



## Editorial

# Publishing in Asian Studies

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Publishers and authors can find themselves with diametrically opposed interests. While it is extremely rare for authors of academic books to make much money out of their publications (you publish not for the royalties, but because the CV demands it), profit is the point of all commercial publishers, and profit – or at least the absence of loss – is increasingly becoming a necessity for university presses. This has great implications for the type of manuscript that can make the successful transition to published book, and thus the type of scholarship available to the academic community.

### What gets published, and how?

In the good old days, many university presses had the luxury of being able, at least occasionally, to publish books because they were good, solid, important contributions to a field of scholarly research, without necessarily considering whether this field was large enough to make the book a profitable proposition. Now, although many university and institutional presses still receive some level of financial support from their parent institutions and can also hope for the occasional outside publication grant, they are invariably subject to far more stringent demands on profitability, and thus their editorial policies can no longer differ much from those of commercial presses. At the same time, the growth of the university sector generally, and the increased demand on academics to ‘publish or perish’ means that most presses are offered a large number of manuscripts to pick and choose between. An unedited collection of conference papers now stands little chance of being published, as does an unrevised Ph.D. thesis. And the brilliant book on an obscure subject which might earlier have caught the attention of a specialist editor no longer stands up to the rigorous demands of the profit ratio.

So how does one go about making a manuscript attractive to publishers, and how does one find the very best publisher for it? Based on years of experience as a commissioning editor, Gerald Jackson offers much advice on this in his article *Breaking into the Gilded Cage* on page 3. For those who want far more detail than can be provided in an article, Bill Hamilton brings his many years of experience as director of a university press to bear in his review of two recent books of advice to authors, in the article *Books on Books* on page 11.

As with most other businesses, the larger a publishing company is, the more it must rely on highly structured systems

and guidelines in its daily work, from benchmarks for sales projections used by editors in deciding what to publish to timelines employed by the production department in bringing out books. Smaller publishers, on the other hand, can be much more flexible in almost everything they do, but lead precarious lives where the failure of just one or two titles to live up to expectations can create serious financial problems. It is interesting to note, though, that while there is a very great deal of activity on the mergers and acquisitions front, with large publishers buying up small and medium-sized ones and merging with one another in a constantly shifting formation dance, there is a very steady supply of new small publishing houses set up by corporate escapees and other enthusiastic hopefuls. In his article *Small, But Perfectly Formed* on page 5, Nick Awde shares his experiences of the joys and dangers of life as a small independent publisher.

Does this matter to authors? It should, as the choice between a large and a small publisher, or a commercial and an institutional publisher, is likely to affect many aspects of a book project – from the terms on which the project is signed up, to the level of attention lavished on it during the editorial and production process, to the efficiency with which the resulting book is promoted to the world at large. But one suspects that what really matters to most authors on a personal, day-to-day level, is the relationship with their editor. Although the author-

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editor relationship is now rarely characterized by life-long commitment but has become more of a serial monogamy affair, while it lasts its nature can impact greatly on the smooth running of a book project. As in all relationships, clear communication, mutual support, and an understanding of the needs of one's partner is of the utmost importance. On page 6, Stephanie Rogers lays out what she as an editor sees as the ideal interaction with an author, in her article *The Author-Editor Relationship Explained*.

### Who are the publishers?

So far, we have looked at publishing as if it is one, homogenous industry, while in fact we should be thinking about many different publishing industries in different countries, with different author and customer bases, different economic and political conditions, different business traditions. It may make little difference to the end result whether a book has been published in the United



States, the United Kingdom or the United Arab Emirates, but it is highly likely that many of the processes have varied, perhaps a little, perhaps a lot. For instance, Australian and New Zealand university presses do not concentrate exclusively on academic books as do their US counterparts, but also publish significant numbers of fiction and poetry titles. In the United States, the home market is so huge that many smaller presses choose to devote very little time

tion, reviews the particular pressures on Southeast Asian publishers to embrace new electronic media for both publishing and marketing in her article *Southeast Asia: Reaching a Worldwide Audience* on page 9, while Paul Kratoska, who has spent many years involved in academic publishing both as publisher and as an academic, reviews the range of *Academic Publishing in Southeast Asia* and the challenges faced by these presses on page 8.

### What about journals?

One highly important side of academic publishing not yet touched upon is journals' publishing. While journals have always been of greater relative importance in the physical sciences than in the humanities and social sciences, they are nonetheless an integral part of the whole, and one that is seeing great change and much experimentation. When library budgets shrink, books are likely to suffer before established journals as librarians are reluctant to discontinue years, maybe decades, of subscription. But new journals are a different matter, and it has become nearly impossible to start a new print journal without a very large sum of money to back it up for the first many years as it establishes its credentials to the extent where libraries are willing to consider taking up the long-term commitment of subscription. This, together with the increased pressure on academics to publish and thus the increased pool of material suited for journals' publication, has encouraged budding journal editors to lead the way into electronic journals publishing – swiftly followed by established journals' publishers quick to spot the advantages of this development.

A vast number of journals are now available online only, or online in addition to a print version. A few are free, many are cheaper than the print editions. Publishing online cuts out the cost of printing, postage and warehousing of back issues, leaving mainly an investment of editorial time. Even this some publishers are now trying to recoup in advance by asking authors to pay for the peer review process and editing work, and in return slashing subscription costs. It is an area in flux, with many eager to predict the imminent death of the print journal, decry the pressure on low-paid academics to fund their own publications, or rejoice in the increasing proliferation of free or cheap scholarship available to all. But whether a journal is provided in print or online, at great or at negligible cost, it will only be read if its academic credentials are in order. Experienced journal editor Anand Yang sets out what he believes makes a good journal and good journal editing in his article *Journal Publishing in Asian Studies* on page 7, where he also lists the cannon of Asian Studies journals today.

### How are books sold?

Even when the academic credentials of a book or journal are impeccable, the writing and editing flawless, and the university world thirsting for more research on the subject, the publication will remain locked in obscurity unless it is efficiently marketed. There has traditionally been what can perhaps best be described as a tug-of-war between editorial and marketing staff, with editors unhappy that marketers would focus on sales potential over academic worth, and vice versa. For many, many years, editors were the clear winners in this contest and most publishing houses were headed by editors or ex-editors. However, while that is still firmly the case among university presses, marketing folk have recently come to play a much-enhanced role with many commercial presses. This should be a cause neither for concern nor jubilation – selecting and producing a book on the one hand, and marketing and selling it on the other, are simply two sides of the same coin, and no publisher can survive without both functions. In my article *Selling the Ivory Tower* on page 10, I look at some of the challenges faced by marketing professionals, and at how authors can help us to make the most of their books.

Once a book has been published and successfully sold to its potential readers, that is likely to be the end of any involvement on the publisher's part. Although it is now technically possible to keep a title in print indefinitely at little cost by storing, not printed copies, but a computer file from which a copy can immediately be printed when an order is received, this is still a facility that is not in general use for new books, and only very rarely extended to titles published in the past. Thus, in addition to the thousands and thousands of new books published every year within our field, and the vast number of backlist titles available from the original publisher, there is an even more staggering number of older – sometimes much older – titles that are out of print. The only hope of acquiring one of these is from an antiquarian bookseller such as Gert-Jan Bestebreurtje, who talks to Paul van der Velde, in the article *Travels the World Over* on page 12, about life among bibliophiles and rare books.

### Want to know more?

There will be an opportunity to discuss some of the issues raised in these articles and many other topics relating to publishing in Asian Studies, at the coming ICAS 4 conference in Shanghai from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 24<sup>th</sup> of August. Long-time Asian Studies editor Albert Hoffstaedt will chair a session during the conference on *Academic Publishing*, and he lays out his plans for this event in his article on page 11. ■