THE JOY OF WORKING BEYOND RETIREMENT
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My impending retirement in November 2005, after 31 years of working (and 13 years at the University of Malaya) became a common knowledge among my students by the middle of the year. A masters student was worried that she might not be able to complete her research paper before my retirement. Her worry was unnecessary as I have continued to supervise 21 Masters students and five Ph.D. students (four completed and one ongoing, as at end of 2017).

The University’s efforts to recruit new staff to take over my courses have been futile until 2016 when my student who had completed her Ph.D. was recruited to take over my courses. In the “handing over” process, I continued to teach Survey and Sampling Methods, and Application of Demographic Techniques, at the undergraduates and masters levels, till today. I also continued to teach Data Analysis until 2010, only to pass it on to a young colleague in 2010 when I was appointed the Head of the Department of Applied Statistics, to concentrate on my administrative duties.

The work of an academic extends way beyond teaching and supervision. Besides sitting in various committees of the faculty, one has to spend time filling up the voluminous forms for ISO compliance. My experience as an internal auditor at the Faculty (serving as chief for two years) and at the University for 12 years before quitting in 2012, has taken me to various faculties and centres. Being an auditor is rewarding as I got to know many colleagues from different disciplines, and have a better understanding of the work culture of the University.

Like all academic staff, I have to fulfill my key performance indicators for research and publication. The conducive environment of the University with funding opportunities has enabled me to undertake a number of research projects as principal investigator or co-investigator, including the High Impact Research Project on Malaysian Elderly Longitudinal Research Project. I have also participated in multi-disciplinary and cross-country projects and enjoyed the sharing of experience and knowledge with co-researchers from other countries and other disciplines. As academics, we are constantly reminded of the idioms “publish or perish”. To meet the requirements of the University, I began to pay more attention to publishing in ISI indexed journals. I have also served as a reviewer for several local and international journals.

After my mandatory retirement at 56, I continued to be involved in a number of consultancy projects, including as a member of the University of Malaya Consultancy Unit. Some of these projects had to be completed within a tight schedule, and one has to be able to cope with the stress to meet the
Deadline. I consider it quite an accomplishment to complete a UNDP commissioned consultancy project to carry out a threemonth Global ICPSR Survey Beyond 2014 for Malaysia, with the help of Associate Professor Dr. Mary Huang from University Putra Malaysia. It was indeed a very challenging and stressful experience, having to read, synthesise and analyse the voluminous information obtained from government officials and the internet, and to write up the report in a short time. My acquaintance with officials from the government departments and NGOs has facilitated greatly my consultancy work as study manager for two rounds of Family Planning Efforts Scores Studies on behalf of Future Group International. All these experiences testify the importance of networking in research and consultancy.

During the 13 years of my extended service, I have presented 50 papers at international conferences and 33 papers at national conferences and seminars, at times as invited speakers. Participation at these conferences has allowed me to exchange knowledge, meet up with old friends and forge new networks. I have also organised a number of national conferences, seminars and training workshops.

My 18 years stint with the National Population and Family Development Board (NPFDB) between 1974 and 1992, first as a statistician and rose eventually to be the Director of the Population Studies Centre of the Board, has provided me invaluable experience in survey research and working with the government. After coming back from my Master’s Degree in Population Planning from the University of Michigan in 1982, I was involved in making population projections that set a very long time frame for the target population of 70 million to be achieved in 2100, under the new population policy announced by the government. Over the next decade, I curated several national surveys on population and family, including the 1984 Malaysian Population and Family Survey, 1988 Malaysian Family Life Survey in collaboration with Rand Corporation, USA, the 1991

Population and Family Surveys in Sabah and Sarawak. The practical experiences are of great value for me to impart my knowledge on survey research and demographic analysis to the students, who are in need of wider exposure to the work environment.

I remain very much part of NPFDB, being the longest serving Board member for 33 years now. As Chairman of the Research Committee of the Board, I have been closely involved in the Board’s research activities, and strategic plan studies. During her farewell speech as Chairman of the Board in December 2014, Tan Sri Napiah Omar had told me to carry on with the Board. All in all, I have served the Board (as a staff and then a Board member) under seven director generals. Datuk Siti Norlailah Ismail (the current director general) who will be retiring come January 2018, has also asked me to continue as a Board member.

Recalling my interview for the position of Associate Professor at the University of Malaya (UM) in 1992, Professor Mokhtar Tamin (representing the Dean) had asked me to "connect" the University of Malaya with the government agencies. Gladly, I was able to provide a formal link between UM and NPFDB, with the signing of MOU on 1 April 2013, the first for UM with a government agency. I was also instrumental in arranging for the signing of MOU between UM and the Department of Statistics Malaysia on 23 November 2013.

A few "big" projects took up most of my time during the last five years (2013-2017). In 2013, I organised an international conference on migration, urbanisation and development. I spent a few months after the conference to edit the papers presented at the conference for a special issue of the Malaysian Journal of Economic Studies. In June 2014, in collaboration with NPFDB, I convened a national conference on Population and Development Inter-relationships, and the papers were subsequently edited with the help of Cheong Kee Cheok and Rajah Rashid for a book on Revisiting the Population-Development Nexus, published by UM Press. I have also devoted much of my time in implementing a project on "Enhancing Demographic Research and Training for Development Planning", after securing a five-year grant from UNFPA, following my reappointment as coordinator of the Population Studies Unit in 2013. The hosting of the Third International Conference
in July 2015 on behalf of Asian Population Association (APA), of which I was a council member for the 2013-2015 term, proved to be a herculean task. Notwithstanding the challenges and anxieties, the conference went well with strong support from my colleagues in APA, our co-hosts (NPFDB, Federation of Reproductive Health Association and UNFPA Malaysia), and the University of Malaya, in particular Professor Awang Bulgiba Awang Mahmud, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor who served as the Chairman of the National Organising Committee. I am also grateful for the strong support of UM students who served as volunteers at the conference.

The symptoms of a heart attack were already imminent since 2003, but I chose to ignore these, and I was just lucky to survive two major heart attacks in 2005 and 2008. On both occasions, I was saved from the brink of death by my good friends (Professor Dr. Sibyamala Nagarat and Dr. Yew Swee Yong) who rushed me just in time to the University of Malaya Medical Center for angioplasty. I was hospitalised again in the middle and end of 2010. On both occasions, I had to ask my friends to present my conference papers, one at the First International Conference of Asian Population Association in New Delhi in June, and the second at the International Conference on Divorce, Re-marriage, Step Families & Blended Families: Challenges and the Way Forward in Kuala Lumpur in November. Since then, I have paid more attention to my health. I adopted a more healthy lifestyle, eating more healthy food, exercising regularly and managing my time to avoid stress. But my health problem did not stop there. In April 2016 I was diagnosed to have an enlarged heart valve when I complained of chest pain to the cardiologist at University of Malaya Medical Centre. In May 2016 I underwent the heart valve replacement and coronary artery bypass surgery, which knocked me off action for a whole month. Then I realized that with age catching up, one really has to slow down and must not get too stressed up with work.

Upon recovery from the heart surgery, and with encouragement from my supervisor (Professor Dr. Goh Kim Leng) and colleagues, I decided to continue with pursuing my Ph.D. which I had procrastinated for a long time. I eventually submitted my thesis on "Essays on Public Health in Developing Countries", mainly based on my prior publications within the last five years, for examination in February 2017, and went for convolution in October. I pursued Ph.D. not just for self-fulfilment, but with the hope that this achievement will motivate others to continue to pursue knowledge as a life-long learning.

My immediate plan is to assist the University in securing funding for the next cycle of the UNFPA project to continue to promote population research for policymaking. I will also continue to strengthen the networking with local and international institutions and to promote South-South cooperation in population research. I have also accepted an invitation from my good friend Professor Mohammad Jasmi Bahari Shavazi of Teheran University to present a paper at the International Seminar on "Population Dynamics and Human Capital in Muslim countries" to be held in Teheran during 8-9 May 2018.

I enjoy the good company of family, friends, colleagues, and students. They cheer me on during difficult times and provide me with all sorts of help and support. I am also grateful to the University's management for acknowledging my small contributions (with the excellent service and excellent lecturer awards), and for extending my service contract for the thirteenth year. I continue my service with UM not as Associate Professor, but as a research fellow with reduced teaching workload (and reduced pay as well), so that I can concentrate on doing more research and guiding young researchers and students.

"Old is gold" One should not stop being active as age catches up. Be active, cheerful and adopt a positive outlook on life. To be active and to enjoy life, one must be healthy and free from financial difficulty. Hence, my advice to the young people is to adopt a healthy lifestyle and start your financial planning early in life. To all those who are about to retire or have retired, stay active and enjoy life.

Employers should take cognizance that older workers can be just as productive or even more productive than younger ones. Older workers are able to spend more time at work, as they do not have to spend much time in taking care of the young and the old. Older workers who are willing and healthy enough to continue working tend to be more dedicated to their work and can be relied on. Moreover, they can also be good mentors to guide younger workers. The use of ICT will surely open up more work opportunities for teleworking among older persons.