

ASIAN LANGUAGES TRANSLATOR

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Introduction

The book business is thriving well within Malaysia, despite being lagging slightly behind her regional neighbours. It is following the worldwide trend. Of special significance is the book translation business and the emergence of chain bookstores that is now taking place in Malaysia. Although the book translation business is on the rise, but we have nothing much to celebrate as yet, as most of the translated titles published in the region come from American and British book publishers. This means that they are mainly translated into a local language from English.

The bigger implication of this scenario is that, there is a big opportunity to bring in more regional titles from Asean countries like Vietnam, Thailand, Philippines and Indonesia, and even other Asian countries like China, Taiwan, Japan and Korea. Regional publishers have very little knowledge of regional titles because of language barrier. And consequently, very few regional bestsellers or works of highly acclaimed authors ever get translated into other regional languages, and consequently appear on the local book markets.

Malaysia - a fast developing market

In term of the local publishing industry, we are certainly lagging behind our Asean neighbours Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam. However, the growth performance of the industry seems to indicate that we will soon be joining these neighbours.

The Malaysian book industry has been estimated to be worth about RM1.5 billion a year, with almost 500 publishers, and more than 600 bookstores in the country.

Recent Government's announcement of The Ninth Malaysia Plan (9MP) is seen to be very positive and encouraging for the industry. Specifically, thrust 2 under the 9MP focused on raising the country's capacity for knowledge and innovation, with the intention of nurturing a 'first-class mentality'. This is an objective that can only be achieved with an increased knowledge and skill for the Malaysians. An objective that may only be attained with more books of knowledge on the shelves of our bookstores.

In general, there are some facts that are highly supportive of the book industry:

- Under the 9MP, i.e. from 2006 to 2010, Malaysian economy is set to grow steadily with the GDP expanding on the average at 6.0% per annum, achieving per capita GNP of RM23,573 in 2010. (This means, there is more money to buy books.)
- During this period, the population is projected to increase to 28.96 million in 2010 with the working age group of 15-64 years, accounting for 63.6 per cent of total population, whilst those aged 65 years and above will increase to 4.7 per cent. (The implication is that, the reading population will be sizable.)
- The government will pump in a total of RM220 billion in the 9MP compared to RM170 billion in 8MP. Of this amount, a total of RM45.1 billion, or 20.5%, will be allocated to the

implementation of various education and training programmes.

- Ministry of Education will receive RM23.19 billion or 10.5% of the budget, and Ministry of Higher Education will be allocated RM17.6 billion or 8.0% of the budget. (More of such programmes would require more knowledge, more knowledge would mean more books, and more books is good news for the publishing industry as a whole.)

Thrust 2 under the RM9 placed the book industry at the high impact segment, with Government's emphasis on human capital development. We generally expect an expanding market for books with population growth, strong economy, and improved GNP. There will be an increasing need for books with bigger number of population getting further education, greater demand for knowledge and progressive thinking. There will be an emerging market in women books, with focus in advancing women participation in the economy. We also expect bigger opportunities as a result of government's expanded allocation on education, which will filter down to books, teaching aids, and the like.

[READING SURVEY REPORT to show that reading level have gone up significantly]

The clearest sign of such an enthusiasm on reading can be seen on the book retailing side. There are two clear trends that are benefitting the local book publishing industry.

First, there is an increase in the number of chain bookstores. Currently, chain bookstores are increasing the number of their outlets by covering more locations that until now was not heard of. The chain bookstores are going into a secondary town, which previously were only served by traditional booksellers. This expansion drive of chain bookstores gives readers outside Klang Valley a wide range of choice of reading materials. Previously, traditional booksellers only focused on selling school text books, work books and stationaries, with very little or no general books at all on their book shelves.

The second important trend in bookselling is, there is an increase of books in local or vernacular languages in the bookstores. Books in vernacular languages is contributing a significant percentage of sale in some of the outlets, especially those outside Kelang Valley area. This in turn, convinced chain bookstores to give more support, better placement, and offer larger number of books in vernacular languages in strategic locations.

With more sale outlets all over Malaysia, publishers of general books can confidently expand their publishing programmes, and be assured of wider distribution. However, there is one negative impact though. The often cited down risk of this trend is that, it may spell the death of independent booksellers.

Such a development in the book publishing industry, will bring us into the worldwide trend in this industry. The role we have to partake is as clear as it is certain. We will have to take our rightful position in the world book publishing industry. Bigger reading population and more money to spend on books, will mean more titles to be published. This will bring us to the next pressing issue. Where will we get all these titles from. In this light, we must take our guide from the prevailing worldwide trend. Malaysia is somewhat behind, but we can catch up. And catching up we will. The local publishing industry will enter into the next phase, i.e. *the phase of translation and licensing*. **The phase of enriching the repository of knowledge in the National Language.**

Translation of Books - The next phase for the Malaysian publishing industry

In the book translation industry, we have a lot to gain from the practices of our immediate Asean neighbours. Within Asean region, Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam have the most vibrant book publishing industry. In those countries, the industry thrives upon translation of works from other languages. Translation rights from international lists (licensing agencies) are actively pursued. Once translation rights and licenses are secured, the works are translated and published, at times almost simultaneously with the international release of the original titles.

In 2006 Malaysia published about 8000 titles. The majority of these books belonged to the childrens book category, written by local authors. In comparison to Indonesia and Thailand, each country published more than 10,000 titles annually. A significant number of those were translated from international bestsellers.

Looking at the success of translated titles in our neighbouring markets, I believe the same trend will occur in Malaysia too. Furthermore, as a logical sequence to our vibrant publishing industry, Malaysian book publishers will have to supplement our local titles with translation works, in order to build up our catalogues in any particular subject, discipline or area of focus. In the case of international bestsellers, the translation of such titles need to be published for commercial purposes, in particular to capture readers interest in any particular moment (i.e. there is an increase on the desire to know about Myanmar now, and books on Myanmar to be translated and published now, as much as there was an upsurge to know about Islam in the United States after the infamous 9-11.)???

As I mentioned earlier, book retail trend in Malaysia, especially those in the National Language and Mandarin is already developing at an encouraging rate.

The Chinese language market in Malaysia in particular, is an interesting case. The Chinese can be described as the most urbanized community in Malaysia. And, in such an urbanized community, English is very prevalent, and the urban Chinese is no exception. However, in book buying pattern, a different picture emerges. They buy books in Chinese.

The bulk of Chinese language books in Malaysia comes from Taiwan, Hong Kong and China. One active importer brings in about 300 titles a month, and a significant number of the import constitutes of translated titles. In fact, a report from a particular bookseller, the Chinese edition of the recent business bestseller, 'The Blue Ocean Strategy' sells a bigger number of copies compared to the original English edition in his outlets.

Chinese edition trade in Malaysia, shows that the demand for Chinese (and local language) editions of many international titles, is healthy and economically viable venture.

As local book market continues to develop, we will soon enter into a phase, where translation of book will be significant in number. It will be significant in size to enable a lot of publishing houses to actively pursue and secure international bestsellers translation rights and licenses.

ASEAN - A big regional market

Asean represents a huge regional opportunity for our local publishers. It is a big region to market our books and to license our best works for translation into other regional languages.

Let us take a look at Asean as a region:

- Total area > 4 Mil. Sq. km.
- Total population > 550 Mil.
- Total of GDP: 1,000 Billion USD
- Number of Publishers > 2,000
- Number of Titles > 60,000 per year

Country	Population (in million)	Books published per annum
Indonesia	220	10,000
Philippines	85	5,429
Vietnam	83	20,191
Thailand	64	11,600
Malaysia	26	8,550

From the above statistics it is obvious that Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia are very active in acquiring translation rights of international bestsellers. They purchase licenses to translate and publish such international bestsellers from licensing agents (or publishers). For some highly desirable titles, the licensing (literary) agents will conduct auction to select the highest bidder from these countries.

Despite the vibrant activity, very little rights licensing is happening among Asean countries presently, except in traditional market of Islamic book between Indonesia-Malaysia-Singapore. The major publishing houses in the region give greater focus on buying rights from international publishers instead of our Asean counterparts.

In the Malaysian book market, almost all the international bestsellers are easily available (in English though). However, if an interested reader is trying to look for works by regional writers from Jakarta, Manila or Bangkok, there is virtually nothing available. We can even conclude that Malaysian readers know all the ongoing in the United States and Europe, but very little about our own neighbours in Asean.

New generation of readers in Asean countries is virtually clueless about prominent regional authors, historical or contemporary. Equally, our prominent local authors are also not getting any attention from readers in Asean as a region.

I believe we have a way to make good this deficit, via a viable book licensing and translation among the regional publishers. The list of things to-do in order to get regional publishers into regional cooperation is numerous.

High on the list would be getting more publishers to participate in the regional book fair. The Malaysian Book Publishers Association (MABOPA), is working to encourage its members to increase their level of participation in regional book fairs. Many Malaysian publishers still question the benefit of participating in such regional book fairs. The association has taken steps such as setting up shared booths to reduce the cost for participating in such book fairs. We believe, with more contact we have with other publishers at regional level, would naturally increase the probability of licensing and publishing deals among the publishers.

We are also promoting the concept of 'Right's Center' at the next Kuala Lumpur International Bookfair. The function of the Right's Center is the exchange of information, networking, buying and selling of licenses. Important information like bestsellers list, new titles, author information, and writing & literary awards can be distributed to interested publishers to create interest for books published by Asean counterparts.

However, I consider the biggest problem for regional publishers to discover other regional works is caused by a language barrier. We need to translate Asean works too.

The translation of Asian works

Today, we use English as the intermediary language in Asean. However, there is an opportunity to translate books directly from Indonesian, Thai, Vietnamese, Filipino or even Japanese, Korean, and Chinese language direct into our National Language, without having to go through the intermediary of English. This is already taking place with Malay-Indonesian and vice versa. Since the two languages of the two countries share a common base, it is much easier and faster to translate books for each others market. We would call such an effort as “intra-translation,” However, rendering a Indonesian into Thai or Vietnamese and the like would call for a “full translation” in every sense oof the word.

Popular and significant regional titles may not yet be available in English. For many reasons, some of these books may probably never be translated to English. Therefore, if not translated into other Asean languages, the regional readership will never be informed about such a work.

We need more translators that to be fluent in Asian languages. For now, we might have to contend with using English as a basis of intra-ASEAN cooperation. But our over reliance on English might cost us some good titles.

Conclusion

As a concluding remark, I would say that our prospect in the publishing industry is good. It is expected to be on the upward trend. Meeting the increase of demand for new titles, we need to go beyond Malaysian borders, in particular in licensing bestsellers, both international as well as regional, in keeping with the objective of the Government to bring education to the people. In doing this, we need to pay particular attention of the increasing trend of readership in the National Language and Chinese. In other words, we need to develop translation as an industry, in order to help the publishing industry to develop further. The Malaysian National Institute for Translation and the Malaysian Translation Association need to cooperate to bring this to bear.

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