

## Founding a Scholarly Journal for the Southeast Conference

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In this invited essay, Howard Federspiel, the founding editor of the journal that today is the *Southeast Review of Asian Studies*, reflects on the journal's 1979 origins.

### Origins of the *Annals* of the Southeast Conference

The predecessor journal of the *Southeast Review of Asian Studies* was called the *Annals* of the Southeast Conference, Association for Asian Studies. It was first prepared in 1979 and distributed at the annual meeting of the Conference in January 1980, in Columbia, South Carolina. The first volume stated that the publication was intended “to serve as a partial record of the annual meeting . . . [and accordingly] contains a listing of attendees, a complete and corrected outline of the program, abstracts of most presentations and the complete text of nine selected papers.” I was listed as the editor and two long-time members of the conference, Robert C. Mildram (University of Tennessee at Chattanooga) and John S. Thomson (Central Intelligence Agency), both of whom passed away in the late 1990s, were the associate editors.

The idea for the *Annals* grew out of my own experience as program chair at the 1979 meeting in Lexington, Kentucky. Several of the conference members were concerned that the great effort that went into organizing the scholarly program should have a record and that recognition should be given to some of the leading papers. As John Thomson stated at the time: “If we keep minutes of the business meeting, how much more appropriate [it is] that there should be an intellectual record. After all, we are a scholarly conference.” In the 1970s, meetings of the Southeast Conference were often held in the Carolinas, so I usually drove to the meetings with two colleagues of mine from Winthrop University, John R. C. James and Nolan Jacobsen. On two occasions we discussed the feasibility of such an effort, and John and Nolan urged me to undertake the project. Since John James had been secretary–treasurer of the Conference since 1970 and

had access to its leaders, he agreed to clear the path for me. He did just that; so when I raised the issue at a meeting of the leadership council in 1979, the officers, particularly that year's president, Austin Creel of the University of Florida, received the proposal very warmly and immediately charged me to undertake the task. The officials at Winthrop University also agreed to offer some publication support. Just afterward, though, I moved to Ohio to take up an administrative position at the Newark Campus of The Ohio State University, and my superiors there thankfully agreed to provide the same level of support as Winthrop had been willing to give.

My initial letter to participants of the Conference, which outlined the project and asked for abstracts and submissions of complete papers, met with a positive response. No one refused to send an abstract, and about twenty papers were submitted to be considered for inclusion. Such was the general trend over the first five years, i.e., that I garnered abstracts without much difficulty and always received enough strong papers to have a good competition. We decided and announced that publication in the *Annals* would not preclude later publication elsewhere, since it was the view of the editors that many papers were really "works in progress" and that the authors undoubtedly would then want to place the finished research in other journals of their particular disciplines. Slightly more controversial was the stipulation that only presentations at the annual meeting would be considered for inclusion, as it disappointed many scholars who had other manuscripts in hand that had not been presented. For the next four years, I turned down about two articles per year submitted by "outsiders"; and a few of the rejected authors expressed their pique at not being allowed to contribute. It was the fourth editor, Larry Kessler (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), who ultimately changed the policy; and I immediately wrote to him to say I supported the change.

### **Editing, Producing & Distributing the *Annals***

I encountered no great difficulties in the editorial process the first year, as the associate editors—John Thomson and Bob Mildram—were friends of mine, and we coordinated without difficulty, using mail and telephone for the most part, since the Internet was still only in its experimental stage. We used reviewers from the Conference who were regarded as accomplished in the subject matter they were reviewing: no one turned us down for that task. As well, word-processors were only then appearing on the academic scene, so all material had to be laboriously typed and retyped before we had a manuscript that was generally free of errors. My office secretary and her student assistants did the work, becoming identified with the project and interested in turning out a good product that would reflect well on all of us. Then came the most difficult part of the process: duplicating the manu-

script and getting it ready for distribution. I had to deal with the campus copy office, which was under the jurisdiction of a business manager who allowed work on the journal only when all university-related projects had been completed. The office workers interpreted this low priority as meaning that the project did not need to be done at all. But with a lot of cajoling, the finished copies were ready on the evening of my departure to the annual meeting. Consequently, I had to take them as part of my baggage, which was very heavy (and I had to pay for excess luggage at the airport as well). The duplication problem was resolved later that year, and copies were thereafter always ready earlier so they could be shipped to the conference site rather than having to be brought with me personally.

Copies were distributed by the local arrangement personnel at the reception area, and every conference registrant was given a copy. A few weeks later, copies were sent to regular members who did not attend the meeting. As I recall, the initial run was 200 copies, and about 150 of them were distributed at the 1980 annual meeting. The reaction was encouraging. Everyone knew the issue was forthcoming, since so many had sent in abstracts and papers for inclusion, so there was a lot of curiosity about the final product. Members carried their copies with them, and conference attendees could frequently be seen browsing or reading various parts of the journal. Actually, I received complaints from two panel chairs that some people read the *Annals* during presentations rather than paying attention to the proceedings of the panel! I was unmoved by those complaints, believing that presentations would still get as much attention as they normally got; after all, distractions are a regular fact of life.

### **Growth & the Future of the *Annals***

During the annual business meeting, I received several requests by members to become part of the editorial process. As a result, Andrea McElderry of the University of Louisville was brought on as an associate editor, and we expanded the list of readers and consultants. In addition, many people arrived at subsequent annual meetings with their abstracts in hand and finished papers they believed were ready for consideration. I remained editor for another four years—through Volume V of the *Annals*, distributed at the 1984 annual meeting in Atlanta—and then passed responsibilities over to Hal French of the University of South Carolina. In my final report, I cited an old adage as my reason for stepping aside: “Friends come and go, but one collects enemies.” That ended my service on a light note. In fact, the real reason for stepping down as editor was that I was posted abroad as a project director for an overseas development project.

The concept for the *Annals* was homegrown and related entirely to what many of the members perceived the needs of the Conference to be at that

time. No conscious effort was made to replicate what other regional conferences of the AAS were doing, and the design was strictly what we worked out as feasible at the time. In reviewing the first several volumes of the journal, I am still satisfied with the early results, as they accurately reflect the work of the Conference at that time. But I am equally pleased with recent issues of the *Southeast Review of Asian Studies*, which show that the scholarship of the Southeast region has kept pace with the tremendous expansion of our field in the last thirty years. I have considerable professional pride in having been the founder of such a fine, lasting institution.