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## Asian Journal of Anesthesiology

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## Editorial view

The (New York) Times, They are a-Changin': The *Asian Journal of Anesthesiology* confronts change in medical publishing

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*Acta Anaesthesiologica Taiwanica* is reborn this issue as the *Asian Journal of Anesthesiology*.

What changes attend this reincarnation? You will see little evidence of transformation in the form or content of this issue. Yet we, our editorial board and production staff, are very much focused on change, and we recognize a need to prioritize it—not in terms of effecting a particular change or two in what we are doing or how we do it, but rather a fundamental shift in how we think about, respond to, and help influence change itself.

The underlying and fundamental goal of the journal has remained the same, in essence, since its founding. We articulate this in our updated mission statement:

Advancing knowledge, capability, and well-being among clinicians, scholars, and allied professionals in the fields of perioperative, advanced care, and pain medicine by publishing and promoting valuable research and facilitating professional communication, across Asia and around the world.

The pace of change in the world of scholarly and professional healthcare publishing is promising and exciting. New pathways have been laid upon which we may advance our mission using tools not previously available. Yet given the immensity of these changes, it often feels more overwhelming, bewildering, and frightening than inviting.

Humans' ability to adapt is commonly cited as a primary factor in our success (so far) as a species.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, today's academic, business/professional and popular media are replete with reports and articles identifying change as a personal, organizational, and social challenge. There have emerged fields of inquiry and concern such as *change management* and *transition psychology*; in medicine, we have areas specifically focused on change, such as

*transition medicine*<sup>2</sup> and *adaptive pathways*, a “a scientific concept for medicine development and data generation”.<sup>3</sup>

What changes do we face at present as an academic journal? What remains the same as we pick up and carry forward the work of those whose efforts we have inherited? What do we want to do, how do we want to do it, and why?

We muster up the courage to say: *In some important regards, we don't know*. If this sounds defeatist or even embarrassing, we brace ourselves with an attendant promise and determination: *We will find our way*.

The primary indicator of quality or prestige in academic publishing has long been widely seen as membership in the vaunted list of what we tend to conveniently, if increasingly vaguely, call *SCI* journals. *SCI* refers to the Science Citation Index, established in 1964. Publishers, universities, scholars, and others latched onto this list, generally accepting the description that it included the best journals in the world. We have long aspired to attain inclusion in this list, as a measure of the quality of the articles we publish, as the way to attract higher quality article submissions, and as a badge of honor and pride—in short, as an indicator or how well we can move forward our mission.

But is this way of thinking useful? Is it sound strategy? If we can achieve it, would that likely happen before the goal itself becomes meaningless or irrelevant?

Attainment of “*SCI* status” has long remained elusive despite investment of considerable effort and resources. Understanding what the *SCI* is today, let alone figuring out how to aim for inclusion therein, presents a Herculean task. After having long been owned by Thompson Reuters, a multinational mass media company, the *SCI* has undergone complex transformations and been renamed and/or incorporated into a long list of various related or derived products. It (whatever it is) is currently owned by Clarivate Analytics, which is, in turn, owned by two private equity funds. Furthermore, a wide range of alternative and competing products—private, public, and various admixtures of the two—compete for recognition as offering more meaningful and valid measures of journal and/or article “quality” or “impact”.<sup>4–6</sup>

Meanwhile, fledgling fields of scientific inquiry have become established which concern themselves with defining and measuring the value of scientific production and the ways in which the products of scientists drive, and respond to, science policy and management; these include bibliometrics, scientometrics, citation analysis, and cybernetics.<sup>7</sup> The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) characterizes *scientometrics* as a field which:

... has evolved over time from the study of indices for improving information retrieval from peer-reviewed scientific publications (commonly described as the “bibliometric” analysis of science) to cover other types of documents and information sources relating to science and technology. These sources can include data sets, web pages and social media.<sup>8</sup>

Globally recognized universities, science publishers, grant- and policy-making organizations, individual scholars, and others continue to add their signatures to the 2012 San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment, which blasted over-reliance on the “impact factor”, issuing a statement that: *the impact factor is not to be used as a substitute “measure of the quality of individual research articles, or in hiring, promotion, or funding decisions”*.<sup>9,10</sup> The Medical Research Council, responsible for coordinating and funding medical research in the United Kingdom, issued a January, 2017 press release on its preprint policy stating that: *Reviewers ... and interviewers should take account of preprints in considering applications and in interviews, noting the content of the papers, not where they, or subsequent peer reviewed papers, are published* [emphasis ours].<sup>11</sup> The prestigious journal *Anesthesiology*, while listed as the third-ranked journal in the 2016 Journal Citation Reports in terms of “impact factor”, does not cite this only recently universally recognized mark of value or quality on its homepage, but buries it three sub-pages deep in its media-kit page, and then is presented in background relative to prominently featured data on “total subscribers”, “average monthly visits”, and “emails”. Its homepage does, on the other hand, prominently feature tweets.<sup>12</sup>

What is your humble team of medical journal editors to make of all this?

Our name change reflects one decision we have made. As previous editorials in this series have documented, earlier editorial teams have worked to expand the reach and focus of the journal to attain international visibility and scope, most powerfully through successful efforts to transform the journal from a Chinese language publication to an English language one.<sup>13,14</sup> Earlier in my (Sun’s) tenure as Editor-in-Chief, we essentially took up the long-standing goal of pursuing “SCI” status. Having recognized that such seemed overly ambitious as an immediate goal, we began looking at the “SCI-expanded”, which mentioned that “regional journals” may be positively weighted in evaluation for inclusion. This stimulated us to engage in thinking about which region we might seek to represent, and indeed, what it meant to be a regional journal: Would it be publishing articles of particular interest to a certain region? Soliciting submissions from authors based in a certain region? A combination of both? Something else, or in addition?

It was during such considerations that we realized that there was no pan-Asian journal of anesthesiology, and we thought there probably should be. What seemed an answer initially, however, quickly turned into a set of questions that needed further exploration: Which of the various definitions of Asia would we use? What would it mean to be an Asian journal? Had we actually clarified anything at all, or merely stumbled into another mess of confusion?

And, centrally: have we incorrectly and blindly confused the pursuit of “SCI status” with our underlying mission?

Interesting discussions within our editorial board and with others ensued, and some answers have begun to tentatively emerge. We will share these in an editorial in our next issue.

Meanwhile, onward as the *Asian Journal of Anesthesiology*.

## Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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