



Publishing your First Book

By Emma Hegarty

Why publish?

If you want to have an academic career, one of the best things in your favour is a list of publications on your cv. It makes you sound hard working and productive, not to mention knowledgeable. Universities value higher degree research students and academics who publish because the universities get rewarded for it in research funding. Increasingly, it is not the quantity but the quality of publications that matters; but both count. Publications are also helpful in building a reputation in your field, and in getting a scholarship if you are not yet in a PhD program.

How to begin

Thesis chapters are handy for turning into articles, conference presentations and chapters for edited books. Conference papers, although not taken as seriously as other types of outputs, help an early career researcher because you get feedback and an opportunity to network.

Book publishing

The publishing industry is divided into education, trade, and scholarly and reference. For the most part you are aiming at scholarly publishers, but there is an area of crossover into trade, and a small number of publishers do both, such as Allen & Unwin.

The most important thing to understand about publishing is that it is a business. It is the least profitable industry in the world. Scholarly publishing is the least profitable sector of the industry. When a publisher undertakes to publish a book, they are taking a risk. It is not uncommon for privately-owned scholarly presses to ask their authors to bear some of the risk by arranging and paying for the copy-editing and layout, which has to be carried out in accordance with the publisher's guidelines. Although most university presses are underwritten in some way, by their universities, by a subsidiary business, or by endowments, they still have overheads they have to cover. Therefore, when any scholarly publisher chooses whether to take on a new book, they have two major things to consider: can we make money out of it, and is it of a quality consummate with the reputation we want to keep/cultivate?

What are publishers looking for?

In short, books that are original, well written and have broad appeal. Each of these is difficult to achieve. The most difficult for those with an academic background is good writing. This means no jargon, as few academic terms as possible, plain English, and a structure that engages the reader. In addition, scholarly publishers almost certainly want their authors to contribute something new to the discipline.

What are publishers not looking for?

Your thesis (more on this later). Publishers will not consider your thesis, so don't get yourself a reputation by asking them to look at it. Nor do they want to know about conference papers, huge books, lavish illustration, or complex copyright issues.

How to approach publishers

1. Identify the most appropriate publisher for your book. This might be an Asian Studies specialist, or a discipline specialist. For instance, many small university presses have esteemed series in a particular area, such as women's studies, musicology, linguistics or

politics. These publishers have established, effective methods for marketing and distribution in their fields that a more general publisher or area specialist may not have. Methods of identifying potential publishers include looking at your field in the bookshop and the library, and asking your supervisor.

2. When you have selected several publishers, look at what their websites say about how to approach them. (see websites for NIAS, Allen & Unwin, Hawaii).
3. Yes, it is fine to send your proposal to several publishers at once. On many occasions I have heard academics say that it is impolite or unwise to send a manuscript to more than one publisher at a time; I have never heard a publisher express this view. Publishers generally do not expect you to consult them exclusively. By sending your manuscript or book proposal to a few publishers at once you will not be breaking any unwritten code of etiquette, but you will be maximising your opportunities. Each publisher is going to have your proposal for a long time, months and months maybe, and you don't have time (nor perhaps the morale and fortitude) to go through them one by one.
4. Do you send a manuscript or a book proposal? See what the publishers' websites say. Most will prefer a book proposal. This is better for you too. It means you only have to convert/write about two sample chapters rather than an entire manuscript before finding out what your chances are.
5. What is a book proposal? This is a document designed to persuade a publisher that they want to publish the book you propose to write. To be successful, a proposal should demonstrate that the book is well conceived, will be well written, and has a market. Publishers will often give an outline of how they want a book proposal to be structured and presented. The following are fairly standard inclusions:
 - About the author. What is your background in relation to your proposed book? Persuade publishers that you are the best person to write it. If the book is related to your thesis, you are probably a leading expert on the subject.
 - About the book. Supply a brief summary of the book. Provide chapter outlines or abstracts if possible. This does not refer to your thesis chapters. A book will probably have quite a different structure, with much less material, and perhaps some areas expanded (see point 6 below).
 - Competition review. What else has been published on this topic? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the competition? Why is your book different, or better? Publishers are quite likely to be well informed on this subject, so you will be demonstrating to them your honesty and judgement.
 - Market review. Who would read your book and why? Have you written a book on a popular subject, or something that attracts media attention. Unfortunately one of the things publishers have to take into account is the financial viability of a book. The broader your market, the happier they will be.
 - One or two sample chapters. This is to give publishers an idea of your writing style.
6. Converting a thesis into a book proposal or manuscript. Writing a thesis proves you can write a thesis. It does not demonstrate that you can write a book, which is a very different beast. Some universities offer subsidies to a select few PhD graduates to support them for a few months while they convert the thesis to a book. Some post-doctoral appointments can also offer this opportunity. For guidelines on how to convert a thesis or dissertation into a book, I recommend the websites of Monash Asia Institute Press and the University of Texas Press. What needs to be done will vary from thesis to thesis, but will usually involve differences in writing style, structure and content (for instance, the literature review and methodology section will not be going into your book).
7. It is important to note whether the publishers want the proposal/manuscript sent to them electronically or in hardcopy. They might get really annoyed and ignore you if you send the wrong one.

8. Be patient. Your manuscript or proposal will be refereed by at least two experts. These people tend to be academics, who tend to be very busy. Refereeing alone can take months, and is followed by a committee process. It all requires administration. If the wait is driving you mad, it's not impolite to ask how your submission is coming along. This process is genuinely anonymous, so don't be worried about prejudiced or compromised referees. The academic world can be a small one, particularly in a specialist field such as Indonesian Studies. However, publishers try to get genuinely unbiased, uncompromised reviews, and will cast the net internationally.
9. How to cope with rejection. Rejection by a publisher, especially of a work that has already achieved academic recognition, is almost never about the quality of the research. It might be because your topic is highly specialised, or because there is not room in the market for another book in this field, or because the publisher felt they did not have the right networks to promote it properly. It might be because your writing style is inaccessible. It might be because you hit a referee who came from a different tradition, or who's pet theory you ignored. Scholarly publishers try to find the time to explain rejections, but sometimes they are too busy to go into detail, and sometimes a general explanation really is accurate.

Technical aspects: the difference between electronic and press publishing

In scholarly publishing, both of these types of production have currency. In general, electronic is more common for journals, particularly in the sciences, whilst traditional off-set printed books are still much more common, and more appropriate, in the humanities. In terms of academic esteem, a properly refereed scholarly journal should have the same standing as a printed journal. An electronic journal is much more easily searched and accessed, which helps the articles reach both broad and specialised audiences.

In terms of lasting impact of your work, there are significant differences between electronic and print production. Electronic publications are archived with storage services. These have to be regularly updated to translate between the technology in which the articles were archived and the technology being used by the people who access them. As time moves on, and both hardware and software develop, the cost of this continual upgrading will be significant, so there are no guarantees about future funding priorities. Therefore, though an electronic article will be stored, it is not known how easily it will be accessed in the future.

Electronic books, despite the millions of dollars that have been thrown at them over the last decade, have never been successful in the market. Books and journal articles are used differently, and readers have demonstrated clearly that they don't want electronic books. Of course this might change, and there are a few universities still subsidising publishers in the hope that the market will turn around soon. The final determiner will be the bottom line, the market, and it is clear that the book is not under threat.

The major difference, which is pertinent to book publishing, is between off-set printing and digital printing. Off-set printing means that the type and images are printed in ink by a process that imbeds them in the paper. They are of high quality, and last for centuries. When electronic publications have a printed version, they are usually digitally printed. Digital printing means that the type and images are printed in toner, as in photocopy toner, and are magnetically adhered to the paper. The toner therefore sits on top of the paper, and can brush off. Over time, digital type fades. Even for brand new books, the production quality is poorer than off-set printing. Images such as photographs and graphs (or anything with tones) cannot be digitally reproduced well. It is likely to be a publisher, not an author, that decides which printing method will be used. Many scholarly publishers use both methods, depending on their budget and their estimation of the book's long-term use. Inasmuch as you have a choice, try to decide whether your book has limited, short-term interest, or appeal that is either broad or long term.

Publishers with a particular interest in Indonesia:

- Asian Studies Association of Australia Publications (Canberra)
- Equinox Publishing (Jakarta)
- Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (Singapore)
- International Institute for Asian Studies (Amsterdam)
- KIT Publishers (Amsterdam)
- KITLV Press (Leiden)
- Monash Asia Institute Press (Melbourne)
- Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Press (Copenhagen)
- Oxford University Press (Melbourne)
- Singapore University Press
- Southeast Asia Program (Cornell University)
- University of Hawaii Press
- Yayasan Obor Indonesia (Jakarta)

Emma Hegarty is the publisher at the Monash Asia Institute, a small scholarly press that specialises in Asian Studies, and in particular, Southeast Asia. She is currently on secondment to the Research Quality Framework team at Monash University.