



# Southeast Asia: Reaching a Worldwide Audience

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It is the desire of all authors to ensure that their books are read by as many people as possible. It is the hope of all publishers that they will sell as many books as possible. And it is the objective of all libraries to ensure that as much material as possible is available for access by their users. In essence, we all want to reach a worldwide audience.

However, it is no mean task for a publisher to tell the world about every new book, to promote it and make it easy for the reader to obtain a copy. For the publisher, there are costs involved, market knowledge, business experience, and many years of building a worldwide network and reputation for quality books.

## Publishing in the West

Western publishers issue books from their offices in North America or Europe that have been – and still are – out of reach of readers in Southeast Asia, either because the books are far too expensive, or there is little attempt to promote and sell them widely in the region. This dominance of books published in the West is now being reversed.

Excellent academic books are being published in English in Southeast Asia, by scholars of Southeast Asia – the young and eminent alike. The scholars may themselves be Southeast Asian, but increasingly Western scholars, too, are choosing to publish in the region. In other words, there is a trend for scholars now to publish in Southeast Asia, rather than look exclusively to the West.

## Why publish in Southeast Asia?

One reason for this reversing trend is that authors have found that if they publish in Southeast Asia, their books still reach the rest of the world and at a reasonable price. The reputation of the publisher is obviously also an important factor, as is the quality of content, production, design and marketing. Often a book issued in Southeast Asia is jointly issued with a co-publisher in the West. This is a happy situation all round; as the author becomes better known in different parts of the world, the two co-publishers sell more copies of the book, the author receives more royalty payments and the readers have easier access to the book through the different publishing networks.

Another reason for the rising trend to publish with regional publishers is the dynamism and versatile approach of some Southeast Asian publishers to meet the expectations of scholars. The publishing industry in the region is reaching a level of maturity and sophis-

tication. This in turn has led to pioneering efforts to push the boundaries of publishing, to embrace the new technologies, in particular the use of computers and the Internet or worldwide web. There are few scholars anywhere in the world who do not make use of the Internet in one way or another – from daily e-mails to the use of search engines, for research and information on the web or at library terminals, discussion groups like H-Asia, e-journals, and perhaps even the latest blogging to share one's personal thoughts with the world.

One such academic publisher in Southeast Asia that has embraced the new technologies is ISEAS, or the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, a regional research centre located in Singapore, which aims to broaden the scope of scholarly publishing, using both print and digital media to reach a worldwide audience.

## Transition from print to electronic paradigm

From an author's point of view, the important thing is to have the work issued by a reputable publisher who can ensure value-added quality and issue the work as quickly as possible. Value-added generally means peer review, copy-editing, design and production, as well as promotion and sales – all the usual roles of a traditional publisher. However, value-added now also refers to a range of other services provided by the publisher at a time when traditional publishing moves from a print to an electronic paradigm.

The fast-changing world of electronic publishing offers new opportunities for disseminating content, for new partnerships in publishing and for new ways of developing library collections. We no longer refer to electronic material as a book, but as "content". Content is packaged differently. It is not necessarily paper-based. The medium has changed. New forms of publication are emerging. As the medium changes, so too does the method of promoting and distributing it.

## E-books and e-journals

E-books are the electronic version of a book that may or may not also be available in print – similarly with e-journals. Few scholars really want to download and print a hefty e-volume of several hundred pages. However, from my extensive experience as publisher at ISEAS, I have found that scholars might not want the whole book, but just one chapter. This chapter might be for their personal reference or for a course-pack for their students on an undergraduate course. Similarly with single articles in a journal – scholars now have the choice of obtaining just one article electroni-



cally instead of subscribing to the entire journal. The publisher can provide such e-content within minutes of the scholar's request, by delivering it online direct to the computer on his desk anywhere in the world at a fraction of the price of a subscription.

## Databases and aggregators

If the scholar chooses not to buy such e-content direct from the publisher, he can also refer to it in libraries that have e-books and e-journals, as well as aggregators such as CROSSREF and other specialist databases like EBSCO. In such cases, the publisher would have made arrangements to deposit copies of the electronic books, chapters, journals and articles in such databases under licence. The advantage is that these databases are accessed by thousands of people all over the world. By plugging into such varied networks, a publisher from "distant" Southeast Asia reaches the same audience as publishers in the West.

## CD-ROM and hyperlinks

Another use of digital media is CD-ROM. These can enhance the content of a printed book if sold together. For example, the book *Power Plays: Wayang Golek Puppet Theater of West Java* by Andrew Weintraub (jointly issued by Ohio University Press and ISEAS) includes a multimedia interactive CD-ROM – bringing colour, sight and sound to the reader. A picture is worth a thousand words, but a CD-ROM does it even better!

The ten countries of ASEAN – Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam – have a wealth of knowledge and information to be shared. Sadly, much of it is "grey" literature that cannot be found in bookshops, and much has gone out of print. Digital media have made it possible to

preserve and continue to disseminate research that might otherwise not be available.

## Creating a balance

Publishing from Southeast Asia is growing as the region develops. As world attention today seems to be focussing on the rise of China and India and the continuing fascination with Japan, Southeast Asia has to compete for attention. The onus is on publishers, book-

sellers and libraries to ensure that the wealth of knowledge and information is shared and accessible all over the world. The Internet is here to stay and we must avail ourselves of the opportunities. Publishers are having to re-examine the economics of doing business while at the same time bearing in mind the trend towards open access. Quality of content and effective marketing strategies are still key factors in publishing.

Within Southeast Asia, the grouping of ten ASEAN countries is also one that represents a range of extremes of socio-economic development. We cannot assume that all libraries, publishers and end-users in Southeast Asia have access to fast Internet broadband so readily. The extremes in the range of stages of socio-economic development can lead to a digital divide within Southeast Asia. Publishers need to factor this into their strategies to ensure that readers in Southeast Asia do not get left behind on the highway of information. Having sung the praises of electronic publishing, I don't think that Gutenberg's invention of the printing press will become obsolete for many years yet. As a Southeast Asian publisher, one is more attuned to meeting the needs not only of the Western scholarly community, but also our neighbours in the region – a balance of serving the academic community at home and abroad. ■