<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>English language academic journals in Singapore: a profile and commentary</th>
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<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Gopinathan, Saravanan</td>
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<td>Source</td>
<td>Academic publishing in ASEAN: problems and prospects: proceedings of the Seminar on Academic Publishing in the ASEAN Region held in Singapore from 9-11 September 1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Published by</td>
<td>Festivals of Books Singapore</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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Considerable work has been done in the last decade to examine the structural inequalities in the production, dissemination and use of knowledge between developed and developing countries. Altbach (1975, 1985 a,b) has been a crucial influence in studies linking knowledge-related issues with those of educational and intellectual dependency. Other works in this tradition include Keith Smith (1976), Mattelart (1976), Israel (1978), Golding (1978). In 1985 Altbach, Abroleda and Gopinathan edited a state-of-the-art volume of essays dealing with various aspects of Third World publishing. The principal objective of all the studies cited above has been to examine the multifaceted processes and consequences arising out of knowledge dominance and knowledge dependency. Among the various factors contributing to this state of affairs has been the location of major universities; research institutes and laboratories in the developed North; the fact that the major publishing houses and libraries are also in the North; the dominance that metropolitan languages and especially English have in the dissemination of knowledge; and traditional patterns of trade which make it difficult to reverse the flow of cultural goods. New and rapid developments in information processing are currently changing patterns of knowledge production and consumption in the North and may be expected to create new forms of dependence.

Relatively little work has been done to examine the place of scholarly journals in the South; notable exceptions are accounts by Ooi (1975), Stone (1975), Lim (1975). Many studies do exist of the role of scholarly journals in scientific and technical communication.

This relative lack of knowledge about scholarly journals is unfortunate since they possess several characteristics that make them unique instruments of knowledge dissemination. Unlike books, many scholarly journals are published by scholarly societies and there is a unity of interest and expertise that binds
the knowledge producer and consumer. Among other key features are that relatively simple technology is required to produce a journal; journals have a steady market in institutional purchases and they are produced relatively more quickly; and thus new knowledge can be put into circulation more quickly (Altbach, 1985). In addition they have important roles to play in countries where new disciplinary centres are growing e.g. growing research in Malay Linguistics and Literature in Malaysia. Also, the problems of marketing would seem to be differently configured when we realise that the bulk of journal subscriptions are taken up by members of scholarly societies and associations.

There are several reasons why it is necessary to examine the position of journals in the South. Information is now seen as a crucial variable in development and the need to indigenize knowledge is commonly accepted (Alatas, 1974, Dube, 1982, Gopinathan, 1984). There has been an impressive growth of post secondary institutions in the South and many centres of specialised research have been established. Printing technology and other intellectual infrastructures have developed and can be counted upon to take up the challenge of knowledge generation. Publishing output has grown, if slowly. However, some problems remain, one of which is the desire of many academics to publish in the North. Thus while the old generalisations of knowledge dependency may not hold it is necessary to gain insights into what has emerged.

We present data in this paper to test some commonly held assumptions about scholarly journals. It has, for example, been found that since the late 1960s most publishers have experienced a steady decline in the number of subscriptions to their printed journals; one response to making journals viable has been to institute page charges and approximately half of all articles published in the U.S. today are subsidized by page charges, submission fees, reprint fees etc. (cited in Lerner, 1984). One could examine as well the role of English in scholarly communication. It has been noted that English is important for journals if they wish to reach international markets but little data exists to show that English language journals in the South do in fact have the bulk of their subscribers overseas. It would also be important to look in greater detail at the types of English language journals that have stood the test of time for some journals have succeeded in spectacular fashion against the structural barriers. These are among the questions we explore in this paper.

We present data obtained through a questionnaire survey and interviews of editors of English language scholarly journals in Singapore. We sent out 31 questionnaires and received 22 responses. A listing of the titles is provided in the Appendix.
At this stage it is necessary to look at a profile of the Singapore-published scholarly journals in order to determine their objective characteristics. The first point to note is that of content. Of the twenty-two journals surveyed, eight were in social science disciplines — economics, anthropology, sociology, geography, political science, history, or a mixture of these. One journal was exclusively devoted to anthropology (Contributions to Southeast Asian Ethnography), one exclusively to geography (Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography) and one exclusively to economics (ASEAN Economic Bulletin). The remainder were inter-disciplinary. One began as such, although with a strong bias towards political and international relations content (Contemporary Southeast Asia), but two of the others had begun as specialized journals (Journal of Southeast Asian Studies as a history journal, Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science as a sociology journal), but had then diversified. Two of the ‘general’ journals, (Journal of the South Seas Society and Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society) while publishing material on cultural themes, archaeology, history, biography, botany and other topics, also contain a substantial amount of social science material.

This pattern is interesting as it seems to indicate pressures towards local social science journals developing an inter-disciplinary character. There may be several reasons for this — shortage of good local manuscripts in small and specialized fields, limited subscribers for narrowly defined subject matter journals, lack of a sufficiently large local scholarly community to sustain research, ability to attract a wider range of books for review and advertisements and pressures from sponsoring institutions to develop interdisciplinary research (which is presently all the rage in Singapore).

Next in frequency after social science journals come professional ones (i.e. accountancy, law, etc), which totalled six in number. In interesting contrast to some of the social science journals, a number of the professional journals have large circulations, but mainly to local subscribers, to practitioners in their specific field. Some, such as the Malayan Law Journal, are considered essential reading for legal workers and basic sources of reference (in M.L.J.’s case, for case law). There were three medical (including dental) journals in the sample and these again had many of the standard characteristics of the other professional journals, including a fairly large readership in specialized fields which require constant knowledge updating.

Interestingly there is only one scientific journal in the sample — the rather innocent sounding Gardens Journal — which is actually a major and internationally recognized source in tropical botany, and is published by the Singapore Botanical Garden — itself a famous and long established site for the study and cultivation of tropical plants. It is perhaps significant that the one
scientific journal that Singapore is well known for should be a botanical one, rather than one in fields such as physics, indicating Singapore's strategic position in relation to the study of tropical plant life, but its peripheral status in relation to fundamental scientific research in the 'hard' sciences.

Of the remaining journals one is in the field of linguistics (RELC Journal) and has established itself, in association with its host institution, the Regional Language Centre, as both a regionally and internationally recognized scholarly publication. Of the three 'general' journals, one is actually an educational journal, but two are multi-disciplinary. One, the Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (JMBRAS), is the oldest journal published in Singapore and has content ranging over almost anything to do with Southeast Asia, contemporary or historical. The other, Journal of the South Seas Society, while also being multidisciplinary, has as its main focus the study of the Chinese communities in Southeast Asia.

When one looks at the dates of founding of these journals a pattern can be discerned: two were founded in the 19th Century (JMBRAS 1877 and the Gardens Journal 1891), two between 1932 and 1940 (Malayan Law Journal and Journal of the South Seas Society), five between 1950 – 1969 and a total of twelve between 1970 and 1985. How may this be explained? Among possible reasons are the accelerating pace of new journal development indicating the creation or recognition of new knowledge fields, the recognition that a sufficiently large community now exists to support a publication, and the desire to provide an outlet for a field which already exists, but has no recognized channel for publication. Secondly, several journals were sponsored or supported by the University or by a research institution (four journals are associated with the National University, two with the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, one with RELC, one with IE, and others are edited wholly or in part by people who are faculty members of the University). Thirdly, it is noteworthy that the two oldest journals are amongst the most internationally recognized today. One of the 1970s journals (Journal of Southeast Asian Studies 1971) has also achieved international recognition as a standard source in its field, while others are still struggling towards attaining that kind of recognition.

In some cases this question of status is related to numbers of subscribers. Seven journals reported subscription levels of from between 200 – 399 which is clearly not very viable economically. Three reported subscription levels of 400 – 599, three also from 600 – 799, one 800 – 999, and eight with subscriptions of 1000 plus. Many of these latter ones were the professional journals, while those in the lowest category were in several cases newly established social science journals. Also in the higher categories were the old
established and internationally recognized ones. Only one journal reported a drop in subscribers, nine reported that subscriptions were increasing and twelve reported no change, indicating a stable supporting community and/or saturation of the probable market.

The geographical distribution of subscribers is shown in the following table:

**Distribution of Subscribers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>16</th>
<th>17</th>
<th>18</th>
<th>19</th>
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<th>21</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia/Pacific</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe (Incl. UK)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US/Canada</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elsewhere</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interpretation of these patterns shows that, not surprisingly, the local professional journals were read mainly in Singapore, but that the internationally recognized ones considered important in their field were read most widely outside of Singapore.

The question of the international outlook of the various journals is also indicated by two other indices. The first of these is the composition of the editorial boards. Twenty-one journals reported having Singaporeans on their boards, only one had no Singaporeans, and nine had both Singaporeans and non-Singaporeans. In some cases this pattern reflects an editorial board with advisory members overseas (a common practice with scholarly journals), in others, for example the University based journals, that boards comprised both of local and expatriate academics. The other index is the source of articles and the pattern here is clearly revealed in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In Rank Order</th>
<th>1st</th>
<th>2nd</th>
<th>3rd</th>
<th>4th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Asia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia/NZ</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Asia</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US/Canada</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elsewhere</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Contributors/Source of Articles

Again the pattern indicates that the more internationally recognized the journal is, the wider the range of sources from which manuscripts as well as subscribers are attracted.

Three final points to note from the profile are firstly, source of funding. Seventeen journals reported subscriptions as their main source of income, twelve reported advertisements, three a subsidy and eight grants from foundations or similar sources. Secondly subscription rates varied widely from between S$5 to S$20 (per copy) with the greatest number clustering at between S$8 and S$18 per copy. One was free to members of the sponsoring professional organization. Finally two journals were monthly publications, thirteen bi-annual, two annual, one bimonthly, two quarterly and two had publication frequencies of three times a year.

One interesting point stands out from this profile: all of the journals in the survey are English-language ones, which is clearly the major language of scholarly communication in Singapore, and presumably also in the rest of the world. This predominance of English-language journals is partly a reflection of colonial and post-independence language policies in Singapore (the working language of the University and of all other tertiary educational institutions is English), but partly also a desire to communicate internationally. Publishing in English, in other words, creates one of the preconditions for establishing a journal as an international one, while clearly the language medium alone does not guarantee status. Indeed, there are factors making the recognition of Singapore journals difficult to achieve, especially possible reluctance of foreign scholars of world rank to publish in a Singapore publication, failure on the part of local academic authorities to give as much weight to papers published in local as opposed to foreign journals and problems of building up a widespread network of individual and institutional subscribers. Physical quality (paper, printing, binding and so forth) is not a problem in Singapore where production standards are high. Those journals that have so far succeeded in building an international reputation are interestingly those that have specialized precisely in their own area, be it social sciences (Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography), botany (Garden Journal) or general Southeast Asian Studies (JMBRAS). So far missing from the picture are journals of a specialized but non-regional nature which can compete with other journals in the field internationally in the areas of theoretical development and research in their various fields. In this respect, despite its strengths, journal publishing in Singapore is still peripheral in relation to the major world centres of knowledge creation and dissemination.¹
The questions on editorial policy and on the achievements of the journal can be taken together for purposes of discussion. For the former we asked respondents to describe editorial policies including preference or otherwise for certain methodological approaches. Several respondents were either silent or gave only brief comments. Most saw editorial policy in terms of the content descriptor i.e. publishing articles in their subject area. Sixteen out of 22 respondents indicated a strong regional orientation, preferring articles on Singapore and on the region. This suggests that they saw the importance of serving the region; however, many also mentioned that they did accept articles that were more general in nature, indicating perhaps the need to keep a steady flow of articles coming. Also indicative in the response is an awareness of the need to fill a gap in available knowledge about the region. Seven respondents indicated (without prompting) that they sought to publish original research. One journal, the *Malayan Law Journal* was a journal of record; if it did not exist it would need to be invented! It was a bit of a surprise that only one editor, predictably in the social sciences, took the cue to note methodological preferences. The editor of *Contributions to Southeast Asian Ethnography* specified an interest in publishing ethnographic material. While it would be simplistic to argue that methodological issues are irrelevant to most journal editors, the lack of comment is noteworthy and needs further study.

We also asked a question about what the editors considered to be the achievements of their journals. We were impressed and gladened to find a strong sense of achievement amongst many of the responses. Several editors noted that their journals had reached international status. Others noted that their journals were regarded as an important primary source in their disciplinary area. Several noted that they were the only English language journals being published on a regular basis from the region. Others saw their roles as being to promote research and to disseminate knowledge about the region. Interestingly, one editor tied the relevance of the journal to the expansion of an academic audience arising from the expansion of the university sector, especially in Malaysia. The editor of the *Singapore Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* noted that the journal was evoking interest in the Eastern Block countries and attracting articles from African countries.

Taken together the data suggests that journal editors see their roles in knowledge production and dissemination as important and view their record positively. The strong regional preference for contributions suggests a vital role for these journals in the indigenization of knowledge about the region. That some journals have reached international standing suggests that high standards can be set and attained in the South in the knowledge production and dissemination process.
We should not, however, imagine that the journals surveyed were without problems. There was some data to indicate that editors worked under constraints. Nine respondents noted that they had problems with articles, both in terms of quantity and quality. One respondent noted a lack of a tradition of academic writing in the region, compounded often by the poor facility in writing in English. One editor, however, remarked that his problem was too many articles and that he was considering changing the frequency of publication while another noted that his subscribers, largely members of a professional society, found the articles to be 'too academic' and wished for something more applied in nature. Several other editors mentioned problems of rising costs of production, the need therefore to increase subscriptions and to obtain funding. However, only 5 specifically mentioned that circulation/subscriptions were a major problem. Our impression is that while journal editors might wish for wider circulation, a lack of funding via low subscriptions does not seem a major problem. This is borne out as well by the data on publicity arrangements. The responses did not indicate, except for about 7 journals, that much effort was put into publicising the journal.

We also gathered data on book review sections and the basis on which books and reviewers were chosen. We worked on the assumption that given the small number of scholarly books in the region, book reviews would be both a way of alerting the wider disciplinary community to books from the region, and if books from outside the region were reviewed, it would suggest that journals were a valuable conduit for information about the discipline. The deliberate choice of reviewers from the region might suggest a commitment to indigenous views.

We found that 15 journals had a book review section, a lower figure than expected, and unfortunate for the reasons noted above. The major disciplinary journals — history, education, sociology, economics, architecture — had book review sections but geography was a surprising exception. The most significant finding was that no special attention was paid either to Third World books or to reviewers. Most chose books to review based on their availability and the same principles applied to reviewers. Several journals had separate review editors. Too little data was collected to enable us to analyse further the significance of the review section but it is an important aspect of scholarly journals and therefore worth studying further.

Finally, a few concluding observations are in order. It is significant that while, as we have noted, circulation was not perceived as a major problem by the majority of journals, rising costs (especially in respect of printing) was a problem noted by many editors. While standards of typesetting, printing and binding are high in Singapore, and photographs, maps and even printing in
some non-Roman scripts (particularly Chinese) proves no problem, costs tend to be correspondingly high. However, some editors also noted that this is a necessary price to pay if their particular journal was to be acceptable internationally by the scholarly community, by potential authors, and by librarians, distributors and book-sellers. But while attractive formats, good quality paper and corresponding costs were widely accepted as inevitable (no editor for example suggested printing or typesetting in Indonesia or India as a way of saving money, although some European publishers and at least one major European journal — the French Southeast Asian publication Archipel — do so), the difficulty then arises of sales to other Asian countries. Except for those journals supported by professional bodies, many journals sell substantially to Europe and North America, not only because of better distribution networks and language of publication, but also because the relatively high prices makes them prohibitive for individual scholars and even libraries outside of Singapore and Malaysia. And even then, shrinking or static library budgets in the West have created barriers to the penetration of new journals into Western collections, especially if they originate in the Third World.

Amongst the other problems noted by editors were internal editorial problems and the relationship of the host institution to the journal. In the first category were difficulties such as the fact that most editors are full-time academics, usually with substantial teaching and administrative loads as well as their own personal research. It is interesting that for the most part editors did not see their journal as a vehicle for the publication of their own material, but as a genuine service to the wider scholarly community. Indeed some editors commented that they spent a great deal of time editing manuscripts that were valuable but poorly written or not in fluent English, or in correspondence with actual or potential authors. Other similar problems related to storage space of back copies, lack of secretarial back up, and the sheer amount of time consumed in editing, corresponding, seeing printers, proof-reading, posting out copies and so on. The smaller journals with no professional staff were especially effected by these kinds of factors.

The question of institutional affiliation was also noted as a problem. On the one hand such affiliation allowed access to typists and other facilities, but on the other hand some editors noted the tendency for the institution to attempt to direct editorial policy. One journal associated with the NUS for example, is being slowly forced to become more general and multidisciplinary as a result of university and faculty pressures to promote inter-disciplinary research. But at the same time one editor commented that despite the desire of his institution to control his independent journal, it did not seem to give any
recognition to the fact that at no cost to itself, an important specialized journal was being edited by its staff members. In some universities for example great academic credit, and possibly even a reduced teaching load, would be given to the editor of a learned journal published from within (even if not by) that institution.

Finally it may be noted that despite the use of the major language of scholarly communication, it is still difficult to publish a regional journal in any real sense in Southeast Asia. Very little ASEAN cooperation or division of labour has as yet occurred in this field. The result is that Singapore journals tend to be Singapore journals, Malaysian published ones, Malaysian and so on.3 Genuine scholarly cooperation to publish regional subject based journals has barely begun. Indeed the study of the issues relating to scholarly journal publication in Singapore casts a good deal of detailed light on the international distribution of knowledge and the problem that even the most developed peripheral society has in penetrating both its own region and the scholarly citadels of the centre.

Notes

1. An interesting recent development requires that this be qualified. World Scientific Publishing, a Singapore-based company has recently announced the launching of a high quality international journal in physics which will be edited and produced from Singapore.

2. In an earlier paper the editor had noted that he wished to use valuable journal space for research rather than on book reviews which may be available from other geography journals.

3. The most prominent example is the break-up of the Journal of Tropical Geography into two journals, one based in Malaysia and the other in Singapore. While this may prove to be beneficial in that greater opportunities are now available for contributors, and the fact that articles in Bahasa Malaysia will be accepted by the Malaysian journal it is a pity that a major regional disciplinary journal was unable to retain its identity.

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Appendix

List of Journals Surveyed

Singapore Libraries
Gardens Bulletin
Singapore Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology
Singapore Family Physician
Journal of Southeast Asian Studies
Malayan Law Journal
Journal of the South Seas Society
Institution of Engineers (Singapore) Journal
Singapore Dental Journal
RELC Journal
Singapore Management Review
Singapore Journal of Education
Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography
ASEAN Economic Bulletin
Review of Southeast Asian Studies
Singapore Accountant
Contemporary Southeast Asia
Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science
Singapore Institute of Architects Journal
Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society
Contributions to Southeast Asian Ethnography
Singapore Economic Review