

## Celebrating 25 years of Asia Pacific management research

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By the time this last issue of Volume 24 of the *Asia Pacific Journal of Management* reaches you, it probably will be early 2008. It is time to celebrate the 25th anniversary of our *Journal*, which published its Volume 1 in 1983. While it is difficult to accurately pinpoint the birth date of Asia Pacific management research, it is reasonable to argue that as an empirically verifiable event, the founding of *APJM* in 1983 can be regarded as the formal launch (perhaps a “blast off”) of this research.

Before 1983, Asia Pacific management research had existed on a limited scale (if it had existed at all), lacked an outlet, and had little influence. Thanks to a group of visionary scholars at the National University of Singapore who overcame tremendous barriers (see Lee, 2007 and Lim, 2007 in this issue and Table 1), Asia Pacific management research has had a home for 25 years. This proud history of 25 years has made *APJM* the world’s longest running academic journal of management that is in Asia, on Asia, and of Asia. Sponsored by the Asia Academy of Management since 2002, *APJM* is also the world’s most reputable and prestigious journal focusing on Asia Pacific management research—a claim that is contested by none.

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**Table 1** *APJM's* Editors-in-Chief<sup>a</sup>

Names	Years
Khin Maung Kyi	1983–1988
Lee Soo Ann and Pan Eng Fong	1988–1990
Wong Kie Ann	1990–1992
Lim Kian Guan	1992–1995
Tan Kong Yam	1995–1998
Kulwant Singh	1999–2003
Andrew Delios	2004–2006
Mike W. Peng	2007–2009 (current term)

<sup>a</sup> All Editors-in-Chief (also known as Chief Editors until 2004) were from the National University of Singapore, except Mike W. Peng, who is at the University of Texas at Dallas.

### The world in 1983

It is hard to imagine what the world looked like in 1983. At that time, Japan was on the rise economically. China was hardly an economic power. Britain and China had just concluded an agreement (in late 1982) for the 1997 handover of Hong Kong. The agreement immediately triggered a mass migration out of Hong Kong and a currency crisis in the colony, the remedy of which was to install Hong Kong's now famous currency board. South Korea made headlines only when one of its airliners was shot down by the now-defunct Soviet Union. India was not on the radar screen of serious managers (and management scholars).

Beyond Asia, the global oil price was at \$30 per barrel, which was considered unacceptably high at that time in light of the price of \$5 per barrel ten years before in 1973 (it is \$70 per barrel now). The personal computer had just been commercialized, and much of Asia was not computer literate. Of course, the cell (mobile) phone and the Internet had not been invented yet. One interesting 1983 event that had strong ramifications on how the rest of the world viewed management in the Asia Pacific was Toyota's joint venture with General Motors (GM) to manufacture small cars in California at a former GM plant. This was Toyota's first entry into the United States using foreign direct investment (FDI). How Toyota managed operations at a place where GM had failed started to demonstrate, under intense media scrutiny, both the uniqueness of Asian management and its transferability elsewhere.

In a world of US- and Western-centric management research, it was the rise of world-class Japanese firms such as Toyota that made scholars increasingly aware that Asian management not only existed, but also deserved special attention. In the 1980s, as Asia became a leading destination for FDI, a growing scholarly and practitioner interest in knowing more about Asian management started to emerge.

As part of that emerging intellectual movement in the early 1980s, *APJM* was founded to probe deeper into Asian management. Naturally, cultural differences became a leading topic. The early 1980s was an exciting period for cross-cultural research, spearheaded by the publication of Hofstede's (1980) *Culture's Consequences* and his contribution to Volume 1 of *APJM* (Hofstede, 1984). It was Asia that prompted Hofstede and his colleagues to realize the potential Western bias in their work, which had identified the four cultural dimensions reported in the 1980 book. Consequently, based on an indigenous Chinese language questionnaire that was

translated into multiple languages, Hofstede and others later identified a fifth cultural dimension—first labeled Confucian dynamism and later re-labeled long term orientation—that would have been missed had they not dived deeper into Asian realities (see Hofstede, 2007 in this issue for a fascinating account of this process of intellectual discovery). This is the kind of contribution that Asia Pacific management scholars aspire to make and that *APJM* is interested in publishing—Asia-based, globally relevant.

## Looking back

Looking back, Asia Pacific management research has graduated from its childhood (Ang, 1997) and experienced the exciting upsurge and growing pains associated with its adolescence (Pleggenkuhle-Miles, Aroul, Sun, & Su, 2007 in this issue). There is no doubt that the accumulation of knowledge and wisdom captured in the 25 years of *APJM* publications has made our community of scholars and practitioners wiser and more sophisticated.

For example, until the 1997 financial crisis hit the region, the usual word attached after “Asian” had been “miracle.” In search of answers to explain the “Asian economic miracle,” many scholars, ranging from those working for the World Bank (1993) to those publishing in *APJM*, identified “Asian values” as a leading cause of the Asian economic miracle. Never mind that the same “Asian values” (such as Confucianism) had been criticized by Max Weber 100 years ago as a leading cause of Asian backwardness. However, winds change. By 1997, much of Asia was engulfed in a financial crisis. Then—guess what?—the same “Asian values” were criticized, by both Asian and non-Asian commentators, for having *caused* such hardship (!). Respect, loyalty, and reciprocity became inertia, cronyism, and corruption. The paragons of “Asian values,” such as leading business families and business groups, suddenly became regarded as parasites and indicative of what was wrong in Asia (Peng & Delios, 2006: 398).

As someone who lived in the region throughout the painful crisis (I taught “Asian business” at the Chinese University of Hong Kong during 1997–98), I personally struggled with—but eventually benefited from—the crisis. This was because I realized how one-sided and superficial some of our research had been. My own soul-searching was driven by my immediate needs to find credible readings and discussion topics for students in my Asian business course in the fall semester of 1997, during which every week a bunch of readings on the “miracle” became totally obsolete as the crisis deepened. I came to the realization that if we as a field aspired to advance, more balanced and more rigorous research would be a must. Instead of proposing simplistic and linear relationships (such as “Asian values” are always good or bad), we needed to address the more challenging but potentially more rewarding questions on whether cultural values, institutional developments, and firm strategies change over time, under different contexts, in different parts of Asia (and the rest of the world). In the long run, the crisis (hopefully) made me a better and more balanced scholar, by motivating me to embark on such research (for recent examples, see Lee, Peng, & Barney, 2007; Peng, Lee, & Wang, 2005; Peng, Wang, & Jiang, 2008; Young, Peng, Ahlstrom, Bruton, & Jiang, 2008).

I have no doubt that my own experience is not alone in the field. My experience is simply a reflection of the evolution of the larger field in search of better and more informed answers trying to keep up with the dynamic and fast-changing world of Asia Pacific business. For example, one stream of work on Asia Pacific business has moved away from simple culture-based explanations and explored the impact of institutions (which certainly include culture as an informal institution, but the definition of institutions is much broader) on a variety of areas such as diversification strategies (Chang, 2006; Peng & Delios, 2006), knowledge management (Bruton, Dess, & Janney, 2007), venture capital (Ahlstrom, Bruton, & Yeh, 2007; Wright, 2007), and network effectiveness (Carney, 2005; Dacin & Delios, 2005). In the area of research on product and geographic diversification, Andrew Delios (*APJM*'s previous Editor-in-Chief) and I have made arguments elsewhere that Asia Pacific research has made the most significant contributions to what we call an *institution-based* view of diversification strategies (Peng & Delios, 2006: 393).

### Growing impact and reach

A short editorial such as this one does not have space to undertake a systematic analysis of the impact and reach of research published in *APJM* in its 25 year history (see Lau, 2007 and Pleggenkuhle-Miles et al., 2007 in this issue for more details). Here, however, I would like to share some recent anecdotal evidence that crossed my desk since I took over a year ago as Editor-in-Chief (summarized in Table 2).

First, *APJM* papers are being cited by major United Nations publications, such as *The World Investment Report* series published by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). *The World Investment Report 2005* cited Ernst (2000) on knowledge outsourcing (UNCTAD, 2005). *The World Investment Report*

**Table 2** Recent *APJM* accomplishments<sup>a</sup>

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#### Accomplishments

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Being cited by major United Nations publications—*World Investment Report 2005* cited Ernst (2000) and *World Investment Report 2006* cited Li (2003), Peng, Au, and Wang (2001), and Ragayah (1999)

Being included as “noteworthy articles from business journals” by the *Economist* (May 2007)—Hill (2007) and Lee and Oh (2007) were the only two articles from an academic journal that were profiled; the other six articles profiled in the same issue were all from practitioner journals such as *Harvard Business Review* and *McKinsey Quarterly*, each of which had one article being profiled

Being reprinted by major publications (Kedia, Mukherjee, & Lahiri, 2006; Peng, 2002) and used in major executive training programs (Lee & Oh, 2007)

Being ranked as a second-tier journal based on a five-tier scheme by the UK-based Association of Business Schools (Harvey, Morris, & Kelly, 2007)—worldwide, only six first-tier journals in the “general management” and “international business” categories are ranked ahead of *APJM*.

Being ranked as the leading outlet (by number of published articles) on two important topics: (1) product and geographic diversification in Asia Pacific (Peng & Delios, 2006) and (2) empirical research on China (Quer, Claver, & Rienda, 2007)

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<sup>a</sup> These accomplishments are not based on any systematic survey; they merely reflect anecdotal evidence that recently crossed my desk. For example, some *APJM* contributors informed me of their accomplishments. I am sure there are other *APJM* papers that have a significant impact in ways that I am not aware of. I encourage all *APJM* contributors to email me of the *post-publication* impact and influence of their work so that we can properly acknowledge and celebrate such accomplishments in the future.

2006 cited Li (2003) on a geocentric theory of multinational evolution, Peng, Au, and Wang (2001) on interlocking directorates in Third World multinationals in Thailand, and Ragayah (1999) on Malaysian reverse investments (UNCTAD, 2006).

Second, two *APJM* papers are profiled as part of the eight “noteworthy articles from business journals” by the *Economist* (2007). In the “What’s In the Journals” section that appeared in May 2007 (<http://www.economist.com>), Hill’s (2007) Perspective paper on digital piracy and Lee and Oh’s (2007) Review paper on corruption in Asia are the only two articles from an academic journal that are profiled; the other six articles profiled in the same issue are all from practitioner journals such as *Harvard Business Review* and *McKinsey Quarterly*. As a proud Editor-in-Chief who personally recruited and worked with these two groups of authors, I, in my inaugural editorial published in the first issue of this year, introduced these two pieces that deal with “major concerns affecting management and organization in Asia Pacific” (Peng, 2007: 5). I complained that “yet we have not seen much research in *APJM* or elsewhere on these topics,” and I went on to predict that “I am confident that the two Perspective and Review papers in this issue will stimulate more research on these crucial but under-explored topics.” Considering that the first issue only appeared in March, it is heartening to see that within a short span of less than two months, the *Economist* has discovered these “noteworthy” articles to be recommended to its worldwide readers. In other words, *APJM* papers are capturing *immediate* media attention. A more subtle point of distinction is that in that online issue of the *Economist*, only *APJM* has two articles profiled, while each of the other six other journals only has one article profiled—thus, *APJM* has beat them all (!).

Third, *APJM* papers are reprinted by major publications and used in major executive training programs. Yeung’s (2007) *Handbook of Research on Asian Business* reprinted Peng (2002), who coined the term an “institution-based view of strategy,” as a chapter. Kedia, Mukherjee, and Lahiri (2006), who wrote on the evolution and transformation of Indian business groups, received a request for this article to be reprinted by ICAFI Books in India in an important collection titled *Management of Succession: Family Owned Business*.<sup>1</sup> Lee and Oh (2007) received a request from INSEAD Executive Education for their article to be included as training material.<sup>2</sup> Most encouragingly, the requests for Kedia et al. (2006) and Lee and Oh (2007) came just one *month* after the articles’ appearance, again suggesting that *APJM* is publishing the kind of papers that receive *immediate* attention from our audiences.

Third, the *Academic Journal Quality Guide* published by the UK-based Association of Business Schools (Harvey, Morris, & Kelly, 2007) has recently ranked *APJM* as a second-tier journal based on its five-tier scheme (we received a score of 3, the second highest after 4—the lowest ranked, fifth-tier journals received 0). Joining us in the second tier are reputable journals such as the *Journal of Business Research*, *Journal of World Business*, and *Management International Review*. The same *Guide* ranks *APJM* ahead of the *Australian Journal of*

<sup>1</sup> Ben Kedia, personal communication, January 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Seung-Hyun Lee, personal communication, April 2007.

*Management, Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences, International Business Review, International Studies of Management and Organization, Journal of International Management, and Scandinavian Journal of Management*, all of which receive a score of 2 as third-tier outlets. Around the world, only six academic journals in the “general management” and “international business” categories are ranked higher than *APJM*.<sup>3</sup> Of course, every ranking scheme has its own biases and agendas. However, this UK-based ranking (Harvey et al., 2007) excels in its objectiveness and comprehensiveness (including hundreds of journals around the world). My editorial team and I believe that this is a fair assessment of *APJM*'s relative standing in the worldwide family of academic journals.

Fifth, two recent studies support our long-held belief that *APJM* is the leading outlet for Asia Pacific management research. In the important area of product and geographic diversification in Asia Pacific, Peng and Delios (2006: 393) report that *APJM* published half of the approximately 100 papers that appeared between 1995 and 2006. In China research, Quer, Claver, and Rienda (2007) survey 12 leading journals during the period of 2000–05 (inclusive) and find that *APJM* published 33 papers (close to 20%) of the 180 empirical papers, leading the rest of the pack by a comfortable margin. The twofold message is loud and clear: (1) Scholars interested in Asia Pacific management research need to consult *APJM* in order to keep current with recent developments in the literature. (2) They should also publish in *APJM* to establish their credibility as members of this community.

Overall, these are encouraging signs indicative of our growing impact and reach. Our ultimate aim is to make studying Asia Pacific management research published in *APJM* as essential for Western colleagues, as studying Western management research is now for Asia Pacific scholars (Hofstede, 2007). According to the *Academic Journal Quality Guide* (Harvey et al., 2007), there are only six “general management” and “international business” journals ahead of us (see footnote 3). In any market competition, breaking into the top tier occupied by six strong incumbents will not be easy. As an academic community, we need to draw inspirations from our real-world colleagues in Asia Pacific—at Toyota, Honda, and Sony in the 1970s, at Acer and Singapore Airlines in the 1980s, at Samsung in the 1990s, and at Huawei and Lenovo in the 2000s. If they can break into the global top tier, why can't *APJM*? That will indeed make *APJM* truly deserve the “A” in our title as an “A journal.”

The current Special Issue is both a celebration of 25 years of accomplishments and a call for more sustained efforts in the coming years, which will be necessary to break into the top tier. As a strategic goal, I hope that future Editors-in-Chief putting together our 30th, 40th, and 50th Anniversary Special Issues will be able to proudly proclaim that we have made it.

<sup>3</sup> These six first-tier journals (with a score of 4) in the “general management” and “international business” categories are the *Academy of Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Journal of International Business Studies*, *Journal of Management*, and *Journal of Management Studies* (Harvey et al., 2007). In addition, two other journals, *Harvard Business Review* and *Journal of Business*, are in the first tier for “general management.” We exclude *HBR* because it has a practitioner orientation and thus is not an academic journal. *JB* was an academic journal. However, it ceased publication at the end of 2006 and thus is no longer in existence. Note this is slightly different from Lau's (2007) footnote 4, which only reports the seven first-tier journals in “general management” (including *HBR* and *JB*) but does not add the only first-tier journal in “international business” (*JIBS*).

## Our 25th Anniversary Special Issue

This Special Issue will be an unforgettable feast with 13 high-quality articles and this editorial, printed in three sections. As we look back, we would like to honor all the distinguished Editors-in-Chief who have made *APJM* what it is now (see Table 1). In the first Perspectives section, we are very fortunate that Soo Ann Lee (2007) and Lim Kian Guan (2007), our second and fourth Editors-in-Chief, respectively, can help us trace our roots back to the 1980s and 1990s. Then, Chung-Ming Lau (2007), the founding President of the Asia Academy of Management, joins the celebration by reviewing the first decade of our sponsoring association.

Since a Special Issue full of “who did what back then” may not be everybody’s “cup of tea,” in the second, Regular Papers section, I have selected four papers that exhibit both the caliber and variety of Asia Pacific management research. Geert Hofstede (2007) makes his third appearance in *APJM*—his first two were published in 1984, of which Hofstede (1984) commands the highest number of citations of all papers published by *APJM*. Hofstede (2007) argues that key to understanding Asian management in the twenty-first century will be cultural differences. Kulwant Singh (*APJM*’s seventh Editor-in-Chief) begs to differ. Singh (2007) makes an interesting case that cultural differences do not matter, as far as firm strategies are concerned. Next, Simon Collinson and Alan Rugman (2007) argue that Asian multinationals are regional in character, just like their counterparts in Europe and North America. This article adds new insights to the debate concerning the uniqueness of Asian multinationals (Dunning, 2006; Mathews, 2006; Narula, 2006; Oh & Rugman, 2007). Finally, different from the three previous Regular Papers that focus on international differences, Kevin Zhou and Caroline Li (2007) deal with a crucial phenomenon in a single country: strategic orientation in Chinese firms.

The last section is Reviews and Commentaries. Erin Pleggenkühle-Miles, Ramya Aroul, Sunny Li Sun, and Yu-Shan Su (2007) provide a detailed account of the adolescence period of *APJM* (1997–2006), which updates an earlier review by Ang (1997) on its first 14 years (1983–1996). Next, in response to Klaus Meyer’s (2006) provocative piece titled “Asian management research needs more self-confidence,” four groups of commentators contribute their wisdom to this debate and dialogue. Kevin Au (2007) provides an interesting Hong Kong/Asia perspective, Xiaohua Yang and Siri Terjesen (2007) add a much needed Australia/Pacific point of view (considering there is a P in *APJM* that is often missing), and Sheila Puffer and Dan McCarthy (2007) reflect on their journey of Russia research to illustrate many of Meyer’s (2006) ideas (this is the first time *APJM* has published something on Russia, a missing gap in my view given that a *majority* of Russian territory is in Asia). In addition, Kannan Ramaswamy (2007) disagrees with Meyer (2006) on a number of dimensions. Finally, Klaus Meyer (2007) provides a rejoinder to put some tentative closure to this dialogue. (Of course, real closure is not possible. If you would like to write a short Commentary on this topic, please email me.)

As your Editor-in-Chief on this job for a year, I can report that there are both excitements and frustrations (I will save the frustrations to share with you on another occasion). Putting together this Special Issue and working with colleagues around the world—ranging from a guru such as Geert Hofstede to PhD students—is

unquestionably the high water mark of my editorial experience (thus far). Now, let the festivities begin. Enjoy!

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