

Publishing new Asia scholarship

This year's twelve-title shortlist for the ICAS Book Prize on social sciences and humanities included three books first published in Asia (two by NUS Press). For the new EuroSEAS Nikkei Book Awards given in Vienna in August this year, five of six finalists originated in Asia. And in March this year, the US Association of Asian Studies (AAS) awarded its Kahin Prize to M.C. Ricklefs' *Islamisation and its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural and Religious History*, a book published in 2012 by NUS Press at the National University of Singapore. Remarkably, this was the first time any book published in Asia received an AAS book prize.

Peter Schoppert and Paul Kratoska

IT TOOK A LONG TIME to reach this particular milestone, and it is useful to explore what it might mean. Does it tell us anything about the shifts in Asian Studies? About new Asia scholars? Despite many predictions over the years that the centre of Asian Studies would shift to Asia, why is so much of Asian Studies scholarship still published outside Asia? And does that matter?

The past few decades have brought an explosion of scholarship on Asia carried out by scholars at Asian universities. The greater part of this research is published in local languages and receives little attention outside of the countries where it appears, and like scholarship in other parts of the world, it tends to come out in the form of journal articles rather than monographs.

Asian-language scholarship often deals with issues of particular concern to the countries where it originates, and is part of a conversation that does not actively invite participation by outsiders. Many universities, research centres and other institutions in East and Southeast Asia publish scholarly periodicals that handle this material. A rough calculation suggests that there are more than 40,000 such publications, many of them fully funded by Asian institutions.

However, the major universities in Asia now expect scholars to publish research articles in internationally recognized journals covered by major citation indexes, in effect requiring them to write and publish in English. When Asian scholars do this, their audience shifts. Potential readers include scholars in the West, but also scholars based in other Asian countries who may well find parallels with their own research concerns. (Recent work that fits this model deals with topics such as regionalism and Asian identity.) As a publisher based in Asia, we look for opportunities to nurture this second audience.

Recent initiatives such as the Consortium for Southeast Asian Studies in Asia (SEASIA) launched in 2013 suggest that institutions and scholars will increasingly work within widespread networks, electronic and personal, that extend across national borders. Technological advances in the production and distribution of books are creating a global

book market. While traditional library markets in the West are under severe pressure, it is possible for publishers in Asia to reach them with greater ease. Asian markets are becoming more open and transparent in response to a growing demand for access to information. The more savvy publishers from the West are sourcing more works from Asia, basing commissioning editors in the region and commissioning more local peer reviews.

Manuscripts written by Western authors are often written to explain Asia to the West, and adopt an 'outside-looking-in' perspective on matters of great import to audiences in the region. Frequently these manuscripts represent solid scholarship, but they position their discussion within the theoretical concerns currently engaging scholars outside of Asia and for a publisher like NUS Press, whose primary market lies in Asia, they have limited appeal. When referees in Asia indicate that the substance of a manuscript is well known within the country concerned, and that the material is not pitched appropriately for Asian readers, our conclusion is that the author should probably seek publication opportunities elsewhere.

At the same time, more and more younger scholars from all parts of the world see social science research as a co-creation of knowledge. If they do Asian Studies they wish to speak to Asian audiences, and while their books and articles may reach readers in institutions around the world, they also become embedded in local discourse.

The book prizes mentioned at the start of this piece reflect a noticeable shift in the geography of publication of Asian Studies. Whether this shift becomes a long-term trend remains to be seen, but the remarkable output of research by Asian scholars cannot be ignored, even if publishers are grappling with new forms of 'publication' and new channels for delivering knowledge.

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IN THE 1960S professors were told to teach in the vernacular. This type of history writing was called "pantayong pananaw"—the vision of ourselves by ourselves. Those who failed to comply were branded as colonial or outdated. Nationalist historiography has its advantages as it helps see history from the point of view of the natives. They see each other as rising from the grip of colonial rule and taking their place in the family of nations.

Another trend was local history writing. This resulted in a plethora of histories of regions of the Philippines, the provinces and towns even down to the barangay or village level. Yet this mode of history isolates one from the region. When we go out to attend conferences abroad such as those organized by IIAS, IAHA and ACAS, we find that we are being left behind as our neighbours are now writing about bilateral histories, and how their national histories are affected by regional events and vice versa. When Filipinos write their histories using their national language, people of other nationalities cannot relate to us and we cannot relate to them.

I realized that by remaining isolated we cannot see the history of the region or the world in general if we just look at ourselves. We must realize that what is happening to the Philippines is probably a result of what is happening in the region. Events in the Philippines too, may affect the region.

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POSITIVE CHANGES in the fields in which I work - Indology, Tibetology or South and South Asian studies—include the elimination of gender imbalances among researchers and lecturers, movement beyond the overly theoretical Post-modernism that dominated approaches in the 1980s and 90s, and the broader understanding of Asian perspectives on the field. On the negative side, centre perspectives continue to dominate at the expense of those on the periphery, archival research is often neglected in favour of (Western) theoretical approaches, scholars all-too-frequently appeal to their own community rather than engage with the concerns and interests of their subjects, and critical approaches are neglected in favour of emic representations. In general scholars tend to follow trends rather than to take up original approaches or uncover original subjects. Probably the greatest risk to proper scholarship lies in the commercialisation of the universities, with economic demands overwhelming academic quality.

Too often, grant application forms are not drafted by academics, but by bureaucrats. The end result is that a scholar on a one-year research fellowship spends much of that year filling in applications for future funding rather than actually carrying out research. The need for academics to publish on a regular basis has led to a proliferation of journals, many of which, while peer-reviewed, of necessity publish material that adds little to the field. Whether on-line publication is a problem or a solution remains to be seen. On-line publication has not yet developed the status of print publication, despite its value in allowing access to scholars in countries where many European publications are too expensive to obtain. None-the-less the field of Asian studies in general is growing organically and there remain publications and publishers who will bring out scholarship that is not commercially attractive, just as there remain institutions and individuals who continue to seek the highest possible quality of work. Fashions may come and go, and attract superficial scholarship as they do, but the field has never been stronger and the future remains bright.

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THE WORD ASIA is of Greek origin and means everything lying east of Greece. Given the number of countries and cultures lying east of Greece, Asian Studies are an unrealistic venture.

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A somewhat dogmatic belief prevails that these regions are difficult to compare because of their contrasting historical, political and social backgrounds. However, when the modernization processes in [Latin America and Asia] are discussed in parallel, it is possible to find commonalities worth to be further explored (see Urushima, A. et al. (eds.) 2015. *Modernização urbana e cultura contemporânea: diálogos Brasil- Japão*, São Paulo:Terracota).

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