



# What does “Asia–Pacific” mean to APER? Toward high-quality scholarship and inclusive practices in international education

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Since its inception in 2000, the Asia–Pacific Education Review (APER) has sought to be a venue through which education researchers in Asia and beyond can share innovative scholarship and education practices with the world, particularly in regard to those innovations and issues concerning the Asia–Pacific region. The executive leadership of the journal in its earlier days intended the periodical to especially foreground research about the Asia–Pacific and by Asia–Pacific scholars.

The first editor of APER, Shinil Kim, wrote in 2000, “our paramount aim is to stimulate educational research in the composite Asia–Pacific region and to contribute to the articulation and development of the educational identities of the many different countries comprising this macro region” (Kim, 2000, p. 3). Yet, what does “Asia–Pacific” mean to APER?

In the early years, “Asia–Pacific” was especially emphasized because of the underrepresentation of the Asia–Pacific region, in which Korea is located, within the geopolitical and educational discourses of the time. Wanting to highlight the multiple histories and identities of the Asia–Pacific that differ quite distinctly from the West—for example, the various writing systems invented in the region, the diverse religions and cultures across a vast land mass, and the Asia–Pacific’s historical prominence within human civilization prior to the period of modernity—APER sought to be a platform for examining and sharing educational developments of, by, and for the Asia–Pacific.

Then, in 2005, APER’s international prominence was significantly enhanced when the journal achieved Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) status. This was the first momentum that enabled APER to acquire legitimacy and identity as an international journal beyond the Asia–Pacific.

In addition, following recognition as an Outstanding Academic Journal by the National Research Foundation of Korea (2013–2023), and receipt of the Scopus Journal Award in 2013, the journal confirmed its strength as a venue for excellence in education research both locally and globally.

More recently, APER has expanded its volume and impact. The number of manuscripts submitted to APER in recent years has increased rapidly from 770 papers in 2019 to 1366 manuscripts in 2022, and we are now expecting nearly 2500 submissions in 2023 from more than 50 countries. Furthermore, the journal’s IF has risen more than threefold during this period from a 0.76 IF in 2019 to a 2.3 IF in 2022. All of this indicates APER’s significant growth as an international journal.

This provided an opportunity for us, when we became Editors in 2021, to rethink what the “Asia–Pacific” means to APER. Since our editorship at APER began, we have sought to expand the geographical remit of the journal beyond the geography of the Asia–Pacific. While the journal continues to foreground work from the Asia–Pacific region, it does not limit its selection of research to this domain. Instead, as Editors, we seriously consider and publish top-quality manuscripts from Africa, the Americas, and Europe in addition to the Asia–Pacific. In particular, we challenge the idea that the journal is categorized as an area studies periodical simply because it is located within the Asia–Pacific context.

Much as American or British journals are considered “global” or “international” instead of “area studies,” we contend that APER too is an international journal not to be limited and bounded by its geographical location, or by the provincializing tropes of Western academe (Chakrabarty, 2000). Indeed, looking through the published papers, since we took Editorship in 2021, at least 23 papers have been published from outside the Asia–Pacific region, including 10 manuscripts from the United Kingdom, 8 from the United States, 2 from Canada, 2 from Hungary, and 1 from Brazil. This accounts for approximately 11.7% of all published papers in this period.

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By contrast, 53 papers were published by scholars in China, 25 from South Korea, 11 from Japan, and 8 from Taiwan. Hence, the journal continues to be a leader in publishing excellent scholarship from the Asia–Pacific, in particular East Asia, but it has also expanded beyond the Asia–Pacific region. This captures some movement in our efforts toward reconceptualizing the journal as a truly global venue.

At the same time, APER also benefits from being Asia–Pacific oriented in its capacity to successfully publish top papers from scholars in the Global South (see also Kim, 2016). Excluding China and Turkey—the leading countries from which APER manuscripts originate—in the period since 2021, APER has published a small but meaningful number of papers from Global South contexts: one manuscript from Bangladesh, one from Brazil, five from India, three from Indonesia, four from Kazakhstan, eight from Malaysia, two from Pakistan, one from Thailand, and three from the United Arab Emirates. This demonstrates the high-quality papers that APER identifies and publishes from researchers located in the Global South, thus, making the journal a critical venue for Southern scholarship (Chen, 2010; Connell, 2007).

Yet several challenges remain in this regard. For instance, many papers from least developed and lower income countries<sup>1</sup> rarely make it through peer review. Although we received over 150 manuscripts from Iran, Ethiopia, and Ghana, we published zero papers among them. It is difficult to know exactly what accounts for this, but as Editors, we keep this representation in mind in making our editorial decisions all the while foregrounding high-quality scholarship. As we see it, there is a continuing need to identify top-quality manuscripts from these less-represented contexts.

Returning to our question: what does the “Asia–Pacific” mean to APER? To be sure, the concept of Asia–Pacific may be interpreted in a number of different ways. To some readers, the Asia–Pacific may represent a context, geographical and historical in orientation (much as it does in the quote from S. Kim’s editorial in 2000). Here, UNESCO identifies at least 47 countries and territories that belong to the region.<sup>2</sup>

To others, the Asia–Pacific may suggest an identity and culture, for example, the language, discourses, theories, and practices associated with the diverse cultures and ways of life in the region. Yet, for others, the Asia–Pacific may represent an imaginary built on concepts of family, community, solidarity, economic exchange, and political possibilities. Here, concepts such as education fever, shadow education,

and (ethno)nationalism persist. A review of papers throughout the volumes of the journal shows that these imaginaries and diverse interpretations of the “Asia–Pacific” have been thoroughly addressed by scholars interested in the region (e.g., Cho, 2021; Jackson, 2019; Lee et al., 2010; Rizvi, 2019).

We see this diversity of interpretations of the concept of Asia–Pacific as a strength of the journal, and we wish to embrace this plurality. For us, the “Asia–Pacific” means foregrounding the region as a knowledge producer with collections of contemporary wisdom in education research across the Asia–Pacific and beyond, which may offer a counterpoint to Western-centered academic discourse. Sharing narratives and new knowledge from the margins and less-represented contexts is a critical move toward diversifying and democratizing knowledge. This not only challenges the notion that the “Asia–Pacific is positioned either as a data mine or a theory consumer” (Takayama et al., 2022, p. 428; see also Alatas, 2000) but suggests that APER is an important medium to contribute to the broader debates and efforts by scholars to learn from and project the Asia–Pacific as a resourceful context for the production of knowledge and theory building in the global education community (Kester, 2023).

Finally, returning to the original APER 2000 Editorial, we reaffirm the journal’s commitment to fostering “mutual understanding through communication among diverse cultures” where this “emphasis on mutual understanding and communication between cultures may be taken as an expression of the need to preserve and actively propagate the cultural diversity and peaceful coexistence of mankind [sic] on the earth” (Kim, 2000, p. 3). In conclusion, since the beginning, APER has endeavored to be a world-class journal for education research, to share Asia–Pacific scholarship with an international audience. We continue this mission today and extend it further—through inclusive practices and a thorough editorial process—to identify high-quality research from less-represented contexts in the Asia–Pacific and elsewhere. For us, this advances the original vision of the journal to stimulate engagement with high-quality scholarship beyond the West.

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