Mindanao Forum*, Mindanao State University-IIT
8. Aileen Baviera, Editor in Chief, *Asian Politics and Policy*, Wiley-Blackwell

9. Anne-di Berdin, *Philippine Journal of Social Development*, College of Social Work and Development, UP Diliman
10. Karina Bolasco, Director, Anvil Publishing
11. Marya Svetlana Camacho, Editor, *Manila Studies*, Manila Studies Association
12. Alejandro Ciencia, *The Cordillera Review*, Cordillera Studies Center, UP Baguio
13. Lisandro Claudio, Editor in Chief, *Social Transformations*, Ateneo de Manila University
14. Golda Crisostomo, Editor in Chief, *Luz y Saber*, Colegio de San Juan de Letran
15. Lino Dizon, Editor in Chief, *Alaya*, Center for Kapampangan Studies, Holy Angel University
16. Divine Endriga, Editor, *Synergeia*, University of Asia and the Pacific
17. Jayson Fajardo, Editorial Associate, *Philippine Journal of Public Administration*, NCPAG, UP Diliman
18. Sascha Gallardo, Managing Editor, *Asian Politics and Policy*, Wiley-Blackwell
19. Jose Neil Garcia, Director, University of the Philippines Press
20. Eulalio Guieb III, Editor in Chief, *Social Science Diliman*, UP Diliman
21. Ramon Guillermo, Associate Professor, Department of Filipino and Philippine Literature, UP Diliman
22. Ronel Jimenez, Managing Editor, *Antorcha*, Colegio de San Juan de Letran
23. Ricardo Jose, Editor, *Kasarinlan*, Third World Studies Center, UP Diliman
24. Romeo Lee, Editor in Chief, *Asia Pacific Social Science Review*, De La Salle University Manila

25. Rowell Madula, Managing Editor, *Malay*, De La Salle University Manila
26. Armando Malay, Jr., Editorial Advisory Board Member, *Asian Studies*, UP Diliman
27. Eric Julian Manalastas, Editor in Chief, *Review of Women's Studies*, Center for Women's Studies, UP Diliman
28. Mayel Martin, *Kritika Kultura*, Ateneo de Manila University
29. Katrina Navallo, Editorial Associate, *Asian Studies*, UP Diliman
30. Janus Isaac Nolasco, Managing Editor, *Asian Studies*, UP Diliman
31. Erlinda Paez, Editor, *Synergeia*, University of Asia and the Pacific
32. Robert Panaguiton, *Asia Mindanaw*, Ateneo de Zamboanga University
33. Raul Pertierra, Editor, *Sabangan*, Philippine Women's University Manila
34. Antoinette Raquiza, Editorial Board Member, *Asian Studies*, UP Diliman
35. Antonio Reynes, *Philippine Law Journal*, UP Diliman
36. Temario Rivera, Former editor, *Philippine Political Science Journal*, Philippine Political Science Association
37. Sandra Roldan, *Journal of English and Comparative Literature*, UP Diliman
38. Josefina Rolle, *Philippine Journal of Social Development*, College of Social Work and Development, UP Diliman
39. Hope Sabanpan-Yu, Associate Editor, *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society*, Cebuano Studies Center, University of San Carlos

40. Ramon Santos, Editor in Chief, *Musika Jornal*, UP Diliman
41. Vincenz Serrano, *Kritika Kultura*, Ateneo de Manila University
42. Eduardo Tadem, Editor in Chief, *Asian Studies*, UP Diliman
43. Teresa Encarnacion Tadem, Editorial Board Member, *Asian Studies*, UP Diliman
44. Jean Tan, Editor in Chief, *Budhi*, Ateneo de Manila University
45. Giovanni Tapang, Editor in Chief, *Diliman Review*, UP Diliman
46. Rosario Torres Yu, Editor in Chief, *Daluyan*, Sentro ng Wikang Filipino, UP Diliman
47. Margaret Udarbe-Alvarez, Editor in Chief, *Silliman University Journal*, Silliman University, Dumaguete
48. Charlie Veric, *Kritika Kultura*, Ateneo de Manila University
49. Olivia Villafuerte, *Sabangan*, Philippine Women's University Manila
50. Michiyo Yoneno-Reyes, Review Editor, *Asian Studies*, UP Diliman

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