

PREFACE

For the times they are a-changin' ...

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Back in 2006, the *Asian Journal of Comparative Law* was launched as a 'digital only' journal. Published by De Gruyter, the *Journal* was published online for nine years, till 2014 when we switched to the traditional print model with Cambridge University Press (CUP). Innovative and daring as that first move had been, we were ahead of our time. Many academics still felt that a journal that was only available online and without a physical equivalent simply 'could not be any good'. Perception triumphed over reality.

Even up to about two years ago, when we once again broached the idea of 'going digital', there was some notable resistance from among our colleagues. Two compelling reasons were advanced for sticking with its print format. First, the age-old feeling that to be serious, the *Journal* needed to be in hardcopy, and second, it was not clear that there would be good access to an electronic format of the journal (due to bandwidth or internet reliability issues) across several jurisdictions in Asia. We decided that we should maintain our hard copy format but also enhance our electronic footprint by actively using the 'first view' option on our CUP webpage, and through social media such as Facebook, to highlight its work.

But now, as the lyrics of Bob Dylan quoted above so presciently tell us, the times are indeed 'a-changin'. The global Covid pandemic we experienced engendered a profound shift, including in academic life, towards operating digitally. In its midst, the *Journal* was compelled to hold meetings of its Advisory and Editorial Boards as well as discussions with the Board of Governors of the Asia Law Institute (ASLI) virtually. A new paradigm has emerged and the world has reached an inflection point at which a move to a purely online format made good sense both in terms of accessibility and lessened environmental impact and with no loss in academic credibility. Our Boards recognised this and supported this decision. After all, much research these days is now done through electronic search as a first port call.

While we recognise that for many people – ourselves included! – there is still something comforting and familiar when a nice hard copy is available, it is time to move on. The volume you hold in your hands is the last to be produced in hard copy. We also anticipate that the purely electronic format will enable us to get more content out more quickly and enable us to extend our reach by providing access at a lower cost.

It is our privilege, as Editors-in-Chief to lead the *Journal* in this new and exciting direction. As always, the *Journal* benefits enormously from the work and advice of our Board members, our partnership with ASLI, the dedication of our Managing Editor, our contributors, and, of course, the support and interest of our subscribers and readers. We hope you will enjoy this issue of the *Journal* and look forward to continued support for the *Journal* in its new format.

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