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First Meeting in Asia of the Asia Pacific Research Integrity Network

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Abstract

In 2017, the University of Hong Kong and the University of California San Diego co-hosted the first Asian meeting of the recently formed Asia Pacific Research Integrity (APRI) network in Hong Kong. Aligned with planning meetings in 2015 and 2016 funded in part by the US Office of Research Integrity (ORI), the Hong Kong meeting was designed by a multi-national planning committee to address pressing challenges in research integrity: improving multi-national communication; exchanging information on managing misconduct investigations; and sharing best practices to promote research integrity. To create a sustainable, robust international partnership to promote research integrity in the region, the purpose of this 2017 meeting was to foster multi-national awareness, understanding, and opportunities for collaboration. The meeting was defined by four objectives that emerged from the previous meetings: (1) Articulate differences as well as

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DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

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areas of common ground; (2) Identify best or recommended practices; (3) Identify opportunities for research or collaboration; and (4) Set an APRI network agenda for coming years. The key anticipated outcome was to advance the conversation surrounding research integrity among academic institutions and regulators in Asian and Pacific Rim nations. This outcome was evidenced by meeting participation, participant satisfaction, and articulation of next steps for the APRI network.

Keywords

Research integrity; Research misconduct; Responsible conduct of research; Asia; Pacific; Multi-national

MAIN TEXT

The past decade has been marked by a rapid and increasing international focus on research integrity (Mayer and Steneck, 2011; Anderson et al., 2016). The first World Conference on Research Integrity (WCRI) was convened in Lisbon in 2007, with subsequent meetings in Singapore, Montreal, Rio de Janeiro, Amsterdam, and most recently in Hong Kong. These meetings have been characterized by broad international representation. It is noteworthy that participation of East and South Asian countries and Australia was just 10% of attendees at the first WCRI in Lisbon in 2007 (Mayer and Steneck, 2007) and just over 10% (75) of the 729 participants, and representing just eight countries, at the 2017 WCRI in Amsterdam (Bouter, 2017). This is clearly an under-representation given that a National Science Foundation report (NSF, 2016) illustrates that excluding Canada and the US, the Asia-Pacific region accounts for approximately 40% of global research and development expenditure. As of 2017, nations of this region contributed 28% of global citable publications, and 36% for citable publications excluding the US and Canada (Scimago, 2017). This reflects the rapid and significant research investment by China and other countries of East and Southeast Asia.

It could be argued that the research focus might be less than other areas of the world because of limited resources in some countries of this region. However, when meetings of the WCRI have convened in the Asian region, representation of Australia and Asian countries exceeded 50% for the 2010 second WCRI in Singapore (Mayer, personal communication, 2019) and about 33% for the 2019 sixth WCRI in Hong Kong (WCRI, 2019). The latter meeting included representation of 19 South and East Asia countries, including Australia and New Zealand (Mai Har Sham, personal communication, 2019).

It is clear that there is an unmet challenge for Asian and Pacific Rim and Island nations to identify common interests, develop opportunities for collaboration, and share best practices in research integrity. For this purpose, the University of Hawaii and the US Office of Research Integrity (ORI) convened meetings of institutional representatives from Asia and the Pacific between 2013 and 2016 to "...increase awareness of US misconduct regulations applicable to institutions in the region, to share "complementary expertise and resources" related to research misconduct and integrity concerns, and to plan and establish the Asia Pacific Research Integrity (APRI) network (Hammatt, 2018). Subsequently, the focus was

broadened beyond research misconduct *per se* to include fostering a culture of responsible research. With this objective in mind, the University of California San Diego and University of Hong Kong obtained a conference grant from the ORI, as well as support from the Croucher Foundation, to hold the first Asian APRI meeting in Hong Kong. The design and outcomes for this meeting are described below.

The impetus for creating an APRI network was not defined by a single language, culture, perspective, or geographic proximity. The number and diversity of languages of the participating countries is wide-ranging, varying greatly even within the borders of some countries. Although there are some commonalities among these countries in terms of their cultures and the research integrity problems they face, it is not presumed that there is one Asian “culture” *per se*. Culture varies among countries of the region and even within the countries of the region, characterized by diverse languages, religious traditions, and political ideologies (e.g., Kymlicka and He, 2005). While characteristics of the APRI network membership may later be defined, involvement in the APRI network is open to anyone who chooses to attend APRI meetings.

Goals, format, content, and outcomes for the proposed meeting were developed by a multi-national planning committee (Table 1). Although origins for the APRI Network began with some leadership from the US community, the directions of this group have evolved to be a multi-national collaboration with committee members identified from interested participants in earlier meetings and WCRIIs. This group was supplemented by local organizers for the meeting planned to be hosted at the University of Hong Kong.

Four meeting goals were set by consensus discussion among members of the planning committee:

1. Articulate differences as well as areas of common ground
2. Identify best or recommended practices
3. Identify opportunities for research or collaboration
4. Set an APRI network agenda for coming years

The first APRI network meeting in Asia was convened at the University of Hong Kong February 20–22, 2017. Meeting the proposed goals would require diverse and wide representation from the Asia Pacific region. The meeting was advertised through networks of planning committee members. To support participants who might lack sufficient resources, a travel grant program was established, with priority given to participants from countries with limited resources, defined largely by levels of national R&D expenditures as reported by the World Bank (2017). With this guideline, travel grants of up to US\$1,000 were available to most regional participants, and limited to US\$500 for applicants from Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Mainland China, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Chinese Taipei, Thailand and Vietnam. Grant applications were reviewed and awarded based on stated need for support and evidence of interest in promoting research integrity.

The meeting agenda was designed to maximize discussion and participation. Beginning with the opening remarks, the meeting co-chairs led a wide-ranging discussion with the audience about goals, interests, and concerns with respect to research integrity. Subsequent sessions included plenary presentations followed by ample opportunities for Q&A as well as small group breakout sessions to address specific questions: (1) What are common research integrity issues of interest? (2) How can these issues be best addressed? (3) How can and should we teach about research integrity? and (4) What are some opportunities for collaboration among countries of the APRI region?

To further foster opportunities for new connections, each lunch session was organized with different sets of assigned seating to maximize international representation in small groups. Finally, several social events and free time allowed for strengthening of new friendships and more in depth discussion. Meeting plans and agenda were posted on the meeting website at: <http://www.apri-network.org>.

This meeting showed a heightened level of engagement from nations of the Asia Pacific region. Prior to this meeting, the largest similar meeting was co-hosted by ORI and the University of California San Diego in February 2016. In addition to representation from the US and Canada, the San Diego meeting was attended by 43 representatives of ten Asian countries, substantially more than had attended past international research integrity meetings. Other than seven representatives from the U.S. and Canada, the Hong Kong meeting was attended by 102 individuals, representing 15 countries in Asia and the Pacific, including Bhutan and Nepal. Self-described roles of registered participants included academic leaders (e.g., Deans, Vice Presidents, Chairs), staff (e.g., Directors or Managers of regulatory offices), faculty, and other (students, research staff, representatives of governmental and non-governmental organizations). Most participants were in the first three categories (academic leaders, 34%; staff, 30%, and faculty, 26%), and the remainder in the other category (nearly 10%). However, this diverse participation is tempered by noting that based on personal observations and anecdotal feedback, one barrier to open communication was language. Necessarily, the common language of the meeting was English.

The question of language in a multi-national meeting is one of the most significant hurdles to be addressed. While participants from throughout Asia and the Pacific are generally proficient in speaking and understanding English, conversations tended to be dominated by people from Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, Singapore and the US, potentially minimizing the voices of non-native English speakers. This is in part a matter of language, but some participants from non-English speaking countries noted that there are at least two other important factors: (1) character (many Asian cultures tend to be more reserved than those of English-speaking countries), and (2) depth of expertise (research ethics is still a relatively new focus for many participating countries). All things considered, a reasonable assumption is that everyone would benefit from facilitating wide participation in conversations. Unfortunately, this is not easily solved. With so many languages represented (Mandarin, Hindi, Japanese, Malay, Vietnamese, Korean, Cantonese, Thai, Tagalog, Nepali, etc.), simultaneous translations are not practical either logistically or in terms of expense. Strategies that are being considered for future meetings include: (1) encouraging facilitators and moderators to ensure a pace and respect that will be inclusive of all voices; (2) for

interactions with the audience perhaps include at least some time in which individuals are asked for their perspective rather than only hearing from those who raise their hand or speak up without having been called on; (3) structuring the meetings with small breakout groups making it easier to hear from diverse members; (4) including language-specific breakout groups, with reports back to the rest of the meeting participants; and (5) after the meeting, perhaps translate submitted abstracts into at least some languages other than English. At the very least, it would be useful in future meetings to track participation to see to what extent language is a factor, and to ask meeting participants for their perspectives on this issue.

Post-meeting evaluations were received from 48 of the 109 meeting participants for a response rate of 44%. Respondents were overwhelmingly positive about the success of the conference (Table 2). Further, several concrete outcomes were cited by high percentages of respondents (Table 3).

Historically, Asian and Pacific Island countries have been underrepresented in international research integrity conferences convened outside this region. This largely reflects geographical proximity, as conferences held in Europe, the Americas, or Asia typically have an over-representation from the respective regions. Nonetheless, the 2017 meeting at the University of Hong Kong was noteworthy both for the number of countries represented and the number of participants, highlighting the tremendous value of this new APRI network. Further, post-meeting evaluations received from meeting participants were overwhelmingly positive.

Although it was not expected that meeting participants would take concrete actions immediately, several lines of evidence suggest substantial success consistent with meeting objectives. First, an overwhelming majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the meeting had been successful in meeting each of the four objectives (Table 2). With respect to the first objective (“Articulate differences as well as areas of common ground”), the comments reflected a strong appreciation for opportunities to voice and hear different perspectives. For example, one respondent highlighted “[t]he range of topics covered, and the diversity of perspectives and institutions represented by the speakers.”

Similarly, other comments helped clarify success in meeting the second objective (“Identify best or recommended practices”). For example:

“Sharing of experiences from participants from different countries, real cases”

“realize the problems and issues about research integrity in different areas”

“The break out groups were a great idea to interact with others and gain deeper insights into a particular issue and share challenges and solutions”

“the good practices of RI education at HKU: how positively the perception towards RI from the top leadership would affect the university-wide awareness towards RI.”

For the third (“Identify opportunities for research or collaboration”) and fourth (“Set an APRI network agenda for coming years”) objectives, one of the strongest indicators of success is the enthusiasm and focus of the multi-national planning committee, which convened immediately after the Hong Kong conference and identified the most pressing

needs for next steps, establishing working groups charged with accomplishing the following four goals (Chan et al., 2017):

1. **MISSION AND GOVERNANCE:** articulate a mission for the APRI network, propose a governance structure for discussion in the next meeting;
2. **WEBSITE:** develop an APRI network website for sharing of resources and meeting outcomes;
3. **EDUCATION:** identify needs and propose strategies to promote education and training in research integrity; and
4. **NEXT MEETING:** plan and convene the next APRI meeting proposed for Chinese Taipei in 2018¹

The next APRI conference in Chinese Taipei was proposed to serve two purposes. First, the meeting would further multi-national awareness, understanding, and opportunities for collaboration. To do so, the meeting would be designed to decrease language barrier challenges, for example, by having smaller breakout groups and emphasizing facilitation to encourage full participation. Second, the meeting would further the long-term vision by strengthening partnerships between individuals and institutions committed to similar goals. The Taipei conference was successfully convened in 2018. More details on outcomes from the working groups, including the 2018 APRI meeting, will be discussed in a subsequent manuscript.

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¹Chinese Taipei APRI meeting website is at: <https://www.apri2018.org>

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Table 1.

Planning Committee

Frederick Leung, Chairman	Hong Kong
Michael Kalichman, Co-Chairman	US
Danny Chan, Vice-Chairman	Hong Kong
Susan Garfinkel	US
Ms. Zoë Hammatt	US
Iekuni Ichikawa	Japan
El-Nasir Lalani	Pakistan
In Jae Lee	South Korea
Eric Mah	US
Tony Mayer	Singapore
Prasit Palittapongarnpim	Thailand
Theresa Sawicka	New Zealand
Mai Har Sham	Hong Kong
Surendra Shastri	India
Ping Sun	China
Paul Taylor	Australia
Ovid Tzeng	Chinese Taipei

Table 2.

Percent of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with success in having met conference objectives.

Articulate differences as well as areas of common ground	96%
Identify best or recommended practices	79%
Identify opportunities for research or collaboration	68%
Set an APRI network agenda for coming years	79%

Table 3.

Percent of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with outcomes of participating in the conference.

Met new colleagues who I expect to contact again.	98%
Learned new ideas that I will incorporate in my home institution.	88%
Conceived of new lines of research that I hope to pursue.	51%
Made contacts for new potential international collaborations.	79%