



English-Language Academic Publishing in Asia

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Following the Pacific War, social science research on Asia shifted from the activities of the West in Asia to the activities of the people of Asia. Asian languages and first-hand knowledge of local societies became an essential feature of research, and a growing proportion of those involved were scholars of Asian origin who taught in the region's expanding university systems.

Post-war academic publishing in Asia

Tertiary education expanded rapidly in Asia between 1950 and 2000, with the number of universities in China, Korea and Japan increasing from 421 to 1,851, and there was a corresponding increase in the quantity of academic material published in Asian languages. These three countries combined had 12 university presses in 1950, but the number increased to 194 by the end of the century. In the year 2000, university presses in Japan published 794 titles (1.3 per cent of the 60,646 books published in Japan that year), those in China published 15,368 titles (18 per cent of the 84,258 titles published there), and those in Korea produced 1,232 titles (6.1 per cent of 19,970 titles published) (Yamamoto Toshiaki, Director, Seigakuin University Press: "Historical Developments and Functions of University Presses in East Asia", unpublished paper). These numbers include a substantial quantity of textbooks, which some university presses published as their primary activity, and books translated from Western languages, but there was also a growing body of original research. A similar expansion of academic publishing took place in Southeast Asia, where every major university created a university press.

Nearly all of this material was in Asian languages, although English-language publishing programmes operated at the University of Malaya in Singapore (later the National University of Singapore), at the University of Hong Kong, and in the Philippines at the University of the Philippines, the Ateneo de Manila, de la Salle University, and the University of Sto. Tomas. These universities remain bastions of English-language publishing, but the output is modest compared with Asian-language publishing. NUS Press (the successor to Singapore University Press) will issue around 50 titles in 2007 and Hong Kong University Press around 40, and these are the largest English-language university presses in Asia. Outside the universities, a substantial amount of scholarly material is published by commercial academic presses, which are particularly important in Japan, Indonesia and India, and by research institutes, NGOs and government think tanks.

English: Outlet or obstacle

Academics who are not native speakers face various obstacles when attempting to publish in English. The most obvious is that a manuscript requires extremely good English to convey complex ideas and meet the standards of international academic publications. Also, the conventions for presenting academic material differ from country to country, and do not always match the expectations of English-language international refereed publications. Some differences go to the very structure of a composition. Japanese scholars present information and develop arguments very differently when writing in Japanese, and in English. One says that it is



necessary to become less Japanese, because English demands a directness that would be out of place in Japanese-language material. Another tries 'not to think in Japanese sentences'. Other issues relating to Asian-language scholarship in translation are the degree to which a piece of work provides detailed citations for specific pieces of information, the value attached to elegant writing, and the question of whether a translation is a new work or an alternative version of an existing work.

Academics in Asia track research trends in English-language literature and strive to contribute to these discussions. However, an article based on literature in an Asian language sometimes emerges from a different discussion and may not make an obvious contribution to anything taking place in English. For example, regionalism and the significance of 'areas' have been pushed aside in Western scholarship in favour of studies based on globalisation, but remain important in Asian scholarship, where active discussions are underway concerning regional identities and the creation of transnational economic and cultural zones. There are also academic exchanges that are difficult for outsiders to enter. While radical Islam is a topic of great interest throughout the world, it would be difficult for non-Muslims or non-Indonesians to participate in the radical Islamist discourse found in Indonesian religious writings. The same can be true of discussions of national identity, the integrity of a national space, or the evaluation of political leaders.

Another difference is in the treatment of sensitive issues. In some Southeast Asian countries these are more likely to be discussed in English than in the national language. While writing in English appears to direct material toward an international audience, it is also a way of employing neutral terminology and of reaching a specific audience within the country. Contrariwise, writing in an Asian language offers a different way of handling sensitive matters because it limits readership to a known group. Japanese scholars, for example, sometimes choose to discuss controversial or awkward issues in Japanese to avoid giving offence.

The value of publishing in English

Under these circumstances, why do Asian scholars take the trouble to publish in English? The obvious reason is to communicate with a wider audience, not just in English-speaking countries but throughout the world. A second is to build strong publication records that will support internal evaluations, or improve university standings in published rankings such as those prepared annually by the *Times Higher Education Supplement*. One of the categories used in these rankings is citations recorded in standard indices, which are heavily weighted toward English-language publications and the style of citation characteristic to them. The same is true of the system of staff and departmental evaluation used in the European Union, which has been adopted by some Asian universities as part of their promotion and tenure exercises. Reliance on these indices to denote the value of scholarly research puts pressure on scholars to publish in English.

In Japan, publications in English and in Japanese are valued equally, but some universities in China give a journal article written in English three or four times the weight of one in Chinese. Except in Hong Kong, where English remains the dominant language of scholarship, the number of Chinese scholars able to write in English remains small, but Chinese scholars with foreign degrees increasingly occupy key administrative positions and are pressing for adoption of Western academic standards as part of an effort to build world-class institutions. Universities in China use three different systems of evaluation, but all recognize the importance and value of English-language publications. In most Southeast Asian countries, however, there is little pressure to publish in English. Universities in Singapore operate in English, and in the Philippines English remains central to tertiary education, but elsewhere teaching is done in the national language and scholars face no disadvantages in terms of career prospects or salary if they publish only in their national languages.

Journals and occasional papers produced in Asian countries offer many opportunities for Asian scholars to publish, both in English and in national lan-

guages. The readership is often small, although scholars occasionally write for serious mass circulation journals catering to general audiences. These publications, and some Asian-language academic journals, pay contributors a fee, and because academic salaries in parts of Asia are notoriously low, such payments are a welcome supplement to a faculty member's income. On the other hand, scholars who choose to publish in English face a painful ordeal that involves writing in a language they handle with difficulty, undergoing refereeing that can seem offensively blunt and confrontational, and waiting months or years for an article or book to appear in print. The process is laborious and unpleasant, and for many scholars offers no significant academic return and no financial reward.

Given the very large volume of academic material produced within a given year, it is clear that even a greatly expanded program of English-language publication would only capture a small proportion of the academic research done in Asian languages. Such publications provide an important bridge between different scholarly traditions, but there remains a pressing need for academics working on Asia to master Asian languages, not only to carry out their own research but also to access scholarly materials produced in the region.

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