

The *Asian Journals* Network Establishing a New Research Identity in the Humanities and Social Sciences

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ABSTRACT

In August 2022, editors of 20 Asian journals in the humanities and social sciences met virtually for the 1st Asian Journals Network Conference. Among the attendees was the editor of the *Southeast Asian Media Studies Journal (SEAMSJ)*. The Asian Journals Network (AJN) had been initiated by *Kritika Kultura* of Ateneo de Manila University and the University of Santo Tomas' *Unitas*. These two academic journals based in the Philippines were also the main organizers of the conference. The editors discussed several issues, including the identity, scope, and limitations of the AJN, as well as the state of academic journal publishing in Asia, as it is influenced by a Western neoliberal publication culture that favors metrics, impact factors, and publishing in the English language. Since this academic culture puts many Asian scholars at a disadvantage, the AJN seeks to foster new ways of knowledge production and dissemination. The conference established a strong sense of community among the participating journal editors and energized the network. On 15 November 2022, the editors of 20 Asian journals formalized their partnership by signing a Memorandum of Understanding. Thus, legitimizing the existence of the AJN and pledged long-term collaboration and knowledge exchange among the member journals. This essay introduces the Asian Journals Network to a wider audience, outlines its possible future role in the humanities and social sciences in Asia, reviews and assesses salient issues and outcomes of the conference, and discusses the possible impact the membership in the network might have on the *SEAMSJ*.

Keywords: academic publishing, Asian journal, humanities, metrics, Scopus, social sciences

INTRODUCTION

The 1st Asian Journals Network Conference took place virtually from 29 to 30 August 2022. It was initiated and organized by the Filipino journals *Unitas* of the University of Santo Tomas and *Kritika Kultura* of Ateneo de Manila University. Significantly, 2022 marks the year of *Unitas'* centennial, which played a role in the decision to initiate a community of academic Asian journals. The editors of twenty Asian journals in the humanities and social sciences – among them the editor of the *Southeast Asian Media Studies Journal* – were invited to introduce their journals to the network. The conference served the purpose of laying a foundation for the network and paving the way for a long-term agreement and fruitful cooperation among the journals' editorial teams. On 15 November 2022, i.e., less than three months after the inaugural conference, the journal representatives met again to formalize their membership in the Asian Journals Network by signing a Memorandum of Understanding. Since the *Southeast Asian Media Studies Journal* was among the signatories, it is henceforth an official member of this novel academic commune.

This essay has three main parts. The first part engages with a survey that the journal editors had to complete before the conference. It also critically reviews and expands on the conference opening remarks by Prof. Dr. Maria Luisa Torres-Reyes and Dr. Vincenz Serrano. The second part appraises and elaborates on the keynote lecture "Reclaiming the Region: Asian Journals Network" by Prof. Melanie Budianta and the special presentation "The Asian Journals Network: A Question about Identity and Ethics" by Dr. Paolo Bolaños. The final part reviews the follow-up meeting with the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding and summarizes the key outcomes of the event.

QUESTIONS ABOUT QUALITY

In early August 2022, Ateneo de Manila University invited representatives of Asian journals in the humanities and social sciences to attend the first Asian Journals Network Conference to be held later that month. Under the headline "Journals Unite to Promote a Truly Global Scholarly Culture," the conference was announced, declaring that "the Asian Journals Network (AJN) is aimed at creating a 'hub' for journals in literature and related disciplines based and published in Asia." It also declared the network to be based on an initiative that "aims to facilitate cooperation among international journals based and published in Asia in areas of journal publishing such as peer review assistance through a shared pool of reviewers, streamlined promotions, international representation in conferences and fora concerning knowledge production and dissemination, creation of an indexing body in the region, and more" (Ateneo de Manila University 2022). The editors were invited to share their insights into quality assurance, challenges and opportunities of journal publishing, and experiences with the influence of Western-centric academic culture on journals published on the Asian continent.

Besides the two journals hosting the conference, eighteen other humanities and social sciences journals from China, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, and Taiwan were announced as participants. These journals had been invited to join the network prior to the announcement. Based on the strength of its application, the *Southeast Asian Media Studies Journal* also received an invitation. This is notable because it would become the network's only journal tied to an association rather than a university and be the only journal with a strong focus on Media Studies.

Before the conference, all editors completed a questionnaire. The survey questions and the editors' responses served to direct the panel and plenary discussions, as well as to build the intellectual foundation of the network. The first group of questions enquired about each journal's founding principles, history, vision, mission, long-term objectives, disciplinary focus, modes of access, modes of dissemination, the relationship between costs and quality of production, as well as administrative structure. Furthermore, it asked about the professional development and monetary compensation for editorial staff, marketing efforts target reader orientation, the role of the international editorial board, and career opportunities for contributors.

The second set of questions asked about the contribution to disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge production, dissemination, and consumption, a comparison to other journals in the same academic discipline, the criteria for selection of manuscripts and guarantee of quality and credibility through double-blind peer-review, as well as the originality and readability of the published articles. This set of questions then continued to ask about the promotion and support of academic activities, response to expectations of universities and the academic community, and the editorial team's stance on current academic culture and the metrics system.

With regard to concerns about the Western influence on global academia, particularly in the area of journal publishing, one of the questions was preceded by a politically charged statement arguing that

the international system of knowledge is controlled and dominated by the Western publications, including journals, even if that knowledge is about the non-West. Among the implications are that the questions, methods, values, norms of scholarship, interests, and perspectives that the journals from the West focus on are those that are relevant to the West, attract and repel non-western scholars' contributions and language access, and limit access to funds, resulting in knowledge production, dissemination, circulation, consumption, and scholarly and intellectual exchange that are uneven and lopsided. To top it all, the major international databases of many abstracting and reference services are based in the West. (Asian Journals Network 2022a)

The sentiments voiced in this statement were picked up during the conference and may likely become central to the Asian Journal Network's future identity and stance on journal metrics. This notion will be elaborated on below.

UNITY ON THE ACADEMIC PLAYING FIELD

The first conference began with a welcoming address by Reverend Brother Jannel N. Abogado, Vice-Rector for Research and Innovation at the University of Santo Tomas. His well-wishes to the participants were followed by the opening remarks by Prof. Dr. Maria Luisa Torres-Reyes who is the current Editor-in-chief of *Unitas*, the former Editor-in-chief of *Kritika Kultura*, and the main initiator of the Asian Journals Network. She explained that the University of Santo Tomas was founded in 1611, making it the oldest university in Asia and that *Unitas* was first published in 1922, i.e., one hundred years ago, long before the existence of online journals, metrics, and databases such as Scopus. She further explained that *Unitas* is an interdisciplinary journal with contributions in English, Spanish, and Filipino languages and that its Spanish name means "unity, or the state of being one" (Unitas 2022a, 00:24:20), which refers to the unity of scholars in different disciplines. She then quoted a passage from the editorial of the founding issue in which the editors propagate a new beginning for scholarship across disciplines.

By sharing her insights into the history of *Unitas*, Prof. Torres-Reyes sought to invoke a spirit of unity and readiness for collaboration among the conference participants. She also voiced her vision for the network, namely, as a group of journals that work together in "maintaining excellence and trying to build a level playing field through collaboration" (Unitas 2022a, 00:27:40) because the current playing field was uneven for historical reasons. She expressed her vision of a democratization of knowledge production and dissemination, as well as her hopes that the *Asian Journals Network* would become a new cultural force in academic publishing across Asia, just like the founding of *Unitas* had marked a new dawn for academic dialogue in the Philippines one hundred years before.

REFLECTIONS ON CONJUNCTURE

The second opening remarks were given by Dr. Vincenz Serrano, Editor-in-chief of *Kritika Kultura*, a cultural studies journal housed by Ateneo de Manila University. He referred to the media theorist Stuart Hall's well-known 2004 live lecture "Through the Prism of an Intellectual Life" (Stuart Hall Foundation 2021). In it, Hall explored the meaning of the concept of "conjuncture," which is commonly used to describe a present situation viewed as the resulting combination of events and circumstances. Hall expressed it as follows:

I would say that the object of my study is not sociology, or cultural studies, or anthropology, or literature, et cetera. The object of my intellectual work, insofar as I am an intellectual, is what I would call the present conjuncture. It's the history of the present. It's what is the condition in which we now find ourselves, and how did we get there? And what forces are creating it in order that we might understand how I might do something about it. (Media Education Foundation 2020)

Serrano further explained Hall's advocating for a deeper investigation into one's present conjuncture, because it is experienced as conflicting. One has to become aware of one's conjuncture and in its context examine the conditions and determinants that have given rise to one's views about politics, culture, and society. This leads to the realization that the factors determining the present situation are not fixed but flexible. The future is open.

To Serrano, Hall's reflections on conjuncture apply to the Asian Journals Network Conference and the conditions surrounding journal publishing. He hoped they would guide the editors' forthcoming discussions about "the difficulties and possibilities of knowledge production and journal production" (Unitas 2022a, 00:31:40). He concluded by arguing that the positions of Asia and the global south contribute to what he considers precarious, i.e., unstable, conditions of academic publishing. Nevertheless, despite precarity, he also sees possibilities of dialogue and new forms of academic communities such as the Asian Journals Network.

RECLAIMING THE REGION

In her keynote lecture titled "Reclaiming the Region: Asian Journals Network," Prof. Melanie Budianta of Universitas Indonesia started by explaining how the Asian region used to be constructed in the imagination of European travelers, navigators, traders, and colonizers, not least because many national borders in Asia were drawn first by Europeans and later by Americans. Information would flow from the northern to the southern hemisphere for centuries, and this was still the norm today. She expressed her hopes that the Asian region would find systems of knowledge production that are different from the dominant neoliberal system of Scopus ranking and the resulting competition today.

Budianta mentioned the Thailand-based Asian Scholarship Foundation (ASF), the Asian Public Intellectuals (API) Fellowships Program, as well as the Malaysia-based Southeast Asian Studies Regional Exchange Program Repository (SEASREP), as alternative routes established by regional entities. She also referred to the Consortium of Inter-Asia Cultural Studies (IACS) Institutions, which organizes summer schools, teaching camps, and conferences, and the Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Journal, which over the last twenty years has sought to make Asian scholarship grow and to balance

the traffic of knowledge. She posited that all these entities have not been as successful as was hoped in their endeavors to change the modes of knowledge production. According to her, these modes were still rooted in Western neoliberal ideology:

These are efforts, these are alternatives, to balance the traffic of knowledge and also to support Asian scholarship from below. But has all this changed the modes [...] and the politics of knowledge production? They have not actually changed it, because today, we see that the modes of dissemination of scholarly work are still very much framed in neo-liberal thinking. We are very familiar with all these keywords: citation, H-Index, Q1-Q4 ranking, and competition. Each university is pressured to check the university ranking in various ranking systems. They are pushed into internationalization. And that kind of pressure is felt by the scholar who lectures on the ground. It is a kind of publish-or-perish phenomenon. (Unitas 2022a, 00:43:20)

A close look at these five organizations beyond the keynote lecture is warranted. The Asian Scholarship Foundation, a Thai non-government organization under royal patronage, houses *The Asian Scholar*, an interdisciplinary e-journal that publishes research articles on current concerns of realities in Asia (Asian Scholarship Foundation). However, the ASF and its journal publication appear to have been inactive for some years. The Asian Public Intellectuals (API) Fellowships Program was founded by The Nippon Foundation in 2000. It has five academic partner organizations in Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand, and is also active in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. Their Thai partner is the Institute of Asian Studies at Chulalongkorn University. The program's objective is to promote research among Asian intellectuals, foster the growth of public intellectual spaces, stimulate collaboration and research across Asian borders, support all disciplines, and share best practices (Institute of Asian Studies – Chulalongkorn University). Whether the API has been successful in these endeavors cannot be assessed here; however, it is noteworthy that the organization does not have an active website and communicates only via Facebook. Finally, the Southeast Asian Studies Regional Exchange Program "aims to promote Southeast Asian studies through various research, study and exchange grants and establish a network of scholars in the region through universities and other channels" (Southeast Asian Studies Regional Exchange Program). These are noble goals, but since the program appears to have been inactive for several years, its original impact is unclear. Thus, these three organizations may indeed only have limited success in shaping directions of research and knowledge production across Asia sustainably.

On the other hand, the Consortium of Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Institutions is active and has been more effective. It merged with the Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Society (IACS) in 2019. The twelve consortium members include departments in various humanities disciplines in universities in Australia, China, India, Indonesia, Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan (Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Society 2022a). The

consortium aims to foster an international exchange of knowledge, research, and best practice between academic institutions in Asia. Its goals include the development of academic exchange, the creation of academic research opportunities, the promotion of joint research projects, and the establishment of a joint postgraduate program (Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Society 2022b). The Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Journal is a well-established journal by IACS and is published by Taylor & Francis. The homepage of the journal includes relevant explanations of journal citation metrics and an important message of caution that echoes some sentiments of Asian Journals Network stakeholders:

Journal metrics can be a useful tool for readers, as well as for authors who are deciding where to submit their next manuscript for publication. However, any one metric only tells a part of the story of a journal's quality and impact. Each metric has its limitations which means that it should never be considered in isolation, and metrics should be used to support and not replace qualitative review. We strongly recommend that you always use a number of metrics, alongside other qualitative factors such as a journal's aims & scope, its readership, and a review of past content published in the journal. In addition, a single article should always be assessed on its own merits and never based on the metrics of the journal it was published in. (Inter-Asian Cultural Studies 2022)

This consortium with its flagship journal may well serve as a role model for the Asian Journals Network in terms of high-level cooperation and strong objectives to support knowledge production and dissemination.

Budianta made several more important observations. For instance, she stated that less than twenty percent of Asian journals in the Arts and Social Sciences are indexed by Scopus, with her home country Indonesia lagging far behind in producing research in internationally indexed journals. Each country has its indexing system, but journals that are not indexed internationally or even nationally are lost in the competition of universities under pressure to climb national and international rankings. She concluded that this fierce competition has resulted in a lack of cooperation among institutions and individuals.

According to Budianta, the journals present at the conference wanted to maintain their international ranking and to collaborate inter-regionally to find alternatives to the dominant system that favors impact factors. Thus, she asked whether we could change this current situation by finding alternative ways of knowledge distribution, and whether and how it would be possible to reclaim the region. She did not advocate exclusionism, i.e., supporting only research about Asia, by Asians, for Asians, but promoted unity through creating a mutually beneficial network among Asian journals for their mutual growth. The humanitarian spirit was at the core of our network; hence, she supported ideas of a welcoming atmosphere, a spirit of collegiality, and improvement of performance through mutual

support. Budianta finally reminded the researchers to collaborate and co-produce knowledge in a network that values unity in order to have a positive impact on Asian societies.

THE TYRANNY OF METRICS

The second conference day began with the presentations of the third panel. They were followed by the special talk “The Asian Journals Network: A Question about Identity and Ethics,” given by Dr. Paolo Bolaños, Editor-in-Chief of the philosophy journal *Kritike*. Bolaños began by pointing out the considerable differences in the scope of the journals participating at the conference, yet he also emphasized the shared joys in and unifying potential of the editors’ challenges in their academic labor, thus echoing the call to unity voiced by Torres-Reyes and Serrano. He went on to explore the current landscape of academic culture under the pressure of journal metrics, defined such metrics as the result of Western neoliberal ideology, and pointed out the inextricable link between the Asian Journal Network’s stance on metrics and its future identity. To Bolaños, the journals’ editorial teams must first self-reflect and elevate the conversation about academic labor to then have a chance of impacting academic institutions’ perceptions and their funding of the journals. He saw such introspection as bothersome but necessary because it would ultimately lead to an enhanced understanding of one’s own identity.

What could be an avenue away from metrics and the academic market economy toward an evenly balanced academic culture that focuses on the quality of output rather than the quantification of that output? What could a strong identity of the Asian Journals Network look like? Bolaños made the salient point that the network’s identity is connected to its ideological, political, and ethical stance on journal metrics. The network, therefore, has to find and refine this position. This would include asking questions about accountability, quality assurance, assessment, and bibliometrics. The latter is concerned with the number of citations that affect the impact factor of a journal.

Bolaños made his opinion about the issue clear when he introduced the book *The Tyranny of Metrics* by Jerry Z. Muller (2018), in which the author posits that most organizations today – in business, medicine, government, and not least in education – are imbued with the delusion that human performance must be quantified because it is believed to be the preeminent means to measure the quality of scientific rigor and is, therefore, the right path to success. Muller then argues that the fixation on measuring is detrimental to the quality of scientific knowledge production and has led to a tyranny of metrics that is afflicting much of people’s professional lives.

Based on his mistrust of journal metrics systems, Bolaños advocated a paradigm shift, i.e., a distancing of oneself from the ideology of metrics because, in his view, bibliometrics contribute to homogenization

and bias, counteracting the diversity of scholarship. He, therefore, advocated the worldwide initiative The Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA), which has been signed by over 22,000 institutions and individuals to date. This initiative “recognizes the need to improve the ways in which the outputs of scholarly research are evaluated” as it seeks “to advance practical and robust approaches to research assessment globally and across all scholarly disciplines” (Declaration of Research Assessment 2022).

Bolaños then spoke about the European Research Council (ERC), which had been established by the European Commission. He suggested that this council had banned the mentioning of “the journal impact factor” but he did not elaborate on the work of the council. However, a look into the “Comparative Scientometric Assessment of the Results of ERC Funded Projects: Alternative Metrics Report (D7)” gives important insights into the concept of altmetrics:

The set of metrics referred to as altmetrics are mainly based on activity on social media and web 2.0 platforms focused on scholarly contents and scholars. They were introduced as new filters alternative to peer review and new measures of research output and impact alternative to citations (Priem, Taraborelli, Groth, & Neylon, 2010). They were also motivated by the aim of considering a wider range of research outputs and metrics to steer against the oversimplification of equating research productivity and impact with the number of publications and citations (Piwowar, 2013). Alternative to the number of peer-reviewed journal articles, research products could, for example, include blog posts, software code and datasets, and impact measurements would not be limited to citations but consider the number of times a scientific document (or any other research product) is mentioned, discussed, saved or used on a social media or networking platform such as Twitter, Facebook, Mendeley, figShare or Github. The exclusion of ‘traditional’ bibliometric indicators is usually the common denominator of altmetrics (Priem et al., 2010). (European Research Council 2015, 3)

While the European Research Council’s findings about altmetrics are thought-provoking for stakeholders of Asian journals, it remains to be seen whether altmetrics have the potential to become a viable and sustainable alternative to the currently dominant forms of measuring and quantifying the impact of academic knowledge production.

Bolaños continued by introducing the London-based Open Humanities Press (OHP) to the audience. This organization publishes seven academic journals, among them *Film-Philosophy* and the *International Journal of Žižek Studies*, as well as six monograph series. “OHP is an international community of scholars, editors and readers with a focus on critical and cultural theory. We have operated as an independent volunteer initiative since 2006, promoting open access scholarship in journals, and books and exploring

new forms of scholarly communication” (Open Humanities Press 2022). While Open Humanities Press could become a role model for the Asian Journals Network of (metrics-)free academic publishing, such a role model would again be rooted in Anglo-European rather than Asian cultures of academic research.

As another example of a comparatively new force in the humanities and social sciences, Bolaños named the International Consortium of Critical Theory Programs (ICCTP). Since he advocated the idea of the Asian Journals Network to eventually become a consortium, and Budianta in her keynote speech referred to the Consortium of Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Institutions, it is worth taking a brief look at the ICCTP. A grant by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, which supports programs in the arts, cultures, higher education, and the humanities, enabled the establishment of the ICCTP in 2016. The Consortium

seeks to document, connect, and support the new and various programs and projects that now represent critical theory across the globe. Housed in the Program in Critical Theory at UC Berkeley, it has established an active network of over 500 programs, projects, centers, and institutes from almost all regions of the globe and 47 countries, which now constitutes the largest international network in the humanities located in the UC system. [...] The Consortium aims to establish the new global contours of critical theory today, supporting critical thought both inside and outside the university in the arts, humanities, social sciences, and science and technology studies. [...] The Consortium was founded and co-directed by Professors Judith Butler (UC Berkeley) and Penelope Deutscher (Northwestern University) during its first phase (2016-2020). (International Consortium of Critical Theory Programs 2022)

Bolaños pondered the questions: Should the Asian Journals Network morph into a commune, a database, or a consortium? What would be the implications of each identity? Further questions that arise from the ones above are, first, whether the stakeholders of the network will voice the ambition and realize the potential to grow the organization to such dimensions that it could become a true philosophical force and, second, whether this force could initiate a broad shift away from traditional metrics systems, thereby impacting academic knowledge production in the humanities and social sciences around the Asian region. Persuasiveness, perseverance, and much funding would be decisive factors for such high ambitions to succeed. While Bolaños’ presentation raised many questions that could not be answered by him alone or the plenum in the limited timeframe of the conference, it became obvious that the Asian Journal’s Network has to negotiate its identity and find its direction in the years to come.

A NEW SENSE OF UNITY

The plenary session that followed was invigorated by the participants' fresh insights into the complex issues that journals have to grapple with and by a new sense of unity. They had gained a deeper understanding of the dubiousness and underlying forces of journal metric systems. Furthermore, they had become more sensitive to questions about quality assurance, quantification, and empowerment in academia and understood that their answers would shape the unity of the network. They went on to discuss the scope and limitations of the network, the formation of committees, and possible activities such as conferences and webinars, as well as opportunities for mutual support. Torres-Reyes provided an overview of the participants' answers to the pre-conference survey. Their answers touched on a vast number of issues, which could be honed down to the following: the relationship of each journal with the network and the network with each journal, indexing and citation, the network's identity, quality control, entry criteria for new journals seeking membership in the network, marketing, promotion, visibility, and collaboration.

The conversation shifted to drafting a Memorandum of Understanding as a formal establishment of the Asian Journals Network and the actual contents of such an official agreement. Key issues of the discussion about the agreement and the identity of the network concerned the appropriateness of the name "Asian Journals Network" itself, a possible change of the name if the network became a consortium, disciplinary issues, the network's scope of its activities, membership promotion, and the inclusion of journals published in languages other than English. Finally, a draft of the Memorandum of Understanding was agreed on and it was decided that a meeting for the signing would take place in a couple of months. Thus, the 1st Asian Journals Network conference came to a successful conclusion.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

On 15 November 2022, the representatives of twenty Asian journals convened virtually for the second official meeting of the Asian Journals Network. They resumed their discussions about the scope and future direction of the network and signed a Memorandum of Understanding in their shared endeavor to join forces in this new community of academic journals.

The Memorandum of Understanding states that all parties have "agreed to form a consortium that shall be known as the 'Asian Journals Network' ('AJN' or the 'Network')." The parties "intend to promote their relations through conferences, forums, workshops, and related activities that advance capacity building, discourses, and practices in the area of scholarly publishing in the humanities and related disciplines" (Asian Journals Network 2022b). The document also states the following:

The parties have agreed to participate in projects that will benefit the Network in terms of:

1. Developing a website representing AJN's interests, projects, and constituents
2. Advancing Asian identities, interests, and scholarship
3. Developing editorial and production protocols that include, but are not limited to, peer evaluation, editorial board membership, and increasing contributor and reviewer bases
4. Developing practices that improve promotion, marketing, and visibility
5. Developing protocols that expand network membership
6. Indexing and citation processes, or alternatives to these, i.e., database
7. Developing joint projects and exchanges that help advance the above interests (Asian Journals Network 2022b)

The twenty signatories are listed in alphabetical order:

1. ***Akda: The Asian Journal of Literature, Culture, Performance*** (De La Salle University Manila, Philippines; Prof. Dinah T. Roma, Editor-in-Chief; Prof. Carlos M. Piocos III, Managing Editor)
2. ***Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies*** (National Taiwan Normal University, Taiwan; Prof. Justin Prystash, Editor-in-Chief)
3. ***Dialektika: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, dan Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia*** (Universitas Kristen Indonesia, Indonesia; Dr. Masda Surti Simatupang, Editor-in-Chief)
4. ***Foreign Literature Studies*** (Central China Normal University, China; Prof. Su Hui, Editor-in-Chief)
5. ***Forum for World Literature Studies*** (Zhejiang University, China; Prof. Gexin Yang, Assoc. Editor-in-Chief)
6. ***Frontiers of Narrative Studies*** (Shanghai Jiao Tong University, China; Prof. Biwu Shang, Editor-in-Chief)
7. ***Interdisciplinary Studies of Literature*** (Zhejiang University, China; Prof. Gexin Yang, Editorial Director)
8. ***Journal of Language and Literature*** (Universitas Sanata Dharma, Indonesia; Dr. Arina Isti'anah, Editor-in-Chief)
9. ***Kinaadman: A Journal of the Southern Philippines*** (Xavier University – Ateneo de Cagayan, Philippines; Dr. Arlene Yandug, Editor-in-Chief)
10. ***Kritika Kultura*** (Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines; Dr. Vincenz Serrano, Editor-in-Chief)
11. ***Kritike: An Online Journal of Philosophy*** (University of Santo Tomas, Philippines; Professor Paolo A. Bolaños, Editor-in-Chief)
12. ***Mobility Humanities*** (Konkuk University, South Korea; Prof. Inseop Shin, Editor-in-Chief)

13. ***Paradigma: Jurnal Kajian Budaya*** (Universitas Indonesia, Indonesia; Prof. Rahayu Surtiati Hidayat, Editor-in-Chief)
14. ***Philippiniana Sacra*** (University of Santo Tomas, Philippines; Fr. Jesus M. Miranda, Jr., OP, PhD, Editor)
15. ***Poetika: Journal Ilmu Sastra*** (Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia; Prof. Wening Udasmoro, Editor-in-Chief)
16. ***Southeast Asian Media Studies Journal*** (Southeast Asian Media Studies Association; Dr. Alexander J. Klemm, Editor-in-Chief)
17. ***Southeast Asian Studies*** (Kyoto University, Japan; Dr. Nathan Badenoch, Chief Editor)
18. ***Unitas*** (University of Santo Tomas, Philippines; Prof. Maria Luisa Torres Reyes, Editor-in-Chief)
19. ***Wacana, Journal of the Humanities of Indonesia*** (University of Indonesia, Indonesia; Dr. Lilie M. Roosman, Editor-in-Chief)
20. ***The Wenshan Review of Literature and Culture*** (National Chengchi University, Taiwan; Dr. Yih-Dau Wu, Editor)

CONCLUSION

After the inaugural conference in August and the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding in November 2022, the Asian Journals Network is now an official group of twenty academic journals on a joint journey to establish a new research identity in the humanities and social sciences. They are based in China, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, and Taiwan, and cover a wide spectrum of disciplines, including Asian Studies, Cultural Studies, Critical Theory, Languages, Literature, Performance Arts, Philosophy, and Media Studies. Thus, most journal headquarters may be far apart geographically, but they are related in their disciplinary perspectives and united in their dissatisfaction with the pressures that academics and institutions in Asia have to endure because of journal metrics systems.

Certainly, the network has yet to find its identity and begin collaboration in earnest, yet steps to these ends have already been taken. In early 2023, the network will launch committees on best practices, publicity, special projects, promotion, and membership. These committees will be steered by the objectives given in the Memorandum of Understanding, i.e., to develop a website, to foster scholarship and best editorial practices, to promote the network and individual journals, to expand the membership base, to seek alternative ways of indexing and citation to commonly used databases, and to collaborate on mutually important projects. Thus, there must be no concern that the cooperation will consist of empty symbolic gestures; instead, there should be confidence that the journals will collaborate on many fronts and generate positive, tangible results.

What does the *Southeast Asian Media Studies Journal* benefit from being a member of the network? Every journal, including the *Southeast Asian Media Studies Journal*, will keep its independence. It may be the most independent journal in the network because it is the only one managed by an association rather than being housed in a university department and subject to institutional pressures. Furthermore, it is the only journal devoted exclusively to advancing media studies in Southeast Asia. This makes its place in the group quite exceptional. Whether and to what extent its membership in the network will affect its identity, research output, and modes of quality assurance remains to be seen. Once the committees of the Asian Journals Network have been formed and become effective, and provided the *Southeast Asian Media Studies Journal* can ensure its long-term active involvement, then the quality of internal management processes and the quality of its academic knowledge production should be affected positively, which in turn should benefit all stakeholders of the journal and the Southeast Asian Media Studies Association.

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