I t may seem to readers of this Newsletter who have been desperately trying to get their work published, that there is some kind of secret society of Asia Studies publishers, with just a few gatekeepers who have secret handshakes and give the nod to one title while surreptitiouslyburying another for no discernible reason. You may have struggled painfully with reshaping your doctoral or master’s thesis based on advice from supervisors, examiners, and kind colleagues. You may have read the writing on the wall, have counted the dead (fellow researchers’ theses lying in crypts, or the dreaded reject piles), and be envious of the lucky few. In general, you will not have been trained to write directly or elegantly - to express ideas without the props of extensive referencing, for instance. After all, the whole exercise of researching and writing a thesis has very little to do with the finished product being an exciting read, or having broad, cross-disciplinary appeal. Mindful of the generally disproportionate impact your first publisher will have on your academic career, you start touting around your book proposal, aiming as ‘high’ as you can - established, prestigious US or British university presses or, more realistically, a good, commercial institutional or regional press. After a polite acknowledgment, you may have to wait for weeks for a reaction, and then, if you are fortunate, you will be asked to submit chapters or the entire manuscript. After you have submitted your material, it may disappear for several months, seemingly into thin air. In fact, it is probably languishing in some peer reviewer’s reading pile, under her or his own backlog of marking, writing or research. And the rejection, when it finally comes, rarely tells you much about why this particular publisher cannot take on your book or what you could do to improve your chances of getting it published. Most publishers have little time to give you personal feedback and advice, and peer reviews are often not written with a view to making helpful suggestions. If you are lucky, a senior or commissioning editor will follow through and support you in making revisions or finding an alternative publisher, but this is becoming rare. Financially challenged and poorly staffed, publishers are too
Academic publishing today

Promote the work of other scholars, support those outside the mainstream, and try to insist on affordable paperback editions of your book. And try to find ways to make sure some copies are donated to poorer institutions, libraries, and researchers in the region you write about.

Support publishers in general

A polished book is a collaborative effort and needs a good publisher and an experienced editor, working with a painstaking typesetter and designer, perhaps an indexer, an efficient printer, interested marketing people and booksellers. Consider it your job as an author to support them all.

Write better book manuscripts

Go through your notes carefully: there may be something that captures the spirit of your research and would make a far better book than a reworked thesis. There may be someone you interviewed or discovered who deserves an entire biography, images which could be annotated and published, or the chapter that could be expanded to book length, or...

Writing is difficult, writing well is a craft and an art, a lifelong learning process; you should be prepared to work hard at your writing.

Please: don’t produce another edited volume. They suck up time and funding and are generally a waste of energy: 90 percent of them are hastily put together as a postscript to a conference or workshop, need a huge amount of editorial work to be turned into books, and then hardly anyone buys or reads them. The vast majority could more fruitfully be published electronically.

Support your colleagues’ efforts

If you are asked to peer review a manuscript, set aside time to do this as soon as you can, within reason. If you are too busy, let the publisher know right away. And when you produce your report, try to make it useful for the author by giving clear recommendations on revisions and changes you think are needed.

Promote the work of other scholars, buy their books, use them in your teaching, review them in major newspapers as well as in specialist journals.

What is to be done?

But economics only explains part of the malaise in academic publishing on Asia, and in particular that on Southeast Asia. There is room for much more imagination and collaboration, more bridging between languages, more writing against the grain.

We need more readers, writers, good editors, translators, book collectors, erudite librarians, bibliophiles, book designers, publishers, specialist and general booksellers. We need to buy more books and sustain the entire spectrum of the culture of the book. We need to publish more intellectually engaging, accessible and productive books on ‘Asia’. We need to inject more boldness, brilliance - and fun - into publishing on Asia. Here are a few places where I think you could think are needed.

Two years ago, IIAS (International Institute for Asia Studies) used the ICAS 4 conference to announce the creation of a website for new publications in Asia Studies. Now we are pleased to say that the New Asia Books website will be launched at the ICAS 5 conference.

New Asia Books makes it much easier for academics to identify, evaluate and purchase new publications in their fields. The website lists academic books published on Asia in the preceding 12 months (using rich data obtained from Nielsen BookData, a major bibliographic data provider), and it encourages academics, including authors, to review and comment on the books listed.

Adding value for the academic community

This unique site focuses exclusively on new books, with no listing older than 12 months, and shows only titles that are currently in print. The site is aimed first and foremost at academics and students within Asia Studies, but we believe it will also be useful for non-specialist, non-academic research and for the informed public.

The idea behind the site is to free academics and students from time-consuming and potentially unproductive searches for new material. A book search on a site such as Amazon will throw up a long list of responses relating to books published several years ago - books that an experienced academic will either already have read or have made an active decision not to read. New Asia Books presents the user with exactly what is necessary: a list of new and recent publications in the field.

New Asia Books also provides a platform for book reviews. We aim to be the first to publish reviews of new titles. All too often, there is a long gap between the time that a book is published and when the first reviews appear. It is by no means unusual for 12, 18 or even 24 months to pass between publication and the first review article. Authors wait with growing impatience, and book buyers are left with little guidance about which titles to purchase or recommend to their university libraries. New Asia Books plugs this gap. We provide a forum for site users and authors to write quick reviews and comment on new titles in a true community dialogue. We believe this is a particularly useful way of sharing early experiences with potential new textbooks.

Ensuring high-quality data

New Asia Books can always be relied upon to contain the very latest information. Regular users of web-based book sites know that while many organisations have created attractive and user-friendly sites, many fall down in the longer term because site owners cannot invest the time to keep information up-to-date. New Asia Books avoids this trap as each search response page is created directly from our database, and the database is fully updated at least once a month.

Publishers are invited to join as New Asia Books partners. Partners will have password protected access to the site, enabling them to update and add material to the title records in the New Asia Books database. Each partner has a profile page where all contact and direct ordering information can be listed. New Asia Books partners are entitled to an upgraded service, with a clickable logo linking to the partner’s profile page. This feature makes it easy for site users to move from searching to purchasing, and gives publishers an opportunity to present themselves directly to their audience. New Asia Books partners can also link to web-based book sellers on their product pages. The cost of joining as a partner is available on request.

To find out more about how the site works and how you can ensure that your book gets a comprehensive and prominent listing, visit www.newasiabooks.org or send an email to info@newasiabooks.org.
Open Access - Utopia Round the Corner?

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The goal of the Open Access (OA) movement is universal, free access to all publicly funded research. In the last few years the movement has gained a significant following among academics, tax-payers, and more recently among grant-giving bodies and legislators. Not surprisingly, though, established publishers and subscription-funded learned societies are less enthused about the idea. The drive towards OA is strongest in the natural sciences, but as the movement gains impetus, it is set to become an increasingly pressing subject for Asia Studies scholars.

Sophisticated, yet demanding

OA is a child of the internet. The first part of its mission is uncontroversial: Since all scholars have access to this marvellous resource for mass storage and global searching, it follows that all scholarship should be available online. Most publishers already achieve this by making their published articles available in OA versions. The second part of the OA mission, however, is what alarms many publishers: that all the scholarship post-edited should be available free of charge and free of (most) author copyright.

In the early stages, much OA material consisted of self-archiving: authors posting their research publications on their own or their institutional web-sites. At that time, many journal publishers were happy enough to allow article texts to be posted for free. But as the amount of material posted online increased, publishers became concerned that having most of a journal’s content available online would result in subscription cancellations.

Alongside the growing interest in posting research findings, the concept of OA has developed into something rather sophisticated and somewhat demand- ing. Today, the formal definition of open access to scholarly texts is free availability on the internet immediately on publication, permitting users to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search or link to the full texts. Furthermore, all material must be placed in organised repositories which are clearly structured and globally searchable.

This definition has two important effects: Firstly, it essentially does away with author copyright, leaving only the right to be properly acknowledged and correctly cited. Secondly, it establishes the need for institutional repositories which have the necessary hardware and software to perform three essen- tial tasks: storing material, allowing scholars to deposit new material, and enabling anyone to search and access all material.

Stewards of scholarship

The arguments for OA are obvious and compelling. Firstly, the more widely accessible scholarly and scientific works are, the better for scientific endeavour in particular and the community in general and to be truly globally accessi- ble, it must be free (although users will still have to pay for the mode of access, i.e. a computer). Secondly, since most university (and much non-university) scholarship is funded from the public purse or by charitable institutions, it is intuitively wrong that shareholders in commercial publishing houses should profit from selling the resulting publi- cations back to those same universities. Proponents of OA believe that universi- ties should not be custodians for their own research, but should instead be its stewards, making it available through their repositories.

Academic journal publishers coun- ter that they provide an indispensable service to the academic community, through editorial improvements and dissemination efforts, and most impor- tantly by arranging peer reviews. They argue that this guarantees the quality of published scholarship, allowing it to be used without further quality control for tenure decisions and research assess- ments. (Furthermore, they fear that OA could spell the end of scholarly journals publishing, an industry that provides many jobs and a net contribution to the balance of payments in English-speaking countries - but that is an empty and purely change-averse argument). The Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers have added their concerns that many scholarly associa- tions survive on the small income they garner from publishing a journal, and that an end to subscriptions could mean an end to these associations.

Some journals, both new and estab- lished, are responding to these issues by experimenting with turning their business models upside down: instead of taking payment for their work from subscribers, they charge authors (or rather their institutions or funders) for publishing their work, or charge a set fee for the permission to make their published articles available in OA repositories. These are not revolution- ary new practices: publishers have often had to ask for author contributions, for example to cover illustration costs or to part-fund publications that are deemed otherwise not commercially viable. This has not generally harmed academ- ic value, as publishers have a vested interest in continuing to operate the peer-review process to safeguard their standing as reputable and trustworthy guarantors of good academic quality. But preparing an article for publication is not cheap, and prices currently start somewhere around USD 1000 and con- tinue up beyond USD 3000 per article.

To compel or not to compel

Provision of work for OA repositories is still mostly on a voluntary basis, with some scholars ensuring that all their work is available, and some journals providing free access a set time after publication. But voluntary arrange- ments make for slow progress, and several funding and political bodies are keen to move towards compulsory pro- vision of OA material, or have already made that move. Organisations that have already taken this step include the National Institutes of Health in the U.S., the Wellcome Trust in the United Kingdom and the Australian Research Council. It begs the question, where will the funds come from to pay for OA infrastructure and for author-pays publication fees if a majority of fund- ing bodies move towards mandatory OA provision. There’s not much left to shave off library budgets, even if librar- ies were to save significant sums on subscriptions.

Recently, the European Commission weighed into the debate with a proposal to make OA provision mandatory within six months of publication for research funded by EU agencies. However, follow- ing strong protest from a group of leading academic publishers, the Com- mission decided earlier this year to take a step back, and instead it has set aside some EUR 30 million to develop OA storage infrastructure and EUR 25 million for research on digital preserv- ation. However, new grants from the European Research Council are likely to include funding for publishing costs and a proviso that OA must be provided after a short embargo period.

Consequences for cash flow?

The rising popularity of OA will undoubtedly have an effect on article authors. That said, the monograph or edited book remains the more impor- tant vehicle for communication in Asia Studies, and while several publishers are experimenting with free access to online extracts of their books (mainly for marketing purposes), no- one is yet suggesting that OA should apply to whole books.

If, however, proponents of OA are suc- ceessful in winning research funders’ support for compulsory OA provision of all scholarly articles, there will be a sub- tle but significant impact on book pub- lishing and thus book authors. Journal subscriptions are paid up-front, before the journal is delivered to the customer, while most book sales are subject to several months’ customer credit. As a result, journal subscriptions make an important contribution not only to pub- lishers’ profits but also, significantly, to their cash flow. Most large, and many medium-sized, publishers produce both books and journals, so if one side of their business is threatened – whether the threat is real or just perceived – it is likely to impact the other side of their business too. It will be interesting to follow developments over the next few years to see whether it is the bearers of glad tidings or the prophets of doom who turn out to be (mostly) right.
The ICAS Book Prize: A Showcase for Asia Studies

Longlist Humanities

The Flaming Womb: Repositioning Women in Early Modern Southeast Asia
by Barbara Watson Andaya
Published 2006 by University of Hawaii Press
Hardback, ISBN 978-0-8248-0195-1

Comments by the chairman of the ICAS Book Prize Reading Committee (whose identity is confidential at the time of writing)

How does the ICAS Book Prize differ from other prizes offered, such as those awarded during AAS?

The biennial ICAS Book Prize (IBP) has a remit which covers the whole of Asia. Other book prizes in the field of Asia Studies, including those awarded during the Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies (AAS), generally relate to specific regions such as East or Southeast Asia. The IBP is a global competition and a global platform for Asia Studies. As a result, the number of submissions is much larger. For the IBP 2007, a total of 80 books were submitted by 32 publishers.

Why is the IBP split into separate categories for humanities, social sciences, and the Colleagues’ Choice award?

The humanities and social sciences categories reflect the two major fields within Asia Studies. We thought it was a good idea to have two prizes instead of one. These categories are judged by an international Reading Committee consisting of six specialists from different areas of study. Only the name of the Secretary of the Reading Committee is made public before the awards ceremony, held during the opening session of ICAS. This guarantees the highest possible degree of objectivity.

The winner of the IBP Colleagues’ Choice Award is decided by fellow Asia Studies scholars. Votes are cast using a virtual polling booth. For the 2007 prize, voting is open until 15th July. You can vote for any book from the full list of 80 titles submitted. Everyone can follow the voting process at www.icassecretariat.org. There are various built-in security checks, and the Secretariat also reviews the voting data after polling closes, to ensure that there have been no irregularities. The winner of the IBP Colleagues’ Choice Award is announced during the awards ceremony at ICAS.

How was a prize for best PhD thesis included (theses are, after all, not real books)?

They are on their way to becoming books, and ICAS assists the PhD prize winner in realising that goal by facilitating publication of his or her dissertation through an academic publisher.

How does the Reading Committee carry out its work?

Once they have received all the submitted books in January, the Reading Committee splits into two. Each group decides on a longlist consisting of ten books. This is made public during the AAS Annual Meeting in March/April. Then, each member draws up a personal list of ten favourites, giving 100 points to what they consider the very best book, 90 to their second choice, 80 to their third and so on. On the basis of these scores, the IBP Secretary prepares the shortlists consisting of three books per category. These, along with the PhD shortlist consisting of two theses per category, are made public via www.icassecretariat.org at the end of July.

Longlist Social Sciences

Bad Youth: Juvenile Delinquency and the Politics of Everyday Life in Modern Japan, 1868-1945
by David R. Amba
Published 2005 by University of California Press

The Making of the State Enterprise System in Modern China
The Dynamics of Institutional Change
by Morris C. Bine
Published 2005 by Harvard University Press

As Borders Bend
by Xiangming Chen
Published 2005 by Rowman & Littlefield

Geographics of Identity in Nineteenth-Century Japan
by David L. Howell
Published 2005 by University of California Press

Fertility, Food and Fever
Population, Economy and Environment in North and Central Sulawesi, 1600-1950
by D.E.F. Henley
Published 2007 by KITLV Press

The International Gold Standard and the Lever of Empire
by D.E.F. Henley
Published 2006 by Cambridge University Press

The Dynamics of Institutional Change
by Morris C. Bine
Published 2005 by Harvard University Press

Global Cinderellas: Migrant Domestic and Newly Rich Employers in Taiwan
by Pei-Chun Lien
Published 2006 by Duke University Press

Intrigues and Ethnopolitics 1928-49
by H.T. van der Keuken
Published 2005 by NIAS Press

Tibet and Nationalism China’s Frontier
Integrating and Ethnopolitics 1958-99
by Huigeng Tseung
Published 2006 by UBC Press
Hardback, ISBN 0-7748-0195-1

Lover of Empire
The International Gold Standard and the Lever of Empire in Prewar Japan
by Mark Metzler
Published 2006 by University of California Press
Longlist Humanities

The Lion and the Gadfly
Dutch Colonialism and the Spirit of E.F.E. Douwes Dekker
by Paul W. van der Veur
Published 2006 by KITLV Press
Hardback, ISBN 90-6718-242-7

Singing the Classical, Voicing the Modern
The Postcolonial Politics of Music in South India
by Amanda J. Weidman
Published 2006 by Duke University Press

The Merchants of Zigong
by Madeleine Zelin
Published 2006 by Columbia University Press

Longlist Social Sciences

The Transformation of Chinese Socialism
by Chun Lin
Published 2006 by Duke University Press

Final Days
Japanese Culture and Choice at the End of Life
by Susan Orpett Long
Published 2006 by University of Hawai’i Press

Pretext for Mass Murder
The September 30th Movement and Suharto’s Coup d’État in Indonesia
by John Roosa
Published 2006 by University of Wisconsin Press

Historicizing Online Politics
Telegraphy, the Internet, and Political Participation in China
by Yongming Zhou
Published 2006 by Stanford University Press

the AAS Newsletter, and other newsletters and journals in specific fields of Asia Studies, H-Asia and a host of websites too numerous to mention. Judging from the quantity and the number of books submitted, (80 book from 32 well-known publishers for the 2007 prizes) it’s clear the IBP is gaining recognition. The prize winning books and the prize winners are of course our best ambassadors.

What does winning the ICAS Book prize mean to an author?
So far there have been three winners. (Elizabeth C. Economy, Christopher Reed and Sam Wong). Talking to them makes it abundantly clear that the prize has influenced their lives both on a personal level (the experience of accepting an award before an audience of over 1,000 peers), and in their careers. For one author, winning the IBP has launched a successful academic career. For another winner it has meant a mid-career boost. They are regularly invited to give lectures as IBP prize winners, and have experienced increased book sales as a result of special mentions in catalogues and book prize winner logos on their books.

How does ICAS hope to see the IBP develop over the coming years?
We are convinced the Colleagues’ Choice Award will prove to be a huge success. It will increase the awareness amongst scholars that Asia Studies is a broad and vibrant field of academic endeavour, with clear trends which can be discerned through the the books submitted. We hope to continue to see more PhD theses submitted. IBP 2007 received ten theses, all of such a high academic standard that deciding on a shortlist will prove no easy task. That said, for IBP 2009 we hope to see the number of theses submissions tripled. The ten we received this year represent only a fraction of what is written.

Since its inception, the ICAS Book Prize has been about increasing the visibility of Asia Studies worldwide. We hope that the IBP will continue to attract wider publicity, beyond the field of Asia Studies itself. We have made a great start, the ICAS 2005 Book Prizes presented at the Shanghai conference received wide media attention in China, and the prize winners were interviewed by radio stations in their home countries. One prize winner’s book will be translated into Chinese, and because it has won the IBP the publishers have tripled the print run.

*At the time of going to press, the prize for the Colleagues Choice Award has not yet been decided.
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 154 by the end of the century. In the year 2000, university presses in Japan published 794 titles (3.7 per cent of the 20,646 books published in Japan that year), those in China published 15,368 titles (58 per cent of the 8,438 titles published there), and those in Korea produced 1,342 titles (6.1 per cent of 19,970 titles published) (Yamamoto Tsunishi, Director, Seigakun University Press: “Historical Developments and Functions of University Presses in East Asia”, unpublished paper). These numbers include a substantial quan-
tity 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 expan-
sion of academic publishing took place in South-east 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 Ateneo de Manila, de la Salle University, and the University of St. Thomas. These universities remain bastions of English-language publishing, but the output is modest compared with a per-language publishing. NUSS 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 aca-
demic presses, which are particularly important in Japan, Indonesia, and India, and by research insti-
tutes, 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 do not always match the expectations of English-language international refereed publications. Also, the conventions for presenting extremely good English to convey complex ideas are more likely to be discussed in English than in Asian languages. Matters because it limits readership to a known

Publications, and some Asian-language academic journals, pay contributors a fee, and because aca-
demic salaries in parts of Asia are notoriously low, such payments are a welcome supplement to a fac-
ulty member’s income. On the other hand, schol-
ars who choose to publish in English face a pain-
ful ordal 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 sig-
ificant 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.

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 through-
out the world. A second is to build strong publica-
tion records that will support internal evaluations, or improve university standings in published rank-
ings such as those prepared annually by the Times Higher Education Supplement. One of the catego-
ries used in these rankings is citations recorded in standard indices, which are heavily weighted toward English-language publications and the style of cita-
tion 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 press-
ing 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 Sin-
gapore operate in English, and in the Philippines English remains central to tertiary education, but elsewhere teaching is done in the national lan-
guages and researchers 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 schol-
ars to publish, both in English and in national lan-
guages. The readership is often small, although scholars occasionally write for serious mass circu-
lation journals catering to general audiences. These publications, and some Asian-language academic journals, pay contributors a fee, and because aca-
demic salaries in parts of Asia are notoriously low, such payments are a welcome supplement to a fac-
ulty member’s income. On the other hand, schol-
ars who choose to publish in English face a pain-
ful ordal 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 sig-
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Although the mass media tend to focus on tensions in East Asia, across the Taiwan Straits, between China and Japan, and of course in the Korean Peninsula, there is in fact much constructive intellectual interaction within the region. While much debate goes on within each country between its public intellectuals and intellectual publics, there are many thinkers in each country who wish to communicate across national and language barriers. A particularly lively field where there is vigorous academic exchange is the study of popular culture as the topic increasingly demands a transnational perspective.

Gatekeepers

Although some scholars are impressively multi-lingual, it is inevitable that English is the predominant medium of communication for such cross-border endeavours. English is not just used as a lingua franca. It also provides, in a certain sense, a neutral linguistic territory. But while the language might be characterised as neutral in one sense, a neutral linguistic territory, it also brings with it a strong direction - a certain sense, a neutral linguistic territory. But while the language might be characterised as neutral in one sense, a neutral linguistic territory. But while the language might be characterised as neutral in one sense, a neutral linguistic territory. But while the language might be characterised as neutral in one sense, a neutral linguistic territory.

For example, if a regional scholar has written an analysis of a television programme from one of the countries of the region, the gatekeepers of the American or British journal are going to have problems in understanding his or her exploration of something about which they have no knowledge. They are therefore likely to reject the article. If they do not, they are going to require substantial additional descriptive material that will seem unnecessary for regional readers. This difficulty was nicely encapsulated by an Australian perspective by Meaghan Morris when she described "swearing to get an article on Rugby League past American referees." Given that publication length is always severely constrained, the demand for such additional material to explain context effectively excludes some of the analysis that is the main purpose of the work.

A fourth perhaps lesser point is the stringent requirements of standard English that many journals impose on their contributors. There is a strong movement to recognise that there are many varieties of English and that one may be no more right or uniquely acceptable than another. African-American perhaps led the way in focusing recognition that there may no longer be one received form of the language. But even if one does not accept the fracturing of English, the requirement of standard English places just one more impediment in the way of scholars for whom the language is not their first.

So there is the paradox that regional scholars need the lingua franca of English but the publishing outlets for work in English set requirements for submissions that subvert the intellectual programmes of regional scholars. The obvious solution is to establish regional English publishing outlets and the main purpose of this article is to report on a transnational effort in this direction. But first, I will allow myself some special pleading by saying that dealing with this paradox is Hong Kong University Press’s primary mission: to offer global distribution of works in English, but without forcing those works into an Anglo-American intellectual and contextual mode. But economic realities permit us only to be receptive to some subjects, so a truly transnational endeavour is called for.

Going transnational

Under the intellectual leadership (and driven by his energy and connections) of Professor Chen Kuan-hsing of the National Tsinghua University of Taiwan, a group of regional scholars and publishers have been meeting to endavour to shape a truly transnational publishing project. The precise form of the scheme is still under discussion and so what follows is very much my own vision of how this might work.

As well as providing the needed outlet for regional works, I see an important value in nurturing independent-minded publishing houses in every country. Whereas this is not an issue in most of the large countries of the region which have vigorous publishing industries (albeit in the national languages), it is a serious concern for some countries within and on the periphery of the region. This is an important issue in other regions and thus it is important that this East Asian scheme be designed to nurture local publishers, because I see this endeavour in East Asia as a prototype for a wider scheme (or schemes) that enables the sharing of academic work around the periphery without central mediation (and shaping).

The simple idea then is for a publisher, having originated a work, to offer it as a digital file to a network of receiving publishers, each of whom can choose whether or not to take the work. If they do take it, they can tailor the way it is published to the needs and purchasing powers of their own customers. Aside from the originating publisher, others bear no first copy costs. Therefore what might well be uneconomic for a publisher faced with the full costs of publication can be viable with smaller sales and/or lower prices for the receiving publishers. In addition, the scheme requires a simple and standard process for determining rights and royalties to be paid to the originating publisher. Terms need to be generous for the receiving publishers because most sales within a single country will be small. But terms can be generous because sales made by a receiving publisher in its country will usually be incremental sales, not substitutes for the export sales of the originating publisher.

Returning to the primary objective, the need is to obtain for each work in English written by a regional scholar the widest distribution within the region. The network of publishers means that in each national (or sub-regional) market the book is being handled by a publisher who knows that market, its needs and how best to reach the relevant readership.

This does not preclude distribution in the US, UK etc, but it does make those markets less crucial and therefore permits scholars successfully to publish work without bending and shaping it to the requirements of Anglo-American publishers, gatekeepers and scholars. Whether our final structure will be something like this or not, the fundamental purpose is to create a way for regional scholars to cross national boundaries and engage transnational intellectual discourse.
Electronic Books
Increase Mileage for All

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With the increased use of the internet for work and play, it is inevitable that publishers should want to present the printed book in other formats too, in order to reach a wider audience. The increasing ability of readers to make their purchases globally and to access information from almost anywhere creates the need for publishers to convert their printed content into various electronic formats.

A new printed book is usually welcome to take its share of the shelf space in bookshops. But a book’s staying power depends very much on its ability to attract buyers. There are always new titles vying for prominent shelf space. A book can be relegated to the back shelves—or even returned to its publisher—in a matter of weeks, sometimes days.

At the Institute of Southeast Asia Studies (ISEAS) in Singapore, we not only publish books and journals, but also actively use new technologies to ensure that the content is available in electronic form as e-books and e-chapters. ISEAS also explores and implements new ways to promote and sell in order to ensure as wide a dissemination as possible.

Widest possible audience
There are numerous advantages to e-books, both for publishers and for their customers. A good publisher employs various marketing strategies to ensure that the books in its list sell well and reach the widest possible audience.

Many are familiar with traditional marketing channels such as advertisements, direct mail, participation in book fairs and academic conferences, and distribution of review copies. But in this internet age, publishers must also diversify the ways in which the worldwide audience can get hold of a book, and not necessarily just in the printed form. With digital technology, an electronic book or e-book can be created simultaneously with the production of a printed format, or it can be converted from an existing hard copy book from the publisher’s backlist by document scanning.

The electronic format creates additional ways for a book to be sold and read. It can be converted into a complete e-book, or split up to produce e-chapters. E-books and e-chapters can be offered for sale on a publisher’s own website or through online booksellers, just like the traditional printed form. Only the delivery method differs.

Ordering an e-book through the Internet eliminates the need to wait for the arrival of the physical product, which might take a few days to a few weeks depending on the mode of delivery. With e-books, delivery can be instantaneous, with the digital file being downloaded direct to the customer’s computer the moment payment is received. On top of that, the customer saves on postage, which tends to add considerably to the cost.

Ease of use
Electronic books offer advantages that cannot be obtained from a printed book.

Manoeuvring through e-books and e-chapters is relatively simple. It is much easier to do a keyword search in an electronic book than in a printed book. This advantage is fully appreciated by those who do research as opposed to those who read for leisure. And since digital files are transferable, they can be accessed anywhere a computer is available, making life easier for students as this eliminates the need to carry around numerous printed books.

A printed book needs to be kept in a relatively safe environment, and it must be cared for in order to prolong its lifespan. Libraries all over the world spend large proportions of their budget on preserving their valuable collections of books. For an e-book, however, the issue of wear and tear does not arise, and there is minimum risk of damage or vandalism to an e-book.

With e-chapters it is possible for publishers to assemble electronic course packs for university lecturers and students, which is useful when a large number of students need access to a common set of materials. Such packs are particularly appropriate when the course is aimed at part-time or distance-learning students who may have limited opportunities to visit the library. E-chapters make good materials for course packs if only certain chapters from a book are needed, since they eliminate the need for students to buy the whole book.

Online immortality
Many new online libraries and digital content retailers are being established to take advantage of the increasing popularity of digital content. If publishers already own the digital content, they can sign up with online libraries so that their books gain a wider readership and exposure.

Some online libraries sell monthly or annual subscriptions that allow reading access to all the digital material in their collections. Others sell individual e-books or e-chapters direct to users. Most online libraries and digital content retailers pay royalties to the content providers (publishers) based on the number of usage incidents or downloads of the digital material.

Electronic books can be offered indefinitely, never going out of print, allowing readers to find older works by favourite authors. Even books that have gone out of print can be brought back via the digital world using document scanning technology, which is much more cost-effective than having to re-typeset an entire out-of-print book.

Once the digital files have been made available, publishers can make use of print-on-demand (POD) technology to put a print version of the book back into circulation. Print-on-demand is the term used for the digital printing technology that allows a complete book to be printed and bound within a short time. POD technology makes it possible to produce books in small quantities rather than in larger (more risky) print runs of several hundred or several thousand.

Most readers still prefer the printed book to the electronic version. However, authors should consider the benefits of making their books available in the electronic format as well. It increases visibility, readership, and sales, and these factors translate to a higher royalty payment and greater recognition.

I am very optimistic about print as a technology. Words on paper are a wonderful information storage, retrieval, distribution and consumer product. Imagine if we had been getting our information delivered digitally to our screens for the past 499 years. Then some modern Gutenberg had come up with a technology that was able to transfer these words and pictures on to pages that could be delivered to our doorstep, and we could take them to the backyard, the bath, or the bus. We would be thrilled with this technological leap forward, and we would predict that someday it might replace the internet.

Walter Isaacson, former CEO of CNN, on www.edge.org, 2007