

EDITORIAL

This special issue of *KEMANUSIAAN the Asian Journal of Humanities* commemorates the 25th anniversary of the journal which began as *Jurnal Ilmu Kemanusiaan (Journal of Humanities)*, first published in 1994. The founding editor, Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail, a historian was responsible for the publication of 14 volumes until 2007 when I took over as editor-in-chief. It was at this point that the journal was restructured to meet the international standards envisioned by the publisher, Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM Press). The restructuring of the journal involved physical and technical improvements as well as its scope. It was clear at the time that none of the humanities journals that were published were dedicated to research in the humanities in Asia. Hence the name of the journal was changed to *KEMANUSIAAN the Asian Journal of Humanities* to provide a scope that is unique and new. The word *kemanusiaan* which is Malay for “humanities” and “humanitarian” captures the scope of the discipline, while the inclusion of the word Asian in the title provides the focus of the journal.

Since the launch of the inaugural issue of *KEMANUSIAAN the Asian Journal of Humanities* in 2007, the number of manuscript submissions has risen significantly, making it possible to increase the number of publications of regular issues and special issues. In 2011, the journal was indexed in Scopus, and in 2017 it won the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education CREAM award. Besides these recognitions, two articles published in the journal, one in volume 19 (1) in 2012 and the other in volume 24 (2) in 2017 won the Malaysian Scholarly Publishing Council and Ministry of Higher Education (MAPIM-KPT) award for Best Article in the Humanities and Social Sciences category.

Now after 25 years, the journal that began at the School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia, has come a long way to be a highly regarded international journal of humanities. It is therefore an opportune time to commemorate this significant milestone with a publication that reflects the current trends in research in the humanities in Asia. The 10 articles in this issue are by authors who graciously accepted the invitation to contribute their research writing to commemorate the journal’s 25th anniversary as well as a few papers that were selected from the journal management system. The contributors of this collection are leading scholars, senior researchers and young academics from various areas of the humanities whose work reflects the contemporary research agenda in the humanities; one that is anchored in the humanities traditions with a renewed agenda for the future of humanity. In this sense, the articles centre on traditional humanities areas foregrounding an issue, an approach, a method and/or a framework that is new and topical, and often interdisciplinary.

The first four articles in this collection discuss various issues in the field of history. The first article is an elegant discussion on noises and how human experiences are shaped by the interpretations of these sounds. Based on a study of one court case in Singapore, the author argues that historical documents on sound give insights into human experiences and social structures, and the richness of historical documents suggests that the region of Southeast Asia “has the potential to make a significant contribution to the field of sensory history”.

The use of natural elements to understand humanity continues in the second article on the use of a water perspective in the study of Southeast Asia. The author argues that studying a body of water “as an equal partner to the human community” can enhance the understanding of society, and where Southeast Asia is concerned, this under-researched perspective on the connection between water and humans may provide new insights into the region’s history, current realities and future.

The significance of understanding the past continues in the next article on the discussion of the oral history methodology as an approach to bridge the past with the present. Focusing on Malaysia, the author argues for an oral history programme that would enable the country’s history and heritage to be informed by “the inclusive memory of the community” and not just be based on “written documents which are remnants of the colonial legacy”.

The significance of historical documents is reprised in the fourth article in this collection on early Dutch exploits in the western archipelago and how relations were established. Based on a critical analysis of the documents, the author presents “an informed perspective of the nature of the different relationships”.

The fifth article is an analysis of a Muslim biographer’s reference to a verse in the Qur’an in discussing the birth of Prophet Muhammad in Islamic tradition. Based on a critical analysis of the historical incidents and the biographer’s exegeses on the verse, the author argues that “conviction and zeal to authenticate” the historical event, let the biographer to adduce a particular verse in the Qur’an as evidence for his narrative.

The Islamic theme continues in the sixth article which explores Islam’s integrated approach to non-prejudiced environment “to community to develop mutual understanding and co-existence”. By revisiting Gordon W. Allport’s “Theory of Contact Hypothesis” and comparing and contrasting it with the Muslim perspective, the authors claim that Islam’s central values of spirituality is a framework that is inherently committed to the elimination of all forms of prejudice and racism, one that is “necessary for cultivating religiosity and morality without risking the value of effective and harmonious human relations”.

The next three articles are discussions on works in the areas of literature, culture and linguistics which centre around the issues of marginalisation and othering. The first is a discussion on the representation of the Filipina migrant body in the novel *Soledad’s Sister* which “is rendered marginal, displaced and inferior”. Despite this, the author argues that the migrant body possesses multiple meanings and by employing postcolonial and gender frameworks, she problematises the dominant discourses on migrant identity “by showing how the novel undermines essentialist assumptions associated with the stereotyped helper”.

The biased views of women are also raised in the eighth article which discusses “the omission of women from religious literature” in Buddhism. As women have been marginalised in Buddhist texts, the authors argue that it is essential to go beyond texts to understand the religious lives of women. Citing two case studies of Buddhist nuns in Bhutan, the authors argue “for ethnography as an alternative to traditional text-based scholarship on religious studies” to allow the opportunity for women to share stories of their lives and “paint their own reality”.

Point of view, a rather under-researched issue in literary criticism, is addressed in this article using stylistics, a linguistic approach to literary works. Focusing on the portrayal of the European in relation to the local natives in the novel *Almayer's Folly* by Robert Conrad, the author claims that Conrad utilises various linguistic devices “to signal point of view and to exercise control over the reader’s attitude”. The article demonstrates the value of “interfacing” linguistics and literature not just in literary criticism but also in approaching the discourse of Othering in other language genres.

The final article in this collection is a discussion on the humanities in the Malaysian higher education context. Although the journal does not usually publish research in education, the issue of human-technology convergence and the dangers of side-lining the humanities in higher education is relevant to the current collection. Citing Malaysia’s case, the authors foreground the concerns in the local scenario that have brought about interest in framing “policies in the context of the human-technology convergence”. Re-positioning the humanities in the higher education, the authors argue, is even more crucial now in the face of digital revolution as the humanities helps us “understand our society, its various pasts and possible futures”.

Acknowledgements

The publication of this 25th anniversary commemorative issue of *KEMANUSIAAN the Asian Journal of Humanities* would not have been possible without the assistance of several people at the Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia. First, I thank Fazlina Mohamed Rouse, Head of Journal Division, for suggesting the idea to publish a special issue to commemorate the journal’s 25th anniversary. Marina Azmi, the journal administrator for overseeing the production process and for making sure that everything was completed in time so that this issue can be published according to schedule. Akhiar Salleh, the Director of Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia, for kindly agreeing to this endeavour on a short notice. Finally, I thank all the reviewers who kindly accepted the invitation to review the papers in this collection.

Hajar Abdul Rahim
Editor-in-Chief
December 2018