

A Farewell Editorial: Birth and Rebirth of Philippine Science Letters and Growth of Philippine Science

It is with great hope and enthusiasm that I share with you the news that Philippine Science Letters (PSL) has been re-launched as the International Journal of Philippine Science and Technology (Phil Sci Tech). The editorial of the inaugural issue of Phil Sci Tech indicates that it will receive major support from the USAID STRIDE program in the Philippines (www.philscitech.org) in the next 3 years, and I will continue to serve as Phil Sci Tech co-editor. On behalf of my PSL co-editor, Ed Padlan, I thank all those who supported PSL since its inception in 2007. We witnessed PSL grow from 9 articles published in 2008 to 46 articles published in 2014.

By our measure, PSL fulfilled its primary aim which was to showcase science done in the Philippines and science done by Filipinos elsewhere. The science that PSL published met the usual standards of good scholarship and PSL became ISI-listed under Zoological Records. For this reason, among all Philippine journals, USAID STRIDE chose to support PSL, retain its mission and expand its coverage to become Phil Sci Tech. In particular, I thank our webmasters/copy editors, Marvin Altamia, Jose de Leon and Gabriel Villoriente, who designed the PSL website and formatted manuscripts with painstaking dedication and meticulous attention to detail. We thank the members of the PSL Editorial Board for their willingness to review manuscripts, and others not in the board who served as reviewers, some as special editors-in-charge. Most of all, we are grateful to our researchers who trusted us with their manuscripts, patiently awaited the reviewers' comments, and rejoiced with us when their manuscripts were finally published.

I am not saddened by bidding PSL farewell. PSL is simply being transformed to Phil Sci Tech that has the potential to exceed the vision and mission of PSL by reaching out to a broader audience and patronage in the Philippines and the rest of the world. While PSL addressed the needs of a young, growing scientific community, Phil Sci Tech aims to link this scientific community to industry and the rest of Philippine and global society - something that USAID STRIDE knows is essential in spurring socio-economic growth in the country.

Scientific publishing establishes a person's competence as a scientist in the university and eventually, his/her credibility as an inventor or innovator to technology investors from government and industry. As part of my commitment to serve the country as a scientist, in 2007 I conceived PSL as a training journal for young scientists. But PSL was not a stand-alone project. Let me recount how it came about in the light of what I and like-minded scientists had been working on in the last decade to create a scientific research culture in our country.

Background of PSL

Sometime in the early 2000s, I became involved in science advocacies for the country. By then I had more time because my research group at the Marine Science Institute in UP Diliman (UPD), which was working on anti-cancer and other bioactive compounds from marine organisms, already seemed viable and productive. As a matter of course, other Filipino scientists became interested in our work and forged collaborations with us. Foremost were Ed Padlan who worked on antitumor antibodies at the US National Institutes of Health and proposed to target our marine compounds to cancer cells, and Toto Olivera at the University of Utah who wanted to expand his work on neuroactive and anti-pain peptides to a group of venomous marine snails known as turrids.

Together we aimed to bring our research to frontier levels, and we also wanted to share our work with other Filipinos and the rest of the world, not just among scientists, but also with educators, other professionals and the general public. Ed then nominated me to the Philippine-American Academy of Science and Engineering (PAASE) where I began to interact with the most accomplished and influential group of "Fil-Am" scientists and engineers in the US and other countries. We then began to recruit more professors and researchers in Philippine universities into PAASE since majority of the PAASE members were still from the US. With a growing membership, PAASE became active in S&T-based volunteerism for the Philippines. Many foreign-based PAASE members started coming home for short peri-

ods under the DOST's Balik Scientist program to team-teach courses, mentor graduate students and pursue research collaborations with professors in Philippine universities.

In 2003, I proposed a popular science column in a newspaper daily to help improve the science literacy of the Filipino public. With help from colleagues from UP who had links with The Philippine Star, we began a column known as Star Science and published it in the business section of PhilStar. Star Science came out every Thursday without fail for more than ten years with contributions mostly from PAASE members who wrote about their research projects in layman's language. In 2005, local PAASE members decided to launch a campaign aimed at getting the Philippine government to invest more funding in S&T for the country. Several foreign-based PAASE members joined us as we lobbied for support in Congress. The campaign leaders wrote a position paper on "The role of S&T in economic development" with major input from Ernie Pernia of the UPD School of Economics. Guided by the UNESCO-recommended GERD (Gross Expenditure for R&D) of 1% of GDP, we proposed a stepwise increase that would bring the level of GERD in the country to 0.5% GDP by 2015.

Caesar Saloma of the UPD National Institute of Physics wrote a proposal to build the National Science Complex in UP Diliman, Toby Dayrit of the Ateneo de Manila University Department of Chemistry sought support for MS and PhD scholarships, and I compiled ~50 R&D proposals from the scientific community for funding by the DOST. By then I had ~70 Star Science articles to share with our public officials whom we knew would understand our work better in layman's terms. I produced 60 sets of all these materials and sent them to selected officials of the executive and legislative branches of government. Within a day, Congressman Louie Villafuerte of the 3rd District of Camarines Sur contacted me and offered to help us bring the campaign to a high level.

Our shared dedication and resolve culminated in the approval in August 2006 of P700 million for the first phase of the National Science Complex to UP (P500 million), and for MS and PhD scholarships to DOST (P200 million). The seed had been planted and it grew S&T funding to at least P5 billion in the next few years. UP and DOST continued to receive funding to complete the National Science Complex, and in April 2007, at least P3.5 billion was allocated to the Engineering Research and Development for Technology (ERDT) program for the construction of engineering buildings in UP Diliman and for postgraduate scholarships and fellowships in engineering. Historically, this was unprecedented funding for S&T by the Philippine government.

Reason for PSL

However, with all the infrastructure that was being supported by the Philippine government, there was still a void that needed to be filled. The work of Filipino scientists was not known or appreciated enough in the local and international scientific community, principally because it was too difficult and expensive to publish in international journals. And so I proposed to establish the PAASE Journal as the official journal of PAASE. This would require the active involvement of PAASE members here and abroad. The PAASE Journal would serve as a vehicle to feature the collaborative work of local and foreign-based PAASE members. It would encourage PAASE experts who came home as Balik Scientists to mentor our young faculty and students, to publish with us and upgrade our publications.

I did not get the approval from PAASE to create the PAASE Journal, but this did not deter me from pursuing my goal. And so I convinced Ed Padlan, the US-based PAASE stalwart who had shown the greatest commitment to help transform Philippine science by coming home once or twice a year to UP, to become the journal's editor-in-chief. Together, we named the journal for starters, "Philippine Science Letters", similar to the early journals in Western countries called "letters" or "communications". As a world-renowned structural biologist, protein crystallographer and molecular immunologist, Ed as editor-in-chief gave credibility and prestige to PSL, and attracted many young Filipino researchers to submit manuscripts to PSL. Sometime after, as the workload increased from the growing number of submissions, I became co-editor of PSL. Together, we and our web manager/copy editor ran the operations of PSL until the end using our own financial resources. At this juncture, after having dedicated so much of his life to Philippine science and PSL, Ed is retiring as co-editor, as he wishes. It is to him that I owe my deepest gratitude.

Moving PSL Forward

As with all the advocacies and projects that we have undertaken, we first planted a seed and now we are seeing progression, growth and transformation – the birth and rebirth of PSL. We wish only that our authors, reviewers and readers will join us as we transform PSL to Phil Sci Tech and breathe into it renewed vigor, a vibrant S&T life that infuses new knowledge, new products and new ideas into our daily lives and supports the vibrance and optimism that we now see in the Philippine economy and in Philippine society in general.

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23 February 2015