Globalization, Internet and Cultural Flows: The Case of the Taiwanese Publishing Industry

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Globalization, Internet and Cultural Flows: The Case of the Taiwanese Publishing Industry

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1.0 Introduction (return to index)

The research in this paper seeks to demonstrate the ways in which the globalization process influences the publishing industry in Taiwan and the ways in which new technologies are involved in the process. Taiwan is one of the countries of Asia; the flow of books into and out of the country shows not only the cultural flows between East and West, but also the flow within the Chinese language market and between Taiwan and Japan. When books cross international borders, in addition to representing cultural flows between different languages and cultures, they also reveal the influence of new technology on the publishing industry.

The reason for choosing Taiwan as my centre of attention is that while the impact of new
technologies on the publishing industry may vary from one society to another, the flow of publishing and book buying between Taiwan and the West can reveal the possibilities and obstacles between different language markets. Furthermore, Taiwan’s situation will enable us to examine the inequality between the worldwide currency of Chinese and English as languages.

1.1 The Aim of the Paper

An important aim of this paper is to show that, although new technology provides tools to connect different geographical areas, there are barriers and difficulties beyond technology. Apart from technology one must understand that cultural, political and economic factors are all involved in the process of books crossing borders, which in many cases make it difficult for the books to make the transition.

1.2 Why New Technology?

New technologies have had a dramatic impact in cultural terms. For instance, they have significantly transformed the ways in which “cultural goods” in general are produced, distributed and consumed, as well as the nature of the cultural products themselves. The publishing industry, insofar as it is one part of the cultural spectrum, has undergone considerable transformations both in terms of its functioning and its position within the broader context of cultural production. I therefore attempt to examine the impact that new technologies have had on the publishing industry in Taiwan.

As Slevin points out, “many features of the Internet point directly to its deep involvement in globalizing processes” (2000, p198). The Internet bookshop reflects this globalization process. It is a new product that combines new technology and the publishing industry, also accounting for some of the changes occurring in the publishing industry in Taiwan. Since Internet bookshops are a relatively new phenomenon, beginning in the late 1990s, this important phenomenon needs to be explored. Moreover, the impact, which Internet bookshops have had on conventional bookshops, is an interesting avenue of investigation, reflecting changes within the book selling-industry. As Jane Stokes remarks, “Traditional bookshops face a threat from advances in new technology, especially given that selling over the Internet can bypass traditional retailers” (2000, p18). One must note that there are some different and additional services provided by Internet bookshops when compared to traditional bookshops. What are some of the strategies adopted by different booksellers in order to adjust to this new environment? Why have new technologies become involved in the publishing industry? What is the social and economic structure behind the impact of new technologies on the publishing industry? In what ways do the new technologies influence the publishing industry? What kinds of problem do publishers face and what are the possibilities of overcoming them? This paper addresses these questions.

By exploring some of the ways in which new technologies have transformed different aspects of the publishing industry, this study attempts to map out how these technologies have also changed our modes of acquiring knowledge and the publishing industry’s marketing techniques.
1.3 Why Taiwan?

The choice of the Taiwan publishing industry for this study was made for the following reasons. Firstly, most books currently in print about the publishing industry and the book trade primarily deal with these industries as they are found in the UK, USA and other Western industrialized countries, while very little material is available concerning non-Western countries. Moreover, most of the current research tends to focus on the publishing industry in English-speaking countries, whereas research on works printed in Chinese is lacking. English is already the lingua franca of the world and its hegemonic position has been further consolidated by new English-based information technologies over the last two decades, while the use of the Chinese language is limited to native speakers of Chinese. By choosing Taiwan as the place to study the publishing industry, one can also illustrate the use of the English and Chinese languages on the Internet and explore the problems, which publishers may face when trying to target a global market. Secondly, because the development of new technology is one of the primary concerns of the Taiwanese Government, the adoption of this policy also indirectly influences the book selling market and provides an environment for the development of Internet bookshops. Thirdly, the development of the publishing industry can also be examined as an example of historical changes in the cultural, political and economic aspects of Taiwanese society.

Another reason to choose it as a research area is that Taiwan has been culturally colonized and influenced by several countries. Looking at the recent history of Taiwan, it was colonized by Japan for almost a century, but is at present politically and culturally closer to the United States. Further, the interaction between Taiwan and China is complicated. Although the two nations have been culturally linked in several ways, the current political situation has created a number of differences between the two. When a publisher in Taiwan wants to enter the global market, these factors influence their understanding and interpretation of the market and thus affect their setup plans.

Books transmit knowledge. Thus, political barriers are encountered when books cross national boundaries. For example, the political situation that existed between Taiwan and China made it difficult for books to cross borders for quite a long time: when governments want to control the ideology of the people, they need to control the flow of books.

2.0 Globalization and Westernization (return to index)

The purpose of this paper is to develop an argument refuting the notion that globalization means Westernization. With regard to the publishing industry in Taiwan, which, in some respects, is deeply influenced by the West, one may readily see that there is no simple equating of globalization with Westernization. Globalization in the Taiwanese publishing industry is also reflected as a complex series of interactions with other Chinese language markets.

By drawing on key concepts from the literature, this section seeks to establish the theoretical basis for this paper. The central issues here cover three different areas of interest, namely: the
cultural flows between the publishing industry in Taiwan and global markets; any traits of cultural imperialism existing in these cultural flows; and the hybridization process in the publishing industry.

2.1 Publishing and the Cultural Flow

In this section, I will examine relevant theoretical debates and formulate a series of arguments through a discussion of theories about cultural flow.

2.1.1 Theories of Cultural Flow

Although scholars such as Schiller argue that the globalization process is largely a product of Western culture influencing other cultural areas, the globalization process of the publishing industry in Taiwan seems to offer a different perspective. This research argues that the globalization process does not flow in one direction, but involves more complicated interactions between different cultures.

H. I. Schiller in Mass Communications and American Empire states:

Today’s world market economy has evolved from, but retains the central characteristics of, the original American pattern. Now it is a global system with many nationally based transnational corporations employing the communication and cultural practices and processes that originated, and continue to prevail, in the United States (1992, p39).

Schiller’s point of view suggests “the global pattern is a one-way flow without reciprocal systems of equitable exchanges or a reverse flow” (Varis, 1984, p56).

This scholar, Tapio Varis, in The International Flow of Television Programs states: “A UNESCO study of the international flow of television programs and news in 1972-1973 found two clear trends: that there is a one-way traffic from the big exporting countries to the rest of the world, and that entertainment material dominates the flow” (1986, p143). Varis points out the serious inadequacy and imbalance in the globalization process and says that most countries are passive recipients of information disseminated by a few other countries.

The strength of Schiller’s point of view, as Thompson (1995, p173) has argued, is that it “has been highly significant in establishing a critical perspective on the power-structuring of cultural globalization”. However, although cultural flow shows some cultural hegemony and may have a strong influence on other cultures, it is not as simple as one-way communication and is complicated in process.

Other scholars, such as Tomlinson and Appadurai, challenge the above scholars’ views, which assert that cultural flow is a one-way communication. Tomlinson in Globalization and Culture maintains that:
The idea that globalized culture is a hybrid culture has a strong intuitive appeal that follows directly from the notion of deterritorialization. This is because the increasing traffic between cultures that the globalization process brings suggests that the dissolution of the link between culture and place is accompanied by an intermingling of these uprooted cultural practices producing new complex hybrid forms of culture.

Beside the theoretical debates, practical fieldwork also shows the different points of view of the publishing participants. Some publishers said in the interviews that the Western influence on Taiwan through books is a strength, because it helps the modernization of Taiwan and inspires Taiwanese readers in different ways. However, some publishers think that Western influence moving into Taiwan will cause a loss of local identity and also make its culture homogeneous. Edward Said seemed to support this point of view, stating that television, films and all the media resources help to reinforce cultural stereotypes and have forced information into more and more standardized moulds. This view could also apply to the publishing industry (1995, p26).

2.2 Cultural Imperialism

Schiller defines cultural imperialism as the “sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced and sometimes even bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating canter of the system” (1976, p9).

According to government statistics, as well as from interviews with publishing industry participants, it appears that around one-third of books published in Taiwan are translations from other countries. The high percentage of translated books in Taiwan raises several questions. First, does the importation of foreign books reflect a significant degree of cultural imperialism in Taiwan? And in what ways do the cultures of the West influence Taiwan through books? Does the globalization of book production show Westernization when books cross cultural and international borders? Through interviews with different publishers in Taiwan, the researcher became aware of different points of view regarding this issue.

Some publishers stated that Because Taiwan does not publish a sufficient number of books of high quality, it needs translated books from abroad to make up for this deficiency. The publisher of the Grimm publishing house said that at present even authors themselves have become globalized, so it is difficult to differentiate between what is global and what is local. He said that if the authors themselves are already globalized, this makes it even harder to establish which books reflect the Taiwanese culture or aspects of other cultures. Moreover, some publishers believe that Taiwan's progress results in part from the books that it imports. Edward Said in Orientalism points out that intellectuals in Eastern societies often look through Western eyes to see their own culture. Hence, is it improper for some publishers to argue that the importing of foreign books into Taiwan is good and necessary?

For Said, categorizing human history into “us” (the West) and “them” (the Orientals) has been
applied to force a distinction between two groups of people. Such distinctions generally do not lead to admirable ends. Further, Said points out that when one uses categories, such as Oriental and Western, as starting and end points for analysis, research and public policy, this usually results in polarizing people from different cultures. Thus, the Orientals become more Oriental, the Westemer more Western, which can limit human interactions between different cultures, tradition and societies.

Said also issues a strong warning: “My hope is to illustrate the formidable structure of cultural domination and, especially for formerly colonized peoples, the dangers and temptations of employing this structure upon themselves or upon others” (1985, p25).

Can this apply to Taiwan in a historical sense? How much has Taiwan been influenced by Japanese cultural domination and how much by Western domination? This is a relevant question to ask in the light of Said’s warning.

The interaction between West and East is not only a relationship of control, but can be a relationship to improve understanding through the interaction, at least, between members of the publishing industry. However, during the globalization process, can one culture end up by being homogeneous with another? For instance, in Taiwan, translated books account for one third of the book market. What sort of impact does this have on Taiwan’s culture as a result of this?

What causes the uneven global flow of books between the West and East? Some publishers face problem on attempting to enter the global market. One publisher said, for example, “it is hard to be globalized, because Eastern children are so familiar with Western stories, but Western children are not familiar with Eastern stories.” Another publisher said, “books are one kind of tool to convey knowledge; if the West does not need knowledge from the East, no matter how good the book is, if they are not interested in its content, there is little chance to market or sell the book.” When books cross cultural and national boundaries, it is not only a cultural matter, but is also associated with economic and political matters. If the latter do not occupy a position of hegemony, can books or other aspects of the knowledge industry have a potential market in the world? When books from other countries enter Taiwan, what kind of language and cultural boundaries do they come across?

Books convey knowledge and, from Said’s point of view, knowledge is linked with power and control (1995, p36). Therefore, this paper will examine whether Western books imported to Taiwan show that Western power permeates Eastern society.

2.3 Knowledge, Power and Cultural Flow

In this section I will attempt to examine the publishing industry in Taiwan from a different point of view from Said’s.

According to Said, Western culture spreads into Eastern society as one form of control and it
represents cultural imperialism. For instance, when we look at the phenomenon of books across boundaries between West and East, we also consider this as a kind of cultural flow and thus consider the knowledge that books convey from one region to another. We thus can examine some of the relationships between power, knowledge and control, and we see that Western books may in some respects have an impact on intellectuals and readers in Eastern societies. For example, it may make them look at their own culture from a Western perspective. But Eastern books going into Western societies do not necessarily have the equivalent effect. However, from my point of view, the interaction through books from West to East and from East to West need not be a controlling relationship, but may and should be a relationship to help the understanding between West and East.

Books can be tools for transmitting knowledge across boundaries. The relationship between power and knowledge is not necessary a relationship of cultural hegemony and control. Books can help mediate the culture flow from one place to another and enhance the understanding between people.

2.4 Hybridization

In this section, I attempt to argue that globalization is not always equated with Westernization; the globalization process is not only a Westernizing influence, but also realistically represents a more hybridized situation.

The book itself may become a hybrid product. For instance, one publisher described this production process, in relation to children’s books, by saying that on occasion his firm may invite writers in Taiwan to write the story, and an artist in Italy, or some other Western country, to paint the illustrations for a book to be produced and published in Taiwan. In such a case, it is difficult to tell whether the result is a “Taiwanese book” or not. Another publisher said that some writers themselves have already become “globalized.” If they have already been influenced by Western concepts and have created their books according to Western concepts, can their books be identified as Taiwanese and is it indeed necessary or helpful to designate books as Western or Eastern?

Armand Mattelart states that theories of linear modernization expressed in terms of a Western vision of modernity have basically failed because in reality they do not always result in political and economic forms of power. Further, he states that the transnational cultural hypotheses posed by many political scientists, historians and sociologists, maintain that flows are engendered by the process of trans-nationalization of the globe, but reflect a world that is being more and more “hybridized.” (1994, p229)

If one examines the book publishing industry in this context, then one can identify two important results of the process of Westernization. First, transnational cultural mechanisms can continuously bombard the sensibilities of the local people to such a degree that imported meaning and cultural forms can become indistinguishable from local forms. In addition, with the
passing of time, imported forms become modified and recycled by local cultures to meet their own needs.

The Indian anthropologist Arjun Appadurai writes:

The globalization of culture is not the same as its homogenization, but globalization involves the use of a variety of instruments of homogenization that are absorbed into local political and cultural economies, only to be repatriated as heterogeneous dialogues (1990, p16).

3.0 Globalization, New Technology, Printing Industry and Society (return to index)

3.1 Globalization and Localization: Co-operation of Internet bookshops and 7-11

New technologies provide new possibilities for the publishing industry. However, the use of new technologies must also accommodate local demands in different societies. The appearance of Internet bookshops provides new avenues for the book trade to sell its products. Although the Internet is becoming the new technology by which publishers can reach the global market, the case study of Taiwan shows that social customs must be taken into consideration. Before “globalization” occurs, the problem of “localization” has to be solved. Internet bookshops appeared in Taiwan in the late 1990s. One of the problems that the Internet bookshop has encountered in Taiwan is the lack of trust on the part of many customers in using credit cards on the Internet. Taiwanese people were apprehensive that giving their credit card details through the Internet exposed them to risks of misuse by others. Owners of Internet bookshops have had to find ways to cope with these fears. People in Taiwan prefer to pay cash, since they feel safer to buy books in this manner.

Co-operation between Internet bookshops and 7-11 will provide the way to meet local needs. For many people, 7-11 is the store on the corner of the street near home; it is where daily necessities may be purchased. Co-operation between Internet bookshops and 7-11, the chain of local convenience stores, means that customers can order books from the Internet and purchase them from the 7-11 store. After customers have ordered books via the Internet, the Internet bookshop will deliver them to a local 7-11 store where customers can see the books before they buy them with cash. In one respect, the 7-11 store has become the bank for Internet bookshops. In this manner the seller accommodates the needs and habits of customers in a society such as Taiwan.

The researcher would like to draw two inferences from this case. First, although new technologies provide new ways for customers to obtain books, they are at the same time able to retain their traditional means of paying cash for them after examining them in their local store. But in the long run the selling/retailing society must provide a trustworthy environment for customers to use so that credit cards can be widely used; only then will the book trade through the Internet become more popular than it is at present. Trust is also a crucial part of the use of new technology for globalization. Globalization may involve long distance contacts between publishers, Internet bookshops and customers. If problems occur it could be costly in both
money and time to rectify them, due to time differences between different areas.

Therefore, both “globalization” and “localization” need to be taken into account by the book industry. Especially, globalization strategies need to be made sensitive to the local cultural content and hence modified if they are to prove successful. New technologies need to specifically cater to the specific needs of readers in different geographic and cultural areas. The case of Taiwan shows that although Internet bookshops do provide another way for readers to obtain information about books, the customers actually use their own traditional ways of buying them. They do have options to buy books through the Internet, although some people would rather get it in 7-11.

The second inference from this case is that new technologies spur the international publishing industry to co-operate with other businesses. New technologies create new possibilities and also create new demands. To cope with new demands, participants in the publishing industry are exploring ways to form links with other companies, whereby co-operation is not limited to the publishing industry itself, but also extends to other businesses.

3.2 New Technologies and the Publishing Industry: the Case of Yuan-Liou

Instead of saying that new technology creates new markets, this paper points out that new technology provides great diversity. Due to space limitations, a few specific cases will be considered.

From one perspective, new technologies create the possibilities for globalization, but before globalization can take place, the problems of localization must to be solved. New technologies facilitate both globalization and localization. For example, through the Internet, book producing and selling can reach to the global world, but the production of books needs to adjust to local markets and fit their demands.

The Yuan-Liou publishing house, to take one case, plans to build a huge electronic database in the Chinese language market so that it can reproduce different products to reach global markets in different areas, but in so doing it also needs to prove sensitive to the local environment.

The high cost of setting things up will lead to cooperation between publishers. Cooperation becomes a requirement for producing capital. The project manager said, “It is a nice idea, but also involves risks.” If anything goes wrong, many publishers’ investments will fail. The investment costs are huge and it is also a long-term plan. It is clear that the new technology inspires publishers to try and provide new possibilities but this inevitably means that they will encounter new difficulties and have to take risks never taken before.

The plan is still at the stage of development, but it shows new imagination and possibilities of cooperation. Although they need cooperation, finding ways in which they can get and share profit may become another problem for publishers and will test whether the plan is successful or not.
New technology shows the ways for the publishers to provide new possibilities. It may be not important to concentrate on whether the plan is successful or not, but on the fact that it shows the ways for new technology to change the publishing industry and provide new possibilities.

New technology also changes the relationship between the publishers and authors and also between publishers and markets. For example, authors sell their copyright to the publishers for print media, but now the publishers need to ask individual authors for permission to use their content for electronic publishing as well. Some authors may feel that if readers get information from such electronic media, they may not be willing to buy the printed version so that they may not agree to letting the publishers have the copyright for their “printed” and “electronic” versions at the same time.

3.3 New Technologies and Social Structure

The key argument of this section is to show that new technology is not only a tool to facilitate the development of the publishing industry but also that the technology may help to restructure social relations.

The new technology is one key aspect of the social structure; it shapes the nature of the social structure and creates social possibilities. New technology enhances what can actually be done, and leads to changes in what is available to society. Access to the Internet has changed the nature of the publishing industry. Internet and publishing have created many new possibilities and new social dimensions.

Globalization and new technologies are continuously changing the ways in which the written form can be used. Reading on, or via, the Internet makes reading more a matter of seeking information rather than following narratives or story-telling, and thus reading has become more fragmented, rather than simply receiving a unified set of ideas such as a plot or story. Reading will conceivably be used less to construct identity in future society; indeed this process may already have begun. In the long-term future, generations may be able to obtain only information from the Internet, resulting in less capacity for cultural pleasure.

Publishing has, on the one hand, manifold possibilities, but, on the other hand, reading could degenerate and become more a matter of seeking information and no longer a habit of reading for pleasure. The printed form has already become just one form of “publishing” and written text on the Internet may change to become more a source of information and less a means of culture.

3.4 The Impact of New Technologies on the Publishing Industry

The historical background with regard to the development of new technologies and the publishing industry may enable us to chart the similarities and differences between Taiwan and other countries, in terms of the impact of new technologies on the publishing industry.
3.4.1 The background of the developments in technology in Taiwanese society

In Taiwan, the plan of the “National Information Infrastructure”, which came into effect in August 1994, was intended to develop Taiwan as a “technological island”. This plan provided a good basis for Taiwan to develop into a network society. Moreover, Taiwan is also a country that produces a large number of computers. Computer-based services and information are relatively accessible to large sections of the Taiwanese population. Government policy, along with the active participation of industry, has enabled the appropriate infrastructure for Taiwanese people to be constructed for them to learn how to handle and use new technologies and the information made available through them.

3.4.2 The development of Internet bookshops in Taiwan

According to a report in a news publication in Taiwan, publishers commented on the market served by Internet bookshops as follows: “Everyone gets a chance, but no one can be sure of success.” The main problem for the publishers is that Internet bookshops cannot earn money to begin with, but no one knows how long this phase will last. Most of the Taiwanese publishers think that the larger market would include all the Chinese-speaking populations all over the world, and think that they can develop simplified Chinese editions so that they can expand to the market in Mainland China. Some bookshops retain traditional services, but are also developing an Internet bookshop in parallel. Although by developing both aspects they can share sources, sometimes finding ways to do this is a source of problems. For example, pricing is a problem when a discount is offered in the Internet bookshop, because traditional bookshops then ask for discount as well (16 Feb 2000, IT home e-paper).

Although new technologies have changed the nature of bookselling, and have provided more functions for the publishing industry, barriers do still exist, particularly when publishers attempt to use new technologies to expand to the global market or promote the local culture. Moreover, although new technologies help cultural expansion in some ways, they also create new problems and can cause an uneven spread in culture.

The flow of published material involving the publishing industry in Taiwan not only represents the interaction between the worlds of the East and West, but also the flow inside the Chinese language markets and other markets within the East itself. This section will offer some examples from Taiwan representing different perspectives on the cultural flows between Taiwan and other global markets.

The case of Yan Chez Publishing house is a good example to illustrate the possibilities and obstacles present in the Taiwan publishing industry as it enters the global market.

4.0 Globalization and Cultural Flows (return to index)

4.1 Cultural Flows within Chinese Language Market: The Case of Yang-Chih
When this researcher interviewed the Chief Editor of Yang-Chih publishing house, Meng Fan, he stated that Mainland China is a potential market for Taiwanese publishers, but it also creates many problems for the Taiwanese publishing industry in crossing a variety of borders.

One of the obvious reasons for publishers in Taiwan to consider Mainland China to be a major potential market for them is the size of the Chinese-speaking population the market serves. However, Meng Fan said, “although there is a big population in China, a lot of them cannot read at all or they are not in the habit of buying books. It is a potential market for books, but this depends on its development in the future.” Moreover, he also mentions that books which travel from Taiwan to China need to go through the process of change from the traditional Chinese in which they are written to the Simplified Chinese version, making localization more difficult. Although both Taiwan and China use Chinese, the usage is still different in some respects and in any case, the politics, economy and lifestyles are quite different in both countries, so that readers’ expectations differ in many ways. It needs to be remembered as well that it takes some time for the publisher to know what local readers want when they go into the global market, and books that sell well in Taiwan do not necessarily sell well in China.

New technologies (such as the Internet) bring new possibilities and opportunities for the publishing industry to cross borders, but in reality they also pose just as many difficulties.

First, Meng Fan pointed out the problems booksellers have in Taiwan when they try to sell books in China. He stated that labour costs in Taiwan are higher than in Mainland China, coupled with the fact that by the time you add in shipping costs, most books become too expensive for Mainland Chinese to buy. Therefore, in order to sell books in China, it is better to use local labour, as well as materials, thereby allowing savings in cost when producing books. For example, for the money it takes to hire one editor in Taiwan, five to six editors can be hired in Mainland China.

Second, Meng Fan pointed out several other problems in relation to books when crossing borders. He stated that “some bookshop owners in China used to ask him if they could sell books to Taiwanese readers through Yang-Chih’s Internet Web page,” but purchasing books over the Internet presents some problems. For example, if readers in Taiwan order books published in Mainland China through Yang-Chih’s Internet Book Shop, then Yang-Chih’s has to order the books for them, but if the publishing houses in Mainland China do not have the books in stock, or there is a delay in delivery time, then it causes problems and can also damage the reputation of the Yang-Chih’s publishing houses.

He also pointed out another problem when buying books through the Internet, one which is linked with the lifestyles of people in the different countries. He said that most people in Mainland China still do not use credit cards and some banks in China only honour credit cards within its national borders and cannot pay funds out at an international level. Therefore, even though many readers in China find Taiwanese books for sale on the Internet, they are unable to purchase them. Therefore, books crossing borders here encounter barriers in terms of different lifestyles, as well as economic problems as China becomes internationalized.
The problems with the expansion of Internet book shops in Taiwan is that Taiwan is a small island, and as such its people find it very convenient to go to a nearby bookshop to buy books. It is different in countries such the USA, where people may live far away from bookshops, so it is far more convenient for them to buy books through the Internet.

However, Meng Fan also said that Internet bookshops are useful for buying academic and professional books and for books that are out of print. These categories of books are not easy to find in ordinary bookshops and therefore Internet bookshops provide a channel for both publishers and readers.

Further, he made the point that an ordinary customer going into an ordinary bookshop can decide whether or not to buy a book, but a customer who needs an academic or professional book is usually looking for a particular item and (a) cannot accept a substitute and (b) on most occasions cannot choose not to buy. Thus, using the Internet to purchase books that are not otherwise easily available becomes a more attractive option.

He also stated that there is two-way traffic in the way that people purchase books. For instance, people tend to buy books that are offered at a cheaper price over the Internet than in a local bookstore, but equally, they may see a book advertised on the Internet, but can more easily examine it in the bookstore before deciding to purchase. If the book costs more or less the same price at both stores, then the customer usually will decide to buy it over the counter.

4.2 Book Flows Between East and West

4.2.1 West to East: Cooperative Forms of Publishing—The Case of McGraw-Hill

The interviews with the present and marketing director of McGraw-Hill provide another perspective on Western books going into the Taiwanese market. The McGraw-Hill publishing house is American. Mr. Liu, the president of the publishing house said that from 1986 to 1993 the publishing house was setting up a branch in Taiwan. At first they only sold books and then later they began co-publishing with other publishing houses in Taiwan. Since 1998, McGraw-Hill has published books of its own. Most of the books they published in Taiwan were academic books or textbooks, in such subjects as computing, business, science and humanities.

Western books enter the Taiwanese market in several ways. For example, McGraw-Hill has different ways of publishing books in Taiwan. One way is to conduct business with a single Taiwanese publishing house. In this case, the publishing house in Taiwan finds the necessary translators and edits the books and McGraw-Hill prints them under the names of both publishing houses. A second way is for McGraw-Hill to find the translators and publish a book on its own. The second way is more beneficial, but also entails a greater degree of risk. A third way is to have a book written by writers in Taiwan, and then have it published there. However, the costs associated with promoting a long-term relationship between a publishing house and local Taiwanese authors are substantially more in terms of investment of time and money, than simply
purchasing the copyright to a best-selling book in other countries. For example, academic books, dictionaries and computer-related books have a certain specialist readership, and most often Taiwanese publishers buy the copyrights direct from Western publishers.

From Mr. Liu’s point of view, the key factor, if a Western publishing house wants access to an Eastern country, is to find the right person with a suitable team to manage and operate it. This person not only needs to be a specialist in the book trade, but also be familiar with the connection and publishing culture in the local book markets. Moreover, this person also needs to have knowledge of global book markets so that he or she can connect the West and the East. Several other publishers endorsed his point when interviewed, asserting that it is important to cultivate specialists from now on, whether from the education system or from practical publishing. When firms try to sell books from one area in another, they need to know the culture on both sides, the tastes and habits of readers in different areas, the average prices of books, the cost of producing books, the connections with local writers, editors and sales channels, and they also need to know the regulations and special rules for the book market which the books come from and where the books are going. These factors are not all easy to find in the same person at any time and it takes time to train specialists in such knowledge. However, it is important if the books are to cross borders and be successfully presented before readers in another language and area.

The sales manager, Ms Hsing, said that McGraw-Hill sold books through the education system and bookshops. The education system takes around 60 percent or more, and the bookshops channel the rest.

The case of McGraw Hill also shows another important perspective, because it not only imports Western books into the Chinese market, but also tries to interest the Western book market in translated Taiwanese books. Director Liu said that the target of McGraw-Hill is to cover both the global and the local markets. Although at the time when the interview was conducted he said that sending Taiwanese books to the English market was not yet the main focus of the book-selling strategy, they have translated some Taiwanese books into English to test their attractiveness. He said that sometimes it is not easy to sell a book if the writer is not internationally well known, so the publishers need to concentrate on certain issues in which Western readers may be interested. For example, they published a book about the Taiwanese computer company Acer and the book did catch the attention of readers who are interested in how a high technology company rose to success in Taiwan.

In Taiwan, the education system still depends on Western imported books in many ways. Some of them have been translated into Chinese, while others may be directly imported. For Western publishers, the textbook market is an important market to explore and it provides relatively certain profit.

The McGraw-Hill case also shows in what ways new technologies cope with the academic books. Moreover, the big Western publishing houses enter the Eastern market because they
have more resources so that they can do things that the smaller Taiwanese publishing houses cannot copy.

Mr. Liu said that new technology had had a huge impact on the publishing industry, especially in academic books. One of the services that McGraw-Hill provides is to design web pages for teachers. Since McGraw-Hill’s target is higher education, if the teachers tell the publishing house which textbooks they need, the publishing house can help to design a website to help teachers, students and parents. In the educational website, the publishing house can help to provide the exam questions so that students can have online tests through the Internet. Publishing houses can also provide an instructional menu to help the teacher to use the textbooks more easily and reduce the time the teacher needs to prepare the course notes. New technologies also add to the value of the books when it provides more functional multimedia to guide students to different concepts.

Apart from its Taiwan branch, McGraw-Hill has a sales office in Hong Kong and an office in Mainland China within the Chinese language market. The office in China also targets the textbooks market and also cooperates with local publishers.

Here, it should be recalled that at the time when this researcher was holding the interviews, neither Taiwan nor China had yet joined the WTO. At that time, when Western publishers were targeting the Chinese language market, many of them actually aimed at the big market of China itself. However, the market in China was still a closed market, not yet opened to the world and had many regulations and prohibitions. Therefore, Taiwan has become the place where Western publishers can test and get the experience they need to go into the Chinese language market. There are several reasons to choose Taiwan as a place where a firm can adapt to the Chinese language market. First, Taiwan has many business links with the global market and culturally is also influenced by the West in many ways, so it is easier for Western publishing houses to make connections and cooperate with other firms. Second, within the Chinese language market, it is larger than Hong Kong, which also has Chinese language readers. Third, in Taiwan at least two thousand titles are published every month and also it is an open society so that those titles cover all kinds of subject and are quick to catch up with the global book market. Therefore, Taiwan is a place that is good for Western publishers to find firms to cooperate with and form some models to adjust to the local Chinese language market, and it is a good preparation for going into the market in China when its markets gradually open to the world.

4.2.2 East to West

4.2.2.1 Difficulties: Impediments for Taiwanese books going into Western countries

Publisher Meng Fan supplied two reasons why Taiwanese books are harder to sell in Western countries. First, he said that very few Western people read or speak Chinese. Second, Western countries are not dependent on Taiwanese culture and knowledge. The kinds of Taiwanese books that sell well in Western countries are generally recipe books, children’s books and art
books. However, the market is very limited. There is generally little demand for translators of Chinese to English and sales are usually very small, although children’s books are something of an exception. In most cases, Chinese books attract little attention in the West.

4.2.2.2. Taiwanese books entering Western countries: Government project

In recent years the Taiwanese government has set up a plan to translate Chinese books into English in an attempt to explore overseas markets, but the results have not very promising. Both Taiwan and Western countries do not have good channels for selling such books, and at present most of the time books being published are given to academic institutions.

According to the interview with the government official Ms. Yang in the Executive Yuan for Cultural Affairs in Taiwan, the Taiwanese government has supported a project for almost ten years to translate and explore the export of Chinese books to other countries, including America, German, Japan and many others. However this project has encountered many difficulties in the process of crossing borders.

Due to the political difficulties at the international level, Taiwan has not joined the United Nations. Therefore, to export Chinese books to other countries is not only a simple trading activity but also a way of conveying Taiwanese culture and national identity to the international world.

Ms. Yang points out the main problem of translation. She said, “it is very hard to find good translators and sometimes a book takes years to translate, but the translators could not complete the work as expected.” Moreover, in the first few years of this project, even when a book has been translated and published, because the Taiwanese government is not familiar with sales channels for books in other countries; therefore, most of the time these books have only gone to academic institutes or libraries and been read by researchers. However, in recent years government has changed its policy to sponsor foreign institute or publishers to translate Taiwanese books into other languages and publish in these countries so that those books can reach more readers and the project can be implemented.

Compared with Western books going into the Taiwanese market, it is much more difficult for Taiwanese books to enter other countries. This is not only because in Eastern societies, many people know more than two languages, so that it is much easier to find translators for English, French, German books and those in other languages into Chinese, but it is hard to find the proper translators for Chinese books so as to market them in Western countries.

4.2.2.3 Taiwanese books go into Western World: Case of Grimm

One of the successful examples of Taiwanese publishers entering the global market is the Grimm publishing House. The publisher How said that he invites painters who win the international prizes in different countries to collaborate with them to produce children’s books. Although some of the books are based on Eastern stories, a lot of them are based on the Western ones. However,
different painters in different countries bring different cultural factors and local elements to the books, so the books themselves represent the global retrospective.

The publisher How points out that it is hard to identify a “Taiwanese book” because of global collaboration during the process of producing the book. He said the books are produced by a Taiwanese company and edited by Taiwanese editors, but the authors and writers may be from other countries, thus rendering aspects of both East and West in the books. He points out that the most important thing for the publisher is to produce good books, without considering how many factors different countries and culture get involved. He does not agree that interactions between East and West amounts to Cultural imperialism.

This example indicates that the interaction between East and West is not necessarily a relationship of competition or domination, but can constitute a bridge between two worlds and produce better products and enhance understanding.

4.3 Japanese books going toward Taiwan

Although Japanese books have the highest percentage of imported books in Taiwan, the kinds of imported Japanese books are very different from other Western imported books. Unlike other English books going into Taiwan, most of them are academic books or novels; most of the imported Japanese books are comic books.

When books cross borders, it is not only a matter of translation into another language that needs to be considered, but one needs to consider other cultural factors on either side of the border as well. Since Taiwan used to be colonized by Japan for almost a hundred years, Japanese culture in various ways have influenced Taiwan. However, in terms of books, Japanese culture influences different generations in Taiwan in different ways. Many of the Taiwanese aged 60 and above have had Japanese education when they were young. Therefore, books linked with Japanese history, politics, literature, culture and so on are translated into Chinese and have certain amount of readers in Taiwanese book market. Moreover, the more important impact of Japanese books on Taiwan is the influence of Japanese comic books on the teenage subculture in Taiwan. A significant part of the younger generation grew up with the memory of Japanese comic books. Japanese comic books are not only the popular among teenagers, but also closely linked with associated products such as animated cartoons, printed T-shirts, toys and computer games.

5.0 Conclusion (return to index)

Through the case study of the Taiwanese publishing industry, this paper has attempted to map the cultural flows between East and West, within the Chinese language market and Taiwan and Japan. This paper has also explored the ways in which the Internet impacts on the publishing industry and plays a prominent role in the cultural flows of books in the process of globalization. This paper has also sought to challenge the customary association of globalization with
Westernization. The publishing industry in Taiwan reflects a complex series of interactions with other Chinese language markets, as well as Japanese influences.

New technology provides new possibilities for the publishing industry; however, the use of new technology must also accommodate local demands in different societies. Both “globalization” and “localization” need to be taken into account by the book industry; and efforts have to be made so that new technology can be used to reach readers in different geographic and cultural areas.

This paper presents evidence that communication between East and West through books can build a relationship of cooperation, and can improve the understanding between East and West beyond any connotation of cultural imperialism.

6.0 Bibliography (return to index)


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11 THOUGHTS ON “GLOBALIZATION, INTERNET AND CULTURAL FLOWS: THE CASE OF THE TAIWANESE PUBLISHING INDUSTRY”

Shela
on February 2, 2014 at 4:38 AM said:

I know this web page provides quality dependent articles or reviews and additional information, is there any other web site which gives these kinds of data in quality?

Margarito
on February 3, 2014 at 2:11 PM said:

I visited several web sites except the audio quality for audio songs existing at this web site is actually wonderful.

Caleb
on February 4, 2014 at 9:20 AM said:

Good web site you’ve got here.. It’s difficult to find high quality writing like yours nowadays. I truly appreciate people like you! Take care!!

brisbane.2600.org.au
on February 4, 2014 at 8:08 PM said:

Woah! I’m really digging the template/theme of this website.
It's simple, yet effective. A lot of times it's challenging to get that "perfect balance" between superb usability and visual appearance. I must say that you've done a fantastic job with this.
In addition, the blog loads extremely fast for me on Firefox. Outstanding Blog!

**make money instantly**
on **February 4, 2014 at 11:20 PM** said:

Definitely consider that which you stated. Your favorite justification seemed to be at the web the simplest factor to remember of.
I say to you, I certainly get annoyed at the same time as folks consider issues that they just
don't realize about. You controlled to hit the nail upon
the highest as smartly as outlined out the entire thing with no need side-effects, people could
take a signal. Will probably be again to get more.
Thanks

**catholic church payson az**
on **February 5, 2014 at 8:05 PM** said:

First off all I want to say wonderful blog!
I had a quick question in which I'd like to ask if you do not mind. I was interested to know how you center yourself and clear your mind prior to writing. I've had difficulty clearing my thoughts in getting my ideas out.
I do take pleasure in writing however it just seems like the first 10 to 15 minutes are generally lost simply just trying to figure out how to begin.
Any ideas or hints? Many thanks!

**home loans in maine**
on **February 5, 2014 at 8:26 PM** said:
Oh my goodness! Incredible article dude! Many thanks, However I am having problems with your RSS.
I don't understand the reason why I cannot subscribe to it.

Is there anyone else having the same RSS problems? Anyone that knows the answer can you kindly respond? Thanks!!

http://i.pwned.com/aCr
on February 5, 2014 at 8:32 PM said:

Today, I went to the beach front with my kids. I found a sea shell and gave it to my 4 year old daughter and said “You can hear the ocean if you put this to your ear.”
She put the shell to her ear and screamed.

There was a hermit crab inside and it pinched her ear.
She never wants to go back! LoL I know this is completely off topic but I had to tell someone!

Peter Popoff Scam
on February 6, 2014 at 12:39 AM said:

I'm really impressed with your writing skills and also with the layout on your weblog.
Is this a paid theme or did you customize it yourself?
Either way keep up the excellent quality writing, it’s rare to see a great blog like this one today.

ministry give
on February 6, 2014 at 7:19 AM said:

Heyy there! I've been following your site for a long time now and finally got the bravery to go ahead and give you a shout out from Austin Texas! Just wanted to tell you keep up the great job!
free sales training plan template on February 6, 2014 at 11:00 AM said:

Do you mind if I quote a few of your posts as long as I provide credit and sources back to your site? My blog is in the exact same niche as yours and my visitors would really benefit from some of the information you provide here. Please let me know if this is ok with you. Many thanks!