

A Comparative Study of High-quality Academic Journals in Southeast Asia

Priraya Rithaporn^{1*}, Nopporn Puangsombat², Andrew Adam³
and Wasu Pathom-aree⁴

¹Research Administration Center, Office of the University, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai 50200, Thailand

²Faculty of Associated Medical Sciences, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai 50200, Thailand

³Research Administration Center, Office of the University, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai 50200, Thailand

⁴Faculty of Science, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai 50200, Thailand

*Corresponding author. E-mail: prirayar@hotmail.com
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ABSTRACT

This study compared the characteristics of the top-ten, multidisciplinary, academic journals, as ranked by the SCImago Journal & Country Rank database in 2014, in Southeast Asia (we used ASEAN, ex-Singapore, as a proxy for Southeast Asia) – Songklanakarin Journal of Science and Technology (TH), Sains Malaysiana (MY), Walailak Journal of Science and Technology (TH), Chiang Mai Journal of Science (TH), Maejo International Journal of Science and Technology (TH), ScienceAsia (TH), Chiang Mai University Journal of Natural Sciences (TH), Journal of Mathematical and Fundamental Sciences (ID), Journal of Science and Technology in the Tropics (MY), Malaysia Journal of Science (MY) – to analyze the factors for success and provide lessons for regional journals. We analyzed the ten selected journals using the SCImago's journal metrics derived from its Scopus database, and compared four metrics: 1) SJR indicator, 2) number of documents published, 3) country affiliation of published authors, and 4) authors most frequently published. We also interviewed Editors-in-Chief and journal officers to gather both 'demographic' data about each journal and insights into how they are managed and issues they perceive with trying to improve the quality of their publications. Thailand is heavily represented in the top-ten regional, multidisciplinary journals, with six of the top-ten, and four of the top-five. However, the region as a whole is relatively weak, with its top-ranked regional journal only in the second quartile of all multidisciplinary science journals worldwide, and its seventh ranked journal already falling into the fourth quartile – Southeast Asia as a region is clearly an emerging, rather than estab-

lished region for internationally recognized academic journals. As the Editors pointed out, these emerging regional journals face several challenges – limited visibility, tight budgets, and volunteer staff, among other obstacles. But, as they also suggested, a continued focus on quality content, finding quality peer reviewers, seeking out current and cutting-edge research, among others, can help lift these emerging journals to further impact and prominence.

Keywords: Academic journal, Scholarly journal, Journal indexing, Journal performance metrics, Southeast Asia

INTRODUCTION

The ‘marketplace’ for journals is increasingly crowded (30,132 academic journals listed in Scopus in 2014), and includes all types, from open source to subscription-based, online to print, free to fee-based submissions, university-based to private, among other variants. Smaller regional journals trying to establish themselves face a competitive field, but still play an important role for both universities and researchers. For an academic institution, its own journal can be a source of pride and enhance the university’s visibility, as well as offering a closer-to-home outlet for its own researchers to publish. But whatever the rationale for establishing the journal, the quality of its papers/publications remains the most important factor to its reputation, visibility, and even its continued existence.

In Thailand, a quasi-public organization, TCI, that bridges government and the academic sector oversees the development and quality standards of Thailand-based journals. TCI manages the Thai Journal Citation Index (also referred to as TCI). Much like international indices, TCI

has established a series of standards that Thai journals must meet before inclusion in its index, with two levels of quality. Meeting the standards of TCI is similar to or a first step towards inclusion in the international databases, depending on criteria and quality. In fact, TCI, in an agreement with Elsevier, is the ‘gatekeeper’ for Scopus in Thailand.

In 2014, 696 journals were published in Thailand, of which 275 are included in Tier 1 of TCI, 145 of which are science and technology journals, the type studied here. These, which include the six Thai journals studied here, are the most likely to achieve the quality standards for inclusion or eventual inclusion in one or more of the international databases. We have chosen to analyze 10 regional, multi-disciplinary journals of high quality, but still more regional than global in visibility and reputation, and look for commonalities or lessons as to how these journals have achieved what they have, and what they might focus on to further improve quality.