

IN CONVERSATION

Asian Association for Language Assessment
Student Committee

Issue 7 (2022)



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Editors' Note:

Warm greetings to AALA student members from across the world!

The year 2022 has witnessed increased visibility and growing membership for the AALA Student Committee (SC). When writing the editors' notes, we feel proud of what we have achieved and would like to express our gratitude to your continued support, dedication, collaboration, and professionalism to make 2022 a fruitful year for our community.

On behalf of the AALA SC, we are delighted to present the 7th issue of *In Conversation* series. In this issue, we first reflect on the impactful events that AALA SC has organised this year. Our April webinar on proposal writing facilitated our student members to build professional

competence; our September webinar was our first attempt to collaborate with organisations outside Asia; we also conducted a survey to better understand our members' needs. We then report on the hybrid 8th International Conference of the AALA in India. Our reports include a conference coverage, a pre-conference workshop report and our annual networking session. We have invited winners of the Outstanding Dissertation Award and Best Student Paper Award to share their brilliant ideas and experiences during their PhD journeys. Towards the end, student member statistics are presented, showing the greatest annual increase in student members since the inception of AALA SC.

Looking ahead, we hope to continue to fulfil our mission to build a stronger community for language assessment graduate students in Asia and beyond.

Best,

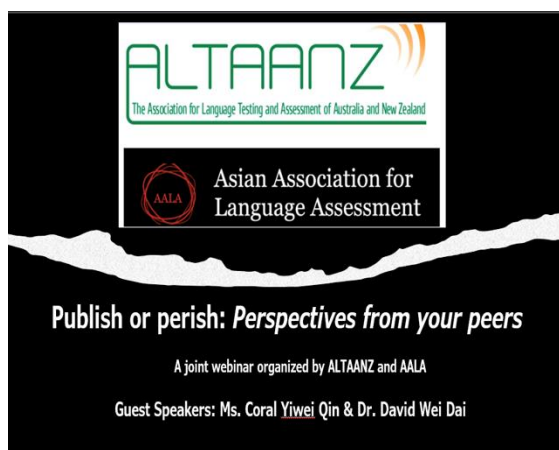
Niles Zhao & Phuong Cao (Co-editors)

AALA SC Webinars



On 25 April 2022, the AALA Student Committee webinar team (Niles Zhao, Phuong Cao, Satoshi Kurokawa, Shengkai Yin, Chang (Annie) Zhang,) hosted a

webinar on how to write research proposals for specific purposes. Guest speakers, Chengyuan Yu (University of Macau), Wenjun (Elyse) Ding (University of Bristol), and Dr. Ji-young Shin (University of Toronto, Mississauga) gave informative and practical talks on writing thesis proposals for PhD candidature, proposals for grant applications and proposals for conferences respectively. The webinar attracted a large audience from Asia (e.g., China, India, and Japan) and beyond (e.g., Australia, the UK, and the US). Participants spoke highly of the webinar and found it particularly helpful for them to draft proposals for the upcoming AALA 2022 conference.



On September 30, 2022, the AALA Student Committee webinar team (Jincheng Wu, Andy Jiahao Liu, Satoshi Kurokawa), cooperating with the Association for Language Testing and Assessment of Australia and New Zealand (ALTAANZ), hosted a webinar entitled *Publish or perish: Perspectives from your peers*. The two invited speakers, Ms. Coral Yiwei Qin (University of Ottawa) and Dr. David Wei Dai (Monash University), shared their

valuable experiences and useful suggestions about academic publishing, including but not limited to journal selection, scholarly cooperation, the process of academic publication, and responses to reviewers' comments. The webinar lasted for around one hour, with half an hour for speakers' presentations, and the other half for Q&A. The webinar interested novice scholars around the world, especially those from Asia and Oceania. Participants gave high praise to the webinar, believing it is helpful for novice scholars who are under the pressure of getting their first publications.

AALA Student Member Survey Brief 2022

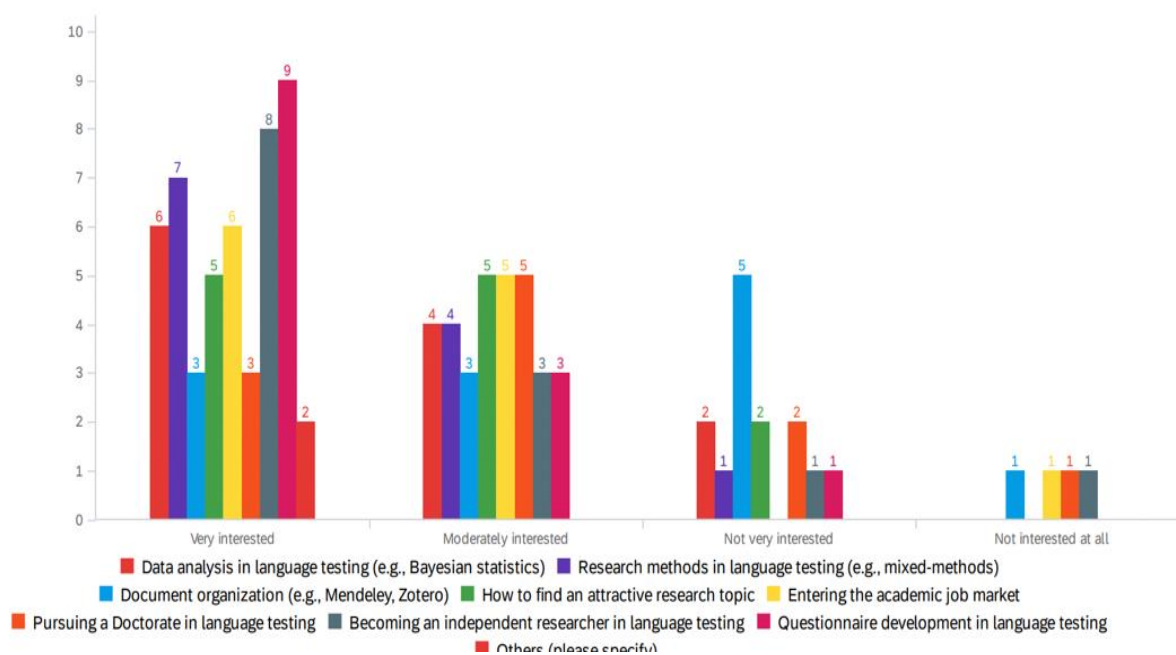
Andy Jiahao LIU (BNU-HKBU United International College)

AALA SC conducted an internal survey in June, hoping to get more information about our student members and understand their research interests and preferences for future activities. Results indicated that most student members are pursuing doctoral degrees in language testing and assessment.

In terms of our student members' research interests, language assessment literacy, learning-oriented assessment, assessing writing, technology and language assessment, and test development and item writing are among the top five, followed by multilingual competence and formative assessment.

For future webinar preparation (see *Figure 1*), our student members showed strong interest in topics such as language testing questionnaire development (N=12), becoming an independent researcher in language testing (N=11), entering the academic job market (N=11), and research methods in language testing (N=10).

Figure 1. AALA student members' preferences for future professional webinars



Regarding participants' interests in future virtual events, they are inclined to attend peer-research sharing sessions (e.g., introducing your research topics and publications; N=13), discussion about presentations presented at future AALA conferences (N=12), and a networking event (e.g., self-introduction to make connections; N=12).

Reflections from an AALA SC Member



Haeun Kim (Iowa State University)

I remember when I first attended the AALA conference in Bangkok, Thailand, in 2015. At the time, I was a graduate student pursuing a master's degree in English Education while teaching middle school students in South Korea. My thesis advisor, Professor Jungok Bae at Kyungpook National University, introduced me to the professional organization and the conference. Although I haven't been able to attend any other AALA conferences other than the virtual conference that was held last year, I have been a proud student member since 2015. In 2021, I was given the opportunity to serve on the AALA Student Committee as Secretary and my term ends this year.

Although I am currently studying for my Ph.D. in the United States, I recognise that my interests in language assessment are rooted in the experiences I have had as a language learner and teacher in South Korea. Being a member of the AALA SC, I enjoyed the feeling of being connected with scholars and other graduate students from Asia who share similar interests as

mine. The main events that I remember being part of include organizing student networking events during the 2021 AALA conference, creating surveys to gather information about specific assessment-related topics student members are interested in, and then organizing webinars on some of those topics. The moments that I enjoyed the most, however, was meeting fellow SC members on Zoom and getting to know everyone and learning so much from each other. I remember how welcoming former Co-chairs Don Yao and Tatsuro Tahara were. Niles Zhao and Phuong Cao did a great job leading this team this year, and I wish I could have been of more help. Because of the time zone differences, there were times I was unable to attend a few of our meetings, and that was one of things that made me decide to pass over my officer position to someone else next year. As I am in the final years of my Ph.D. program, I hope to be able to successfully complete my dissertation study and share my findings at an AALA conference in the near future. I am so grateful to have been part of such a wonderful organisation, and I will cherish the memories that we've created together.

AALA 2022 Conference Coverage

Shengkai Yin (Shanghai Jiao Tong University/ The University of Melbourne)

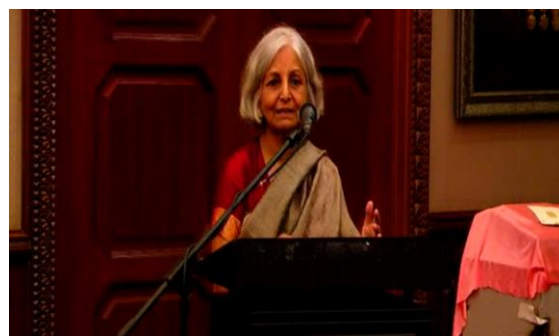


The 8th International Conference of the Asian Association for Language Assessment celebrated its big return to the onsite conference on October 26-28 in Chennai, India after nearly two years without face-to-face events due to the pandemic. The conference was hosted by Anna University with the theme of “Classroom-based assessment in the new normal and beyond: Challenges and possibilities”.

The conference attracted 160 registered conference participants (83 on-site presenters, 37 online paper and poster presenters, 35 on-site participants and 15 online participants) from 17 countries and regions in Asia, Europe, North America and Oceania. A hybrid mode was adopted this year where participants could travel to India in person or join the conference virtually, making remote collaboration possible. The conference consisted of three pre-conference workshops, two keynote speeches, five invited plenary talks (four delivered in-person, one delivered via a video link), two plenary panel discussions, one AALA student

networking session, 77 parallel papers presentation, and 23 posters presentations.

The pre-conference day started with workshops involving three interesting and insightful topics in line with the theme of the conference: ethical dilemmas in modern language assessment, unravelling teacher beliefs in assessment dilemmas, and using a learning-oriented assessment approach to the development of language assessments based on scenarios. The day ended with some delights of Indian classical dance performance and a virtual tour of the campus.



Professor Emerita Rama Mathew at the opening ceremony

The first day of the conference kicked off with opening speeches by Professor Emerita Rama Mathew (University of Delhi), local conference convenor, and Professor Jirada Wudthayagorn (Chulalongkorn University), President of AALA, followed by Dr. Antony Kunnan’s (Carnegie Mellon University) keynote speech on fairness and justice in language assessment. Then the plenary speech was delivered by Professor James Purpura (Columbia University) describing scenario-based assessment in fine-grained detail, prior to the journal editor session, paper presentations, panel discussions and another plenary speech.

On the second day of the conference, we continued with brilliant paper presentations in each hall, accompanied by plenary speeches, poster presentations, panel discussions and a successful virtual student networking session. Professor Constant Leung (King's College London) wrapped up the conference and brought it to an end with an inspirational closing keynote speech, shedding fresh light on the concept of English language proficiency. His talk encouraged the audience to revisit the commonly accepted construct of language assessments.

Overall, it was a successful and enlightening conference that not only provided opportunities for language testing researchers in Asia and beyond to engage in open discussion of key issues in the field but also promoted research in India as the first conference of its kind.

Pre-conference Workshop

Workshop 1: Ethical Dilemmas in Modern Language Assessment

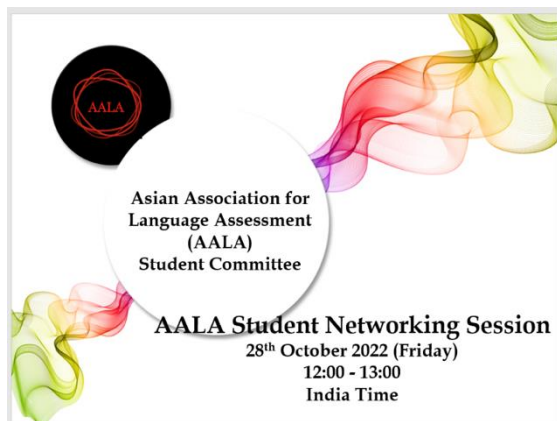
Jincheng WU (University of Macau)

On October 26th, a pre-conference workshop was delivered by Dr. Antony Kunnan, Principal Assessment Scientist at Duolingo, and a Senior Research Fellow at Carnegie Mellon University. The workshop concerns potential ethical dilemmas we might encounter while we are developing and using an assessment. The workshop attracted audiences' interest at the very beginning by referring to the famous social dilemma, the trolley problem thought experiment. Following this thought

experiment, which helped to raise the audiences' awareness of the importance of ethics, a series of language assessment scenarios were proposed for discussion. These scenarios described dilemmas that may appear in the selection and evaluation of an assessment. Specifically, eight scenarios were offered, covering dilemmas in the assessment tasks, bias and fairness evaluation, defective tasks, classification of test-takers, scoring difficulties, and assessment quality. These scenarios stimulated rich and valuable conversations among the audience and with the presenter. After each discussion, reflections from the presenter were offered, trying to offer possible ways to deal with these dilemmas. The workshop ended with problems that may appear in the future, such as fairness and bias issues of online assessment and innovative assessment. To cope with these ethical issues, assessment practitioners and researchers need to balance the quality, fairness, and expenditure of an assessment. The workshop raised the audience's awareness of ethical issues in language assessment and would benefit future research on language assessment.

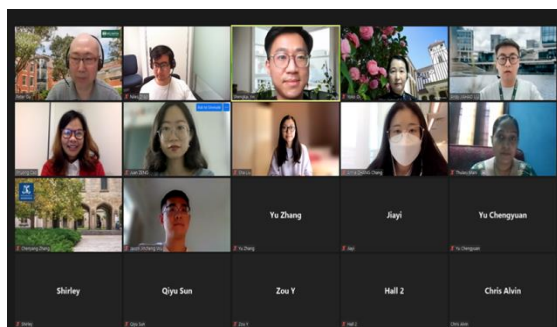
AAALA 2022 Student Networking Session

Chang Zhang
(The Education University of Hong Kong)



empirical examples. The audience were deeply intrigued and inspired by Dr. Gu's presentation, especially impressed by the new perspective that he introduced to view theories. Following this presentation, AAALA Outstanding Dissertation Award Winners, Dr. Yoko Oi and Dr. Juan Zeng, shared the challenges they encountered during their Ph.D. journeys and gave suggestions for language assessment students. Attendees of the session found their sharing to be very useful and practical and felt empowered by the talks.

The AAALA 2022 Graduate Student Networking Session at the Annual Conference was held online on October 28, 2022. This session aimed to enhance graduate students' competencies in language assessment and promote exchanges among student members.



In this session, Associate Professor Dr. Peter Gu, from the Victoria University of Wellington, gave a very informative talk entitled "Language testing and assessment language: from theories to research". Dr. Gu shared insightful experiences and recommendations on language ability and validity in language assessment by presenting a thorough analysis of theoretical conceptualization and

Words from the AALA Outstanding Dissertation Award Winners



Dr. Yoko Oi (Waseda University)

Hello AALA student members! My name is Yoko Oi. I feel highly honoured to be given the AALA 2021 Outstanding Dissertation Award. I gained my PhD degree in Education from Waseda University. I currently work for several universities. I also taught English in a Japanese public senior high school for a long time. While working in senior high school, I found many research questions and felt the necessity to link theories with practice in terms of educational implications. I had experienced difficulty in putting theory into practice, especially for young learners in Japan. Consequently, I considered that linguistic or educational theories need to be tailored or modified to be more effectively applied in the classroom, depending on the learners' educational conditions (e.g., learners' age, culture, and proficiency). Therefore, I decided to study applied linguistics at Waseda university to further explore my research interests and contribute to the development of English education in Japan.

It took me eight years to complete the dissertation (it was quite a long time!). This happened because I worked as a full-time teacher in a Japanese public high school while working on the dissertation.

Consequently, I had to carefully balance my time between my teaching duties and my research (e.g., reading previous studies, thinking of research questions, and writing papers). A dual life as a high school teacher and PhD candidate was difficult but it gave me a lot of insights, which deepened my research interests. Therefore, I grew to appreciate my students and co-workers who gave me those meaningful experiences.

The road to completing the dissertation was sometimes challenging. In my opinion, the most important thing was to constantly focus on what was questioned during the first stage of the study. I also found that it was important to discuss my research interests with supervisors and peers to be given advice and suggestions. I was able to meet many honourable teachers and friends at Waseda University. In particular, Professor Yasuyo Sawaki has always enlightened and motivated me. Professor Sawaki served as a lighthouse for me in my study. Without these people's heart-felt cooperation, it would have been difficult for me to complete my dissertation. Finally, I would like to thank AALA for giving me this honourable award, which empowered me to go forward.



Dr. Juan Zeng (South China Normal University)

Hello, AALA student members. I am Juan Zeng, a graduate of South China Normal University under the supervision of Professor Liyan Huang. I am super honoured to have won the 2022 AALA Outstanding Dissertation Award and very glad to share my journey with you.

My PhD project is about rater cognition. Initially, I was interested in the scoring rubric of the continuation task, a newly developed integrated writing task in mainland China. I didn't find my motivation until I participated in a rating task of continuation writing in January 2019. After the rating, we held a seminar to discuss the rating criteria and rating process, which revealed several problems with the official scoring rubric. That seminar initiated my motivation to construct and validate the scoring rubric for the continuation task. However, after reviewing the literature and discussing with some experts, both the experts and my supervisor suggested that my focus should be beyond the development of a scoring rubric and that an innovative technique, such as eye-tracking, should be adopted. Otherwise, it would be hard to contribute to the field. Well, it was not easy to step into a completely new field. I seized every opportunity to learn this new technique and borrowed eye-tracking equipment from other institutions. Thankfully, I was not alone, and people were so nice that they made my eye-tracking experiment come true. I owe my debt to all those lovely people.

Pursuing a PhD degree is really challenging, which provides an opportunity for people to push themselves far beyond their

mental limits. My journey would not have been completed without the seven-year push and help of my supervisor (four years for MA), Professor Liyan Huang. She always encouraged me by saying that "It's no big deal. It's just an academic game." If you find yourself trapped or feeling frustrated about your project, try to think positively and make some adjustments or seek help. I quite agree that the whole journey has been fulfilling. It was fun at times, frustrating at times, and even heartbreaking at times. But after overcoming all the challenges, you will find it is all worth it. Fun is easy to obtain. Frustration can be comforted. Heartbreak can be healed. The feeling of true fulfilment lasts for a lifetime. I feel very lucky and grateful to have been given the opportunity to experience the challenge. I think you may also cherish this unique experience that most people around the world would not have the privilege to encounter. If there are any suggestions for you, I think I will still quote Professor Liying Cheng's suggestion to "read and write every day" which I also mentioned in AALA Student Networking Session. Just believe everything counts, such as each book and article you read, each presentation you shared, and each task or duty you completed. All these efforts will pay off.

I currently work at the School of Foreign Language, Guangdong Polytechnic Normal University. Sitting beside my desk and telling you my story, I feel grateful to life, my family, friends, and all the experts and teachers who once gave their hand to make my project complete and improved. I hope you all could enjoy your research and your life.

Words from 2022 AALA Best Student Paper Award Winners



Sha Liu (University of Bristol)

Hello, fellow graduate students at AALA! I am Sha Liu, a PhD candidate at the University of Bristol, UK, supervised by Professor Guoxing Yu. I feel truly honoured to receive the 2022 AALA Best Student Paper Award after the 2019 AALA Best Student Poster Award. I am also grateful to the AALA Student Committee for inviting me to introduce my research and share my experience.

My research interests include second language writing assessment, automated writing evaluation, eye-tracking, and Rasch modelling. The paper that won me the award was based on my doctoral research entitled “L2 learners’ engagement with automated writing evaluation as a diagnostic assessment tool: A mixed-method study”. As a part of my doctoral thesis, this paper particularly focused on the impact of feedback explicitness and accuracy on how L2 learners engaged with AWE feedback in the process of essay revision. To this end, I proposed my own theoretical framework of feedback engagement which was conceptualised as attention allocation,

cognitive effort expenditure, and revision responses. Methodologically, eye-tracking measure, in combination with stimulated recall, and reflective journal, was used to obtain deep insights into L2 learners’ online feedback processing. The findings suggested feedback explicitness as a determining factor affects L2 learners’ ability to engage with and benefit from AWE feedback, therefore pointing to the need for timely teacher or peer scaffolding. The results also suggest that AWE tools need to be constantly updated to improve their feedback accuracy, as error-prone feedback may cause participants to make inaccurate amendments to their writing. In addition, teachers should help learners confirm the accuracy of AWE feedback. The paper has recently been published in the [AWE special of the journal *Language Learning and Technology*](#) and is freely accessible.

As a final-year PhD student who is taking some extra time to ‘[ph]inish’ my study, I would like to share a piece of advice that has guided and inspired me throughout my journey: **The best thesis is a done thesis so do not let great be the enemy of good!** This suggestion would benefit those of us who tend to be “perfectionists” unnecessarily spending endless hours perfecting our writing. Second, **take your time, take as much time as is needed.**

This advice from the book “*The slow professor: Challenging the culture of speed in the academy*” by Maggie Berg and Barbara Seeber may sound counter-intuitive to us in academia which advocates the culture of productivity and overwork. However, the doctoral journey can sometimes turn out to be bumpy and

challenging. On those occasions, it is more than okay to pace our graduation and 'slowly' flourish.



Emily Di Zhang (Macau University)

Hello, my dear AALA student members! I am Emily Di Zhang, a Ph.D. student at the University of Macau, China. It is a terrific honour and pleasure to receive the 2022 AALA Best Student Paper Award and share my research interest and experience here.

I embarked on my language testing and assessment journey in my MA study at Zhejiang University where I worked with Professor Lianzhen He. It is she who opened the door of language testing and assessment to me. During my MA study, I participated in the project of developing China's Standards of English (CSE), which turned out to be a great learning experience for me. I started to have basic ideas of how to develop and validate scales. After I got my MA degree, I came to the University of Macau to pursue my Ph.D. study, working with Professor Antony John Kunnan, who is a leading figure in the field. Guided by him, I completed reading the volumes of *The*

Companion to Language Assessment, which helped me to gain a comprehensive picture of the *status quo* and future directions of this field. Admittedly, it is a great pity that Professor Kunnan left for the U.S., and I needed to switch supervisors, but working with Associate Professor Shulin Yu, an expert in the second language (L2) writing, has drawn my attention to the cutting-edge research in L2 writing and inspired me to incorporate the new findings in L2 writing to L2 writing assessment. The idea of assessing digital multimodal composing (DMC) came from the growing body of research on DMC in L2 writing research. While L2 writing researchers have given much attention to the affordances of DMC to L2 students, little is known about how to measure the DMC competence or assess the DMC performance. This research gap has driven me to conduct the research of developing and validating an L2 student DMC competence scale.

From where I stand, undertaking language assessment research calls for perspectives from other disciplines such as educational measurement, L2 acquisition and learning, L2 teaching, L2 curriculum studies, to name a few. Just as an old saying goes, stones from other hills may serve to polish the jade of this one. We need to be open-minded and well-informed of what is happening in other disciplines and apply knowledge and methods from those disciplines to solving problems in language assessment.

Membership Statistics

Table 1. Student Membership by Year (Updated on November 2nd, 2022)

Year	Number of New Student Members
2014	17
2015	24
2016	21
2017	13
2018	26
2019	15
2020	34
2021	27
2022	39
Total	216

Table 2. Student Membership by Country/Region (Updated on November 2nd, 2022)

Country/Region	2021	2022
India	20	46
Mainland China	28	32
UK	18	18
USA	17	17
Australia	16	17
Vietnam	10	11
Thailand	9	11
South Korea	9	9
Japan	8	9
Hong Kong SAR	8	8
Macau	7	7
Indonesia	5	5
Canada	4	4
Singapore	3	3
Malaysia	2	3
Iran	2	2
Philippines	1	2
Bangladesh	1	1
Hungary	1	1
Nepal	1	1
New Zealand	1	1
Pakistan	1	1
Portugal	1	1
Sri Lanka	1	1
Taiwan	1	1
Turkey	1	1
Uzbekistan	1	1
Algeria	0	1
Ireland	0	1
In Total	177	216

AAALA Founding Members (in alphabetical order)

He, Lianzhen (Zhejiang University)
Imao, Yasu (Osaka University)
Jin, Yan (Shanghai Jiao Tong University)
Kunnan, Antony John (University of Macau)
Lee, Yong-Won (Seoul National University)
Lee, Young-Shik (Hannam University)
Qian, David (Hong Kong Polytechnic University)
Sawaki, Yasuyo (Waseda University)
Wu, Jessica Row-Whei (Language Training and Testing Center)

AAALA Executive Board (2022-2024)

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(Chulalongkorn University)

Co-President

Thi Ngoc Quynh Nguyen (VNU University of Languages and International Studies)

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The University of Melbourne)
Chang Zhang
(The Education University of Hong Kong)
Jincheng Wu (University of Macau)
Jiahao Liu
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AAALA Student Committee In Conversation Series

Issue 7 (2022)

Co-editors: Niles Zhao & Phuong Cao