

Publishing: from National Development to International Relations



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Introduction

If you speak Japanese, you will know that the word for “society” is *shakai*. And given how much we Asians traditionally value community, do you know how long the word has been used in this way? Only since the 19th century!

The same goes for words such as *jiyū* and *kenri*, which are the terms for “liberty” and for “rights” (as in “human rights”: *jinken*). So you can see the important though often invisible or at least unremarked effects of language and publishing.

Let me tell you a little of how I came to discover such things.

Story of My Publishing Business

At the age of 71, I entered the world of publishing, having had no earlier experience of it at all. I did so in memory of my wife, and for the purpose of nurturing democratic and humane values among Indians and others who love India. As those values are under threat, that focus is easily understandable, but why in memory of my wife? Because she had started a small publishing effort – though that dried up very soon, when we moved as a family to another country.

My wife had gone into publishing at a time in history (the 1990s) when barriers to becoming a publisher had fallen but there hadn't yet been the explosion of self-publishing that hit the publishing industry, particularly from the 2000s. Today, there are almost no barriers to self-publishing, but too many people suffer from the illusion that their book will sell widely just because it is published. The huge increase in supply of titles has meant much greater competition for the attention of customers, so that publishing has become a far more vigorous battle in terms of marketing. And “real publishers” now need much greater investment of time, effort, and money to merely remain in the game.

I launched Pippa Rann Books & Media in August 2020. The pandemic had spread through the world months earlier. In India, the publishing industry ground to a nearly complete halt. For example, the largest publisher in India, which used to publish 40 or more titles a month, cut back to publishing only one or two titles a month.

As my publishing in relation to India was paralysed, my mind looked about – and struck upon the fact that there is no imprint that focuses on global challenges from a global perspective. So I conceived my second imprint, Global Resilience Publishing, which focuses on topics such as climate change, the international financial system, international corporate governance, global philanthropy,

corporate sponsorships, public-private partnerships, the ethics and impact of the transformations wrought by the latest technologies, and possible reform of the United Nations.

Changing Publishing Business in Recent Years

Given that background, the most important things that strike me about the changes in publishing in the quarter century between my wife's publishing imprint and my imprint in her memory are that:

- there is a much greater permeability between genres: manga and anime, which used to be created primarily for children, are now increasingly being produced also for adults, and now have influence worldwide;
- proofing and formatting are now almost entirely the responsibility of authors, because the dominant publishers have moved into machine-like “smooth processes”, so that the boundaries of the industry have become much more permeable, with much greater cross-fertilization, and opportunities as well as threats often arising on the interface between what was traditionally considered “publishing” and what were traditionally thought of as “other industries” – for example, book and magazine publishers are moving into, or are partnering with, organizations in the worlds of information technology, broadcasting, movies, social media, conferences, education, and video games.

Beyond the changes in publishing itself are changes in the global context of publishing: from increasing freedoms, to the re-ascendance of tyranny. What used to be the province of isolated and small countries, such as North Korea and Cuba, is sadly now also the province of countries such as China and Russia, as well as of countries where we had thought tyranny abolished for the foreseeable future, such as Poland and Eritrea. Indeed, even in countries that won freedoms centuries ago, such as the United States, there is a real threat of the return of censorship and self-censorship due to the rise of political correctness, “woke” fashion, and the deployment of modern technology to prevent and attack the spread of knowledge. For example, in India, the regime of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in pursuit of making India a country fully ruled by Hindutva (as distinct from traditional Hindu thought and practice, and in opposition to the values of the Indian Constitution) has put people in prison for simply publicising the fact that cow urine does not cure Covid19.

In other words, repressive regimes have acquired a second breath,

and it will take much more determined effort to root them out. That is why it is worth keeping firmly in mind that the whole history of publishing as an industry starts with the Gutenberg Bible and its being smuggled, sometimes across borders, to be sold clandestinely to customers – and, if one was caught, the penalty was death, because neither emperors nor popes wished to tolerate the Bible's subversive content.

Was it because publishing was then an industry only for the most daring that the Bible became, and has remained, the all-time bestseller? However, that is less important than the fact it has been the most influential book in international relations, and that from it have flowed the liberties – and indeed the DNA – of the modern world, as the Indian scholar Vishal Mangalwadi documents in his magisterial publications *The Book That Made Your World* and *This Book Changed Everything*.

The whole framework for modern international relations would have been impossible were it not for the modern understanding of what is a nation, for what is the rule of law, for what constitutes human rights in relation to the freedom to be educated and to be treated fairly and equally, for women's rights, for environmental concern, and so on.

History of Japanese Publication Business in Relation to Politics

Let us look at this in the case of Japan, from the perspective of books and publishing:

The *Analects of Confucius* were introduced to Japan in the third century AD, and the study and dissemination of books from China and Korea created new types of books, such as commentaries. In 816, Shingon Buddhism was founded by Kukai, who traveled to China and studied Sanskrit as well as Chinese Vajrayana. Though Kukai's work was sponsored by several Japanese emperors, the impact was primarily on the elites so far as education and the widening of mental horizons were concerned. Japanese was marked by a great variety of words expressing emotion and feeling, but it had very few words for intellectual concepts – or indeed even for moral concepts such as honesty, justice, integrity, probity, or goodness. Japanese literature remained emotional and subjective, emphasising refinement of sentiment and elegant phrasing. Japanese writers who wanted to express intellectual or abstract meanings wrote in Chinese, or borrowed from the Chinese language, with the result that roughly half the vocabulary of literary or scholarly Japanese was

borrowed from Chinese.

Then came the very first book in Japan to be published in the modern sense: *Aesop's Fables*. This was also the very first Western book to be translated into Japanese – by Western missionaries, who published the book in 1593. Culturally exceedingly influential, the book sowed the seeds of the transformation that was to follow the Meiji Restoration. Up to that time, Japanese culture had been marked by relative material stability and the cultivation of individual sensibility and inner feeling. The opening of the Japanese mind and culture to influences beyond China, Korea, and India, meant that the focus was reversed: material progress became the focus, with the cultivation of feeling shifted to the margins of national and corporate concern.

The publication of the Japanese Bible in the 1830s contributed to the growing antagonism between the government and the people which is central to early Meiji political discourse, when Japanese intellectuals fiercely debated such Biblical and Western political concepts as popular suffrage, religious liberty, and press freedom. There was a struggle to agree the appropriate Japanese terms, eventually resulting in the standardization, for example, of *jiyū*, *kenri*, and *shakai* as the terms for “liberty”, “rights” and “society”. Many Meiji reformers accepted that reforms were necessary for achieving equality with other countries. But, perhaps because they were overly-impressed by Commodore Matthew Perry's “Black Ships”, they mistook those as essential to the West, rather than an egoistic and greed-inspired distortion of the real values of the West. Meiji leaders seem to have focused on the fruit of progress in the West but remained unaware of its roots. In a culture where appearances and externalities are so important in public life, their strategy was hugely successful, though at a huge cost: the emphasis on military strength subverted the path toward democracy by leading to a narrow kind of nationalism, and eventually to the tragedies of World War II.

On the other hand, positive Meiji initiatives included the introduction of compulsory education, the implementation of land tax reforms (even though those were not nearly as successful or thoroughgoing as those of General Douglas MacArthur during the period of the postwar Allied occupation of Japan), and investment in everything from banks and railroads to modern printing presses.

The most widespread impact of these printing presses was the development of newspapers – the *Yokohama Mainichi Shimbun* in 1871, the *Yomiuri Shimbun* in 1874, and Japan's foremost business daily the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun (Nikkei)* in 1876. Many magazines were also launched, many of which produced enough profit to create

what have become some of Japan's largest publishing houses. There can be no democracy without the free circulation of information and discussion, enabled by newspapers, magazines, and nowadays also social media. However, more significant is the fact that books had not begun to reach a wider audience till the latter half of the 18th century, and a mass market emerged only in the Meiji Era.

That was also the time when a flood of translations from Western literature gave Japanese prose fiction a new direction. Maejima Hisoka was the first person to formally petition, in 1866, that written Japanese be reformed by substituting colloquial speech for the Chinese-influenced literary language (*kanbun*) used then. This echoed William Wordsworth's plea in the Preface to his *Lyrical Ballads*, published in 1798. Hisoka had studied English and would have been familiar with Wordsworth, one of the most popular poets of the time – though Wordsworth was, of course, in one sense merely carrying forward the tradition of the brave early translators of the Bible who sought to make its wisdom available to everyone in their own language. However, *Ukigumo* ("The Drifting Cloud", published in three volumes from 1887 to 1889) by Futabatei Shimei, was the first novel written in colloquial Japanese. And Futabatei's original works, such as *Sono omokage* (1906), as well as his translations of Russian authors such as Ivan Turgenev, Leo Tolstoy, and Fyodor Dostoevsky, were what succeeded in fulfilling the demand for *gembun itchi* – i.e., constructing a language appropriate for the literature of contemporary Japan. By 1908, novels no longer used the formal elegance of classical *kanbun* and, by the 1920s, the same was true of all newspapers, though government documents remained in classical Japanese until 1946. The process of democratizing the language had taken over a century, but that transformed the entire universe of Japanese thought. And without democratization of writing and thought, there can be no democratization of a nation.

After World War II, there was the further impact of democratic values, and the much greater impact of English, which has speeded up over the last four decades. Important people, such as Count Shinken Makino (1861-1946), Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida (1878-1967), and Vice Minister of Finance Kohki Naganuma (1906-1977) have declared that reading in English is both instructive and essential.

The difference between pre-Meiji Japan and today's Japan may be best symbolized by the printed form of modern Japanese books. Most (including manga) are printed to be read from right to left in the traditional fashion, whereas technical books and textbooks are

printed according to the Western model – and are therefore read from left to right. In other words, modern Japan has been influenced by many people inspired by the power of ideas from other parts of the world, to move from its past without abandoning it.

Japanese Publications: Influence on Other Parts of the World

Naturally, Japan has also influenced other parts of the world through the power of its traditions and ideas. One of the first Japanese works translated into a European language was *Sangoku Tsūran Zusetsu* (1832). Two years later, the translator, Julius Klaproth, also published a translation of *Nihon Ōdai Ichiran*. Poetry was the earliest form of literature in most languages, and remained the most influential internationally till at least World War II. So it was Klaproth's inaccurate translations of Japanese poetry which portended what was to come: by far the most influential form of Japanese literature is also the shortest: haiku. Some Western poets try to copy the Japanese form closely (5–7–5 syllables). Others don't follow the form but try to evoke the "spirit of haiku": intense imagery, usually drawn from nature, rendered in as few words as possible. Naturally, there is the objection from some purists, for one reason or another, that English poets aren't writing "real" haiku – but haiku remains a key way in which Japanese poetry has influenced world literature, world lifestyles, and world politics.

From the 1890s, Ernest Fenellosa, Lafcadio Hearn, and Percival Lowell (elder brother of the poet Amy Lowell) each wrote extensively about what they saw and experienced in Japan. Their books became massively popular, and remained bestsellers for years, creating the climate in which translations of haiku, tanka, and Noh plays were well received in English and in French. In 1904, separately, the Japanese poet Yone Noguchi, and the American critic, anarchist and poet of German and Japanese descent Sadakichi Hartmann, published influential articles on Japanese poetry. Hartmann was a friend of Walt Whitman, Stéphane Mallarmè and Ezra Pound. And there were articles on haiku written in French by Paul-Louis Couchoud, who was a physician, a man of letters, controversialist, and adapter of Japanese haiku into French. His work was read by the early Imagist theoretician F. S. Flint, who passed on Couchoud's ideas to members of the proto-Imagist Poet's Club, including Ezra Pound.

One of the first American poets to write extensively about Japanese subjects was Amy Lowell (1874-1925). Even as a young

girl, due to her brother Percival's letters from Japan, her knowledge of the country was far more extensive than that of most people in the US. Her brother also sent her *ukiyo-e* prints, of which she had a large collection. Some of her poems describe the scenes depicted, and relate what she thought were the stories that went with them. Lowell made a trip to London specifically to meet Pound and learn about haiku. On her return to the US, she worked hard to interest others in this "new" form.

So, streams from different angles converged to make Japanese ideas popular in French, British and American literary and arts circles. In fact, Japanese literature may have been the most influential force in the American Poetic Renaissance of the 1920s. Ezra Pound's Imagist movement gave Modernism its start, and was the first organized literary movement in the English language. Pound's haiku or *hokku*-inspired poetry came to represent Japanese poetry to most European and American writers such as Conrad Aiken, John Gould Fletcher, and Carl Sandburg. And it is mainly Pound's interpretation of Noh that is mediated via William Yeats to T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, and Kenneth Rexroth.

The influence extended, in the postwar period, to the Beat Generation, whose work had as its central elements: rejection of standard narrative values, interest in Eastern religions, a turn away from materialism, experimentation with psychedelic drugs, and exploration of sexuality without commitment to traditional marriage. Gary Snyder, an important member of the Beat movement, was also a member of the West Coast group, the San Francisco Renaissance, which developed independently, and brought San Francisco to prominence as a counterculture hub not only of avant-garde American poetry but also of the visual and performing arts, philosophy, interest in Asian cultures, and new social sensibilities.

The Hippie years of the 1960s spread the word to the world through the songwriters of rock-music (e.g., San Francisco Sound). That was also the time when the "underground press" (e.g. the *San Francisco Oracle*) spread from America, giving prominence to Beat/San Francisco writers, such as Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Michael McClure, Jack Kerouac, and Snyder (who is also an environmental activist).

So much for poetry. What about Japanese prose? *The Tale of Genji* has beautiful use of language, of course, but has never had much of an impact either in literature or in any other field. It is not till the early 20th century that we find novels which have been influential, such as those of Natsume Soseki, and Mori Ogai. David Stephen Mitchell (born 1969) is an English novelist, television writer, and

screenwriter who lived in Japan for 15 years, and has written nine novels, two of which were shortlisted for the Booker Prize. His work uses a Western perspective to cater to his Western readers' preference for Japan's traditional and cultural elements, and at the same time subverts stereotypes in the manner of the Japanese author Haruki Murakami. Kazuo Ishiguro, who moved to Britain in 1960 with his Japanese parents when he was five, and has been educated entirely in the UK, has won a string of awards and honors for his work since 1982, including the Nobel Prize and the Booker Prize.

Ishiguro provides a good segue from fiction to related arts, as he has produced not only novels and short fiction but also lyrics and screenplays. Two of his novels have been made into films, and one has been adapted into a musical. The best-known Japanese filmmaker, Akira Kurosawa, has influenced, among other movies, George Lucas's *Star Wars*. The high-tech images of contemporary Japan in science fiction (e.g., *Neuromancer* and *Blade Runner*), remind us of film scholar and critic Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto's comment that "The future world does not seem to be able to function without things Japanese."

Publisher's Role in Promoting a Nation's Culture & Intercultural Exchange

Finally, I return to the crucial question of what was and is the publisher's role in all this. Is not the publisher's role that of a gatekeeper? In the case of each work mentioned after the start of modern publishing, it was the publisher who decided what was promoted to the public. The publisher exercised faith that the work being published was important or was at least going to be popular. And publishers not only put their talents and life into horizon scanning, spotting trends, scouting for the best manuscripts, and producing the highest possible quality of book; they do all that by putting their own money behind the works they choose to publish. Great writers, great publishers, great artists shape our collective identity and institutions, whether regionally, nationally, or globally. Could it be that it is not writers but publishers who are the unacknowledged legislators of mankind?

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