



Janice Nga's Member Testimony

### **ISTR Has Enhanced My Academic Journey**

I became a member of ISTR in 2005 during my PhD years. Indeed, ISTR has a special place in my life, especially in the pursuit of my academic path. I have always wanted to be an academic since I was five years old. Humbled with God's grace and blessings, I have journeyed progressively well on this path. I received my PhD degree in 2009, the first of its kind i.e. integrated PhD or PhD Plus from the Department of East Asian Studies, The University of Leeds, United Kingdom. During this process, I had the great opportunity to learn from two distinguish professors in that field of study, Prof. Victor Terry King and Prof. Mike Parnwell.

It was also during my PhD that I had the opportunity to present for the first time, a paper and a poster at an ISTR conference held in Bangkok in 2006. I remembered very well that it was the only poster presented at that conference. I received many useful comments for both my poster and paper from scholars around the world and at the same time had the opportunity to meet and converse ideas with many big names there. I had the opportunity to meet face-to-face with scholars that I had quoted in my work. Since then, ISTR conference has always been the conference that I would not want to miss, although I attend other regional conferences whenever my time and the financial situation permit me to do so.

During the ISTR regional conference in Taiwan 2009 and in Istanbul 2010, I was invited to chair a session besides presenting my own papers. I was also invited to review abstracts for the ISTR 2010 Conference. After that conference, I was given the opportunity to be an editor and administrator of the social network (Facebook) for the social media expansion of ISTR. Furthering my commitment in ISTR, I was invited to Tokyo in 2011, to speak in the Workshop on the Roles of Civil Society and Philanthropy in the Age of Crises: Cases of Asia and the United States, organized and funded by ISTR, OSIPP, University of Osaka, Japan Foundation for Global Partnership (Japan), University of Iowa and University of Wisconsin (USA). At the ISTR conference in Siena 2012, I was invited to be a member of the PhD Task

Force for the newly introduced PhD seminar. I was also appointed as a committee member for the Nominating Committee for ISTR Board Members.

From my humble experiences and involvement through ISTR, I must say ISTR has added valuable training to my academic direction and inculcated in me the eagerness to learn and contribute in any way possible. Besides the training opportunities, I have also gained support and confidence in my academic journey and faith to face various challenges.

As it is, it is very often I find myself the sole presenter from Malaysia for the past ISTR conferences. However, this situation may well be a mere coincidence. I am an economist and as I started my academic career in 1999, I observed that the importance of the civil society or the third sector in economics study was very much under researched or neglected by economists. I have noticed the existence of a relationship between money and power or power and prosperity resulting in the need to seek an explanation for this situation its consequences, justice and equality. Hence, I had since begun to propose my PhD study in this area. While it was an exigent process to convince the panel in order to secure a scholarship for this kind of unconventional economics study, it was equally challenging to find a place to pursue my PhD. However, with consistent patience and passion, God led me to Leeds. I am not elaborating the process here, but it is worth mentioning the testing times that I faced. In fact, even with my PhD degree and my academic involvement in this area of study, there is comment from a dominant university professor that I am 'wrong parking' i.e. refers to my field of specialization the third sector that is wrongly parked under economics based on his understanding. Although such criticism or its kind of action becomes harsh on me sometimes, I continue to work and promote the significance of third sector in economic development especially in my university and my country.

It is worth mentioning that ISTR is a platform where I find comfort and regenerate my confidence. ISTR through its conferences and scholars give me support and assurances that my work and I are in the 'right parking' without doubt. In other words, to a lone scholar working on an unconventional field of study in my place, I find ISTR my academic home because international scholars and economists that attend ISTR conference are many and willing to share their experiences. 'ISTR is Home' where one can find courage and comfort! I firmly believe that slowly but surely the situation can be improved and my specialization will be well accepted in times to come. Thus, I will keep on trying and never give up. Although not all my attempts were successful, I have gained some humble achievements. To date, for example, I have managed to establish an elective course namely Civil Society and Development. It has been approved and I have started to teach the course since 2012. It is an emotive moment when I get to receive the news unexpectedly. I considered the approval and introduction of this course as an important step in many challenging steps to come. It is my hope and wish that we will have a Malaysian chapter of ISTR sooner rather than later.

All and all, from the bottom of my heart, I thank you ISTR and wonderful dedicate people of ISTR community. God bless.

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