

## The persistent allure of book series in Asian studies

Michael Duckworth

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES for authors, editors, and publishers in developing academic series, and what are the hurdles to success for all parties involved? For authors and publishers, a sturdy and provocative series can be a magnet for talent and can help sustain several years of cohesive editorial work, often with consistent series design and production templates that help lead to clear brand identity in the intellectual marketplace and other marketing synergies.

For general readers and teachers suffering from hyper-connectivity and shrinking attention spans, a well-defined and well-managed series can help navigate information overload and focus attention on a body of new work with consistently high standards of editorial investment. Similarly, younger scholars can find a safe harbor for their work and ideally can receive an extra round of intensive critical feedback from engaged series editors, while also making connections among series authors that may become a foundation for future research and career development.

### Successes and challenges

Compared with stand-alone monographs, series titles may also enjoy residual benefits in terms of marketing as the series grows and gains fresh promotion and new audiences. But anecdotal evidence suggests that some of these traditional benefits of series publishing are eroding amid a recent glut of new series and budgetary fatigue among many libraries. Increasingly, library acquisitions plans are influenced less by series affiliations than by other factors, including the rise of more rigid approval plans and on-demand purchasing.

Working to develop and sustain several series in Asian studies over fifteen years with the University of Washington Press (UW Press) and Hong Kong University Press (HKU Press), I've noticed some common elements of success as well as familiar and recurring challenges. Whether edited by one or two talented scholars or by a larger editorial collective, a vital ingredient for success is the willingness of editors to remain focused and engaged over several years despite many competing pressures

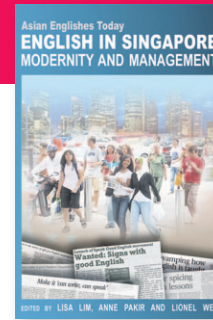
of teaching, administration, and other research goals. The best results often accrue to series that are not only timely and intellectually powerful, but also managed by series editors who are able to sustain energetic commitment to the series as a central part of their own career development, rather than just one of many items on a busy and rapidly expanding resume.

### Series by UW Press and HKU Press

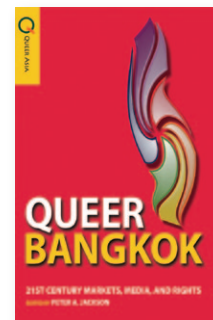
UW Press has developed distinction and competitive advantages in several fields in Asian studies through the cumulative impacts and awards and course adoptions from series such as *Gandharan Buddhist Texts*, edited by Richard Salomon, which grew out of a research project commissioned by the British Library after it acquired in the 1990s a trove of birch bark scrolls in Kharosthi script. Prof. Salomon's team of research fellows and graduate students was one of the few places the library could turn for deciphering and reconstructing these crumbling 2000-year-old scrolls, and their work has attracted fresh commissions from other scroll owners around the world.

*Studies on Ethnic Groups in China*, edited by Stevan Harrell in close collaboration with my UWP colleague Lorri Hagman, was another standout series that has helped several younger scholars publish their first books. Like many series, it grew out of an unusually successful conference volume, *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers*. For many authors, a primary appeal of the series was the opportunity to work intensively with the tireless Prof. Harrell, often through several revisions prior to publication. Series can also provide a rallying point for innovative cross-disciplinary work, as in the case of *Studies in Modernity and National Identity*, edited by Resat Kasaba and Sibel Bozdogan, which features a number of prize-winning works on architectural history and politics of the Middle East and Asia.

For Hong Kong University Press, groundbreaking series such as *Queer Asia*, *Trans-Asia Screen Cultures*, and *Asian Englishes* have helped to establish the Press as a dynamic regional publisher committed to pan-Asian themes. The management of the *Queer Asia* series is particularly interesting, with four series editors who



annually rotate the lead role in handling new submissions and evaluations of manuscripts. The editors—Chris Berry in London, Peter Jackson in Australia, Helen Leung in Canada and John Erni in Hong Kong—also bring an extraordinary range of academic perspectives, professional networks and disciplinary depth that would be extremely difficult for a single editor to provide.



### Serious rewards

Even informal series can have a major impact for authors and for a press seeking unusual funding support to attain greater visibility and prestige, as in the case of a group of 15 heavily illustrated UW Press monographs on Asian art supported by the Getty Foundation. These publications, which have won a variety of editorial and design prizes from AAS, ICAS, College Art Association and other sources, would not have been viable without substantial external support; Getty was interested to support an ambitious multi-book project, but not stand-alone volumes. Similarly, the Mellon Foundation in recent years has helped to launch several series and press collaborations such as *South Asia Across the Disciplines* (a joint series by California, Chicago and Columbia) as well as other multipress initiatives in American literature, ethnomusicology, and art history.



Whatever the subject focus or editorial mechanism, it's essential to maintain clear communication between series editors, press staff and authors (who are often juggling tenure calendar pressures) to agree on mutual expectations and realistic schedules at each step of the process. New series, like new journals, need careful planning and development to launch effectively and thrive in their initial years until books begin to generate a self-sustaining stream of reviews, awards, course adoptions, and word-of-mouth referrals. But with careful planning and dedicated investments on all sides, series can become extremely rewarding endeavors for editors, for publishers and especially for young authors.

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## NIAS Press Gendering Asia series

Gerald Jackson

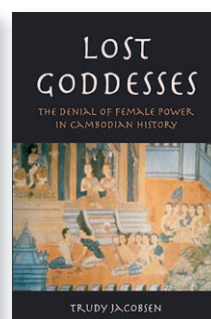
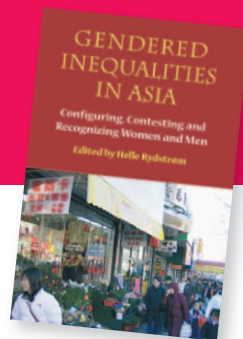
NIAS PRESS IS A SCHOLARLY PRESS specializing in publishing innovative research on modern Asia. The Press is a globally focused publisher with authors from every continent, and distribution covering all parts of the world. It is focused mainly on the social sciences and history, particularly research dealing with contemporary Southeast Asia and East Asia.

The *Gendering Asia series* is certainly contemporary but mention of 'gender studies' all too often evokes images of earnest, activist, *female* researchers undertaking 'women's studies'. Reality is another matter, especially with regard to our *Gendering Asia* book series. How otherwise would (say) a study of the backroom male culture of Thai politics be of interest to the series editors? Or the representation of male homosexuality in China today?

### The importance of gender

A key aim of the series is to challenge the reductive notion that gender in Asian studies relates solely to women both as objects of study and as researchers. Now in its fifth year, *Gendering Asia* is a well-established but still exciting series addressing the ways in which societal powers intersect with the constructions of gender, sex, sexuality and the body in Asian societies. To date, six books have been published in the series and a strong field of new candidates is under consideration for publication at NIAS Press. Some of the books in the series are co-published with North American and/or Asian university presses.

As well as challenging female-centric research, the series aims to make the importance of gender visible, to identify the invisible workings of gender norms and power relations as they manifest themselves, and to make it clear to the wider Asian studies community—as well as to policy makers and the general public—that applying a gender perspective makes a difference to the knowledge we are able to construct. The series thus invites discussion of how people shape their gendered identities and become shaped by the very societies in which they live.



The series is concerned with the region as a whole in order to capture the wide range of understandings and practices that are found in East, Southeast and South Asian societies with respect to gendered roles and relations in various social, political, economic, religious and cultural contexts. How Asia manifests itself in the rest of the world is also of interest.

Among the titles published thus far we find: *Working and Mothering in Asia: Images, Ideologies and Identities*; *Lost Goddesses. The Denial of Female Power in Cambodian History and Gendered Inequalities in Asia: Configuring, Contesting and Recognizing Women and Men*. For further information on these books, including detailed descriptions, reviews and pricing, see [www.niaspress.dk/books/series/gendering-asia](http://www.niaspress.dk/books/series/gendering-asia).

### Gendering Asia Network

As a multidisciplinary series, *Gendering Asia* explores theoretical, empirical and methodological issues in the social sciences. Although most volumes published in the series to date have had a strong empirical foundation, the editors and their authors also work to draw exciting new approaches from the discipline of gender studies into the area of Asian studies. At the same time, they offer innovative studies on Asia back to the disciplinary field that may underpin or challenge these new approaches.

The series is international in its scope, as reflected in the authors published and in membership of its international advisory board. It is, however, Nordic in origin, having developed out of (and remaining closely associated with) the Gendering Asia Network, a Nordic-based scholarly network established by the three series editors (Wil Burghoorn, Cecilia Milwertz and Helle Rydstrom) back in 2005. Supported by the Nordic research organization NordForsk, this network provides Nordic scholars with a forum to interact and exchange research results and ideas. A key aim of the network is to support and encourage Nordic research on gender in Asia. For more information, see [www.barha.dk/group/gendering-asia-network](http://www.barha.dk/group/gendering-asia-network).

NIAS Press welcomes book proposals fitting the series profile. To discuss your book proposal or idea, please contact the series editors or myself at the email address below.

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